

Shorter Notices*

Subhash Bhatnagar and Robert Schware (eds). *Information and Communication Technology in Development: Cases from India.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000. 230 pages. Paperback. Indian Rs 225.00.

This book deals with the various successful applications of information and communication technology (ICT) in rural development in India. An introductory chapter highlights the use of ICT in rural India with specific emphasis on some of the problems that have affected the implementation of rural development programmes. This chapter also suggests possible solutions to the problems identified. The remaining 16 chapters of the book consist of case studies in which ICT applications have been made. The case studies that appear of special interest include “Electronic Support for Rural Health Care Workers” (Chapter 2); “Computer-aided Registration of Deeds and Stamp Duties” (Chapter 5); “Application of Information Technology for Rural Postal System” (Chapter 7); “Knowledge Network for Recognising, Respecting, and Rewarding Grassroots Innovation” (Chapter 8); “Same Language Substituting for Literacy: Small Change for Colossal Gains” (Chapter 14); and “Multipurpose Electronics and Computer Centres: Promoting IT-Centred Maintenance and Employment in Rural Areas” (Chapter 15). Other case studies deal with disaster management, telephones, and the provision of services to the handicapped. The case studies highlight the different applications of ICT, from the basic to the most sophisticated. Basic and simple applications deal with cheap technologies, whereas the sophisticated applications refer to satellite-based communication.

The usefulness of the book lies in its practical approach to the capabilities of modern technologies to play a catalytic role in furthering the pace of rural development. The lessons learned from this book can be applied to other developing countries. Public administrators, management experts, and development planners would benefit from reading this volume.

Haile Mariam Kahssary and Peter Oakley (eds). *Community Involvement in Health Development: A Review of the Concept and Practice.* Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1999. v+160 pages. Paperback. SFr. 52.00.

In its seven chapters, this volume presents an analysis of community involvement in health development (CIH) from various perspectives. Chapter 1

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outlines, in a historical setting, the evolution of the concept of CIH within the purview of development theory and practice. Specific emphasis is placed on trying to understand the reason for under-development and poverty. The next three chapters are case studies of CIH in Bolivia, Nepal, and Senegal. These case studies focus on the application, successes, and failures of CIH in these countries. Chapter 5 looks at health development structures in nine countries. The chapter concludes with the view that significant steps can be taken by different sectors and different strata of government to promote health development structures. Chapter 6 critically reviews the concept of participatory development from a methodological perspective, and is an important chapter. The case studies provide useful input for this review. The last chapter sums up the important lessons which can make the concept of CIH more practical. A significant contribution of this book is its multi-disciplinary approach in tackling the problems associated with CIH. The book would be of use to sociologists, economists, and those dealing with community-level planning and development.

World Health Organisation. *Community Emergency Preparedness: A Manual for Managers and Policy-makers.* Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1999. vi+141 pages. Paperback. SFr. 42.00.

This manual outlines policies, procedures, and planning techniques aimed at reducing the fall-out from natural and man-made disasters, which include, for example, earthquakes, floods, and chemical and nuclear incidents. All such disasters, if not properly anticipated, can cause immense damage to life and property both in the short as well as the long term. The manual spells out how to deal with these disasters based on a wide range of evidence cited from previous disasters. Keeping this objective in view, the manual is comprehensive in its coverage of the full range of considerations required to identify vulnerable populations, predict the likelihood and consequences of emergencies, and plan for an appropriate response.

Although slim in size, the manual has six chapters. Chapter 1 describes the concept of emergency preparedness and vulnerability reduction. The chapter also discusses their importance in view of several recent trends, namely, the increase in the number of disasters, the number of people affected by these disasters, and the cost in economic terms. More importantly, this chapter lists the major sectors whose main responsibility would be related to disaster management; communications, health, police, search and rescue, social welfare and transport, and other lifelines. As a number of departments are involved, coordination of a high quality is needed if disaster management is to succeed.

Chapter 2 deals with policy issues and various options, the details of which are spelt out in a tabular form on page 22 of the book. Chapter 3 examines the concept of vulnerability assessment. It is well-illustrated by the description of a flood and

other hazards. Chapter 4 deals with emergency planning. Such planning is necessary if life, property, and the environment are to be protected. Emergency planning is a dynamic and continuous process, the objective of which is to reduce the cost to the community if disaster strikes. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the requirement for training and education of vulnerable communities, and outlines procedures for monitoring and evaluation. The book has a number of useful annexes and tables that reflect the scale of damage as a result of wind storms, hurricanes, earthquakes, landslides, and volcanic eruptions.

Donald S. Shepard, Dominic Hodgkin, and Yvonne E. Anthony. *Analysis of Hospital Costs: A Manual for Managers.* Geneva: World Health Organisation, 2000. viii+92 pages. Paperback. SFr. 28.00.

This manual deals with the principles and methods of cost analysis as a managerial tool in the efficient operation of hospitals. Hospitals have different activities, and hence different costs for these activities. This book provides the hospital administrator with the necessary knowledge and skills to estimate the cost of different activities, analyse their importance, and use the information thus acquired to maximise efficiency through better resource management. The manual, whose main objective was to train hospital managers, was developed after extensive field testing in Bangladesh, Egypt, and Zimbabwe. The manual has three chapters with four appendices. The three chapters deal with the computation of unit costs, and with using the cost data to improve management of a hospital and that of a hospital system.

The manual highlights the importance of the data required to make correct decisions on operations and infrastructure investment, planning of future budgets, user charges for the provision of patient services, and the development of a system where costs are kept in control. The manual uses practical examples to get the message across. The appendices have additional useful information for hospital managers, with one devoted to exercises and answers in relation to costing hospitals in Bangladesh, Egypt, and Zimbabwe.

Martha J. Garrett. *Health Futures: A Handbook for Health Professionals.* Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1999. xiv+320 pages. Paperback, SFr. 102.00.

The central message of this book is the utilisation of the futures approach in developing a number of scenarios—probable, desirable, feasible, or the worst—so that appropriate policy options to deal with these can be drawn up. Such an approach has been of particular use in developing countries where health conditions are rapidly changing with the emergence of new problems, which demand that scarce resources

be prioritised for those which are of a more acute nature. The nine chapters here discuss the futures approach from various perspectives. The first chapter introduces the concept of futures research along with its many applications in the health sector. The second chapter, through a question and answer approach, illustrates how futures projects are employed to evaluate a range of problems in national health systems, with a particular emphasis on the developing world.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five form the core of the book. Chapter Three gives suggestions on how to initiate and undertake a futures exercise. Some of the major subjects discussed include legal establishment, organisational structure, funding, evaluation, etc. The fourth chapter examines the basic components from which futures projects can be typically constructed. The fifth chapter describes more than thirty different project designs that reveal the flexibility and versatility of health futures. The sixth chapter discusses various technologies that apply to futures work, and also provides guidelines for choosing the most appropriate tools. Chapter Seven deals with the application of futures techniques in health, with particular reference to health planning and policy-making at the national level. The remaining chapters discuss printed and online information resources as well as data on various futures organisations in different parts of the world. The book would be of great assistance to health officials in the public sector. It is easily accessible as the prolific use of practical examples helps illustrate complex concepts. The glossary of terms given at the end is also helpful.

Jyotsna Agnihotri Gupta. *New Reproductive Technologies, Women's Health and Autonomy: Freedom or Dependency?* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000. 706 pages. Hardback. Indian Rs 775.00.

The current volume on reproductive technologies, women's health, and autonomy is the twenty-fifth volume brought out under the Indo-Dutch Programmes on Alternatives in Development. The book deals with the important issue of women's emancipation and control over fertility, particularly in the light of the new technologies that have been developed in the field of human reproduction in the latter half of the twentieth century. The author divides these technologies under four heads for the convenience of the reader: (a) technologies to prevent conception and birth; (b) technologies to assist reproduction; (c) technologies for pre-natal diagnosis; and (d) gene technologies. The discussion is wide-ranging, encompassing not only the narrower scientific/medical issues but also the impact of these technologies on social, economic, health, and ethical issues. The debate in the book is about the impact of these technologies in India and the Netherlands. The author concludes that the new technologies have made a larger number of women than before more dependent, with increased financial costs as well as adverse health effects. On the other hand, the

author contends that a select group of women have benefitted from these technologies. The usefulness of the book lies in the fact that the overall effects of the new technologies in reproductive behaviour have stimulated a debate with regard to choice in fertility matters.