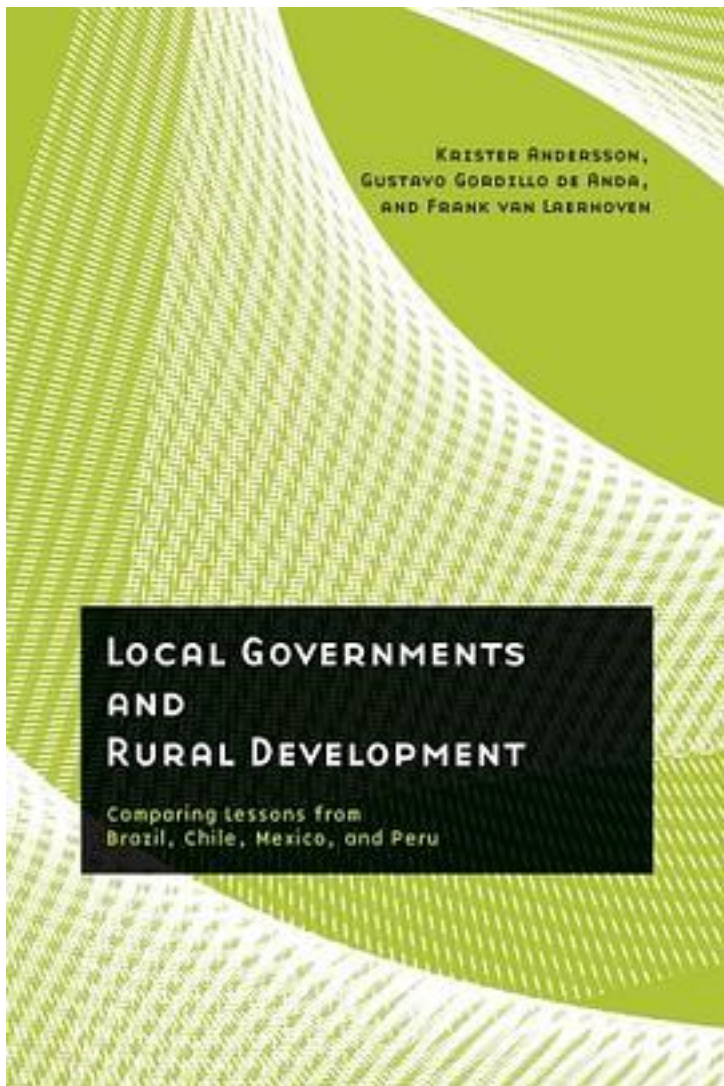


Local Governments and Rural Development



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Despite the recent economic upswing in many Latin American countries, rural poverty rates in the region have actually increased during the past two decades. Experts blame excessively centralized public administrations for the lackluster performance of public policy initiatives. In response, decentralization reforms have become a common government strategy for improving public sector performance in rural areas. The effect of these reforms is a topic of considerable debate among government officials, policy scholars, and citizens groups. This book offers a systematic analysis of how local governments and farmer groups in Latin America are actually faring today. Based on interviews with more than 1,200 mayors, local officials, and farmers in 390 municipal territories in four Latin American nations, the authors analyze the ways in which different forms of decentralization affect the governance arrangements for rural development on the ground. Their comparative analysis suggests that rural development outcomes are systemically linked to locally negotiated institutional arrangements: a formal and informal relationship between government officials, NGOs, and farmer groups that operate in the local sphere. They find that local-government actors contribute to public services that better assist the rural poor when local actors cooperate to develop their own institutional arrangements for participatory planning, horizontal learning, and the joint production of services. This study brings substantive data and empirical analysis to a discussion that has, until now, more often depended on qualitative research in isolated cases. With more than 60 percent of Latin America's rural population living in poverty, the results are both timely and crucial.

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