

Aboriginal people in Canada play an important role in sustainable development. Many Aboriginal communities have constitutionally guaranteed rights that originate from treaties or comprehensive land claim agreements that provide them with priority use of some natural resources and lands. Many such communities derive important economic, health, spiritual, and cultural benefits from the environment and its resources. Their traditional ecological knowledge is earning greater recognition and subsequent application.

Canada's economy is based largely on free market principles. It is highly integrated into the global economy. Because our private sector has substantial freedom of action within legal limits, it has a significant responsibility for many aspects of sustainable development.

Business has responded to public concern and consumer demand by initiating new environmental protection programs and shifting efforts to produce some immediate environmentally beneficial results. Programs to reduce packaging, purchase recycled products, increase energy efficiency, reduce emissions, and produce less waste are all playing a part in the greening of the corporate sector.

A tradition of organized action by groups and individuals is a basic part of Canadian life. Labour unions and community and non-governmental organizations are some of the groups that play a major role in shaping the sustainable development priorities and actions of the Canadian people.

Canada has a long tradition of international co-operation. The primary vehicle for international development assistance is the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). For CIDA, the concept of sustainable development rests on five pillars: environmental, economic, political, social, and cultural sustainability. Through support for research, the federally funded International Development Research Centre (IDRC) assists developing countries to create long-term solutions to pressing development problems. Private organizations such as the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) are also important sources of expertise and activity. The Institute was created to promote sustainable development in decision making and has research and communication programs linked to UNCED follow-up.

The official development assistance (ODA) budget for 1992/93 (the latest year for which figures are available) was \$2.7 billion, or 0.44 percent of the gross national product (GNP). Canada remains committed to the 0.7 percent ODA/GNP target established at UNCED, while recognizing that achievement of this goal is dependent on the long-term health of the Canadian economy.

Changing the Way Decisions Are Made

Making the transition to sustainable development is not a simple process. It involves very real changes in attitudes, expectations, and an understanding of the interconnectedness of activities. That is not a quick process. It involves changing the criteria used to make decisions in all sectors of society. It requires more and broader information, available in usable formats. There is substantial evidence that this change is under way in Canada.

The Canadian Youth Foundation's mission is to "put issues of significance to youth on the public agenda." Consultation with both public and private sectors has shown the Foundation that there is a need for communication between youth, youth organizations, decision makers, and the general public. The private sector has been a major source of support to the Foundation in the development of the Canadian Youth Business Trust to help improve the employment situation for Canadian youth. Businesses created through the Canadian Youth Business Trust will be encouraged to respect environmental standards.

The Environmental Choice[®] Program (ECP) was created by Environment Canada to help consumers identify products and services that ease the burden on the environment. Established in 1988, Canada's program has become an international leader in environmental labelling and a model for other countries. The EcoLogo[®] currently appears on over 1400 products. A licensee survey in 1992 indicated that 71 percent of licensees agreed that ECP licensing was a good business investment. A 1993 survey found recognition of the EcoLogo[®] and the program at 51 percent among consumers.