



# Lessons on Transformative Resilience from Migrant-Led Collection Action

Knowledge mobilization in the immigrant and refugee-serving sector  
Research in Action, Wellesley Institute  
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SSHRC CRSH



Tkaronto | *"Where the trees meet the water"* (Mohawk)  
Mural from First Nations House, University of Toronto

# Outline

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Principles of Critical PAR

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Overview of the project

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Lessons on Transformative Resilience

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Questions & Answers



Cann & DeMeulenaere (2020)

## Enacting Epistemic Justice & Activist Scholarship

- Relationships grounded in mutual respect
- Respect that everyone's knowledge and experience contributes to solutions to social issues
- Knowledge is highly subjective, relational, contextual
- Flow of knowledge & information benefits all
- Boundaries between academic & community knowledge are dynamic
- Shared authority at all stages of the research
- Those who are closest to the lived experience of an issue are the ones best able to address or solve it

An aerial photograph of the Toronto skyline, featuring the CN Tower prominently on the left. The city is densely packed with skyscrapers and buildings, extending towards the waterfront. The water is visible in the upper left, and the surrounding landscape is green and hilly.

# Migrant Organizing in Toronto

- Long history of grassroots organizing and mutual aid in migrant communities
- City's Motto "Diversity is our Strength"
- > 50% population born outside of Canada
- "Three Cities" = racial & economic segregation
- ↑ income inequality and precarious work

## Individual Resilience

Individual capacity to cope with, adapt to and recover from adversities towards improving well-being.

## Community Resilience

A community's capacity to draw on individual and collective resources to respond to and recover from adversities towards improving individual and community well-being.

## Transformative Resilience

Capacity within communities to resist systemic inequity and envision and bring about changes in social, economic, and political systems towards increasing inclusion, equity, and well-being for all members of society.



**Tibetans in Parkdale**



**South Asian Women  
in East Danforth**

# Overlapping Systemic Issues

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Economic insecurity

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Precarious migration status

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Settlement issues

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Racism & xenophobia

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Legal Aid Budget Cuts

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Barriers to accessing services

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Gender-based violence

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Lack of supports for LGBTQ community members

# Key Concerns within Each Community

## Tibetan Diaspora in Parkdale

- Chinese occupation of Tibet
- Cultural & language preservation
- Protect and sustain the community center
- Precarious immigration status
- Psychological toll of displacement

## South Asian Immigrant Women

- Underemployment
- Precarious work
- Gender discrimination
- Islamophobia
- Social isolation & stigma

# Impacts: Consciousness raising and Empowerment

**"People when they participate in these collective actions, they see the power of many.** They see that if we all stand together and we are all together, whether it's occupying somebody's office or blocking traffic or sealing off the Chinese consulate, there is power in numbers, there's strength in numbers and it would not be the same if it was just one person, whatever the issue is. So, **I have seen people, almost joyful after actions.** We laugh, we joke around, you know, you can visibly see people feel empowered, if there's such a thing you can see it. And when you come together you realize that we are all connected, we are all affected by the same issues so, I think it makes a huge difference when people do participate in collective actions."

-TIBETAN COMMUNITY LEADER

# Barriers to Organizing

- Individual barriers
  - burnout and limited time
- Internalized oppression:
  - stigma/shame, fear to speak out
- Marginalization within migrant communities
  - LGBTQ youth; poverty
- Systemic barriers
  - racism, public and social service cuts
- Barriers faced by organizations
  - limited resources; not feeling heard

*“They [people who are participating in collective action] **don't see their voices being reflected in decision making**, whether it be in the faces of who makes those decisions, but also in the kind of narrative that comes out from those places.”*

- South Asian Woman Leader

# 7 Lessons from Migrant-Led Collective Action

The way people  
come together  
matters

Creating spaces of  
belonging & critical  
consciousness

Tapping into  
community assets  
builds individual and  
collective resilience

Migrant organizing  
promotes  
transformative  
resilience

Limited and unstable  
funding strains  
communities

Gov't's and Non-  
Profits can better  
recognize migrant  
knowledge &  
leadership

Resisting assimilation  
and practicing  
cultural knowledge  
reimagines  
belonging



# Thank You

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