



International Development Research Centre  
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

**Remarks to the delegates at the  
90<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of  
the Canadian Institute of Forestry**

**WORLD TRENDS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON  
CANADIAN FOREST PRACTICES**

by

Maureen O'Neil, President  
International Development Research Centre

Delivered on October 5, 1998

**Remarks to the delegates at the 90<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of  
the Canadian Institute of Forestry**

**WORLD TRENDS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON CANADIAN FOREST  
PRACTICES**

October 5, 1998

---

As my fellow panelists have so clearly elucidated, foresters and other natural resources professionals are everywhere facing a host of new challenges. Societies throughout the world are demanding today that their woodlands be managed not just for fibre production but for a broad range of goods and services.

There are many competing demands. We used to talk just about -- most people still talk just about -- sustainable development. But increasingly, as we have thought more and learned more about what this actually is -- or ought to be -- we now focus on the need for development that is sustainable and equitable.

These two qualities are inextricably linked. They are Siamese twins.

The theme of this conference provides a timely opportunity. One of the reasons why I am so pleased to be here today is that it gives us a chance to explore, together, both global and local linkages. But more than this, to consider how we might develop partnerships and networks that more effectively address critical social and economic issues, vital issues that we face in trying to manage - and safeguard - our forests.

Sustainably. And equitably.

Let me explain why I feel so strongly about this. A child born in this city of Ottawa today, or in New York or Rome or Tokyo, will consume, waste and pollute more in a lifetime than fifty children in a developing country. Let's face it -- right now, they don't even get the chance! And by a cruel twist of fate, those who consume less will bear the brunt of the resulting environmental damage.

This news comes to us from the UN's latest annual Human Development Report, which was released a few weeks ago. This is the same report that again this year ranked Canada as the nation whose citizens, as a whole, enjoy the highest quality of life in the world. As a Canadian I am proud that we do. But we must confront the question:

At what price?

At what price, when modern industrialized countries like ours are the dominant consumers. When people in the world's poorest countries, pay -- compared to people like us -- the highest price for the pollution and degradation of the lands and rivers and oceans and forests they depend upon for a living.

The age we live in has been one of unprecedented growth, in both the scale and the diversity of economic opportunity. It is an undeniable fact that more people are better fed, and better housed, and healthier than ever before. And as the new millennium approaches, living standards have risen to where hundreds of millions enjoy a quality of life unimaginable to their grandparents or great grandparents a hundred years ago.

Yet we are all still living in a dangerous time. Global patterns of consumption are adding to already gaping inequalities of opportunity.

As Amartya Sen, a wise economist, has noted:

“There is a serious need for the narrow concept of economic development to be replaced with a broader notion of social development. What ultimately matters is the nature of the lives that people can - or cannot - lead.”

Put another way, the success or failure of economic development simply cannot be judged merely in terms of income and output.

About 20 per cent of the world's people live in high-income countries like our own. They account for about nine-tenths of all goods and services that are consumed each year on the planet. This richest 20 per cent - we (you and I) - help to consume close to 85 per cent of all the paper that is produced on Earth. Wood consumption globally is up 40 per cent from what it was in the early 1970s, says last month's latest UN Human Development Report.

But consider this, too. Since 1970, the world's wooded area per citizen of Planet Earth has dropped by more than one-third. (From 11.4 sq km per 1,000 inhabitants to 7.3 sq km today) And, unlike a generation or two ago, the losses are concentrated in countries of the South, not in the advanced industrialized world.

In the past ten years, an area of tropical forest -- the equivalent of the combined size of British Columbia and Alberta -- has been lost. Irretrievably.

We are all aware that devastation on this scale has huge implications. The loss of biodiversity. Changes in microclimates. And worse.

In many parts of the developing world, poor communities that are able to draw at least half their food from forested areas have never experienced famine. That ability is being bled away.

In the Philippines, half the country's forests fell to commercial logging during the Marcos dictatorship. Eighteen million forest-dwellers were left destitute. The ultimate social consequences of such an upheaval are immeasurable.

There is no Richter scale to measure earthquakes like this.

Some people think that poor countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America ought to restrain their consumption levels in order to limit environmental damage.

Easy to say.

But it would also mean prolonging what is already a scandalous level of deprivation.

Taken together, the developing countries of the South face a major strategic challenge. Do they repeat the industrialization and growth processes of countries like ours during the past 50 years - and wreak environmental havoc, in the name of redressing the balance, and achieving a kind of economic justice?

Or do they leapfrog ahead to an approach that is pro-environment? One that is aimed at preserving natural resources. That is pro-poor. And that creates jobs for poor people and households and affords them access to the basic social services that a life with dignity demands.

Clearly, this is the road of justice, and to justice. And common sense. By going this route, developing countries can accelerate their peoples' access to a better life while minimizing the cost to the environment. They can also be encouraged to turn towards available technologies that are cleaner and less energy-intensive.

For example, in Africa -- in Tanzania -- in the early 1990s, IDRC began managing a project to reduce the reliance of local plywood producers on imported ingredients. Local researchers there had the opportunity to learn new skills that have enabled them to develop simple and reliable wood glues and preservatives from local sources.

IDRC was created by the Government of Canada to help poorer countries enter the modern age of science and technology in order to improve the lives of their people, Lester B. Pearson, our former Prime Minister and first Chair of the IDRC Board, said 30 years ago. We must also assist them to secure these benefits while avoiding the threats to their own tested values and traditions; and to their own environment and culture, as a result of uncontrolled technological progress. Now, in my view, we may understand better, thirty years on, that this is not actually possible — for good or bad reasons. However, at the heart of Pearson's statement was an exhortation to respect the people we work with — and that is an enduring pre-occupation.

Today, there is an urgent need to address needs, and yes, raise the consumption levels of a billion poor people worldwide -- the more than one quarter of humanity that has been left behind.

In a sense -- and in tens of millions of cases -- they are people who have been, quite frankly, deforested of hope.

I would say that we in this room have an obligation to start thinking about such things in a more serious way. And to begin to address their needs while at the same time moving to more sustainable consumption patterns, for us all.

In short, sustainable development with equity. Growth patterns that reduce current levels of environmental destruction. Policies that make it easier - and economically attractive, as well - to concentrate new research and investment efforts on the regeneration of renewable resources. Wood. Water. Soils. Fish.

But none of this can work without building closer and more effective global linkages between among affluent and developing societies - at a time when the OECD countries, taken together, are spending in real terms only two-thirds of what they were fifteen years ago.

I quoted Lester Pearson a moment ago. I will again.

He made another point relevant to us today: that the spirit in which help is offered, and given, is just as important as the help itself. In other words, that there ought to be feeling of participation and achieving, of involvement and partnership, on the part of the recipient. And that poor countries can't and should not be expected to be grateful for a few "crumbs or even a loaf from the rich man's table," as he put it.

A generation later, as we approach the point at which there are six billion of us, I would ask: How can we not support the people of developing countries with programs that make sense from their perspective?

The organization that I head -- IDRC -- does not have a specific mandate to deliver foreign aid programming, as this is typically understood. Our job, our mission, is much more general: It is to support research for development. In a nutshell, we spend the Canadian taxpayer dollars that we get in order to help people in other countries develop the capacity to help themselves to build a fairer world.

Which, at the end of the day, is what sustainable and equitable development is really all about. Isn't it?

The slogan of my organization is "Empowerment Through Knowledge." And I can tell you -- as the president of IDRC -- that it is an inspiring thing to go into the elevator to my office each

morning, and ride up with world-class scientists and other researchers, who live this reality, whether working a short walk from where we all are now, or in one of the 142 developing countries where IDRC has worked in the past three decades.

Almost 30 years on, we have now worked with hundreds of networks, linking tens of thousands of researchers, scientists, and policy-makers, and if we have learned anything, it is this: Public debate, pluralism and the competition of ideas, all characteristics of democracy, depend on the knowledge that often flows from good research. And the way that you do that research is just as important.

In short, anything other than a democratic approach -- participatory, inclusive, that leads to results being communicated in a readily accessible way -- is a waste of time. Participation, inclusion, accessible results: This is what networking is all about.

Unfortunately, in many societies, prevailing political realities have excluded a lot of marginalized groups from being effectively involved. Indigenous peoples. Women. And others.

Including them in the debate and involving them in decisions is essential. In many societies in the developing world where resource extraction is highly export-oriented, these groups are the main repositories of knowledge.

They deserve to be respected for what they are: key actors in any informed debate about social and economic issues. And about developments that could profoundly change the only world they will ever know.

Without such involvement, without community “buy-in” to new ways of managing resources fairly, sustainable development policies are doomed to fail.

At the international level, networking is also a way for people to exchange experiences and strategies with counterparts in other countries, even other parts of the world. And to foster solidarity with kindred spirits -- who face similar challenges in their countries in trying to develop momentum for their own inclusion in the political decision-making processes.

At IDRC, a public corporation created by the Parliament of Canada, we believe that networking of the kind I am describing is an essential tool for building a fairer world. One that flourishes because, as it grows, it remains both an equitable and a sustainable model of development.

Having said this, I would like to share with you a few examples of our own work in the field of forestry. And also of mining, because so many of the issues are similar.

We have just begun an innovative, five-year research project that focuses on mining exploration and development in Latin America and the Caribbean, and how to make these activities more sustainable from an environmental point of view.

It aims to do so by reducing the gap between researchers and research users, and by making research priorities more policy-relevant for all parties that have a stake: Communities, government, corporate interests, NGOs. It aims to promote improved understanding of the positive and negative aspects of environmentally sensitive development. Particularly the impacts -- positive and negative -- on indigenous cultures. To draw all stakeholders into the process of investigating and recommending better legal, regulatory and policy frameworks.

Canadians -- indeed all of us in this room -- know well that while mining or forest development may bring bursts of welcome economic activity, it can also leave a trail of devastation in its wake. The negative consequences can range from pollution through occupational accidents on a massive scale, to community displacement.

We all recognize that there is an issue of moral responsibility here -- when there are activities that threaten to leave communities worse off than before.

Every prospector's -- every mining executive's -- dream is to hit a bonanza. We believe that, in dreams, begin responsibilities. And, whether it's mining or forestry, these responsibilities start with protecting community interests by managing the ecosystem responsibly.

The failure to do so, a failure to do one's homework really, has been a serious obstacle to the healthy development of many societies in the developing world. Canada's experience as a country with a fragile ecology is of the utmost relevance.

We -- with our huge frontier, large indigenous population and particular history of natural resource exploitation -- know one thing, for sure. A sustainable and just approach to economic development dictates an approach that must be both democratic and socially inclusive.

Closer to home, and to the reason why we are here today, IDRC was pleased in 1995 to become the host for the International Model Forest Network Secretariat. The term "model forest" conjures up images of pristine sanctuaries far from the intrusions of people with chain saws and tractors.

In reality, model forests are all about people, and how they use and interact with the forest ecosystem and the many resources linked to it. This relationship is what we have in mind when we use the word "model." Model forests are about community-based partnerships and people learning to make decisions together. Working together for sustainable forest management.

Model Forests began in Canada in 1992 as an innovative experiment. Led by the Canadian Forest Service of the federal government, the initiative has proved to be a Canadian success story. One that is now being expanded, internationally.

The Canadian experience is the backbone of the International Model Forest network

headquartered within IDRC. Together with our main domestic partners, we are working in networks abroad on every continent. There are now model forests in Mexico, Russia, Japan, Chile and the USA. Argentina, China, and others may soon follow.

I will stop here. But before I go, I would like to recount a story that I think really speaks to what I have been trying to convey today.

Some years ago, I happened to meet a friend who was a Canadian missionary working in Central America. It was during that terrible period of bloodshed and human rights violations and dictatorship in the late 1980s. During a visit home to Canada, he said that, in travelling across Canada, he was troubled -- and puzzled -- to find alienation and resignation everywhere he went.

He would go to the East Coast or to the West Coast and people would blame Central Canada for their troubles -- saying that they were powerless to change things. He would go to Toronto and people would blame Ottawa for their problems. He would come here and we would blame Toronto for our problems.

He compared our mind-set to the mind-set of the people he was working with in El Salvador. They were surrounded by the horror of war. They were constantly threatened. Those governing them were unrepresentative.

And yet, the people somehow felt intimately involved in the civil life of their country. They believed they could make a difference, and make things better. They were not discouraged; they were not without hope.

I believe that we should take strength from -- indeed guidance from -- people like those citizens of El Salvador in that dark time.

We should feel an obligation to align our support with the elements of a society that, however fractured, can still engender a vision of what it means to work together to improve the lot of everyone. But lacking the means through no fault of their own.

More than this, we need to start feeling more the obligation to help less fortunate countries manage their resources in a more equitable and sustainable manner. And help them adopt better tools to do this job themselves.

Empowering people in far-off lands to be able to act in their own best interests, and to work to build fairer societies there, may seem to some an esoteric enterprise.

It is anything but.

I'll grant you that it may be the most inexact science in the world today. But for those who



choose to invest in it, it may, in the long run, prove to be the most rewarding.

Let`s take that risk.

Thank you.