

## PRESENTATION

In the early months of 1997, the Equatorial Pacific showed signs of an impending massive El Niño, and as a consequence of the early predictions, the event received enormous and unprecedented press coverage, drawing attention to the need to mitigate its catastrophic effects around the world, but also to factor its modulating effects on economic endeavors in order to enhance economic productivity. The 1997-98 El Niño brought to international attention the importance of climatic events on human activity. The effects of El Niño in Mexico had not been documented extensively before and were limited to some isolated observations of a probable causal relationship between large-scale weather fluctuations and the departure from a 'normal' state of some environmental conditions, such as the annual regional rainfall, the success or failure of individual crops, or the fluctuations in the location and catches of a particular fishery. The catastrophic landing of hurricane Pauline in the fall of 1997, while not necessarily a direct effect of El Niño, resonated with the reports from around the world about the dire consequences of extreme weather patterns. Dr. Carlos Basdresch, then Director General of the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACyT) of Mexico, immediately made available a generous fund to support point studies that should assess the response of the natural and human environments to the presence of El Niño. A call for proposals was issued in the fall of 1997, and projects were selected by an ad hoc committee in December of the same year. The results from the research supported were presented at a special symposium *Los efectos del fenómeno de El Niño en México*, held in Mexico City on May 17 to 19, 2000, and a non-technical interpretation of the findings was published in 2001 by CONACyT. The present volume is a compilation of the scientific papers that resulted from these studies, and whereas a larger participation of social and economic scientists might have been desirable, these communications indeed provide a detailed quantification of the environmental response to climatic variations such as El Niño.

Very many colleagues contributed to the success of this research effort. Quite especially, Dr. Basdresch provided the funds to be administered directly by one of us (A.B.) in coordination with Drs. Jaime Martuschelli and Raúl Herrera of CONACyT. This unprecedented form of supporting the research saved much of the overhead of the projects and reduced the selection and funding of the studies from months to days. The selection committee consisted of Drs. Raúl Herrera (CONACyT), Lorenzo Aceves (Colegio de Posgraduados), Horacio de la Cueva (CICESE), Myrl Hendershott (University of California), Doménico Voltolina (CIBNOR) and Antonio Badan (CICESE), who all donated their time generously. The symposium to examine the results of the investigations was beautifully put together by Mrs. Doris Perló, with the collaboration of Drs. Marcial Bonilla, José Valdés, Raúl Herrera, Rodolfo Arvide, Mrs. Laura Villavicencio, and their staff. Throughout and after the proceedings, Mrs. Ivonne Best provided the organizational support that made this volume possible. Finally, Prof. Cinna Lomnitz, together with Mr. François Graffé and Ms. Mónica Nava have ensured the completion of this very nice special volume. The chief guest editor is profoundly grateful to all, and to the associate editors, especially Dr. Miguel Lavín, for the enormous effort provided to conclude the volume.

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