

The first national urban sustainability workshop, held in June 1995, focused on appropriate frameworks, criteria, and selection of "core" indicators. Major trends in rural Canada based on fourteen indicators were published this past year in "Rural Canada: A Profile". Additional information on indicators is in the section of this report entitled Information for Decision Making: The Role of Indicators.

The Business Development Bank of Canada has a variety of products and services tailored to the needs of nontraditional entrepreneurs such as women, Aboriginal groups, young people, and members of ethnocultural communities. Services such as specialized financing, business training, counselling, and mentoring are helping them to achieve sustainable livelihoods. Many of the bank's initiatives are developed and delivered in partnership with private sector groups, associations, and government departments.

Once the redevelopment is complete, the waterfront neighbourhoods will provide social diversity, urban design distinction, pedestrian-friendly environments, continuous public access to the water's edge, environmental conservation, and an array of urban innovations to support high-density living.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities supports the sharing of best practices beyond Canadian borders by encouraging partnerships between Canadian municipalities and municipalities in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. It is also facilitating training activities in China that focus on urban environmental management.

Enhanced Communication

Communities are using the Internet as a bridge to a wider world of services, information, and expertise needed for sustainability. It is already proving to be an excellent tool to link people and organizations in rural and remote areas. Access to the Internet may help to furnish communities with opportunities for growth and jobs. As noted above, it is improving their access to learning and information. It will also enable them to communicate easily with each other, conduct business, and exchange information and ideas. To help provide rural communities with affordable public access to the Internet, as well as the skills to use it effectively, a national network of community access sites is being established across Canada.

Using Heritage to Revitalize Communities

An aspect of sustainable development is the preservation and revitalization of existing buildings and community features. One example is the revitalization of commercial main streets through partnerships between downtown merchants and municipalities. Downtown revitalization offers economic and environmental benefits, including the continued use of buildings and infrastructure especially by small businesses. It has also proven to be a strong deterrent to low-density suburban sprawl. The rehabilitation of older buildings now exceeds the dollar value of new construction in Canada.

Heritage conservation is also contributing to rural and regional regeneration. Communities are now forming partnerships to develop corridors based on scenic roads, historic waterways, paths, and trails, and as alternate uses for abandoned railway lines.

Action 21

Action 21 is a new federal program to help Canadians take action in their communities in support of healthy environments. This Environment Canada program has two components. It has a public awareness initiative to encourage all Canadians to become active participants in environmental solutions. It also has a community funding program that provides financial support to nongovernment, nonprofit groups to carry out local environmental projects.