

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 within legal limits, it has a significant responsibility for many aspects of sustainable development.

A tradition of organized action by groups and individuals is a basic part of Canadian life. Labour unions and community and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are some of the groups that play a major role in determining the sustainable development priorities and actions of the Canadian people.

Canada has a long tradition of international co-operation. That co-operation has grown to encompass issues of sustainable development, particularly since the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (Stockholm Conference). The primary vehicle for international development assistance is the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Growing concern in Canada has led to the creation of new or expanded institutions focussing on different aspects of sustainable development. At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Canada announced that the mandate of the federally funded International Development Research Centre (IDRC) would be broadened to emphasize sustainable development and to support implementation of Agenda 21. In addition, private organizations, such as the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), are also important sources of expertise and activity. The IISD was created to promote sustainable development in decision making and has research and communication programs linked to UNCED follow-up.

For a complete review of Canada's economy, people and environment, and the linkages between them, please refer to Canada's National Report, submitted to the UNCED Secretariat in 1991.

(a) The Concept of Sustainable Development

The debate in Canada on how best to integrate economic, environmental and social values into decision making has evolved since first gaining prominence as a result of the Stockholm Conference. That debate was further galvanized by the more integrated approach promoted by the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, or the Brundtland Commission).

As one of the first nations to respond to the results of the Brundtland Commission report, Canada established the National Task Force on the Environment and the Economy in 1986, bringing together representatives from all major sectors of Canadian society. In its 1987 report, the task force recommended a series of

The local round table in London, Ontario, a community of 300 000, has organized a major conference, An Agenda for the Responsible City. It has also developed 500 "vision circles" (small meetings of citizens interested in participating in shaping the future of their community), involving more than 4000 people.