

Thus, though the underlying premise with which we began this work is more widely accepted than it was, we feel that the need to clarify facts and options is at least as great. Our leaders began to change their attitudes because in the late 1980s a consensus developed among scientists, forecasters, and the general public about the urgency of the growing environmental threat. Since the Club of Rome published its famous Limits to Growth study in the sixties, many analysts have been at work, and half a dozen points have emerged that are now agreed by all major forecasters and global modellers.¹

1. Population and physical capital cannot continue to grow forever on a finite planet.
2. There is so far no reliable complete information about the degree to which the planet can absorb all the wastes created by human wants.
3. Unless changed, present policies will lead to an increasing gap between rich and poor, among nations as among individuals. Even vastly increased foreign aid cannot significantly redress these global inequities.
4. Whereas technology can help, by itself it is not the answer.
5. Interdependence among peoples and nations is much greater than has been commonly realized. In other words, actions taken in one part of the world can often have profound consequences elsewhere.
6. For this reason, policy changes made sooner are liable to be more beneficial than those made later.

THIS LIST IMPLIES THAT, IF WE ARE TO SURVIVE, big changes will have to be made in the way things are organized. It doesn't follow that governments will make those changes, because so far the people who bother themselves with such questions lack real influence with most governments. If the Canadian case is typical, they tend to be enthusiastic civil servants and researchers who beaver away at their studies in isolated offices, get together for seminars to discuss their troubling insights, and produce a rain-shower of far-sighted documents that seldom penetrate the protective shell behind which ministers shelter.

These general propositions agreed by futurists offer us little comfort when they are applied to the major global issues of the contemporary world. They posit a future of danger, shortages, and deteriorating standards. For example, here are the five issues that one futurist says will define the world in 1994 – a mere half decade away:² the potential for nuclear war, severe food shortages, the deterioration of the biosphere, the imbalance in the distribution of wealth, and shortages of material and energy.

Underlying these issues is the sense that economic development and environment are two sides of the same coin, both of crucial importance to our future; and that we must find a way to make all future development sustainable in environmental and resource terms.

This concept of sustainable development was launched into the global marketplace of ideas in 1981 with the publication of a ground-breaking report under the somewhat bureaucratic title of the World Conservation Strategy (WCS). This document was prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and the World Wildlife Fund. The document was an effort to meet the objections that citizens of Third World countries had made to the alarm expressed about the state of the globe at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972.

At that time the predominant idea was that economic development was ruining much of the natural world, and this carried a strong implication that development was bad. Not unnaturally, people from countries desperate for development rejected the whole thesis, and even considered it something of a white man's plot to prevent the destitute people in the world from gaining their place in the sun.

The WCS came to grips with this problem for the first time. It recognized that the planet's capacity to support people is being reduced through poor land management, profligate use of resources, and the poverty that in many places forces people to destroy the resources they need if they are to survive. The document agreed with environmentalists that it is essential to maintain Earth's ecological processes and life-support systems, and to preserve genetic diversity. The WCS went further: it recognized that human activities will continue to depend on the use of other species and entire ecosystems, and it added that

Nature must be used on a basis that can be sustained into the distant future.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BECAME THE ideology animating the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and it has since won rapid acceptance – as an idea. By treating both development and environment as essential to the continuance of human life on this planet, the document helped to take the curse off the environmental analysis of the human situation for the developing countries. Confronted by the WCS challenge, many governments formally took the pledge to put their affairs on a sustainable basis, promising to draw up and follow national conservation strategies to guide all their future development.

Unfortunately, so far it has been mostly talk. In one country after another finance ministers and their economic advisers have remained oblivious to environmental thinking. Warnings given by scientific advisers and global thinkers

have been ignored. Environment ministers have had low status and little influence in cabinets.³

Yet not all the prognosis is bad. The lip-service that leaders have begun to pay to environmental concerns has a firm and real cause, namely, the dramatic change that has occurred throughout the Western world in public attitudes. Many opinion polls suggest that electorates are changing their minds about the real threats to security. Canadians, as judged by such polls, appear to be ready for action to deal with the emerging, long-term threats (though they may not yet have accepted the need for higher taxes to pay for such action).

In the days of the Cold War the Soviet Union was regarded as the enemy and the number one world problem, in Canada as elsewhere in the Western world. This perception has greatly diminished. Indeed, a poll published in 1987 by the Ottawa-based North-South Institute, indicated that the fear of Soviet aggression is almost the last thing on the minds of Canadians when they think about the world.

CANADIANS DO SEE THE WORLD AS A TROUBLING PLACE, TO BE SURE, BUT the things that trouble them now are of a different kind, such as (in order of priority, according to this poll):

- pollution and the environment
- major world diseases
- poverty and hunger
- the possibility of nuclear war
- apartheid and human rights
- world economic collapse

