THE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

This book presents a new perspective on adaptation to climate change. It considers climate change as more than a problem that can be addressed solely through technical expertise. Instead, it approaches climate change as an adaptive challenge that is fundamentally linked to beliefs, values, and worldviews as well as to power, politics, identities, and interests. Drawing on case studies from high-income countries, the book argues that it is time to consider adaptation to climate change as a challenge of social, personal, and political transformations. The authors represent a variety of fields and perspectives, illustrating the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to the problem. The book will be of interest to researchers, policy makers, and advanced students in the environmental sciences, social sciences, and humanities as well as to decision makers and practitioners interested in new ideas about adapting to climate change.

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Preface

Research on climate change adaptation has increased dramatically in recent years, providing new insights into and information on the possibilities and challenges of living with environmental change. However, this growing area of research has also raised important questions about what it really means to adapt to climate change. How do social processes influence the capacity to adapt? What are the limits to adaptation as a response to changing climate conditions? And finally, what are the implications of these limits for human security? These were some of the questions addressed in a large research project on “The Potentials of and Limits to Adaptation in Norway” (PLAN), funded by the Research Council of Norway’s NORKLIMA program (2007–12). This project explored how societies adapt to changing climate conditions as well as why they do not. Looking at relationships between behaviors, systems, cultures, values, and worldviews, the research showed that adaptation involves much more than technical responses to changing temperatures and rainfall patterns, exemplified through improved water management, better infrastructure, new regulations, or different types of crops. Recognizing adaptation as a social, cultural, political, and human process, it became clear that climate change is an adaptive challenge – a problem or situation that challenges mind-sets and approaches to change in general.

The chapters in this book, written by project participants and an international network of collaborators, present analytical frames and case studies related to climate change responses. The research focuses largely on adaptation yet also suggests a need to redefine this concept, taking into account both the personal and political dimensions of climate change.

Writing this book presented more than a technical problem for us as editors; it was an adaptive challenge that pushed us to question our own assumptions about what adaptation really means. It took some time for us to identify the threads that run through the chapters and to pull out the larger messages. We hope that we have adequately defined and illustrated the nature of the climate change challenge in a way that can contribute constructively to effective responses, whether adaptation, mitigation, or social transformation.
Preface

We are grateful to the many people involved in the PLAN project who made this book possible, particularly Siri Mittet, the PLAN project manager. Including all of the authors of the chapters in this book, we would like to thank the researchers, research assistants, students, artists, and international collaborators who provided valuable contributions and inspiration throughout the PLAN project: W. Neil Adger, Virginia Antonijevic, Eva Bakkeslett, Hans Ivar Blystad, Elin Lerum Boasson, Marianne Bruusgaard, Tim Carter, Halvor Dannevig, Jon Vegard Dokken, Per-Ove Eikeland, Torill Engen Skaugen, Siri Eriksen, David Furlow, Inger Hanssen-Bauer, Gail Hochachka, Ida Holth, Gunhild Hoogensen, Grete Hovelsrud, Tor Håkon Inderberg, Jan Erling Klausen, Richard J. T. Klein, Janina Kringstad, Berit Kristoffersen, Irene Lorenzoni, Anne Lucas, Susanne Moser, Mauricio Múnera, Lynn Rosentrater, Cathrine Ruud, Inger-Lise Saglie, Mina Saunte, Jimmy Schmincke, Andreas Segrov, Monica Sharma, Louise Simonsson, Michael Simpson, Ida Skivenes, Knut-Bjørn Stokke, Roger Street, Linda Sygna, Jennifer West, Olga Wilhelmi, Marte Winsvold, and Johanna Wolf. We are also grateful to the Research Council of Norway and the NORKLIMA program, particularly Stine Madland Kaasa and Eivind Hoff-Elimari, for their support. Finally, we thank the chapter reviewers for their valuable feedback and Matt Lloyd and Holly Turner at Cambridge University Press for their continuous support.