



Reducing Poverty, Protecting Livelihoods, and Building Assets in a Changing Climate (Directions in Development)

Dorte Verner

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Climate change is the defining development challenge of our time. More than a global environmental issue, climate change and variability threaten to reverse recent progress in poverty reduction and economic growth. Both now and over the long run, climate change and variability threatens human and social development by restricting the fulfillment of human potential and by disempowering people and communities in reducing their livelihoods options. Communities across Latin America and the Caribbean are already experiencing adverse consequences from climate change and variability. Precipitation has increased in the southeastern part of South America, and now often comes in the form of sudden deluges, leading to flooding and soil erosion that endanger people's lives and livelihoods. Southwestern parts of South America and western Central America are seeing a decrease in precipitation and an increase in droughts. Increasing heat and drought in Northeast Brazil threaten the livelihoods of already-marginal smallholders, and may turn parts of the eastern Amazon rainforest into savannah. The Andean inter-tropical glaciers are shrinking and expected to disappear altogether within the next 20-40 years, with significant consequences for water availability. These environmental changes will impact local livelihoods in unprecedented ways. Poverty, inequality, water access, health, and migration are and will be measurably affected by climate change. Using an innovative research methodology, this study finds quantitative evidence of large variations in impacts across regions. Many already poor regions are becoming poorer; traditional livelihoods are being challenged in unprecedented ways; water scarcity is increasing, particularly in poor arid areas; human health is deteriorating; and climate-induced migration is already taking place and may increase. Successfully reducing social vulnerability to climate change and variability requires action and commitment at multiple levels. This volume offers key operational recommendations at the government, community, and household levels with particular emphasis placed on enhancing good governance and technical capacity in the public sector, building social capital in local communities, and protecting the asset base of poor households.

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