

David Cadman, is very dynamic, and it put up a proposal to CIDA [Canadian International Development Agency] and to David MacDonald's office of Canadian Emergency Co-ordinator/African Famine. There was also the link to The Tree Project's clearing house in New York, going back two years to the time when the NGLS people put on a road show and made contacts in Vancouver. The people of British Columbia, having some appreciation for forests responded with enthusiasm for this idea. They wanted to go beyond simply sending a few dollars over for relief and were interested in setting up a long-term partnership.

"The working groups in B.C. represent a cross section of society: everyone from business and labour union representatives to students, municipalities, women's organizations, environment and development groups (obviously), church groups and so on. My trip in Africa, though, convinced me that it was premature to think about direct linkages between these Canadian working groups and projects undertaken by small communities in these countries.

"Here in B.C., we are simply too far away to be in touch with the daily changes at the local level in Africa, changes that can dramatically affect a development project. An awareness of local conditions and the ability to respond quickly are critical in building effective programs that are in the best interest of the community. For a partnership to exist, a fundamental sense of knowledge, understanding and trust must be established on both sides. This requires time, patience, open communication and interaction on a continuing basis. The ability to communicate is indispensable to the development process.

"Therefore, it is impractical to forge direct linkages between groups who are thousands of kilometres apart and don't know each other. How can we expect them to understand the dynamics of their separate circumstances? In all likelihood, they will not even share the same language. Even if they did, many village groups just don't have the writing skills or the means (telephones, for instance) for easy, long-distance communication. And we in B.C. have to learn more about the specific problems in different countries and have to scale down our expectations—nobody is going to 'regreen the Sahel'; it's a question of small successes, of increasing food crops locally, for example.

"So, certainly the best way will be to work through an intermediary at the field level. That can be a Canadian NGO [that] has a long-term commitment to forestry projects, or an indigenous organization [that] knows the capacity of various communities. Part of our program, meanwhile, is to extend a greater awareness of Africa through the province's high schools, providing students with up-to-date videotapes on the situation in these countries, and encouraging discussion of the real factors obstructing Africa's development.

"In west Africa I went to Senegal, Niger, Togo and Burkina Faso, spending an average of two weeks in each country and travelling as much as possible overland and by public transport. In the northwestern coastal area of Senegal, for instance, there were many small forestry projects: windbreaks along the coast, and nearby a group of young farmers at Meckhe experimenting in agroforestry, extending their tree nursery to interplant with food crops, and elsewhere groups growing trees for fuelwood or for timber. Throughout these