



Volume 36
Issue 1 *March*

Article 17

2009

Review of *Grassroots Struggles for Sustainability in Central America*. Lynn R. Horton. Reviewed by Ian W. Holloway.

Ian W. Holloway
University of Southern California

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Holloway, Ian W. (2009) "Review of *Grassroots Struggles for Sustainability in Central America*. Lynn R. Horton. Reviewed by Ian W. Holloway." *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 36 : Iss. 1 , Article 17.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol36/iss1/17>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



Although Le Grand is careful to point out that all of these approaches have merits, he clearly prefers the choice and competition model. Indeed, a whole chapter of the book is devoted to an exposition of this model and objections to the model are systematically dismissed. His claim that high-quality public services will only emerge as a result of the creation of markets is then applied to a discussion of choice and competition in school education and health care. In addition, he examines the prospect of expanding choice through the provision of what are known as direct payments by which resources are allocated to consumers to allow them to purchase the services they need. The book ends with a discussion of some of the ideological and political implications of these recommendations and two leading experts, Alan Enthoven and David Lipsey provide commentaries on Le Grand's proposals.

Although many of Le Grand's ideas are familiar to readers in the United States, he provides an interesting and incisive account of the case for the "reform" of the British social services through promoting markets. The author's own preference for the expansion of market behavior in social welfare will of course be contested by many social policy scholars not only in the United States but in Britain and elsewhere. Although Le Grand examines some of the objections that have been made to the expansion of social service markets, others are given little attention and some are ignored. Nevertheless, the book provides a lively, and well written polemic that should be widely consulted particularly by those who are skeptical about the merits of a market approach to social welfare.

James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley

Lynn R. Horton, *Grassroots Struggles for Sustainability in Central America*. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 2007. \$55.00 hardcover.

The 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development was heralded as an opportunity to rejuvenate and inspire continued attention to issues of sustainable development worldwide. However, despite these lofty goals, the Summit has been criticized by some as a step backward in the attempt to achieve sustainability due to its unclear and

nonbinding outcomes. While many international intergovernmental organizations, national governments and civil society organizations emphasize the importance of sustainable development, there remains great variability in the conceptualization of sustainable development depending on one's perspective. For example, the discourse surrounding sustainable development is often intertwined with issues of power and distribution of resources. In this way, a World Bank official and an indigenous farmer in a developing nation will likely have distinct perceptions regarding the meaning of sustainable development. While a large body of literature documents dominant sustainability discourse, relatively little has been written about grassroots perspectives on issues of sustainable development.

This book gives voice to three rural and indigenous communities on the subject of sustainable development: Miraflores, Nicaragua; Ipetí, Panama; and Puerto Jiménez, Costa Rica. Through qualitative research carried out over the course of 18 months in 2000 and 2001, Horton explores the meaning of sustainable development for residents and leaders of the case study communities. Sustainable development practices, such as ecotourism, cultivation of alternative exports, and collective land titling as well as dominant practices linked to sustainable development, such as neoliberal reforms and environmental protection policies are examined based on findings from in-depth interviews. Using a triadic framework that emphasizes empowerment and disempowerment and considers environmental, social, and economic factors tied to sustainable development policies and practices, the author carefully analyzes the ways in which sustainable development is carried out on the local level. Economic, political and cultural implications that sustainable development policies and practices pose for rural and indigenous communities are highlighted.

Chapter 1 provides background information on the varied approaches to sustainable development discourse, both dominant and alternative. The remainder of the book is devoted to exploring community visions of sustainable development in the case-study communities and situating these views within the larger sustainability dialogue. Chapter 2 introduces the communities of study and describes the social, historical, eco-

conomic and political context of each community in the post-World War II. Chapters three through eight are focused on the individual case study communities and the ways in which community discourses of sustainable development complement or contradict those of dominant institutions, such as the World Bank and other international financial institutions. The final two chapters utilize a comparative framework to summarize findings across the three case studies and contextualize these findings within the broader theoretical debate over the meaning of sustainable development. Detailed indices are provided to elucidate the author's data collection methodology and analysis techniques.

Horton's book is an important contribution to scholarly literature on sustainability in the developing world. The book is intended for sociologists, anthropologists and others who study the theory and practice of sustainable development. Given the academic nature of this book, prior knowledge regarding sustainable development discourse would be helpful to the reader. One of its major strengths lies in its detailed descriptions of the transactional manner in which state and local governmental and non-governmental policies affect the individual communities of study. The impact of these policies, including neoliberal economic reforms, expansion of environmental regulations, and implementation of specific sustainable development projects are dissected and evaluated under a framework that highlights empowerment and disempowerment of local communities. The result is a thoughtful, nuanced analysis of sustainable development policies and practices in Central America at the grassroots level.

Ian W. Holloway, University of Southern California

George J. Borjas (Ed.), *Mexican Immigration to the United States*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007. \$60.00 hardcover.

The large-scale immigration of Mexican-born persons to the U.S. continues to fuel a number of contentious policy debates that are rooted in economic and cultural concerns. The growing