



World Bank Group Archives Exhibit Series

First World Bank Strategy Statement on
the Environment

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WORLD BANK GROUP





The World Bank Group Archives Exhibit Series contains exhibits originally published on the Archives' external website beginning in 2002. When the Archives' website was transferred to a new platform in 2015, it was decided that older exhibits would be converted to pdf format and made available as a series on the World Bank's external database, [Documents & Reports](#).

These exhibits, authored by World Bank archivists, highlight key events, personalities, and publications in the history of the World Bank. They also bring attention to some of the more fascinating archival records contained in the Archives' holdings.

To view current exhibits, visit the [Exhibits](#) page on the Archives' website.



First World Bank Strategy Statement on the Environment

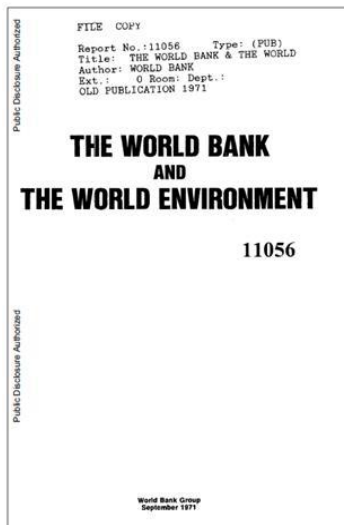
The World Bank Group recognized the importance of the environment in its development work -- not in the 1980s or 1990s -- but over 40 years ago in 1970.

Currently, it is the policy of the Bank Group that careful attention must be given for the consequences to the environment and to the health and well-being of affected peoples in the planning of its development projects. Though the Bank had, in the past, concerned itself with the environmental effects of its activities, no systematic procedure existed to identify and examine those effects. More importantly, methods to prevent and mitigate adverse environmental consequences had not yet been devised.



James A. Lee

The World Bank created the Office of the Environmental Advisor in 1970 in reaction to externally voiced concerns. James A. Lee became the first Environmental Advisor. His office had a small staff, reviewed all projects, and recommended changes where necessary. Its impact was modest, and project officers widely regarded it as an “adversary.” It remained isolated from the mainstream so that, by the mid-1980s, the Bank was lagging behind other multilateral agencies in implementing environmental policies and practices.



September 1971 - The first public statement by the Bank about its strategy for the environment.

Several Bank projects (including the Polonoroeste Project in Brazil and the Narmada Project in India) elicited strong negative public reactions due to adverse environmental and social impacts. Complaints were registered by the Bank’s major shareholders and from environmental NGOs. In response, the Bank created an Environment Department in the 1987 reorganization, sharply increased the number of environmental staff, instituted environmental safeguard policies, and launched a program of environmental lending. The new department was given wide responsibilities for research, developing new environmental initiatives, regular environmental reviews of projects (including authority over environmental design aspects), and



strengthening the Bank's environmental policies. Under the leadership of President Conable, the Bank's allocation of resources to environmental activities increased substantially after the 1987 reorganization, and by 1995 there were 300 staff in the Environment Department.

The Office of the Environmental Advisor in 1970 was the seed that gave rise to the robust growth of the Environmental Department beginning in 1987. The first report issued by the Bank Group on the environment, [The World Bank and the World Environment](#), was written in September 1971. The importance of this 1971 report marked the beginning of a strategic change in World Bank policy. One of the first ventures of the Office of the Environmental Advisor was to ensure that sewer outlets were designed to keep waters clean for swimming and boating in the tourist areas surrounding Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia. In the 30 month period between July 1, 1971 and December 31, 1973, the Bank Group reviewed 434 loans and credits from an environmental standpoint. 275 of these revealed no potential problems. Environmental problems were identified for 135 and were handled by Bank staff. The remaining 24 projects required special studies by outside consultants.

While the Bank continues to address country-specific issues with respect to the environment, it has now responded to the global challenges as well by forming partnerships with other institutions.