

to continue with their work. It would be interesting to see if Macdonald's conclusions were altered by some more up-dated field work since her analysis is based on interviews and observations carried out in the late 1980s. The implementation of structural adjustment programmes in Nicaragua in 1990 and the continuation of economic reforms in Costa Rica have brought with them a reinforcement in the neo-conservative ideology which has forced many NGOs to conform to the dictates of neo-liberalism.

Jasmine Gideon
University of Manchester
PII: S0261-3050(98)00016-3

Fox, Jonathan and Aranda, Josefina (1996), *Decentralization and Rural Development in Mexico: Community Participation in Oaxaca's Municipal Funds Program*, Centre for US-Mexican Studies, University of California (San Diego), xx + 74 pp. \$11.95 pbk.

As Social Funds continue to be advocated by international donor organisations such as the World Bank, as a means of funding poverty alleviation programmes, Fox and Aranda's study of the Municipal Funds Programme in Mexico provides us with some important insights. Such funds are generally seen as 'a good thing', promoting democratisation accountability and community participation in decentralised decision making processes. Yet, as the authors point out there is very little empirical evidence to actually back up this enthusiasm. Their study sets out to analyse these issues in some of the poorest areas of rural Mexico and examines the capacity of projects to strengthen local government and community decision making.

Development spending has often been unevenly distributed in Mexico, with a prominent urban bias and generally favouring the wealthier states. In 1989, the National Solidarity Programme (PRONASOL), was set up and attempts were made to channel decision making to the local level. The government has directed significant amounts of resources to municipal governments to fund development projects to be chosen by local communities under the umbrella of PRONASOL. The Municipal Fund was among the most decentralised of solidarity programmes and received funding from the World Bank to target the rural poor.

Despite the impressive rhetoric surrounding the implementation of Municipal Fund programmes, Fox and Aranda's findings regarding the impact of projects are not optimistic. They confirm suggestions made elsewhere that projects implemented under these type of funds are only concerned with rapid results and do not meet the real needs of the poor. The authors found that, contrary to claims of decentralised decision making processes, in many communities in Oaxaca it was state government officials not local communities who defined the projects. One municipal official claimed 'we have to do little tiny projects, which even though the community doesn't really need them, we can finish in a year, since they want the final paper work delivered. In the end we go on without resolving our larger problems and we end up just the same as when we started' (p. 26).

Fox and Aranda's assessment of projects also found that technical assistance was unavailable to most of the smaller rural municipalities, and that which was available was of poor quality. This was especially the case among indigenous communities, where there were fewer successful projects. The authors maintain that this is related to the very small budgets per outlying community and the lack of sufficient leverage over state officials to get appropriate technology (p. 46). Yet the evidence confirms that vulnerable groups are often increasingly marginalised by decentralisation processes.

This point directly leads on to my main criticism of this book. Fox and Aranda could have taken their analysis one step further and discussed the gendered implications of their findings. Women often feature disproportionately among the vulnerable groups and a discussion of the gendered impact of projects should form a vital component of any such study. At present there is very little available literature on the effects of decentralisation on gender inequality but understanding gender imbalances in decision making at both national and local levels would provide some insight into why many development projects fail. Gender inequalities will continue to occur unless they are considered in the design of rural development programmes.

The authors conclude 'increased finding without institutional change is likely to reinforce the existing institutional structure' (p. 50). This is a thoroughly researched and stimulating book which highlights some disturbing trends that require redress if decentralisation continues to be advocated by governments and international donor organisations.

Jasmine Gideon
University of Manchester
PII: S0261-3050(98)00017-5

Keeling, David J. (1996), *Buenos Aires: Global Dreams, Local Crises*, Wiley (Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore), xvi + 256 pp. 35 hbk.

The importance of cities in Latin America is highlighted by the decision of the editors of the World City Series to publish another book on this region (Mexico City was previously published). Indeed Latin America is about 70 per cent urban, meaning that more than three hundred million people inhabit the area's cities. Buenos Aires is not only Argentina's main city but also the third largest city in Latin America after São Paulo and Mexico City, with a metropolitan population of near 13 million people (1991 figures).

The introduction provides a framework for analysis and raises the important question of what is the recipe to achieve a world city status as well as what are the possible development scenarios for Buenos Aires in the immediate future. The second chapter concentrates on a historical analysis and describes Buenos Aires era of growth and prosperity especially between 1880 and 1930 when the city was considered by many to be the cultural mecca of Latin America. Although Buenos Aires continued to grow as Argentina's main city it lost its place as a world city.

The third chapter describes the contemporary urban landscape of Buenos Aires and is designed to give spatial context and meaning to the later chapters examining the various municipalities and neighborhoods. Keeling examines the principal urban centres located along the four primary corridors of the Outer Ring; Greater La Plata and the growing *partidos* of the Middle Ring; thirdly, the 19 *partidos* of the Inner Ring; and fourthly the focus shifts to the 47 *barrios* of the Federal District.

In the fourth chapter Keeling focuses on politics, planning and housing in Buenos Aires. Politically Greater Buenos Aires is divided into the Federal Capital, the seat of government, and the surrounding 19 municipalities located in the northern part of the Province of Buenos Aires. Both provinces and municipalities have elected governments although the executive head of the Municipality of the City of Buenos Aires (the federal capital) has been traditionally appointed by the president. It seems that the city will continue to have urban management problems until the jurisdiction over the Greater Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area continues to be divided between national, provincial, local bureaucracies, an interjurisdictional body, and several *quangos* no clear integrated urban management system will emerge. Another major problem is that the housing market continues to be bleak for low income groups. Self-help housing has proliferated not only in the outer suburbs but also in the downtown core. Although no accurate figures are available a huge segment of Buenos Aires' society lives in miserable housing conditions. The new free market economy policies of the Menem administration have not addressed the deteriorating housing conditions.

The fifth chapter reviews the major changes occurring in the dynamics of the labour force. One of the key globalization strategies of the Menem government was to privatize Buenos Aires' public services which resulted in a major shift of surplus and nonproductive labour from the public to the private sector mainly tertiary and service-oriented activities. Based on preliminary results of the 1995 census Keeling concludes that Buenos Aires is beginning to exhibit some qualities typical of world cities — it is becoming more involved in global information and service networks. Yet in the long term one questions the ability of Buenos Aires to transform itself into a global city as there are no concomitant investments in education which are vital to the city to be able to compete in a 'sophisticated, integrated and technologically driven society' (p. 147).

Three major characteristics of a world city — transport, telecommunications and culture — are analysed by Keeling. In the 1990s the Menem administration privatized and deregulated