

SUMMARY

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) brought together almost every country in the world in an effort to have the global community commit itself to the goal of sustainable development. Among its major achievements was Agenda 21, an ambitious plan of action on 39 environment and development issues. The United Nations subsequently created the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) to monitor progress towards achievement of UNCED's goals. Each annual meeting of the Commission includes a review of activities on specific chapters of Agenda 21 and other UNCED outcomes. There will be a full review of all 39 issues in 1997.

The CSD encourages countries to report on their activities since UNCED. These reports gauge progress in achieving the goals of Agenda 21, indicate the challenges that exist in attaining sustainable development, and outline future directions. They permit each country to share information on the lessons they have learned since UNCED and the steps they intend to take.

General Trends in the Implementation of Agenda 21

Canada's sustainable development agenda covers an extremely large number of social, environmental, and economic issues. Our political and economic structures, as well as our tradition of public participation in decision making, distribute the responsibility for domestic action on these issues very broadly.

There is no one government or institution that is exclusively responsible for sustainable development; all Canadians are. This responsibility does not stop at our border. Sustainable development is a global concern and Canada plays an important role in international efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Changing the Way Decisions Are Made

One of the most important trends is the steady shift from a focus on single issues, values, or criteria for decision making to more comprehensive approaches to sustainability. For example, governments across the country are formulating sustainable development strategies. Some have begun to apply these ideas to resource extraction and land use policies, which now explicitly take into account a broad range of social, economic, and environmental values. They are following up on commitments made at UNCED, shaping new directions for Canadians.