

### III. THE CENTRE FOR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

The Centre for Intercultural Learning became part of the Institute on April 1, 1996. It continues to provide training that enhances the intercultural effectiveness of individuals and organizations involved in CIDA-funded development assistance programs and serves a growing number of other clients on a cost-recovery basis. It has a growing profile in DFAIT where intercultural effectiveness is an important competency for employees serving abroad.

The program of services helps overcome intercultural barriers. The success of overseas work – whether international development, diplomacy or business – often depends on intercultural skills wedded with technical, professional or business expertise. These might include negotiation skills across cultures, cross-cultural teaching and management skills. Particular countries or regions within a country often call for different solutions.

#### What is Intercultural Effectiveness?

Intercultural effectiveness has many facets. At the individual level, a person's capability to work and live in another culture can depend on the intercultural skills and knowledge they have acquired. In addition, there are personality traits that research has shown are predictive of intercultural success. Equally important, there are organizational values and practices that are conducive to intercultural cooperation and success. While there may be many factors that influence international success, there is little doubt that intercultural effectiveness is one of the most important among them.

#### 1997-1998 General Overview

The Centre provided services to over 250 different organizations from the private, public, and para-public sectors. Revenues totalled \$4.3 million including the \$45,000 DFAIT appropriation. The Centre provided training to 3,636 people. Training delivery occurs across Canada and overseas. The Centre produced 3,598 country anthologies to support its programs and to respond to individual requests.

### DFAIT Highlights

#### 1. APEC

The Centre played a major role in the preparation for the 1997 APEC Conference in Vancouver. Tasks to be undertaken by the 1,500 staff and volunteers of the APEC 1997 Canada Coordinating Office (ACCO) meant interacting with large and culturally varied groups of delegates. Given the potential for miscommunication and resulting impact on APEC relations, ACCO management turned to the Centre for assistance.

The project challenged the Centre to demonstrate its flexibility and creativity in customizing a learning program that would meet ACCO's needs. Given the limited funds and limited time available for preparing staff and volunteers, the Centre determined that the most cost-effective and engaging solution for improving ACCO staff skills was a combination of a self-learning program delivered via video and learning guides and large group sessions facilitated by one of the Centre's experts.

The customized program focussed on communication barriers that can exist between members of different cultures and on strategies for overcoming them. Separate sessions were held for APEC volunteers, media relations officers and liaison officers. To assist APEC volunteers/staff in their self study, the Centre prepared anthologies covering the social, political, economic, environmental and cultural context of each of the 18 participating countries. The video, "Below the Surface", the accompanying learning guides and the anthologies were all produced within the facilities of the Centre.

The video and learning guide were subsequently reused for training the liaison officers at the Ottawa Conference on the Global Ban of Landmines.

*... I received excellent cooperation from everyone at the Centre from the initiation of this huge undertaking to its completion. Over 1,300 people had the privilege to learn from "Below the Surface" and, my only regret is that because of time constraints, more people were not reached. I took every opportunity at staff meetings and other gatherings to mention your wonderful support and promote the excellence of the Centre.*

Huguette St-Pierre  
Training Coordinator, APEC

*"I am most impressed with the video, the context and presentation were excellent with just the right amount of humour. Congratulations on a super job!"*

APEC Attendee

*"I found this to be an excellent vehicle for communicating the cross-cultural awareness message. I have attended and delivered many sessions myself, so, this high recommendation is based on my comparisons to other tools. Great job!"*

APEC Attendee