

WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT



The *Beijing Platform for Action* (PfA) identifies “gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment” as an area of critical concern. The PfA contains strategic objectives and actions to: involve women actively in environmental decision-making; integrate gender perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development; and, strengthen or establish mechanisms to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

PATTERNS AND TRENDS

- Canada is a highly urbanized country with 80% of the population living in urban areas. Canadian cities face complex, interrelated challenges that have adverse effects on quality of life and long term sustainability such as urban sprawl, greenhouse gas emissions, air/land pollution and related health issues for vulnerable populations.
- Forest management is increasingly complex. Canada has challenges in developing new approaches to data collection and management, creating tools to measure social value and tracking the expanding knowledge of forest ecosystems.
- Canada has approximately 7% of the world's renewable water resource.
- Public consultation is a legal requirement under many federal, provincial and territorial laws. Governments have increased efforts to find an effective means of involving major environmental groups and citizens in shaping the sustainable development agenda.

TOWARDS EQUALITY

Examples of federal measures include:

- The *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (1999) provides the federal government with powers and tools to protect the environment and human health, and to contribute to sustainable development through pollution prevention. In addition, the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, the *Fisheries Act*, the *Canada Health Act*, the *Pest Control*

Products Act, the *Plant Protection Act* and the *Animal Protection Act* are the main government regulations for protecting the environment.

- Particulate matter and four other smog causing pollutants have been added to the list of toxic substances under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA, 1999) committing the Government of Canada to take control and action.
- Canada is establishing development tools on waste management such as general criteria, national standards on processes and on waste types of concern (i.e., PCBs).
- Canada is developing a regulatory framework for the export and import of prescribed non-hazardous wastes destined for final disposal. During the development of the framework, extensive stakeholder consultations were conducted.
- The Government of Canada, through the Centres for Excellence on Women's Health, provides ongoing public education, research, and consultation with women's groups on issues of the environment (general, work and home) and the impact on women's health.
- The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment comprises environment ministers from the federal, provincial and territorial governments. The 14 ministers usually meet once a year to discuss national environmental priorities and determine work to be carried out in its work to promote effective intergovernmental cooperation and coordinated approaches to inter-jurisdictional issues, such as air pollution and toxic chemicals.

RECENT INITIATIVES

Examples of federal initiatives include:

- The role of municipal authorities is critical in achieving sustainable development. The federal government has invested \$125 million in 2002, in local authorities to implement projects and programs to enhance sustainability.
- Environment Canada's EcoAction Community Fund provides financial support to community groups for projects that have measurable, positive impacts on the environment. Since 1995, the EcoAction program has funded more than 1,450 projects in support of environmental issues such as clean air, climate change, water quality and nature conservation. Beginning in 2004, EcoAction reserved 50% of its funds for climate change projects that assist Canadians in reducing their personal greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Sustainable Forest Management Network is an incorporated, non-profit Canadian research Network of Centres of Excellence that supports interdisciplinary, university-based research conducted by teams that include: pre-eminent Canadian researchers; university students and other highly qualified personnel; federal, provincial and territorial governments; industry; non-governmental organization partners; and other agencies in Canada and abroad.