

The Canadian Economy

Canada's economy is based largely on free market principles. It is highly integrated into the global economy. Because our private sector has substantial freedom of action it has a significant responsibility for many aspects of sustainable development.

Governments

Canada is a federal state with ten provinces and two territories. Its constitutional and political system gives all orders of government (federal, provincial/territorial, municipal) some degree of authority for environmental, economic, and social issues related to sustainable development. Governments have created mechanisms to coordinate their sustainable development policy making and activities. They also act independently within their spheres of jurisdiction. For example, the provinces own and control the use of most of the natural resources within their boundaries.

The Changing Nature of Governance

The political, fiscal, and societal forces taking place in Canada are affecting governmental roles and the way decisions are made. The transition to sustainable development is increasingly recognized as a shared responsibility between different orders of governments, individuals, and nongovernmental organizations and businesses. Government roles are also evolving with respect to Aboriginal peoples in the context of land claims settlements and self-government initiatives that call for the shared management of natural resources.

Decision-making processes are becoming more open to interested citizens and groups. The creation of round tables and the widespread use of processes that involve all sectors of society are redefining the balance between hierarchical and shared decisions.

An example of the improved level of government accountability is the establishment of a federal Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. Additional information on this and other aspects of the changing nature of decision making in Canada is found in the sections of this report on strengthening the role of major groups and on integrating environment and development into decision making.

Trends

Every year Canada highlights several trends in its sustainable development agenda. This report notes the emergence of new approaches to education and understanding sustainability. It considers trends in community action. It discusses some impacts of information technology.

New Approaches to Education and Understanding Sustainable Development

Education is essential to engendering the values and attitudes necessary for Canadians to understand and support sustainable development. In Canada, education is considered to

Cooperatives are businesses owned and controlled by the 12 million people who use them. They contribute to community sustainability because they are member-driven organizations, surpluses stay in the community, and decisions generally reflect a sensitivity to local public interest/needs. There are 9878 cooperatives in Canada.

The Manitoba Round Table on the Environment and the Economy has created the Sustainable Development Awards of Excellence Program. Since 1992, it has recognized projects and efforts of Manitobans that exemplify the principles of sustainable development. Award categories include research and development, small business, the public sector, large business, education, youth, nongovernmental organizations, and households/ neighbourhoods.