

PART II, SECTION II

INDICATORS FOR SUSTAINABLE

DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Chapter 40 of Agenda 21 focuses on environmental information to improve decision making. One of the activities cited in this chapter encourages countries and international organizations to develop the concept of indicators for sustainable development. Indicators are an important tool for translating and delivering scientifically credible information in a concise manner that decision makers and the public can readily understand and use.

The development of environmental indicators in Canada has progressed considerably during the last few years. Initiatives that link environmental, economic, and social indicators in a sustainable development framework are in their early stages. However, all orders of government are making progress, often in co-operation with partners from various sectors of society. The pace of progress may reflect the conceptual difficulty in defining sustainability. It also shows the constraints posed by the lack of available supporting data.

Canada's Progress and Achievements

Canadian indicator initiatives range in scale from the local to international. They range in orientation from sustainability to environmental performance to the sector-specific. They support work such as SOE reports, which many Canadian jurisdictions produce. This discussion notes some examples. Others, such as those related to indicators for forest ecosystems, are mentioned elsewhere in this report.

Environment Canada is leading a federal effort to develop a comprehensive national set of environmental indicators for use by decision makers and the public. These indicators provide a representative profile of the state of Canada's environment. They will help measure progress towards the goals of sustainable development. A progress report produced in 1991 presented preliminary national environmental indicators for 18 issues. Research and development to improve and refine these indicators has continued through work carried out with other federal agencies and consultations with stakeholders.