

Leadership Deep Dive Webinar by:

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Book Title- Leadership for Disaster Resilience: Lessons from India

The ADCLOD Leadership Deep Dive Webinar featured an engaging and thought-provoking conversation with Prof. Jacqueleen Joseph, Ms. Suchita Awasthi, and Prof. Zubin R. Mulla, co-authors of the book *Leadership for Disaster Resilience: Lessons from India*. Drawing on rich theoretical foundations and field-based insights, the speakers collectively emphasized the need to reframe disaster leadership beyond immediate crisis response to focus on systemic, inclusive, and justice-oriented transformation.

Prof. Jacqueleen Joseph set the context by introducing the book and emphasized that disaster resilience must be understood from a socio-institutional lens one that goes beyond formal authority to encompass the creation of enabling ecosystems. A distinctive strength of her talk was the careful demarcation of the book's conceptual boundaries: she clearly articulated what the study aims to explore and equally, what it consciously avoids. Rather than presenting a comprehensive catalogue of disaster types, the book focuses on disasters that expose systemic vulnerabilities and institutional stress, such as the Arenga railway accident, allowing for deeper exploration of leadership processes. This selective lens is rooted in the authors' goal to understand disaster resilience leadership as a response to structural inequalities and socio-technical complexity, not as a crisis management manual. Prof. Joseph called for collaborative governance, multi-stakeholder engagement, and transformative resilience grounded in social and environmental justice as central pillars of disaster policy and practice. Reflecting this, the book conceptualizes leadership as: "a process where individuals, groups, organizations, or institutions use expertise and resources to implement socially and environmentally just solutions by engaging cooperation across various actors, both within and outside organizational boundaries."

The focus of Ms. Suchita Awasthi's presentation was a detailed articulation of the methodological approach adopted in the book to understand and strengthen genuine community resilience. Drawing from her deep, field-based experience and case studies across varied ecological contexts including wetlands, water systems, and climate adaptation projects she emphasized that building resilience requires more than programmatic interventions: it demands embedded, participatory research methodologies. She clarified that the book adopts a multi-case study design, grounded in India's diverse geoclimatic zones, where selection of cases was driven by their ability to reveal the interplay between leadership, vulnerability, and systemic risk. The methodological pillars she outlined include:

1. Participatory leadership approaches, where local actors are engaged not as beneficiaries but as co-creators of resilience strategies.
2. Integration of indigenous knowledge systems, which enables a nuanced understanding of context-specific vulnerabilities and solutions.
3. Decentralized governance mechanisms, which empower communities to act autonomously and responsively.
4. Vulnerability assessment tools, used not merely as diagnostic frameworks but as iterative, community-led reflections.
5. Ecosystem-based resilience strategies, which recognize and leverage the buffering capacity of natural systems.

Furthermore, Ms. Awasthi elaborated on the practical application of key methods such as vulnerability assessment for systematically identifying and understanding a community's specific weaknesses, and the implementation of ecosystem-based approaches, which leverage natural systems to enhance community adaptation and protection. She also underscored the vital, yet often unacknowledged, contributions of vulnerable groups and women throughout these methodological processes.

Prof. Zubin Mulla's contribution was central to unwrapping the book's conceptual framework, which was developed after analysing the 17 case studies included in the book. He elucidated how leadership practices for disaster resilience would differ across bureaucratic, political, civil society actors, and institutional actors. His insights were particularly useful in detailing an Individual Leadership Framework derived from the case studies of specific leaders, which revealed patterns in leadership emergence, practices, and outcomes. These leaders often exhibited charismatic authority, extending beyond formal positions, and demonstrated prototypicality and self-sacrificing behaviour, thereby enhancing their credibility. Their leadership practices involved strategically building operational networks and crafting culturally resonant narratives that effectively highlighted the unacceptable status quo, painted an ideal future, and served as powerful calls to action. The outcomes of their leadership were evaluated by charisma routinization the institutionalization of their work and overall organizational effectiveness, encompassing public recognition, member engagement, leadership development, responsiveness, and inclusivity. Prof. Mulla also elaborated on an Integrated Framework for Disaster Resilience Leadership, which distinguishes between non-formal actors like individuals and civil society organizations, and formal actors such as established institutions and bureaucrats. This framework highlights the crucial diffusion of innovation, where successful non-formal initiatives can inspire and become part of government policy, as seen in Maharashtra's drought management initiatives. Ultimately, his contributions underscored the major argument that transformative resilience fundamentally rests on leadership adept at negotiating complexity, establishing trust, and creating sustained change.

Together, the speakers reinforced the book's conceptual contribution a multi-actor, multi-level framework for disaster resilience leadership in India. They emphasized that resilience is not about returning to a pre-disaster normal but about “bouncing forward” to a more just and sustainable future. The webinar concluded with a call to invest in leadership development ecosystems that value empathy, equity, collaboration, and context-sensitivity as core competencies for disaster resilience.