

Aid and Environmental Responsibility

In 1986, when the Brundtland Commission released its acclaimed report on the global environment, the Canadian International Development Agency jumped onto the bandwagon, promising to usher in a "new era... of greater concern for our environment." It is obvious today that it has been business as usual at CIDA. At its heart, the Brundtland Commission shone the spotlight on the public's right "to participate in decision-making on activities likely to have significant effect" (on them), going so far as to recommend referenda as a guard against government's penchant for grandiose and destructive mega-projects.

Instead of protecting this fundamental right, CIDA made a private arrangement with Environment Canada in 1986

to exempt itself from public hearings, both in Canada and in the Third World. By so doing, CIDA violated not only the spirit of the Brundtland recommendations but also Canada's Environmental Assessment and Review Process Guidelines Order.

The Access to Information Act, ironically, has helped CIDA to maintain the wall of secrecy around its activities. This Act prohibits disclosure of information — including a document as benign as an environmental impact assessment — obtained in confidence from a foreign government or an international organization of states without the consent of that government or organization.

Yet there is no justification for including environmental assessment of foreign aid projects in this wide net of ex-

emptions. By invoking the Access to Information Act, CIDA violates the EARP Guidelines and shows its commitment to Brundtland to be a public relations exercise. Moreover, CIDA has extinguished the right of the public, both in Canada and in recipient Third World countries, to an informed public debate about the sustainability of its projects.

As long as CIDA rejects a legitimate and effective environmental assessment process that provides access for those most affected, it will continue to bankroll projects that destroy the environment and victimize people in the Third World.

Patricia Adams, Probe International, Toronto

Adjustment With A Human Face

Are the days numbered for current approaches to structural adjustment? If the fate of women and children were a concern of finance ministers and their designates, we could expect to see a re-think of the economic development recipe now being fed to poor countries.

In *Adjustment with a Human Face*, UNICEF startled development experts in 1987 with statistics that showed a reversal in key indicators of children's health and well-being. This document may not have precipitated a complete overhaul of structural adjustment programmes, but it certainly demonstrated the need for complementary measures to shore up eroding services.

UNICEF's dismal picture has persisted in *The State of the World's Children 1989*. Despite significant increases in the number of immunized children and the success of oral rehydration programmes, the continuing debt struggle and reversal of economic development are now accompanied by rising

child malnutrition and declining primary school enrolment. Health and education budgets in the 37 poorest countries have fallen respectively by 50 per cent and 25 per cent in the last few years.

A few weeks ago the Commonwealth Expert Group on Women & Structural Adjustment released its report *Engendering Adjustment for the 1990s*. This report contrasts the gains made between the 1950s and the 1970s in women's health, education and in some cases, their economic situation, with the stagnation and reversal, particularly in health and education, of the 1980s.

The losses are characterized as "not so much...daylight robbery as stealth in the night — a largely unintended byproduct of the economic difficulties of the period." The recommendations call for policy discussions to "seek to synthesize proposals for and reach consensus on the policy goals for a broader adjustment strategy fully reflecting

women's interests." It says a Commonwealth Declaration defining structural adjustment in terms of how people — especially women and children — are affected would give political impetus to change current economic policies.

This change will have to be more than an add-on. It will require a pointed assessment of the recipe. If alleviation of poverty is to be a benchmark, if evidence of income redistribution is to be a criterion of successful economic policies, it may be that current policy ingredients are wrong.

If so, Canadian policies need a close look too. Child poverty has risen considerably here in the 1980s. The last few budgets have been regressive for incomes and the latest featured massive ODA cuts. Canada is definitely not yet on the leading edge of this policy re-think.

Maureen O'Neil, North-South Institute, Ottawa