

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Agenda 21 document was one of the main products of the June 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The document is comprised of some 500 pages, and contains hundreds of recommendations in 39 substantive chapters. Specifically, the following sectors (with their associated chapters) are addressed in Agenda 21.

- A. Critical elements of sustainability (Chapters 2-5)
- B. Financial resources and mechanisms (Chapter 33)
- C. Education, science, transfer of environmentally sound technologies, cooperation and capacity building (Chapters 16, 34-37)
- D. Decision making structures (Chapters 8, 38-40)
- E. Roles of major groups (Chapters 23-32)
- F. Health, human settlements and fresh water (Chapters 6, 7, 18, and 21)
- G. Land, desertification, forests and biodiversity (Chapters 10-15)
- H. Atmosphere, oceans and all kinds of seas (Chapters 9, 17)
- I. Toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes (Chapters 19, 20, and 22)

Agenda 21 is not intended to provide detailed policy direction to its signing nations, but to identify objectives and indicate types of action which should be taken for the world community to achieve sustainable development. The initial focus of Agenda 21 is on the 7 year period following UNCED from 1993 to the year 2000, and then beyond into the twenty-first century. Agenda 21 is a non-legally binding and non-prescriptive circumscription of the activities necessary for humans to achieve a long-term environmentally and economically sustainable contract with the planet.

At UNCED, the world community explicitly and formally recognized the fundamental interdependencies between environment and development - between human survival and ecological integrity. It may be hoped that this recognition constitutes a precursor to national and international actions and processes in the human economy which support, rather than undermine, these interdependencies. While various criticisms have been levelled at Agenda 21 from several quarters, there is little doubt that the implementation of Agenda 21 recommendations would go far toward providing this support.

Eradicating the causes of poverty and making wealth creation both more evenly distributed across the globe and more benign in its impact on the environment are seen in Agenda 21 as among the essential challenges to be met on the path to sustainable development. Inherent in Agenda 21, therefore, is the belief that for the majority of the Earth's rapidly expanding citizenry, there