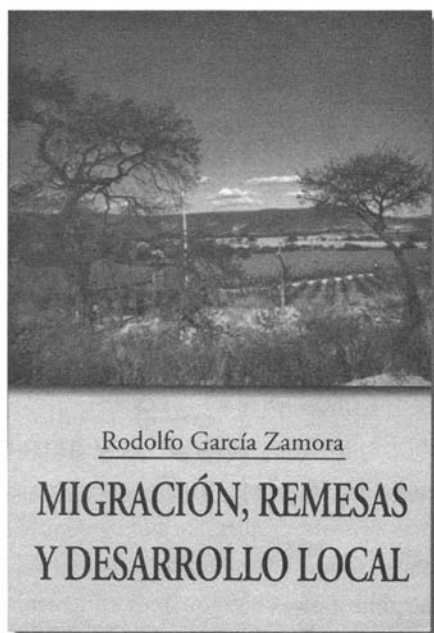


Reviews



Migración, remesas y desarrollo local
(Migration, Remittances and Local Development)
Rodolfo García Zamora
Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas
Mexico City, 2004, 271 pp.

THE RISKY LEAP FROM SOCIAL TO PRODUCTIVE PROJECTS

As international migration has increased over the past several years, it has been accompanied by growing concern and debate about its impacts at both the sending and receiving ends. Even though the remittances generated are often considered to be one of the most important effects from the country of origin's perspective, they sometimes seem to have little long-lasting impact on the sending region's economic development. Rodolfo García Zamora proposes including elements such as migrants' savings and newly acquired skills as part of the analysis in an effort to visualize how these factors, along with the remittances, may constitute a more integral strategy of development for some

of the sending regions. His perspective is derived from contacts with, and knowledge of, projects being implemented by hometown associations from the state of Zacatecas, Mexico, as they move forward in a process he has described as "the risky leap from social to productive projects."

In his book *Migration, Remittances and Local Development* he maintains that these organizations, located in the United States, in conjunction with their communities in Mexico constitute a new bi-national entity that aims to move beyond the realm of philanthropy toward the implementation of productive endeavors that will have an impact on employment, output and incomes in their hometowns. In his discussion of this process, he underlines the significance of "collective remittances" as a qualitatively enhanced resource that can propitiate new development models. The author believes that the organizations in question have reached a stage of institutional maturity that opens up new spaces for political participation and the promotion of micro-enterprises that will enable them to thus participate in the construction of a new bi-national Mexican identity.

He is cautious enough to indicate that the existing migrant organizations will not be able to promote local and regional development by themselves. Such an ambitious task requires, as García Zamora recognizes, the combined efforts of local communities; the migrant organizations; local, state and national Mexican governments; educational institutions; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); and international bodies. However, the author is anxious to stress the importance that international migration has for Mexico and the potential that hometown associations have for promoting local development in states like Zacatecas, where the primary sector of the economy is affected by structural crisis, there is a chronic inability to create employment opportunities, and thus transnational migration has become the most important economic and social process.

The book contains papers presented by the author at various national and international fora held between Octo-

ber 2000 and October 2003, addressing the issues of international migration, the remittances it generates and the impacts it has on local development. He draws on his own academic research, that of his colleagues affiliated with the doctoral program in development studies at the University of Zacatecas and that of other experts in the field, as well as his direct contact and collaboration with the hometown associations of migrants from Zacatecas in California, Illinois and Texas. Some of the most recurrent themes are: the need to regulate remittances to eliminate the considerable losses suffered by senders and recipients and to achieve more security and lower costs; the potential market that migrants represent in the United States for products from their places of origin; the fact that many migrants are anxious to contribute to their hometowns' economic and social development but do not know how to go about doing so; the need the hometown associations in the U.S. have for organized and active counterparts in Mexico in order to be more effective in promoting local development; and the need for more systematic follow-up for all of the initiatives undertaken.

Other topics explored include the negative impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement, which are perhaps most severely felt in the Mexican countryside where, as the author points out, the *campesinos* have clearly been excluded from the dynamics of neo-liberal capitalism. He proposes establishing micro-banks in remote rural areas in order to provide financial services and allow for transferring remittances, thereby creating mechanisms and an institutional framework for pooling and mobilizing the scarce but nevertheless existent economic resources.

García Zamora insists that local development policies are different from traditional industrial policies insofar as the center of attention is small and medium-sized or even micro-firms, and thus economies of scale are not a major concern. Emphasis must be placed on decentralization and the promotion of new productive and entrepreneurial endeavors that can provide for sustainable endogenous development, he maintains. The principal actors in this process must be the combined social forces existing at the local level, he explains, while at the same time recognizing the need for external help from governments, NGOs and international organizations.

The author is highly critical of the economic policies implemented in Mexico over the past two decades or more, and sees therein the underlying causes of the fact that so

many Mexicans consider migration to the United States their only alternative for a better life. Nevertheless, he seems to be quite optimistic about migrants' capacity—which he insists they have acquired through collective actions and organizations—for promoting integral and sustainable local development strategies in their communities of origin.

García Zamora analyzes the accomplishments and limitations of Zacatecas's 3 x 1 projects and provides some very useful guidelines for similar endeavors, based on those experiences. He maintains that alternative strategies for local and regional development require breaking away from the current mode of thinking which has undermined the role of public policy. He believes that the political administrative apparatus and public policies have a strategic role to play. He even refers to the need for bi-national policies to promote development in the sending communities, based on the fact that the migration taking place is a bi-national process.

The author admits that complete and fruitful participation of the entire population in a local development project, a necessary ingredient for success, will be extremely difficult to achieve, and even utopian to hope for. While he seems to be fully aware that such an enormous task is beyond the capabilities of the migrants themselves—even though collective organization and action can enhance their strength—he perhaps overestimates the willingness and interests of other actors and agents that would be required to accompany them in this endeavor.

For several generations, growing numbers of Mexicans have felt the need to change their destinies by migrating to the United States. García Zamora maintains that the time has come for migrants to begin to work collectively toward altering their communities of origins' destinies by making the risky leap from financing social projects to promoting and participating in productive projects in those localities, so that not migrating may become a viable alternative for future generations. A utopian proposal perhaps, but one that is already being attempted by some communities, as this book illustrates.

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