

Conclusion: Looking Forward

The UN Program of Action has provided an excellent blueprint for African governments and for the international community to begin building a solid economic foundation for African recovery and development. But the two years since the Program was adopted have seen an evolution of increasing concern about the impact of structural adjustment on vulnerable groups, the serious deterioration in environmental conditions and the spread and impact of AIDS. In the remaining years of the Program, these three elements will require particular attention.

Many African governments have already undertaken difficult and courageous decisions to reform their economic policies. Almost all of Africa is faced by a crisis of acute economic disequilibrium. Adjustment is necessary and inevitable in these circumstances. The challenge for African governments and for the donor community is to establish the basis for orderly adjustment consistent with long term development needs and supportive of vulnerable groups. As a donor, Canada is committed to take account of the human dimension in the design of adjustment policies and to search for appropriate complementary programs and projects to ease the impact on the poor, especially women, of any serious short-term effects of structural adjustment.

The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, the Brundtland Report, has focused world attention on the imperatives of building environmental concerns into development planning. Spreading deserts and shrinking forests are a harsh reality. The management of toxic wastes and the changing environment are of urgent concern. The burden is being felt most severely by the poorest people in the poorest countries where resource exploitation combined with a poor understanding of the environment has led to serious ecological damage. Without proper respect for the environment, no development strategy can lead to long-lasting sustainable development.

Environmental considerations must be integrated with, not separate from, national strategies for economic growth and development. It will take time, considerable effort and carefully channelled resources to tackle the enormous and complex issues affecting environmental degradation. Development assistance planning between governments and donors must urgently take environmental considerations into full account in the context of overall economic planning.