

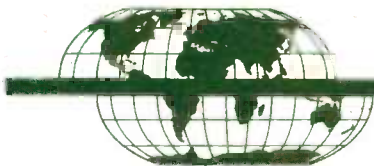
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IDRC, UNCED, and beyond

IDRC's preparation for "Earth Summit 1992"



IDRC's role

IDRC has been involved with UNCED and its preparatory process in several ways:

- IDRC has funded projects directly linked to UNCED and supported related research.
- IDRC staff members have provided inputs to various Canadian government position papers and participated in issue groups developing materials for UNCED.
- IDRC personnel are participating in UNCED-related activities.
- IDRC has prepared position papers for the UNCED Secretariat and several groups may attend the conference.

UNCED and Agenda 21

In preparation for the Earth Summit to be held in Brazil in June 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Secretariat defined its expectations for the Conference. Of key importance is the evolution of "Agenda 21," which is an environment and development action plan for the 21st century.

Most of IDRC's current UNCED-related activities are aimed at improving the preparatory process and ensuring that the Conference is supported by research and knowledge-based services. However, IDRC's ultimate goal is to stimulate effective, sustainable approaches to creating and sharing research and its resultant knowledge beyond the 1992 Conference (Agenda 21). Thus, a key role for IDRC is to act as a catalyst to bring potential partners together in a collaborative way and to stimulate support for a sustaining mechanism when the Conference doors close.

Through support for research, Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) assists developing countries in creating their own long-term solutions to pressing development problems. Support is given directly to Third World institutions whose research focuses primarily on meeting the basic needs of the population and overcoming the problems of poverty. Research is undertaken by Third World recipients independently or, occasionally, in collaboration with Canadian partners.

IDRC is funded by the Canadian government, but it is autonomous in its policies and activities. Its Board of Governors is international and reflects the nonpartisan, multicultural nature of the organization.

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Projects supported

Commission on Global Change and developing countries

Global environmental problems have potentially catastrophic implications for all countries. However, there exists a large gap in understanding how global environmental changes affect developing countries and the potential of the social sciences in identifying means to avoid, limit, or adjust to problems caused by global change. The Commission on Global Change was conceived, created, and funded jointly by IDRC and SAREC (the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation) to review the issues and problems from a Third World perspective.

The Commission is charged with determining what can be done to ensure that research on global change is made as relevant as possible to the needs and interests of developing countries. Its report will define ways to increase the use of researchers and research institutions in developing countries and suggest ways to develop national capacity in information exchange and education about global environmental change. More specifically, the report of the Commission will:

- propose a research agenda that reflects the problems faced by developing countries at varying levels of income and with different ecologies and cultures;
- define ways to maximize the use of researchers and research institutions in developing countries in the process of studying global change; and
- identify means by which the results of studies on global change can reach both citizens and policy-makers in developing countries.

The Commission consists of six eminent scientists from developing countries. Its report will be submitted to the four organizations currently supporting the Human Dimensions to Global Change Program (HDGCP) and to UNCED.

Environmental NGO position papers

Environment-development NGOs in the developing countries created the Third World Network (TWN) in 1984 for coordination and information sharing. TWN is currently helping its members prepare for UNCED. With support from IDRC, the Network has produced a set of short monographs and position papers that integrate research findings from environmental groups around the world. The monographs have the dual purpose of making NGO research available to a broad audience and helping environmental NGOs in developing countries reach consensus on positions vis-à-vis proposed international agreements.

IDRC funding for this project is used in about equal measure for research and dissemination. The first discussion papers

were presented at PrepCom III in Geneva, where they were very well received by NGOs accredited to the PrepCom and by many governments of developing countries.

Computer-based communication networks

One novel aspect of the UNCED preparatory process is the extensive use of computer-based communications to encourage the involvement of various actors, primarily via a set of electronic conferences. NGOs have been actively encouraged to become involved in this major UN activity by attending preparatory meetings, producing position papers, and providing input at various levels. IDRC has:

- supported the "African Environmental NGO Electronic Networking Node Development" project with the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) in Nairobi. The project is developing an electronic network to serve environment-development NGOs in Africa so that they can exchange mail, discuss issues, share information, and participate in the UNCED process electronically; and
- supported an NGO Environmental Networking Inventory to identify opportunities for extending electronic networking.

Improving information coordination

A project to establish an NGO information coordination mechanism, called NGONET, has recently been approved with the Instituto del Tercer Mundo in Montevideo. In addition to improving electronic linkages, the project will reach environment and development groups that do not have access to electronic networks, via such channels as radio stations, NGO publications and newsletters, press releases, etc. This will enable NGOs to participate more fully in the UNCED process and in the Conference follow-up.

Agenda 21 Information System (AGIS)

As part of its work on Agenda 21 for UNCED, and its overall information strategy, the UNCED Secretariat is developing an Agenda 21 Information System (AGIS). The objective is to provide a flexible, computer-based system facilitating rapid extraction, analysis, and presentation of textual information contained in Agenda 21 and the UNCED National Reports.

To facilitate the system's design, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) in Winnipeg and IDRC jointly sponsored a 3-day Design Workshop, 25-27

November 1991, at IISD. The Workshop developed a design document for AGIS and detailed systems specifications. Participants included a select group of experts in database design and implementation (including database, hypertext, user interfaces, graphic presentation, and telecommunications technologies), together with selected UNCED national/agency delegates and NGOs (i.e., the users).

Activities of researchers and research institutions

IDRC has funded the UNCED-related initiatives of a variety of developing-country researchers and research institutions. It has helped to defray the travel costs for developing-country scientists to attend meetings related to global change and UNCED and it has supported such meetings as:

- A workshop in Caracas of eminent social scientists from Latin America to review problems of sustainable development specific to that region under the auspices of the HDGCP and the Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Cientificas.
- A similar workshop in Dakar for eminent social scientists from West and Central Africa under the auspices of HDGCP and the Institut des sciences de l'environnement, Université Cheikh Anta Diop.
- A seminar in Bombay on approaches for developing countries to take at UNCED, sponsored by the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research.
- A meeting in New Delhi of Indian business people and industrialists under the auspices of the Business Council for Sustainable Development.

Investing in people

IDRC is preparing a paper to be submitted directly to the UNCED Secretariat to serve as a background paper on health in relation to environment. The paper — to be published by the Secretariat as a "research paper" and distributed at the fourth PrepCom in New York — focuses on ways to invest in people.

The IDRC study presents principles of a research strategy aimed at serving the basic needs of poor populations in the health and environment sectors, including in particular:

- active participation and empowerment of communities;
- the necessity for research to be relevant to community needs;
- intersectoral involvement;
- affordable, sustainable, and environmentally friendly health technologies;

- local capacity building;
- a preferential focus on the micro level; and
- multilevel networking mechanisms to maximize replicability.

The document illustrates the application of the foregoing principles on the basis of recent health and environment research projects in developing countries, and it identifies lessons from this research experience that may be applicable to Agenda 21.

IDRC and Canadian NGOs

Through support from the Centre's Public Information Program, a series of public and private forums will be held that will help Canadian NGOs prepare their inputs into the UNCED process. These events, to be held at IDRC in February 1992, are coordinated by the Environment and Development Program of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), an umbrella organization of NGOs in Canada. They include:

- an **Alternative Development Strategies** forum, which will bring together a dozen experts on sustainable development with NGO representatives and the public;
- the **National Meeting of the Canadian Participatory Committee for UNCED**, where NGO representatives ranging from churches to unions will discuss the action NGOs will take before, during, and after UNCED.

Staff participation

IDRC staff are participating in a number of the Canadian government's 24 Interdepartmental Working Groups. In particular, IDRC is contributing to the Working Groups on Poverty, Population, and Health (Canadian International Development Agency); Urban Human Settlements (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation); and Women in Environment (Status of Women Canada).

Centre staff continue to participate in the UNCED Working Party on Information Systems which is advising the UNCED Secretariat on its own information systems as well as on long-term strategies for environment and development information after the Earth Summit.

The two main program areas identified at the Working Party in Geneva (enhancing data collection/monitoring/assessment capabilities of countries; and improving access to data and information related to sustainable development) are all of special interest to the Centre. In addition, IDRC has provided



the UNCED Secretariat with relevant subsets of several of its databases (including IDRIS, the records of the Brundtland archives, and all IDRC-related documents on the environment) to provide input into its information collection. The Secretariat has indicated that this information has already proven useful in its work.

IDRC and an outside steering committee have prepared a document entitled "Technology, Environment and Development: Options for Canada at UNCED and Beyond." This paper was prepared upon the request of the National Round Table on Environment and Economy and will be submitted to External Affairs as Canada's official contribution to UNCED in the field of technology transfer. The paper (an abbreviated version of a much longer document) offers a set of desirable and feasible options for Canadian action.

The Centre is involved in the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research that will be announced at UNCED and will also be a key research and training initiative for Agenda 21. IDRC's representative is Dr Anne Whyte, Director of Natural Resources. Centre staff also participated at a conference organized by the International Congress of Scientific Union (ICSU), focusing on an agenda of science for environment and development into the 21st century. **Dr Anne Whyte** was a rapporteur, and **Dr Adzei Bekoe**, Regional Manager for Eastern and Southern Africa, presented a keynote paper. As well, several IDRC governors were involved and **Dr Menon**, a past governor, chaired the conference.

Developing Stories

In May 1992, television stations around the world will broadcast a unique environment and development series by six of the most outstanding film-makers from the developing world. The films, coproduced by the Television Trust for the Environment (TVE) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), will present a new perspective on the global environment crisis as seen from the South. It is the first time an entire series for prime-time television has been commissioned from the developing world.

As part of its mandate to develop programs that fit into the Third World agenda and focus the attention of Canadians on the importance of global interdependency, IDRC has acquired Canadian television rights to the "Developing Stories" series. In turn, IDRC is offering the series to Canadian broadcasters who will air it just prior to the Earth Summit. In addition to the broadcast, a parallel written version is being developed by TV Ontario.

During the Conference

The Centre is planning demonstration activities both at the official UNCED Conference and at the parallel NGO

Environment Conference. There will be several opportunities to demonstrate access to information resources via electronic networking, most likely in conjunction with the APC (Association for Progressive Communications) node in Rio, Alternex, which will be hosting most NGO communications (via its proposed telematics centre for NGOs). These could involve connections to different systems, such as those of UNCED and NGONET, as well as the exchange of messages with NGOs in developing countries.

In addition, the possibility of demonstrating packet radio communication via satellite (the transmission of packets of data via radio waves using satellites) as a medium for difficult-to-reach locations in developing countries is being explored by IDRC.

In conjunction with the Canadian Centre for Remote Sensing (CCRS), IDRC is exploring presenting some of the results of ongoing or completed projects dealing with the use of remote sensing and Geographic Information System (GIS) techniques as part of a Canadian exhibition to be set up at UNCED. Funding for this exhibition is still under negotiation between Energy Mines and Resources Canada and External Affairs. It is expected that IDRC will have two display panels: one on IDRC's program activities in geomatics generally, and one focusing on a specific IDRC project in this area. A likely candidate for the latter is the project entitled *Remote Sensing Contribution to Soil Mapping in Morocco* and its second phase *Geographic Information System for Agricultural Development*. This project involves both remote sensing and geographic information systems (in its two phases), is environment related, and illustrates well IDRC's cooperative research modality and linkages to Canadian expertise.

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