

A basic part of this approach is an emphasis on public and stakeholder participation. Through round tables and other mechanisms, citizens with different views are searching for common ground.

Information for Decision Making

Decisions on Agenda 21 issues require information that links environmental, economic, social, and health factors credibly and correctly. Solid and accessible information is critical to improving decision making for sustainable development. In Canada, information has always been available from a wide range of sources. State of the environment (SOE) reporting has been just one important way to gather information and convey it to citizens, institutions, and decision makers.

Two priorities have emerged in this area. The first is to take a more integrated approach by drawing together more comprehensive data than has traditionally been needed or collected. Organizations and governments are attempting to tie information together to support efforts such as SOE reporting. This permits people and institutions to track many aspects of sustainable development in an integrated fashion.

The second priority is to enhance access to information. A variety of initiatives to improve databases of research, activities, and information sources are taking place. Electronic networks and databases form an increasingly important means for providing access to up-to-date information. The challenge is to ensure that access is as broad as possible.

Indicators for Sustainable Development

The global and complex nature of many environmental problems and the increasing interest in promoting sustainable development have stimulated international interest in improving decision-making tools such as indicators. The federal government is developing national indicators for environmental sustainability. These will provide a representative profile of the state of Canada's environment and help measure progress towards the goals of sustainable development. Similar efforts are being made by the provincial, territorial, and local governments. They are being complemented by the work of other organizations. Sustainability indicators are also being developed for specific sectors such as agriculture, forestry, and urban environments.

The goal of all these projects is the development of indicators that are credible, relevant, and applied consistently and that will be used widely and will influence decision making at all levels. More scientific development work is necessary to achieve this goal, and is a major focus of Canadian activity.

Science for Sustainable Development

Sound science is the basis for sustainable development policies in Canada. Universities, government departments and agencies, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations all contribute to increasing the body of scientific knowledge. Much scientific