
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 to examine 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 richer 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 types of funds are often not well targeted, 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 solving 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. 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 suffer 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 advocated by governments and international donor organisations.

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The importance of cities in Latin America is highlighted by the decision of the editors of the published title. Indeed, Latin America is about 70 per cent urban, meaning that more than three but also the third largest city in Latin America after São Paulo and Mexico City, which a metropolitan population of near 13 million people (1991 figures).

The introduction provides a framework for analysis and raises the important question of what for Buenos Aires in the immediate future. The second chapter concentrates on a historical 1930 when the city was considered by many to be the cultural meca of Latin America. Although 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 the four primary corridors of the Outer Ring: Greater La Plata and the growing parishes of the 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. 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 national provincial locally elected governments although the executive head of the president. It seems that the city will continue to have urban management problems until the national provincial locally elected governments although the executive head of the president. It seems that the city will continue to have urban management problems until the national provincial locally elected governments although the executive head of the president.

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 housing conditions are analysed by Keeling. In the 1990s the Menem administration privatized and deregulated.