

Welcome to *Milenio Ambiental*

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With this first issue of *Milenio Ambiental* is born an ambitious project to open a space for views and technical discussion. This publication is also a tool to connect IDRC to specialists in the various sectors involved in environmental management in the region, through the Environmental Management Secretariat.

Milenio Ambiental's mission is to project a multidisciplinary, multisectoral vision of the environment into the future. To do so, the magazine is founded on one of IDRC's objectives: to strengthen and help mobilize the indigenous research capacity of developing countries, especially directed to achieving greater social and economic equity, better management of the environment and natural resources, and more equitable access to information. Equity and sustainability are the fundamental principles.

A bi-annual publication intended for an international audience, *Milenio Ambiental* presents the results of innovative research and proposals, as well as reflections on environmental management and local insights about global sustainable development. Its name itself refers to efforts to meet the new millennium's environmental challenges, particularly as reflected in the Millennium Development Goals, set by the United Nations in 2000. The magazine also aims to link researchers and decision-makers, and thus help disseminate the knowledge and experience of various local participants, particularly civil society, public institutions, communities, politicians, the private sector, and development banks.

The theme of this first issue of *Milenio Ambiental* is crucial for humanity: the global impact of local management of fresh water resources. In fact, although oceans and seas cover a large part of our planet, fresh water is very scarce, representing little more than 2.5% of Earth's total surface. People currently extract 8% of all renewable fresh water sources.

For many years, IDRC has promoted research around the world to address water management, both in terms of its impact and value. Only in recent decades has international public opinion become aware of looming water shortages and of the multidimensional facets of the problem – cultural, social, ethic, economic, religious, biological, and environmental. With recognition of this multidimensionality comes awareness of the difficulty in assigning an economic or financial value to water, and thus of levying tariffs or providing subsidies, even of investing in the sector. The consequences are obvious in the inadequate drinking water supplies and sanitation services that are the source of ongoing disputes between civil society and service providers in many cities.

Because water is a resource that depends largely on local management and whose value is multidimensional, no single, universal solution can be applied to the many different ways water is used, managed, and owned in cities. Therefore, we invite readers of *Milenio Ambiental* – especially in those sectors involved – to reflect on the need to formulate legislation and generate negotiation opportunities that integrate participatory research. This would contribute to the development of sustainable institutional arrangements, tailored to particular local needs.

As part of these efforts, in 2003 the EMS launched a call for proposals, with IDRC support. Many municipalities in Latin America and the Caribbean have responded. Together with academics and other collaborators, they have prepared joint research proposals that will contribute to the development of institutional platforms to ensure that multisectoral policies for sustainable management of water in cities are themselves sustainable.

In this issue of *Milenio Ambiental*, specialists from different sectors discuss and attempt to provide solutions to some of the issues presented above. Many other questions, still unanswered, will be raised in future issues.

I hope that you find the information presented in this and future issues of *Milenio Ambiental* both interesting and useful in your endeavours, and I invite your contributions to this magazine.

