This book is designed to help bridge the gap between our ability to cause change and our capacity to manage it to enable managers to meet the new challenges of sustainability. If humans are to try to manage their impacts on the planet, they need a greatly improved knowledge base to do so. This must begin with general ecological literacy for managers, including enhanced understanding of human-planet relationships. Ecological literacy is becoming a necessary skill for today’s managers. The first book of this series (On Common Ground: Managing Human-Planet Relationships by Ranjit Kumar and Barbara Murck, 1992) is aimed at promoting this type of understanding; it is a primer of skills and knowledge relevant to the goals of sustainable development. On Common Ground explores the interconnected nature of Earth systems and highlights the emerging challenges to managers in that context.

The Challenge of Sustainability builds on the conceptual framework presented in On Common Ground, and offers an integrative model for the relationship between humans and the environment — an ecosphere approach. Ultimately, an ecosphere perspective on management will involve modifying many of our planning and decision-making processes, our institutions and institutional links, even our value systems, to permit effective integration of ecological, economic, and social objectives. The management of human demands, modification of human behavior, and mitigation of human impact on the environment must become the central themes of sustainable environmental management. We must integrate and incorporate this new perspective on human-planet relationships into our daily lives, particularly into the way we make decisions and manage our activities (Kumar and Murck, 1992). Building a sustainable future will require new techniques and approaches to help managers understand problems and devise and implement lasting solutions.

The Challenge of Sustainability is thus founded on two basic premises:

- We need new knowledge to gain access to new sources of information, to broaden our perspectives, and to gain new vision in order to meet the challenges and mandates of sustainability.

- We need to explore new approaches and strategies, new instruments, techniques, and links in order to develop the comprehensive and holistic management and decision-making processes implicit in the concept of sustainability.

The substance, structure, and organization of the book reflect these two needs.

Part I, “Understanding and Measuring Environmental Problems,” explores the “need to know.” An unprecedented global consensus has generated a series of new mandates for sustainable management, which will compel the integration of a broad range of social goals, environmental values, and economic needs and objectives. It is critical that managers understand the scope of the challenges posed by these new mandates. The chapters in this section focus on understanding the evolution of the global problematique; challenging traditional value systems; broadening the perspectives of managers; and acknowledging and comprehending the new responsibilities facing today’s managers. Enhancing the quality and accessibility of environmental information, facilitating the communication and sharing of such information, and developing new standards by which to measure our problems and progress are fundamental steps in enriching our
understanding of human-planet relationships.

In order to meet these challenges and achieve these objectives, managers must also begin to explore new strategies and approaches. They must become familiar with new ways of managing and accounting, with more consultative and participatory processes, and with more effective means of influencing individuals and organizations to behave in environmentally acceptable ways. They must learn the usefulness — as well as the limitations — of comprehensive approaches to planning, data management, and problem solving. Part II, "Working Towards Sustainable Solutions," surveys some of the comprehensive approaches and strategies available to help managers meet the challenges of sustainability. Effective application of integrated planning and decision-making approaches like Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can greatly enhance our understanding of environmental problems and fundamentally transform management perspectives. Strengthening the participative and consultative aspects of the strategic planning process and developing more effective methods of promoting sustainable management are important aspects of this exploration of new approaches and strategies.

Understanding sustainable development requires a new set of knowledge, skills, and tools for decision making. Introducing decision makers to these skills, encouraging cross-sectoral approaches to problem solving, and facilitating inter-regional and international co-operation are all key elements of building a framework for effective environmental management. All of these elements require a significant enhancement of capacities at the level of individual managers, institutions, governments, organizations, and sectors. Capacity building is a fundamental part of the new mandate that has emerged from the global consensus; this is the focus of the Conclusions, "A Challenge to the Managers of Our Future." Capacity building is not just oriented towards an increase in technical competency; it implies a wider, more holistic approach, aimed at reshaping societal values and understandings, improving policies, and strengthening institutional links (Morgan, 1992).

This book is part of Project Learning — a broad-based exploration of new visions, new knowledge, and new skills, focusing on the roles of management, training, and human resource development in building a sustainable future. The project was conceived and initiated by the Centre for a Sustainable Future, a division of the Foundation for International Training (FIT). Project Learning is explicitly aimed at meeting the learning needs of decision makers in the public and private sectors worldwide, as they face the mandate to incorporate environmental sustainability into management and decision-making processes. One of the goals of the project is the development and dissemination of effective learning packages, through a cooperative, collaborative process that builds on existing strengths in partner institutions worldwide.

This book and Project Learning represent the beginnings of a response to needs that have been expressed through the global consultative process. In recent years, the global community has debated the need to shape a future that is more enduring and equitable than the future we seem to be facing. Through a variety of participatory and consultative processes, the world community is searching for sustainable alternatives, based on a set of principles that accord equitable access to the bounty of the planet, without unduly depleting the stock of natural endowments. The lessons and mandates that have emerged from this search, partly ensconced in the form of documents such as the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN/
UNEP/WWF, 1980), the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), and Agenda 21, the "wish list" of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992, have provided the impetus for this learning enterprise.

The global community is in the midst of a rapid learning process — each new problem reveals how little we know or understand of how the world really works. A global enterprise of learning is critical to equip managers with the capacity they need to manage for the 21st century. Today's managers are at the forefront in the struggle to achieve the objectives and meet the challenges of sustainability. But for managers to be effective we must provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills, and reaffirm their resolve to be the global force to build a sustainable future for us all. Our hope is that this book will act as a catalyst for global thinking and co-operative exchanges. The material in the book is based primarily on a Northern perspective, although we have tried to draw on examples worldwide. We hope it will stimulate future work, built on a wider range of perspectives from all cultures and environments.
REFERENCES


