

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Arctic countries have made sustainability a central tenet of their approaches to circumpolar development. For its part, Canada laid out a set of sustainable development goals relevant to the north through the sustainable development strategy released by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in 1997. Internationally, Canada worked hard to ensure that the 1996 Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council would confirm sustainable development as a key objective of the new Council, building on the work of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). Sustainable development thus occupies a prominent position in Canada's northern foreign policy.

While efforts to define sustainable development for the north have been contentious, in essence it entails integrating economic, social and environmental concerns in decision making relating to the Arctic and its resources. The sustainability concept is especially meaningful to Arctic Aboriginal peoples because it implies passing the natural environment on unimpaired from one generation to the next, maintaining diversity in economic and cultural development, and integrating these goals with the region's carrying and assimilative capacities. Sustainability in practice, however, is an ongoing challenge for policy makers and practitioners alike. The following principles guide the approach Canada takes to sustainable development through its northern foreign policy:

- diversification of income- or revenue-producing activities that do not harm the environment;
- enhancement of the viability of, and respect for the integrity of, Indigenous cultures and economies as an important element in achieving sustainable development;
- participation of local people in development and resource utilization decisions; and
- maximum retention of benefits from economic growth at the community level.

In pursuing sustainable development through its northern foreign policy, the federal government works closely with territorial and provincial governments where they have jurisdiction over natural resources. It will focus on a number of core objectives in this area, guided by the principles set out above.

Sustainable Utilization of Renewable Resources

Canada's renewable resource sector spans a wide range of activities, from small family trapping and fishing businesses to large forestry or husbandry enterprises. While this sector accounts for a smaller portion of overall economic activity than the non-renewable resource sector, it is nonetheless important for maintaining traditional ways of life and providing employment. Today, though, virtually all of its component parts — e.g., fur or caribou harvesting, fishing and forestry — face significant challenges relating to distance from markets, vulnerability to environmental threats, and exposure to extra-regional market and political forces. These are forcing northern communities dependent on the renewable resources sector to get better organized politically, and to become more business-oriented, better educated and more connected with the outside world.