

Statement by the Delegation of Canada to the Sixteenth Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

Friday May 9 2008, 3 pm – Parallel session on Interlinkages, International Cooperation in Development and Innovation

Dear Madame/Mister Chairperson,

Even twenty years after Brundtland, no country in the world can be considered sustainable. In a very real sense, all our countries are still learning how to develop in a manner that considers the three dimensions of sustainable development in an integrated fashion. From minimizing the risk of epidemics, to understanding how we can all benefit from increased trade – these issues link us all very much more one with another.

Yet the nature of international cooperation has changed. There is a need to re-invent and re-imagine how we undertake the work of international cooperation. The “donor-recipient” paradigm is over. Canada recognizes that international cooperation is no longer about “us” and “them”. In an increasingly smaller planet, where climate change affects everyone, it very much is about “us”. We all have a stake in resolving common regional and global problems, and in working together to undertake research into these problems and share knowledge on them, so that changes in policy and practice may follow.

Such cooperation must bridge efforts for development and innovation. Canada, through the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), is making this happen. For 37 years, IDRC has fostered research in developing countries, undertaken by the people of those countries, for their own development. Today, IDRC is also fostering partnerships among organizations with mandates that contribute to sustainable development.

Putting sustainable development into practice forces us all to overcome institutional barriers and link our collective efforts. Allow me to share with you three concrete examples of how Canada is linking its efforts in development and innovation towards a more sustainable future.

First, the Global Health Research Initiative (GHRI) combines the efforts of four organizations to focus on the health priorities of low and middle income countries. In its first six years, the GHRI funded more than seventy research projects to seed partnerships on a broad variety of issues. This initiative includes:

- the Canadian International Immunization Initiative (CIII) which strengthens and expands the delivery of immunization services;
- the Teasdale-Corti program which supports international research teams to find practical and sustainable solutions to the world’s most pressing health issues; and
- grants to strengthen African institutions conducting clinical trials, as a key step in developing affordable preventative technologies.

Results to date are showcased in a Global Health Research Casebook, freely available online, which tells the stories of research in action. This Casebook crosses disciplines and continents to weave together valuable lessons about conducting such research.

Second, the International Research Chairs initiative seeks to strengthen the research capabilities of universities in developing countries. This initiative creates opportunities for chair holders in developing countries and in Canada to implement a joint research program, create unique training and fieldwork opportunities for students, and identify new avenues for knowledge, policy or technology transfer.

Third, the International Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) program is fostering teams of community organizations and postsecondary institutions. Through a process of ongoing collaboration and mutual learning, these actors work together on comparative research, training and the creation of new knowledge in areas of shared importance for the social, cultural or economic development of communities in Canada and the south.

Both these latter two partnerships are expanding already successful Canadian models to the international stage. They are also focused on four themes of direct relevance for realizing sustainable development: Environmental research improves understanding on environment-health issues and promotes the sustainable use and management of natural resources. Information and communication technologies offer new opportunities for communities to control over their own development. Innovation policies guide the impact of science and technology on development challenges. Social and economic research informs key areas of public policy related to poverty reduction, equitable economic and social development, health, and human rights.

In summary, Canada is supporting activities that enable researchers from developing countries to collaborate with Canadian research excellence to find solutions to pressing problems, while working with people in communities that will directly benefit from the research. In doing so, they ensure that the results and knowledge gained through these projects will develop new technologies, change practices, and advance policies and laws that build healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous societies.

Madame/Mister Chairperson, Canada is linking its development and innovation efforts by pioneering partnerships to overcome the traditional boundaries between institutions in order to build a more sustainable future. It isn't easy, but it is a productive means to develop and spread technologies that put sustainable development into practice.