Priorities and strategies

It was universally agreed that the department continues to struggle with setting priorities, in large part because the departmental planning process was not "priorizing a sense of purpose or direction". As one workshop participant remarked, "It is crucial that we priorize what we want to do. We talk about our international role, but if we were more strategic and focused we could accomplish a great deal more. We're too generalized, we haven't translated our intentions into specific objectives." Many noted that the department has too many priorities. For FY 2000/01, participants pointed out, the department had identified 29 "main" priorities and 144 "secondary" priorities. The lack of focus was matched by a lack of follow-up. As one participant explained, "Canadian initiatives often lack adequate follow-up because the resources to back them up and to build constituencies and to deliver on our positions aren't part of the strategy". In a host of areas, the department needed to develop strategies "to explain why things are being done".

Information Management

Information technology has been transforming diplomacy. Not since the advent of the telegraph and telephone has anything so profoundly affected how foreign ministries operate. The communications revolution has dramatically accelerated the flow of information, generated vast new stores of data, created new ways of processing knowledge, involved interest groups and individuals directly in policy-making, and changed how governments communicate.

In response, DFAIT has invested heavily in information technology ([14]). The department currently spends in excess of $100 million dollars a year on informatics, twice what it did five years ago. In FY 99/00, informatics accounted for 7.4% of the total budget -- more than personnel costs (6.9%); more than the annual costs combined of all the department's foreign policy, trade and economic policy, international business development, and public diplomacy operations (4.1%); more than real property costs (4.1%), and more than assistance to Canadians (3.4%). (*Annex 2: Budgetary Realities*)

For the money, the department reckons it operates the most advanced communications system of any foreign ministry in the world. Its political officers agree. SIGNET and MITNET allow them to work with each across the globe "almost as if people were down the hall".

---

[14] *The Information Management and Technology Bureau (SXD) is the largest bureau in the department with an official complement of 425 FTEs and another 100 "consultants" on site. The bureau is large enough to have its own human resources and training units. It takes 18 pages in the DFAIT directory to list SXD staff. In addition, 150 individuals in other bureaux have full-time informatics responsibilities. In contrast, there are 482 political/economic FSs and 381 trade FSs.*