

Valuing variability – New perspectives on climate resilient dryland development

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Agricultural economies in dryland areas are widely viewed as being in crisis, suffering from persistent food insecurity due to a lack of rainfall. Many governments look for solutions that require to replace existing livelihoods, seeking to master nature by choosing interventions to ‘stabilise’ the environment. But history shows that this rarely succeeds in the long term, and commonly leads to many other problems. Environmental variability is on a path to become the most frequent condition in agriculture. Mastery needs to give way to accepting and living with uncertainty, and seeking ways of making good use of variability. Family farmers and herders in dryland regions are ahead of this game, specializing in relating to the inherent variability of their environment as a valuable resource, rather than as a disturbance to a ‘normal’ condition of stability.

Valuing Variability is a challenge to the view of the drylands as naturally vulnerable to food insecurity and poverty. It argues that improving agricultural productivity in

dryland environments is possible by working with climatic uncertainty rather than seeking to control it – a view that runs contrary to decades of development practice in arid and semi-arid lands. Highlights from the specialist literature on drylands and pastoralism, are presented in combination with case studies from China, India and Kenya, and testimonies from drylands producers and practitioners. The book targets motivated policy makers and development agents, urging them to overhaul their present thinking about ‘controlling’ drylands, and consider the possibility of an alternative pathway, one based on taking advantage of variability.]

Valuing Variability can be downloaded from the IIED website: <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10128IIED.pdf>

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