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Autor: Mitchel/ Clark/ Cash/ Dickson/ (Eds)

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Knowledge about environmental problems has expanded rapidly in recent decades, as have the number and variety of processes for making large-scale scientific assessments of those problems and their possible solutions. Yet too often scientific information has not been transformed into effective and appropriate policies to protect the global environment. In this book, scholars use a comparative analytic framework and supporting case studies to evaluate the impact of environmental assessments, looking at how, and under what conditions, global environmental assessments influence political and economic decision makers. They find that global environmental assessments are more likely to be influential if the process is perceived not only as scientifically credible but also as salient to policy concerns and as generated through legitimate means. The studies show that although the content of the assessment clearly matters, its influence is often determined more by the process that generated it and by external factors affecting the receptiveness of different audiences. Assessments that involve ongoing interactions among scientists, stakeholders, and policymakers prove particularly likely to influence behaviors.

The diverse case studies--ranging from global assessments of climate change and acid precipitation to assessments of sea-level rise in Maine and Hawai'i and climate forecasting in Zimbabwe--embed their findings in contemporary theoretical frameworks while remaining informed by pragmatic policy considerations.