

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Engaging Atlantic Canadian
Youth on the Sustainable
Development Goals



ATLANTIC COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION



YOUTH VOICE IN DECISION MAKING

INCLUDE CULTURE + ART

RECONCILIATION COUNTS!

BE IN SCHOOLS

AMPLIFY YOUTH ACTION

16 ROUND TABLES

70 YOUTH

43 YOUTH-SERVING PROFESSIONALS

SPACE TO BE REAL

CONNECT TO SMALL LOCAL PERSONAL

KNOW WHAT YOUTH CARE ABOUT

SDGs AS A CAREER COUNSELLOR

SUPPORT FOR YOUTH-SERVING PROFESSIONALS

ENGAGING YOUTH IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 ambitious goals, representing a global framework of action for people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. The Atlantic Council for International Cooperation (ACIC) has been working with youth on these Goals since their adoption in 2015. We undertook the “Your Voice Matters” project to offer a snapshot of what Atlantic Canadian youth think about the SDGs, and how they are already being engaged in work, conversation and leadership opportunities for sustainable development. We spoke with over 100 youth and youth-supporting professionals across Atlantic Canada (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland & Labrador, and Prince Edward Island), reaching the greatest diversity of communities that we could during the two-month time period of the project.

The Government of Canada has committed to including youth in its strategy and ongoing work to implement the SDGs, and our conversations confirmed that youth voices are integral to this process. Although civic engagement among youth today may not read as well using traditional measures (voter turnout, etc.), youth are involved and care deeply, at times suffering from a sense of being overwhelmed by complex global problems. At the time of this project, the most relatable goals to youth participants were Climate Action, Gender Equality, and Quality Education.

Participants saw true sustainable development as breaking free from the short-term goal-making of election cycles, focusing on an inclusive, systems-level shift away from status quo resource-focused capitalism and neocolonialism. They called for strong leadership and government policy to support the work of implementing the SDGs, and maintained that Canada’s ongoing reconciliation efforts with Indigenous peoples are a prerequisite to being able to move forward on this work.

We heard that youth want to feel valued and connected in their local communities in order to take action on the SDGs. Participants emphasized the importance of including ways of learning about and taking action on the SDGs in schools and universities, reaching youth in the all of the diverse geographic and cultural contexts of Atlantic Canada, and creating safe spaces where youth can be themselves in a supportive environment to find their own ways to make a difference.

Drawing on findings from the project, existing research, and our own direct experience engaging Atlantic Canadian youth on the SDGs, we put forward ten recommendations: (1) use the SDGs as a career map; (2) be in schools; (3) include youth voices in decision-making; (4) reconciliation counts within the SDGs; (5) make space to be real; (6) support youth-serving organizations; (7) connect global issues to the small, local and personal; (8) include art and culture; (9) know what youth care about; and (10) amplify youth action.



INTRODUCTION

Atlantic Council for International Cooperation

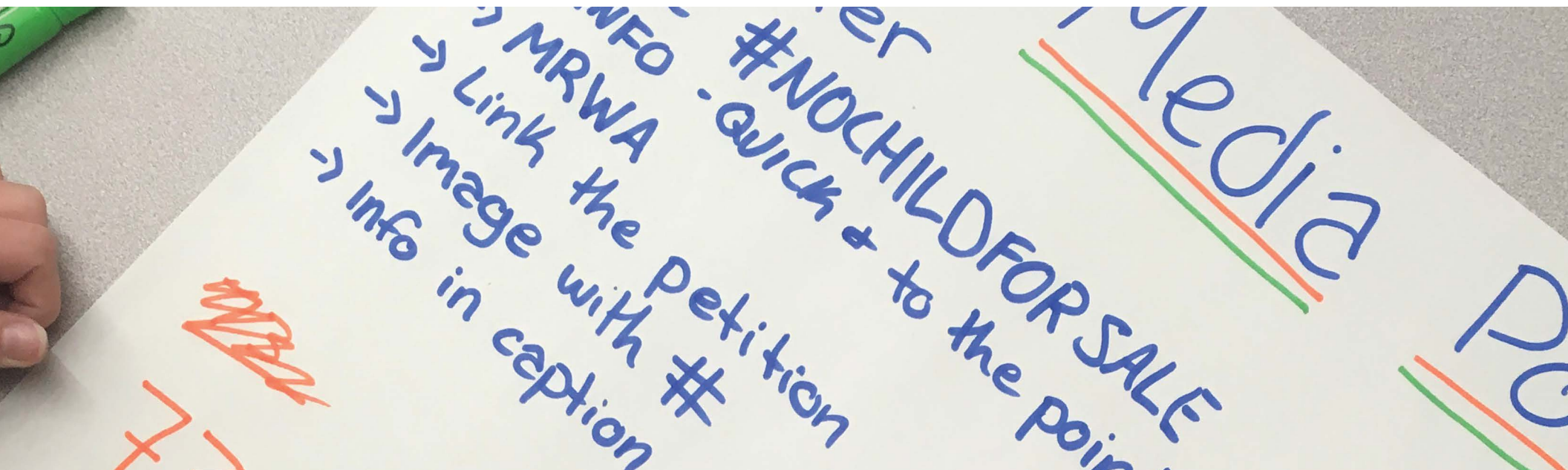
The Atlantic Council for International Cooperation (ACIC) is a coalition of individuals, organizations, and institutions working in the Atlantic region, which are committed to achieving global sustainability in a peaceful and healthy environment, with social justice, human dignity, and participation for all. ACIC supports its members in international cooperation and education through collective leadership, networking, information, training and coordination, and represents their interests when dealing with government and others.

ACIC's new five-year strategic plan (2019-2024) prioritizes developing a stronger, more innovative and effective international development community at the regional level, in part through the development of strategic partnerships with youth-serving organizations and leaders, women's organizations and local Indigenous organizations, among others. ACIC will play a leadership role in creating platforms for connections, developing an expanded sector ecosystem, and looking at areas where our diverse work is overlapping and interconnected, particularly as this relates to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Agenda 2030

As a member state of the United Nations, Canada has signed on to an ambitious set of goals for global sustainable development, called Agenda 2030, or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2015, we agreed to share responsibility for achieving the 17 goals outlined in the Agenda, which apply universally, to both our own domestic responsibilities and to our global partnerships.

Agenda 2030 is described as a global framework of action for people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. The Goals, which include social, economic, and environmental goods such as zero hunger, clean and affordable energy, and good health and wellbeing, are intended to be crosscutting and aspirational. In order to move Canada towards reaching these goals, the federal government (at the time of this project) is undertaking the development of a whole-of-society 2030 Agenda National Strategy, led by Employment and Social Development Canada.



“WE ARE IN CRISIS, AND THE WAYS WE’VE BEEN WORKING UP UNTIL NOW WILL NOT GET US THROUGH THE INTERSECTING CRISES. YOUTH HAVE BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF EVERY SOCIAL MOVEMENT IN HISTORY, SO IT MAKES SENSE TO SUPPORT THEIR EFFORTS.”

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANT





A Focus on Youth

ACIC believes in the importance of amplifying youth voices and making space for youth leadership, and we see youth as integral to the success of implementing the SDGs in Canada. We work with youth directly and also work to build capacity in our sector to meaningfully engage youth, shaping programmes and decision-making processes that are explicitly inclusive to youth, especially those who have historically faced barriers to participation.

In its approach to developing a 2030 Agenda National Strategy, the Government of Canada has echoed our commitment to the importance of youth involvement in the process, stating:

The Global achievement of the 2030 Agenda will have the greatest benefit for children and youth - they will inherit the world we leave them, and so our successful implementation will have the greatest effect on future generations. Young people can be powerful in holding their govern-

ments accountable to their commitment to the 2030 Agenda by speaking publicly about their support for the SDGs and supporting business and organizations working to achieve the goals. They can use their education to take specific actions on the SDGs and share their knowledge with others. Children and youth are agents of change, already taking action on the SDGs across the world, empowered through information, knowledge and awareness of sustainable development. They can invent, they can innovate and they can campaign for causes or to solve problems that they care about. (Sustainable Development Goals Unit, Government of Canada, 2019).

We also heard from youth and youth-serving professionals that youth voices must be included. 98% of survey respondents (45 of 46), representing both youth and youth-supporting professionals, reported that the voice of youth in their communities was an important part of Canada's action on the SDGs.

Objectives

The “Your Voice Matters” project aimed to engage youth and youth-serving institutions and organizations to better understand how best to interest and engage youth in Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. Feeding into Canada’s whole-of-society 2030 Agenda National Strategy, led by Employment and Social Development Canada, we were interested in how to effectively incorporate a youth lens into Canada’s approach to implementing the SDGs. The main goals were to:

- convene roundtables with multi-stakeholder groups (including youth) to gather feedback on how to effectively engage and connect youth to the SDGs;
- gather input from youth-serving organizations/youth on options for Canada’s National Strategy;
- collect data from youth about their interest in the SDGs and how to successfully obtain their views on Agenda 2030 and the implementation of the SDGs;
- further develop and/or build relationships with three levels of government (municipal, provincial, federal), Indigenous organizations, private sector, academia, and civil society to support the implementation of the SDGs;
- develop a robust report that outlines best practices in engaging youth around the SDGs.

Literature Review

At the core of engaging youth on the SDGs are the concepts of global citizenship and participation. In signing on to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), Canada has agreed that all young people under the age of 18 have the right to participate in decision-making.

Although traditional measures of citizenship among Canadian youth (such as voting and keeping abreast of news and current affairs) are down, youth are still actively participating, with 69% of youth (age 15-24) reporting membership in a group, and 66% of youth (age 15-18) volunteering (Statistics Canada). In light of these trends, and the strong role of social media in youth’s lives, Bond (2015) recommendations on engaging Generation Z include being open to “light touch engagement” with youth audiences, such as social media sharing YouTube storytelling, especially given that those who use social media as their primary source of information are less likely to be exposed to something that is not shared by their peers.

Baczewska et al (2018) note that social-change-oriented youth “negotiate politics through everyday, localized and relational networks,” navigating effortlessly between ‘real world’ and online engagement. Their Ontario study of social-change-oriented youth concludes that “building opportunities for young people to meaningfully participate in local decision-making processes (i.e. in schools and municipal government) about the issues that affect their lives remains a key priority.”

Youth education is a well-established aspect of sustainable development, and was an area of special focus during the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) 2005-2014. This period saw the formation of Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RECs), of which there are currently 168 worldwide. Atlantic Canada has only one, RCE Tantramar, which is primarily a collaboration between the Town of Sackville, New Brunswick and Mount Allison University (Global RCE).

Another example of regional collective action for sustainable development education is a study on a collaboration by a group of two universities and five colleges in Quebec. They found that connectivity among educational institutions “helped in building a critical mass of practitioners in the field and launched a community of practice and integrated sustainable development in the member institutions at different levels, strengthening the educator’s knowledge on sustainable development pedagogy.” The study also found that the “integration has helped in developing the understanding of sustainable development by students and has also resulted in a positive attitude towards sustainable development.” (Anand, Bisailon, Webster, and Amor, 2015).

As these, and other studies show, regional, collective action in engaging youth shows evidence of success, particularly around sustainable development. The results of our work substantiate these findings, and contribute to the body of research around youth engagement.



METHODOLOGY

Building on existing relationships with members, partners and networks, ACIC conducted a series of roundtable conversations and interviews with youth and youth-serving professionals across Atlantic Canada. Our approach was grounded in recent experience hosting youth dialogues on SDG #5 (Gender Equality) through the Youth for Gender Equality (YGE) Initiative, a national partnership with PLAN International Canada, the Canadian Teachers Federation, and others. In collaboration with the Employment and Social Development Canada’s SDG Program, ACIC’s facilitators developed a series of activities and discussion questions that were used to guide each roundtable and interview (see Appendix A).

Our recruitment strategy included direct outreach to ACIC’s membership network, consisting of 70+ individuals and organizations across Atlantic Canada, as well as outreach to non-member educational institutions and youth-serving organizations. We approached key contacts in each region to help us recruit participants and promoted the roundtables on ACIC’s website and social media, reaching over 3,000 people on Facebook and over 1,000 on Instagram. We also ran paid social media ads which garnered over 78,000 impressions, and a YouTube video ad which had 37,000 views.

We ultimately held 16 roundtable discussions in nine diverse locations across the Atlantic region, including Fredericton, Saint John, and Sackville, New Brunswick; Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; St. John’s, Newfoundland and Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador; and Wolfville, Antigonish, and Halifax, Nova Scotia. We also conducted a total of 18 one-on-one interviews. All in all, we spoke with 70 youth and 43 youth-serving professionals. Our multi-stakeholder approach brought together representatives from municipal and provincial government departments, academia, private sector/businesses, civil society and Indigenous organizations that have experience in, and knowledge of, youth engagement.

Over the brief two-month time period of this project, we sought to speak with as broad a representation of Atlantic Canadian youth and youth-supporting professionals as possible. Working in Atlantic Canada poses the geographical challenge of reaching a low density population base spread across Canada’s mainland and a collection of peninsulas

and islands separated by major bodies of water, including rural and remote areas (some inaccessible by road). We undertook this work primarily during the month of March, a time of year when wintry weather in the region can make travel unpredictable, and when schools and universities take spring breaks. Despite these challenges, our sample size and the diversity of participants provided us with a robust model that showed clear patterns of results.

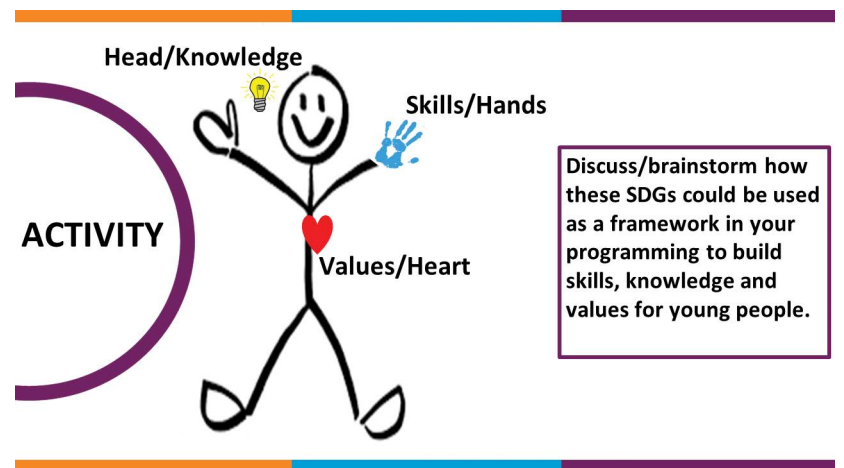
Using the SDGs as a framework, we gathered input from stakeholders to learn how we can best support youth engagement in the implementation of a national strategy. We used a grounded theory approach to analyze the data collected via roundtables and interviews, marking with a series of codes extracted from the notes and transcriptions using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. We then grouped the codes together into similar concepts in order to form concept categories (Bryman & Teevan, 2007). The results described below represent the concept categories developed through this process.

RESULTS

Relevance of the Goals

When asked whether they thought the Sustainable Development Goals can make a difference, both youth and professional participants agreed to varying extents that they can. Participants noted the colourful graphic design as making the goals clear, engaging, and relatable to a broad youth audience. Although participants expressed little certainty that the Goals can be achieved by 2030, most people appreciated the aspirational nature of Agenda 2030, and asserted that it was motivating to have big goals to work towards together.

Everyone we spoke with was able to find goals that captured issues that were important to their communities. Climate Action was the number one most relevant goal for the Atlantic Canadian youth we spoke with, and the third most relevant for youth-serving professionals. Youth also related highly to Gender Equality and Quality Education. Professionals cited Quality Education as the most relevant, followed by Gender Equality, Climate Action and Good Health and Wellbeing. Participants in Indigenous communities were frequently drawn to Life on Land, which was seen as the most closely relatable goal to the preservation of their culture and its inherent connection to the land.



Defining Sustainable Development

In most conversations about the meaning of sustainable development, participants started with a version of the Brundtland Report (1987) definition of sustainable development: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Thinking more about what sustainable development meant, participants frequently mentioned a few common themes: long-term thinking; a holistic, systems-level approach; in-it-togetherness; and a values-based move away from the status quo.

LONG-TERM THINKING

Participants agreed that sustainable development requires a long-term vision, beyond the current generations. One interviewee suggested a move beyond “sustainable” to “regenerative,” proposing use of the lens, “What is this blank doing to be regenerative over time?” They pointed out that settler culture and the culture of capitalism lack this kind of vision.

Others framed the need for long-term thinking as a break free from the short-term goal-making of election cycles. As one participant said, work on sustainable development “shouldn’t stop if the government changes; put in the system and regardless of who’s in power, they [the SDGs] can be followed.” Long-term thinking was also mentioned as a shift necessary for families and the general public. As one youth illustrated, “Even my parents have said, ‘I’m not going to be alive when it happens.’ How do you make somebody realize something that’s not here yet?”

SYSTEMS-LEVEL APPROACH

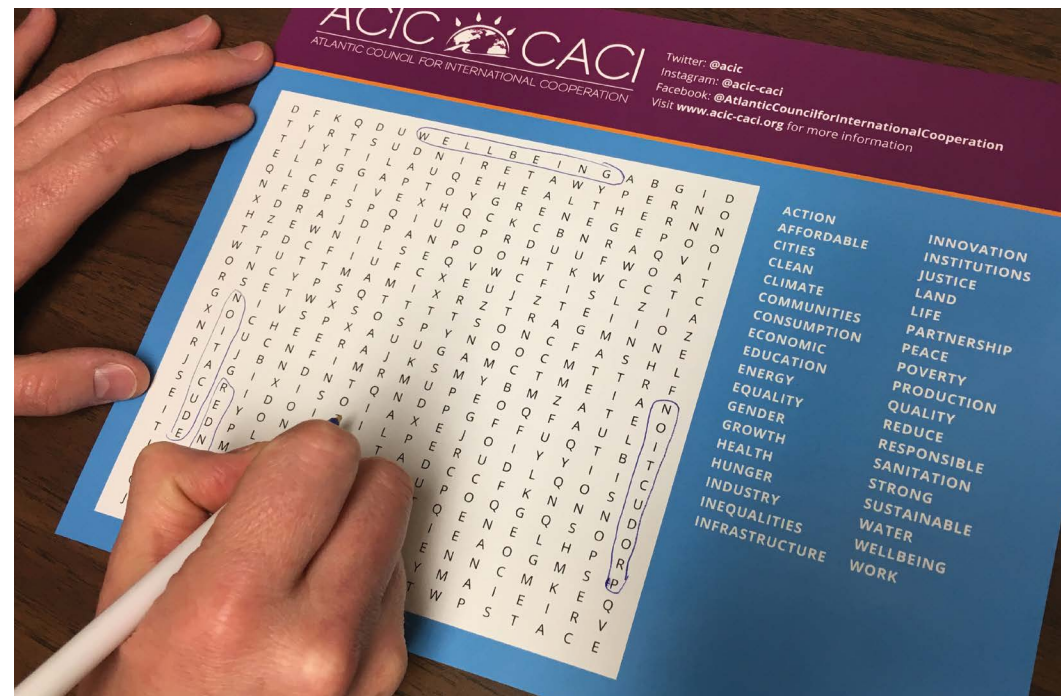
Sustainable development, according to some participants, means working holistically across multiple systems. As one participant put it, “several of the [Sustainable Development Goals] will intersect in any kind of programming that you put together.” Another participant asserted that appropriate resources should be allocated to “look at this holistically.” We also heard that sustainable development needs to be adaptable in its approach, knowing that needs and conditions change over time.

IN-IT-TOGETHERNESS

Inclusion, sense of community, equity and shared responsibility were identified as key components of sustainable development. Participants were clear in their belief that everyone needs to work together to reach the common goals outlined in Agenda 2030. One person said, “people with privilege have the ability to make these choices, but it’s not enough—we need to lift each other up.” Another described sustainable development as “knowing who your neighbours are, a sense of community. Everyone knows each other, people step in to watch kids, act as family, etc.”

VALUES-BASED MOVE AWAY FROM THE STATUS QUO

Many of the youth and youth-serving adults we spoke with saw morals, values, and spirituality as the foundation of sustainable development. One participant argued that “sustainability cannot be a layer on top of the status quo.” Conversations in multiple roundtables examined capitalism and the assumption of economic growth as problematic. To one participant, sustainable development meant “the end of capitalism, and a cultural shift on a global scale.”



Barriers to Implementing the SDGs

LEADERSHIP

Political will and leadership was a major theme during the roundtables and conversations. One youth participant said, “politicians don’t see a penalty to not implementing the SDGs. They don’t see the goals as achievable.” A participant from a student group that works to convince politicians to commit to work on the SDGs described the difficulty of maintaining a non-partisan status for Agenda 2030 in order to secure buy-in across party lines, noting “We’ve found in talking to MPs that we have to frame it differently depending on who we’re talking to.”

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Many participants recognized that compromises and lifestyle changes, especially for Atlantic Canadians with the most privilege, would be a necessary element of truly implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, and noted the difficulty of getting people to shift behaviours and habits. One youth said, “our habits of today: we’ve taken a lot for granted in Canada and we have a consumer culture. [It’s] hard to break this culture once in place, but we need to do so.”

OVERWHELM

A sense of being overwhelmed by the world’s problems, and the breadth of work required to achieve the goals was a common challenge cited by participants in multiple roundtables. “It kind of scares people because it’s overwhelming maybe. There’s so much that needs to be done.” One group of youth-supporting adults mentioned that some students at their university seemed “crippled by anxiety,” some even not attending classes, perhaps because “the future is unknown.” A participant in a group of 18 to 24-year-old students talked about the grim potential impacts of climate change even playing into their reproductive choices: “I want to have kids, but there’s been so much talk... people who have decided not to have children because of the climate crisis we’re facing now... That shouldn’t be the reality, but the fact that we’re at this point now... has put me in an awkward position.”

RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation and the rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada came up frequently in our discussions about the barriers we face to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. “Reconciliation,” according to one participant, “is a national priority in Canada, which may be a prerequisite to addressing the SDGs.” Another participant felt that “the government tends to turn their backs to issues such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, and Indigenous Waters and Lands.” A few participants brought up the importance of The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and its relationship to the SDGs. We heard that Canada “can’t advocate for SDGs on the world stage until reconciliation happens,” as one participant put it.

INEQUITIES

Participants saw inequities, from global to individual scales, to be a major challenge for Canada in terms of being able to work towards the SDGs. On a global scale one participant described Canada’s reliance on neocolonialism, noting that “poor countries are developing rich countries.” Another participant talked about “hidden people, those that get overlooked,” thinking about how poverty particularly can be much more visible in urban centres than in rural and remote areas.

On an individual level, we heard concern in most of our conversations that privilege and power play heavily into who is able to participate. Pressures such as disability, mental health, financial circumstances, or food security can prevent people from claiming agency in taking action on the SDGs, and even from imagining a world where the SDGs are possible.

AWARENESS

Although many participants were aware of the SDGs, there were a number who learned about the Goals for the first time through these discussions with ACIC. Youth participants told us that “school populations don’t have knowledge of the SDGs except for youth already engaged in social justice.” Participants felt that broad public awareness of the goals was necessary to their success, suggesting “we can go further as Canada; we’re aware here, but not as much as we should be.”

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ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANT



Youth Engagement

EDUCATION

The most frequent suggestion in terms of connecting youth to the SDGs was ensuring that both educators and students in secondary and post-secondary settings know about them, and ideally use them to plan and contextualize their studies and initiatives. Many participants indicated a desire for provincial education curricula to explicitly incorporate the goals, though we also heard from provincial education staff that the guidelines are designed to be broad in terms of subject areas, with the understanding that teachers should always be including emerging issues and frameworks (e.g. climate change and the SDGs).

VALUING YOUTH

Participants emphasized the importance of valuing youth for who they are, and recognizing their knowledge and lived experience as the foundation of their ability to contribute to the SDGs. For some youth-serving organizations in Atlantic Canada, valuing youth takes the form of formal recognition of youth through rites of passage or awards ceremonies. Others frame their youth work as “focusing on the whole person,” explicitly avoiding assumptions, and ensuring that people and organizations who say they want to hear from youth are truly prepared to listen. Participants saw self-worth and confidence as enabling conditions for youth to care about the SDGs, and one youth-serving professional described this as their ultimate goal: “Success for me is if I have 20 kids who say, you know what, I believe in myself, I believe I have a future worth investing in, you know, I believe that I deserve to have these opportunities.”

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Community connection was another strong thread that ran through our various conversations. A participant working with youth in an Innu community described the experience of taking a group of youth hunting, and giving the meat back to the community. “We take [the youth] on a boat, two-and-a-half-week outing... we bring back everything that we hunted or captured or whatever, we bring it back and then give it out to the elders, and give it out to their family. So it wasn’t just ‘oh, it’s mine.’ It’s ‘what can we give to the community?’” This gesture gave youth

an opportunity to be seen and appreciated by community members as active and important contributors, and also helped youth see their own role and importance.

Another participant noted the importance of “actionable experiences for youth grounded in community,” with connections and guidance provided by supportive leaders. Some youth-supporting adults talked about their own experiences with trauma and struggles with mental health and addiction over the course of their lives. These participants, in communities where trauma shaped the social landscape for youth, felt that honest storytelling about their own life experience (including regrets and failures) was an essential part of what they were able to offer in their work with youth.

CULTURE

A connection to culture and expression was seen as a way for youth to “use their skills in creative ideas to help them get out their inner feelings,” said one participant, as well as a tool to make positive change in their communities. Facilitating expression through the arts could deepen understanding of issues within the SDGs as well as open dialogue around those issues in the artists’ communities.

In Indigenous communities, where intergenerational trauma has resulted in mental health struggles and youth suicides, connection to culture was described as a vehicle for survival, an integral part of health and wellbeing of youth, and a prerequisite to youth being able to think about or contribute to the goals.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Youth we spoke with did want to take on leadership, but described an ideal balance: “Youth-led, but organization from the administration would definitely help... really interactive activities where you’re engaged, not just listening to someone talk.” This combination of agency and guidance was echoed by youth-serving professionals, who recommended “giving youth responsibility, agency, asking youth to identify what’s important and come up with ways to develop the [Sustainable Development Goals].”

Many participants cited the recent climate strikes (March/April 2019) as an example of youth leadership, with varying views on its success. Overall, it was seen as a sign of hope, and a call to action/support for youth. One roundtable of youth-serving professionals examined their own role in supporting the movement, noting that high school teachers were supportive, but not explicitly so with parents, who were left divided on whether and how to endorse their youth's participation. Participants in another roundtable questioned the clarity of youth demands in the school walkout, and didn't see that participating youth were prepared to articulate their stance on climate action.

SAFE SPACES

Participants told us that safe spaces where youth can feel a sense of belonging make their work possible: "Inclusion is everything, and creating a safe space for youth. Considering all genders, expressions of genders has been really important. And of course, that really fits into what youth are all about, like youth are discovering that. It's creating a space for that to happen." Participants mentioned trust and openness as important elements of any effective group of youth, offering examples such as creating culture clubs to "help youth understand other cultures' traditions and holidays," which help newcomer youth "feel included in their new community." Being seen, and having leaders who are committed to "being there to support [youth] through the challenges they face" was cited as another component of providing safe space.

Leaving No One Behind

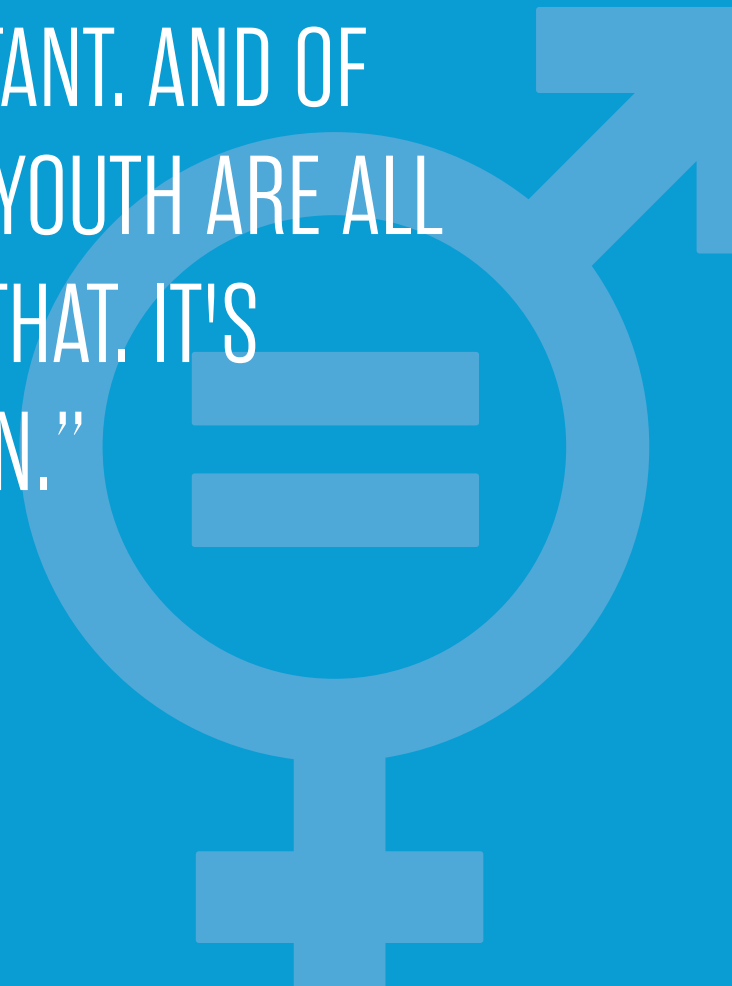
When asked about what "leaving no one behind" meant to them, participants' answers ranged from addressing global-scale inequities such as power dynamics between the Global North and Global South, to social inclusion at a local level. "Canada is a big country with a huge area, hard to connect east to west; problems are different across the country," said one participant.

We also heard that some regions of Canada experience complex social and environmental problems more acutely than others: "Certainly Labrador is like a canary in the mine. Yeah. Where people further north have been trying to get everybody's attention and say, 'Look, you know, this is devastation, this is death to us...' Losing your culture, losing your land, your food and everything. It's so scary. And I mean, I know we call it climate change, but it's worse than that. It's worse than change, it's an absolute crisis now."



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ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANT



DISCUSSION

Overall, the SDGs resonated with the youth and professionals we talked to. However a couple of key questions and challenges stood out as important: (1) Where are reconciliation and the reclamation of Indigenous rights and culture within Agenda 2030? (2) Given the urgency of the work we want to tackle, how can we support youth in mobilizing quickly and effectively to inform and act upon the SDGs?

The Government of Canada has recognized the role of reconciliation in its work on the SDGs, noting “significant alignment between the SDGs and the work of reconciliation— centered on closing socio-economic gaps between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous Canadians, advancing self-determination and improving relationships with Indigenous peoples.” Their 2018 Review also includes an explicit commitment to including Indigenous participation, particularly youth and other underrepresented Indigenous identities, throughout the process (Global Affairs Canada).

This approach is aligned with the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) assertion that “[UN] member States should facilitate Indigenous peoples’ participation in national-level processes to plan, implement and monitor national frameworks for the 2030 Agenda, including their capacity building.” The UNPFII has also expressed concern that the concept of self-determination, which is protected through UNDRIP, is left out of the Agenda.

Working to protect and strengthen Indigenous cultures in Canada is not an explicit Goal, but Duxbury, Kangas & De Beukelaer (2017) advocate for cultural policy as integral to sustainable development, proposing four possible roles: “to safeguard and sustain cultural practices and rights; to ‘green’ the operations and impacts of cultural organizations and industries; to raise awareness and catalyse action about sustainability and climate change through arts and culture; and to foster global ecological citizenship to help identify and tackle sustainability as a global issue.”

In terms of mobilizing youth effectively for the SDGs, we propose learning from collaborations such as the RCEs and the Quebec universities. It may be useful to support a collective impact approach, calling on youth-serving organizations and institutions to partner on for

long-term work on common goals, then agree on how to track progress collectively. The collective impact model uses the strengths of each organization to find new ways of working together, requires consistent communication among partners, and provides a backbone to move the work forward. (Tamarack Institute). According to Kania and Kramer (2011), “creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time, and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.”

Recommendations

1. SDGS AS A CAREER COUNSELLOR

Youth are seeking work that matters and contributes, and makes them feel valued. Use Agenda 2030 to identify how an existing activity ties into the big picture, or use it as a starting point for a new initiative. Think about how any job, project, or area of study could contribute to multiple goals.

2. BE IN SCHOOLS

Whether or not the SDGs are part of the curriculum for your school or university, make sure students learn about them—more than once! Work with educators to find ways of using Agenda 2030 to situate any subject matter in the global context, and deepen students’ connection to learning by showing why it matters. See Appendix B for resources on learning about and teaching the SDGs.

3. YOUTH VOICE IN DECISION MAKING

Youth have a right to participate in decision making. Advocate for youth inclusion in governance and decision-making, and provide the support and resources to make it possible. Build leadership skills through real life practice; youth leadership is key to implementing the SDGs in Canada.

4. RECONCILIATION COUNTS

Although Indigenous rights are not front and centre in the SDGs, work on reconciliation in Canada is part of working towards Agenda 2030. Providing opportunities for Indigenous youth to strengthen connection to culture, making space for an Indigenous lens in the way you tackle and measure progress on the Goals, and centring youth voices from the Indigenous community are all great places to start. Remind all youth that reconciliation is action on the SDGs.

5. SPACE TO BE REAL

Create safe spaces where diverse groups of youth can be themselves (their whole selves!), engage with what they're passionate about, and grow new ideas. Share failures and celebrate positive risk-taking. These spaces embrace and learn from the lived experience of both youth and adults, and open space for community-based solutions to the complex problems Canada has committed to tackling by 2030.

6. SUPPORT FOR YOUTH-SERVING PROFESSIONALS

Offer opportunities for those who work with youth, especially in communities that face barriers to participation, to learn more about the SDGs. Strengthen networks of youth-serving professionals and promote collective impact for Agenda 2030 among youth-serving organizations.

7. CONNECT TO SMALL, LOCAL, PERSONAL

Combat feelings of being overwhelmed by connecting small issues and actions (plastic straws were a trendy example at the time of these roundtables) to big global issues, and vice versa. Create opportunities for youth to identify as global citizens with agency and power, and make a practice of being explicit about local-global connections, referencing the SDGs.

8. INCLUDE CULTURE AND ART

Celebrating traditional cultures and making space for creative expression can help youth grapple with the big social and environmental problems we're facing, bring communities together for positive change, and help us understand the SDGs in a new way. Youth can use the arts, including new and digital media, to spread awareness of the Goals and the issues that matter most to them.

9. KNOW WHAT YOUTH CARE ABOUT

During this study, youth we spoke with were thinking about climate change (Greta Thunberg and Fridays for the Future) and plastic straws (social media frenzy), which made those issues great entry points into talking about the SDGs. Ask youth what's on their mind, and start from there.

10. AMPLIFY YOUTH ACTION

Get inspired by the amazing work that youth are already doing on the SDGs. Learn more, and share the opportunity with others whenever you have a chance!

CONCLUSION

The “Your Voice Matters” project was able to instigate much-needed conversation on youth engagement and the SDGs in Atlantic Canada. We look forward to seeing the connections, relationships, and ideas that emerged through the process grow into the future. We spoke with over 100 Atlantic Canadians over a two-month period, and 86% of participants reported an increased understanding of the SDGs as a result of the roundtables. We were able to raise awareness of the SDGs, also reaching another 119,000 via social media.

We heard that youth and youth-supporting professionals see value and urgency in moving the SDGs forward. Climate action is top of mind, and the youth we spoke to are impatient with policies and politics that maintain the status quo. Youth are inspired to use the SDGs as a way to find their roles in making a difference, and youth-supporting professionals see it as a helpful tool to connect the local and global.

Canada’s whole-of-society 2030 Agenda National Strategy should explicitly include youth engagement, and we are confident that the input we gathered from Atlantic Canadians, as well as our research and recommendations, will be put to good use towards this end.

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APPENDIX A

These guiding questions were used by ACIC facilitators to gather input through roundtables and interviews:

- How does your work impact youth?
- Which (top 3) of the SDGs are most relevant to your community?
- What does sustainable development mean to you?
- What are you doing to build a more sustainable Canada?
- Do you think the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can make a difference?
- What should Canada focus on in a national strategy to advance the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainability?
- What does Leaving No One Behind mean to you?
- What do you see as Canada's biggest challenge to achieving the sustainable development goals?
- Talk about a time when you experienced a very engaged group of youth (in a project, activity, or idea)? What were the elements of successful engagement?
- Discuss/brainstorm how the SDGs could be used as a framework in your programming to build skills, knowledge and values for young people.

APPENDIX B

Resources to learn about, and teach, the SDGs. For more, visit: www.act4globalchange.ca/sustainable-development-goals

About the SDGs

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

UN Overview: Expands on introduction to Goals with big, bold calls to action.

2030 Agenda

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

UN Overview: Excellent introduction to the Goals, the 2030 Agenda and questions frequently asked about them.

Action Networks for the SDGs

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/actionnetworks>

UN Hub for Involvement: Links to ongoing action projects. This is an excellent hub for finding local action and getting involved.

Global Schools Program

<https://www.globalschoolsprogram.org/>

UN-related education program for youth 18-30 in school settings. Touches on advocacy and global citizenship responsibility.

World's Largest Lesson

<http://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/>

Excellent graphic resources and videos for youth and resources for educators!

The Global Compact Network Canada (GCNC)

<https://www.globalcompact.ca/sustainable-development-goals/>

Good network for Canadian businesses and stakeholders with interesting projects, training and workshops.

Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)

<https://uwaterloo.ca/sustainable-development-solutions-network-canada/>

Solid post-secondary students' resource with student led initiatives on the SDGs.

Global GoalsCast

<https://globalgoalscast.org/>

Online Podcast: Stories, knowledge, best practices on achieving SDGs from around the world.

Transitioning from the MDGs to the SDGs

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_hLuFui6ww&t=120s

Video from UN on the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs.

The Lazy Person's Guide to Saving the World

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/LazyPersonGuide.pdf>

Provides easy action items, that everyone can do, to address the SDGs.




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