

PART I

GENERAL TRENDS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Overview

The Canadian approach to sustainable development reflects our unique characteristics. These include a low population density, large distances between centres of economic activity, a cold to temperate climate, and a large, energy-intensive, natural resource-based export sector.

Canada is the world's second largest country. We have the world's longest coastline, and 7 percent of the world's land mass. We are a country whose more than 28 million people enjoy one of the world's highest standards of living and a good quality of life. Canada is endowed with substantial natural resources, with, for example, about 9 percent of the planet's supply of freshwater, 10 percent of its forests, and significant reserves of oil, gas, coal and minerals.

Canada is a federal state with 10 provinces and two territories. Our constitutional and political system results in all orders of government having some degree of authority for environmental, economic and social issues related to sustainable development. Governments have created mechanisms to co-ordinate their sustainable development policy making and activities. They also act independently within their spheres of jurisdiction.

Indigenous peoples in Canada play an important role in sustainable development issues. As a result of treaties and agreements, many indigenous communities have constitutionally guaranteed rights to the use of resources or lands. Continued reliance by indigenous peoples on traditional uses of renewable resources, and on traditional cultural values and ecological knowledge also underline the importance of the environment to many of these communities.