



Photo credit: Environment Canada

Social capital is generated when people come together to resolve issues such as the health of the Salmon River watershed.

Sustainable development is built on the notion that a generation ought to act as stewards of resources for future generations. A society that functions with a greater degree of harmony and in which there is a stronger collective sense of shared direction and values should be better able to adapt to change.

Broader equity factors are important elements in building social capital. During the past twenty-five years, Canada has become more aware and active in support of equity principles. The creation of a constitutional Charter of Rights in 1982 was linked to increased awareness and concern about individual rights in the face of growing government authority. It reflected the work of activists on behalf of groups within Canadian society who had been marginalized, such as Aboriginal people, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities. The recognition of the need for the full and equal participation of women in economic, political, and social decision making has been an increasingly important element in building social capital in Canada and in Canadian sustainable development initiatives.

There has been a movement toward community-based solutions to environmental problems, often

based on an ecosystem approach. A number of programs draw on the commitment of local people to identify, take ownership of, and act on solutions. Efforts to draw the full range of stakeholders together to resolve differences and achieve consensus build social capital.

Social capital has an important role in the overall move toward sustainable development. Development in a country depends on more than the presence of skills or resources. It requires a sense of confidence and mutual trust within a society to enable people to take long-term perspectives and ones that reflect the needs of others. These are the kinds of attitudes that are fundamental to sustainable development.

THE PATH FROM HERE

The past twenty-five years have been a time of change in Canada. People are increasingly aware of the connections between themselves and the world that is their