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The colossal human ecological footprint now threatens the sustainability of the entire planet. Scientists, policymakers, and other close observers know that any understanding of the causes of global environmental change is a function of understanding its human dimension—the range of human choices and actions that affect the environment. This book offers a state-of-the-art assessment of research on the human dimensions of global environmental change, describing how global threats to sustainability have come about, providing an interpretive framework for understanding environmental change, reviewing recent work in the social and ecological sciences, and discussing which paths for future advances in our knowledge may prove most promising.

The chapters, by prominent North American and European authors, offer perspectives on population, consumption, land cover and use, institutional actions, and culture. They discuss such topics as risk, the new Structural Human Ecology approach to analyzing anthropogenic drivers of global environmental change, recent progress in understanding land use change, international environmental regimes, the concept of the commons, and the comparative vulnerability of societies around the world.