



Averting a Global Environmental Collapse: The Role of Anthropology and Local Knowledge

Thomas Reuter

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The numerous and varied indicators of environmental risks point toward the likelihood of a systemic and catastrophic ecological failure at some point during this century. Political inaction and cultural resistance, meanwhile, are even preventing the implementation of already available technical solutions, which has led many experts to conclude that averting a global environmental catastrophe is, foremost, a socio-political, rather than a technical, challenge. The World Science Union (ICSU) has recognized that knowledge of the social sciences is indispensable for facilitating the major socio-cultural transformations now required, and, together with the International Social Science Council (ISSC), called for a mainstreaming of environmental research in the social sciences at the Rio+20 Earth Summit. The two major international organizations in anthropology, IUAES and WCAA, responded to this call by co-sponsoring a symposium on environmental change at the Manchester World Anthropology Congress, and by creating a scientific Commission for Anthropology and Environment, which then hosted a second symposium in Chiba City, Tokyo, in May 2014. This volume is a selection of the many papers presented by a truly international group of experts at the two symposia. It identifies and provides case study examples in six major research areas where anthropology and local and indigenous peoples knowledge can make a significant contribution: Environmental Vulnerability and Risk Perceptions; Sustainable Urban Environments; Sustainable Rural Environments and Food Security; Indigenous People and Nature Conservation; Environmental Justice and Corporate Social Responsibility; and Sustainable Resource Management. Contributors represent nine different national anthropologies across all continents. The volume thus also enacts a new world anthropologies paradigm, first proposed by the World Anthropologies Network (WAN), which aspires to unify and globalize the discipline in a spirit of equality and mutual respect among scholars across all national traditions and language barriers. Furthermore, the volume will also support teaching and promote further research in the anthropology of the environment.

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