

In 1994, a renewed emphasis on Latin America in Canada's foreign policy, combined with the difficult adjustments of the Special Period in Cuba following the demise of the socialist bloc, created a new interest on both sides in resuming official development co-operation. An initial five-year program of bilateral projects was negotiated between CIDA and its new Cuban counterpart MINVEC. Canadian NGOs were welcomed as a channel for official development assistance between the two countries. Cuban universities started to develop a broad spectrum of faculty exchange and training programs with Canadian universities. The Canadian Embassy in Havana was given resources to support small, community based development projects, through the establishment of a Canada Fund for Local Initiatives. Today, all of these mechanisms for co-operation are flourishing and development co-operation has become a central theme of Canada-Cuba relations.

Education was an initial priority for co-operation under this new program. Following the Special Period, Cuba had an acute shortage of paper, while Canada is the world's largest exporter of newsprint. Canada provided several million dollars worth of newsprint to Cuba to produce school text-books,

which in turn created a Social Development Fund in pesos to finance a number of social housing projects. A subsequent project in the same sector involved donating the printing equipment and the editorial software to allow the Cuban Ministry of Education to reprint and update on a regular basis primary school texts. The first books produced using this modern Canadian technology, dealing with mathematics, geography, and natural sciences, are already in use in Cuban schools.

Marta Entralgo and Jesus Pereira of Editorial Pueblo y Educación producing new school texts, 2003



The health sector was also an initial priority for Canadian co-operation. While Cuba produces most of the medicines needed for its public health system, there is a deficit of certain drugs that still have to be imported. The Canadian pharmaceutical industry, in