

PART II, SECTION I

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF

MAJOR GROUPS

Introduction

Chapters 23 to 31 of Agenda 21 stress the need to involve all sectors of society in the promotion of sustainable development. Canada has made broad public participation in decision making a priority for many years. In the years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), that trend has intensified. Since major group activity takes so many forms in Canada, this section focuses on two trends that have become significant since 1992.

Access to Decision Making: The Maturing of Intersectoral Dialogue

Governments have increased their efforts to find effective means of involving major groups and citizens in shaping the sustainable development agenda. Forums that bring together representatives of many different groups have become important vehicles in these consultative processes. The intent of such forums is to encourage debate and consensus building that crosses traditional major group lines.

These kinds of consultative processes support the public consultation requirements central to such basic environmental laws as the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, the Quebec Environmental Quality Act, and the Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. Development and implementation of these laws have involved the full range of environmental groups, industry, labour, Aboriginal people, other major groups, and citizens.

Similar consultative mechanisms have been part of the development of policies, programs, and responses that address specific environmental challenges. These challenges have included work on issues facing the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River ecosystems, the Atlantic coastal zone, British Columbia's Fraser Valley, and northern river basins.

Provincial governments have also put in place consultative mechanisms to foster effective public responses to sustainable development challenges. Both New Brunswick, through its Commission on Land Use and the Rural Environment, and British Columbia, through the Commission on Resources and Environment, involve citizens, communities, and