

PART II, SECTION IV

COMBATING POVERTY

Introduction

Chapter 3 of Agenda 21 recognizes the links between poverty and the environment. It notes that natural resources are often the only resources available to the world's poor and that the poor must have alternative means of achieving a sustainable livelihood to avoid destructive dependence on primary resources. It calls on countries to enable the poor to achieve sustainable livelihoods. A large number of measures are suggested in Chapter 3 to achieve this goal. Canada's response to the chapter is both a domestic and international one.

Addressing Poverty in Canada

While Canada is a developed country, there has been an increase in the number of Canadians living in poverty in recent years. "Living in poverty" is usually defined as living below a low income cutoff figure that is based on the percentage of income spent on basic necessities, family size, and location. Using that measure, the percentage of Canada's population living in poverty increased from 15.2 percent in 1990 to 17.9 percent in 1993.

Various initiatives have been put in place to combat poverty in Canada. Among the most significant in terms of resource transfers are the following:

- the federal government's Unemployment Insurance Program, which provides income support to people who lose their jobs;
- a range of social services and income, health, and housing programs for persons in need provided by provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, much of which is funded by the federal government under the Canada Assistance Plan; and
- income support provided to older people through the Old Age Security Program and the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

Federal social programs and those in many provinces are being reformed to focus more emphasis on improving the ability of Canadians to obtain and keep jobs through better employment skills.

A number of ways of consulting with individual Canadians, communities, and nongovernmental organizations at the national and community level on poverty issues have been established. Examples range from formal Parliamentary hearings to informal community efforts.