

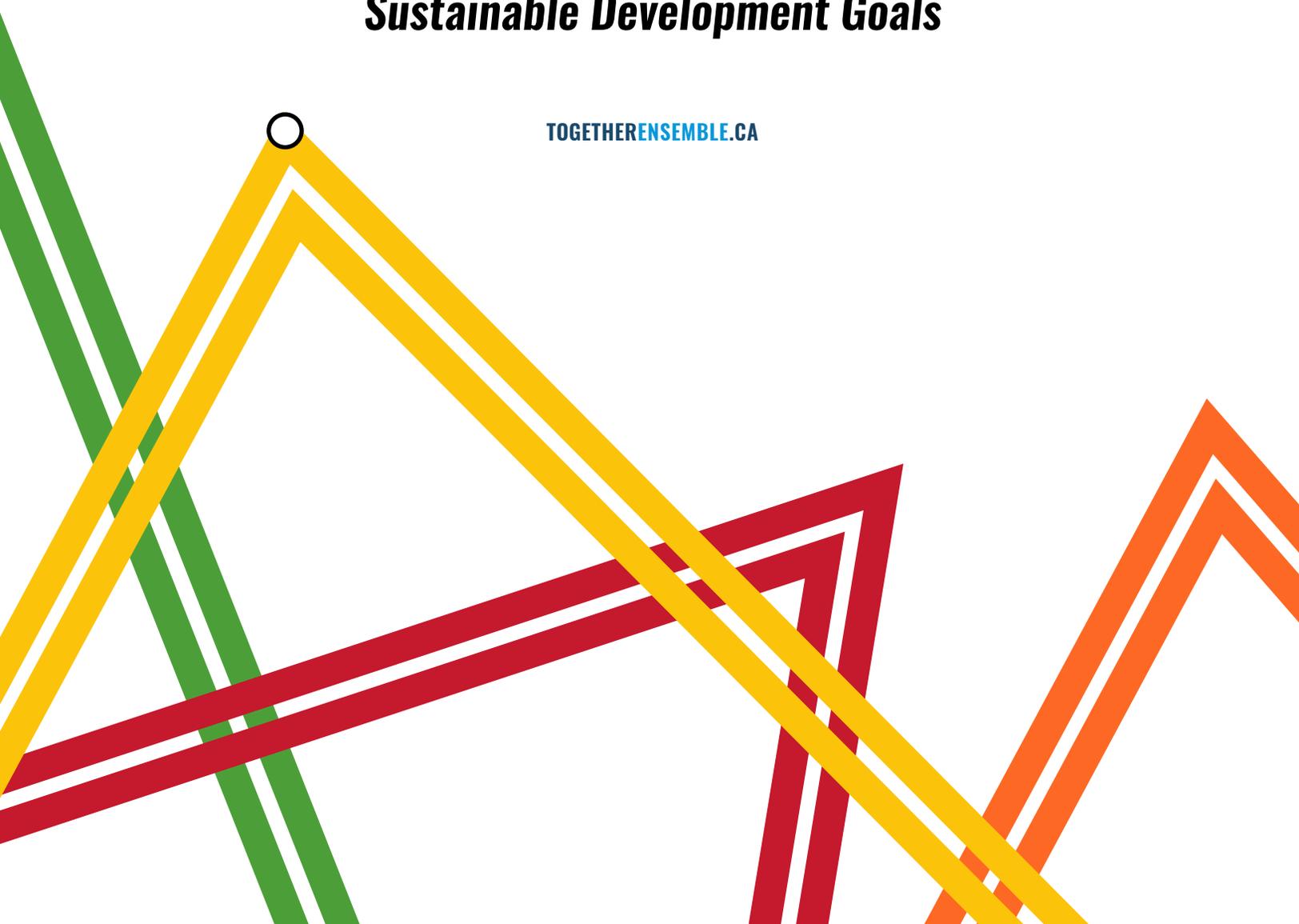


TOGETHER | ENSEMBLE

2023

Tracking Canada's commitment to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals

[TOGETHERENSEMBLE.CA](https://togetherensemble.ca)



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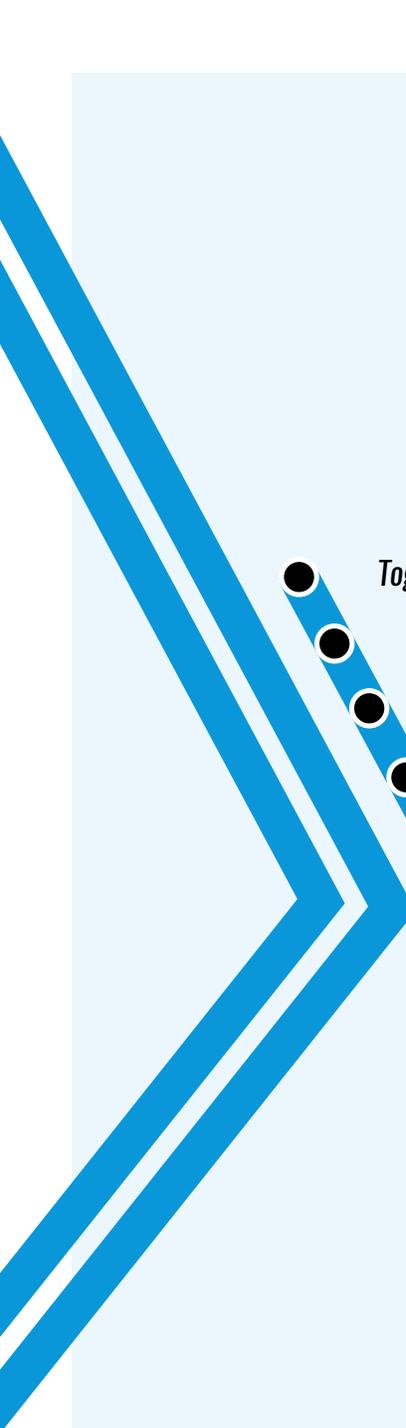
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TOGETHER | ENSEMBLE

Together|Ensemble is Canada's national conference devoted to tracking progress on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, a set of ambitious goals agreed to by world leaders at the United Nations to guide global action on the urgent economic, social, and environmental challenges facing our planet.

Together|Ensemble 2023 was the fifth version of the conference, bringing together Canadians from all sectors to track Sustainable Development Goals progress. This year marked the half-way point of the SDGs mandate to 2030, and disappointingly, no country in the world is on track to achieve them completely, with Canada ranking 26th in the world on SDGs implementation. The 2023 conference theme focused on how we can accelerate Canada's SDGs progress and what needs to be done differently to achieve them.

Originally convened in 2017 by the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation, Together|Ensemble has become an important milestone event for tracking progress and raising ambitions for the SDGs in Canada.

Our efforts now should be to not only to build back better, but build back differently towards Agenda 2030.

John McArthur

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1 NO POVERTY



End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

2 ZERO HUNGER



End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

5 GENDER EQUALITY



Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



Reduce inequality within and among countries.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

13 CLIMATE ACTION



Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

14 LIFE BELOW WATER



Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

15 LIFE ON LAND



Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Foreward

We'd like to thank Winter Dawn Lipscombe, Youth Advocate with the [Treaty #3 Youth Executive Council](#), for providing the land acknowledgement for Together|Ensemble 2023. Winter Dawn joined us from Wauzhushk Onigum Nation in Treaty #3 territory, which is located on Lake of Woods several hours east of Winnipeg, Manitoba. To learn more about the land you occupy, visit [whose.land](#).

A land acknowledgement is a minimum standard. Canada is wholly built on the traditional lands of Indigenous peoples, and every day we benefit from the resources, lands, waters, and people that were originally here. But words alone are not enough. It's easy for me to be here this morning and say that I acknowledge the land I'm on and the ways I benefit and the ways in which the land provides for me, but what does it mean to honour the land? To care for the land? To respect the land?

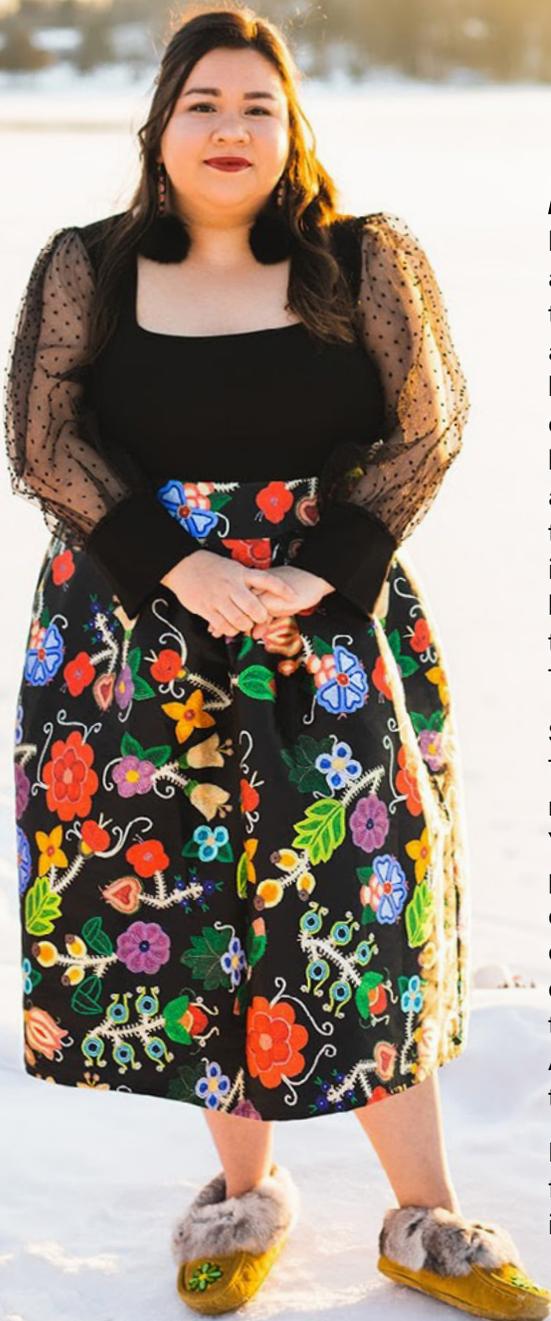
Several years ago, a town in Treaty #3 sparked a debate on the renaming of Colonization Road. You would think that in an era that purports reconciliation, a name change for a street advertising colonization is a relatively easy change, but it was only a 4-3 vote that approved a name change. A considerably vocal group opposed the name change to Agamiing Drive.

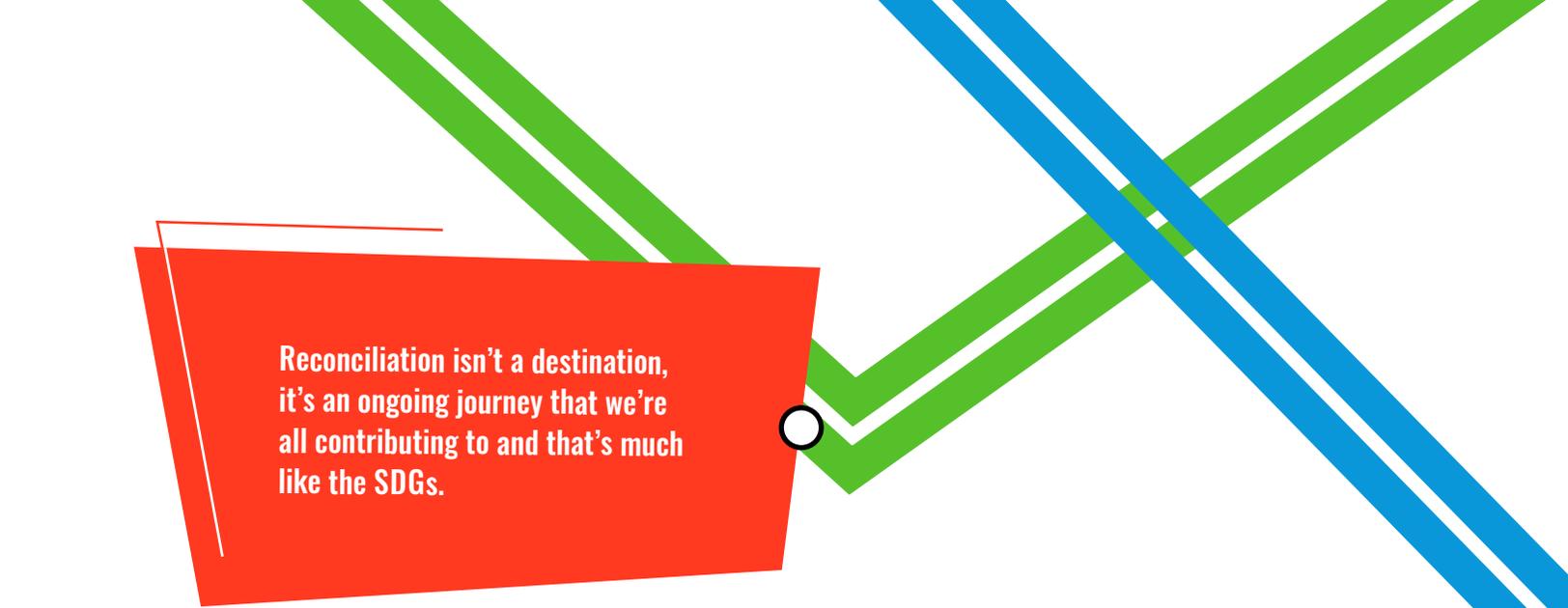
But the name changed, and letters from across Treaty #3 poured out in support. We acknowledged a

traumatic history, a racist present, and contributed to a reconciliatory future where communities come together to build new relationships. Settlers can be proud of their familial contributions, but also acknowledge that progress and growth hasn't been positive for the whole territory. Acknowledgement is the recognition that there is an ongoing benefit for us, but also at significant cost to Indigenous peoples in terms of land, culture, way of life, and beyond.

We're in a time that is hopeful, or at least I'm hopeful, about the future of relations between Indigenous people, Canada, and settlers. Around me, I see many people taking the next step in reconciliation, however they define that. Many with no connections to Indigenous people that are now grabbing hold to the idea of Indigenous brilliance and success as much as trauma and suffering, and we've begun to shift the conversation.

I remember a time, and this sentiment is still around, where the first question anyone asked was





Reconciliation isn't a destination,
it's an ongoing journey that we're
all contributing to and that's much
like the SDGs.

"how much is this going to cost?" We get hung up on funding. That's not to say funding for Indigenous communities is not a barrier to progress, but the reason growth is slowed is because we get stuck focusing on this part of the conversation and miss all of the other systemic issues at play.

We don't need exemptions from the laws, rather a recognition of our traditional laws, which are ancient and based on restorative relationality and kinship. From land management to policing and community justice, there is a place for our worldview beyond the status quo.

Do I envision a future without Canada? No. Indigenous peoples have existed long before states, and we can exist within the Canadian state, but allyship, rights recognition, and opportunity for self-determination are essential. We want to be respected as Nations and participate alongside a broader community of Nations and toss away this pan-Indigenous approach. My Inuit relatives are distinct from the Wolastoquey

from the Anishinaabe. Our values, ceremonies, and laws, while similar in some foundational respects, are still distinct and deserve to be honoured by Canada as such.

It can be difficult to grasp that individual communities are sovereign Nations, but we are, and we must be allowed to figure out what that looks like within contemporary society.

As an Anishinaabe person, to think of the collective has been instilled in me from a young age. Make sure the Elders are okay, to serve them first, to share amongst my family and community, to provide an offering if I harvest from the land, to think about the next generations in my actions.

It's an honour to be here this morning, amongst those joining from private sector, government, civil society, and academia. To the young people here today, I have hope for the future we create. Young people, by virtue of where they are at in their life phase, confront the world differently because we're

experiencing different life stages that perhaps aren't as relevant to other generations.

To the experienced people, your guidance and lessons are so valuable but be open to new thinking even if at times it seems impossible. Good policy happens when a multitude of perspectives and ideas come together.

There is opportunity all around us for the change we talk about to be transformative, but it doesn't happen only in sweeping legislation or investments. It happens in the small conversations you have with your peers, family, and colleagues. In the little ways which our thinking shifts, in how we consider alternative perspectives, when we correct or educate.

Reconciliation isn't a destination, it's an ongoing journey that we're all contributing to and that's much like the SDGs. Meeting the 2030 Agenda doesn't mean our work is done, we must continue to work to maintain our progress toward a sustainable future.

Executive Summary

*This year marks the half-way point of the Sustainable Development Goals mandate to 2030. Disappointingly, no country is on track to achieve them, with **Canada ranking 26th in the world on SDGs progress.***

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 **2023** 2024 2025 2026 2027 2028 2029 **2030**

2023 has been a year marked with tremendous social, economic, and environmental disaster, and a stark reminder of the continued urgency in achieving the SDGs:

- › Wildfires raged in Alberta, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Quebec and Northern Ontario destroying thousands of hectares of forests, causing mass evacuations of communities and creating air quality warnings across North America and Europe.
- › Worldwide inflation continues to cause financial hardship, economic disparity and deepening inequality for Canadian households.
- › War in Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, and war-time challenges in South Sudan, Yemen, and Afghanistan.
- › The continued tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada.

With this backdrop, the 2023 Together|Ensemble conference asked speakers and participants to consider two key questions:

- 1 ***How can we accelerate Canada's SDGs progress?***
- 2 ***What needs to be done differently over the next seven years to achieve them?***

Over the course of three days, more than 1,000 people participated in Together|Ensemble conversations online and in-person at five event sites across the country. The conference featured panel discussions and presentations designed to share new ideas and lessons learned while inspiring everyone to find new ways to work together to move forward in achieving the SDGs.



Several core themes emerged from these Together/Ensemble 2023 conversations:

Areas of Hope

Canada's progress towards achieving the SDGs

Canada has areas of strong hope to build on, from progress on climate change (i.e. carbon pricing), reductions in the poverty rate, increases in the amount of maritime area protected, and the highest female workforce participation rate in Canadian history. Now is a time to move from rhetoric to action by driving accountability for the SDGs at all levels of government and learning how others have achieved success internationally. Recognizing the interconnectedness between the SDGs, we can harness scarce financial resources to maximize impact across many areas of need.

Localization

Shifting power to local community action

Local action on the SDGs will have a fundamental impact in reaching our SDGs targets and helping citizens better understand the SDGs and their impacts. Shifting power to the people most impacted will put communities out front to take ownership to imagine the future they want to see. Localization also means ensuring the people most affected have a voice in any transition. When policy changes are far removed from local communities, the impact can be devastating.

Respecting the Way

Honouring Indigenous leadership in the path forward

Embracing Indigenous leadership involves putting a deeper focus on transitioning the economy to incorporate good health, well-being and connection to land and place. For many Indigenous communities, failure to meet the ambitions of the SDGs is a "life and death struggle". To move forward, Indigenous

inclusion, participation and leadership must be included in the process. This involves challenging everyone, including allies in civil society, to call out and talk about Indigenous peoples with every citation of the SDGs and to normalize inclusion in the context of the goals where Indigenous peoples are not currently included.

Climate Resilience

Preparing for what's to come

Climate change is our new reality. As we accept that climate change is here for the foreseeable future, Canada must focus on resilience as well as taking action to reduce our impact on the environment. Whether it's fighting against the creeping normalcy of gradual changes in our climate that impede action or recognizing the oversized impact on northern and Indigenous communities, investing in climate resilience and dealing with social issues so that no one gets left behind are critical in combatting climate change in Canada.

Youth Action

Intergenerational collaboration is the key to success

It's time look at all avenues for creating change, including changing how we view young people, how we value their contributions and how we support their ideas. To be successful, it will require finding a way to re-center and reintegrate the worlds of young people and adults, and ensure young people feel supported and not pushed away. This must include finding ways to create more space within organizations for youth voices and dismantling hierarchies. The goal is to find ways for generations to work cooperatively and make everyone feel welcome and valued. This involves handing over power, trusting young people, and getting over the fear of trying new things.

AREAS OF HOPE

Canada's progress towards achieving the SDGs

*"We have to continue to **take action**, to **be ambitious**, to **celebrate our successes**, **apply lessons learned** and **address our challenges**."*

This was the **Honourable Minister Karina Gould**, who at the time of the conference was the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (the Ministry responsible for the SDGs in Canada) sharing the ways in which Canada has seen progress on the SDGs over the last seven years while also acknowledging the significant amount of work that still lies ahead.

Canada's Second Voluntary National Review

Minister Gould presented highlights of Canada's second Voluntary National Review (VNR), an update report outlining progress on Canada's efforts on the 2030 Agenda to be presented to the world at the United Nations. Most notably, Canada has exceeded its target of a 20% reduction in the poverty rate, which decreased from 14.5% in 2015 to 7.4% in 2021. 2.3 million fewer Canadians, including 653,000 fewer children are living in poverty. While the progress is promising, Minister Gould also recognized that the impact of the pandemic is still unknown, with

inflation, high housing prices and global economic instability putting pressure on the household income of Canadians.

Minister Gould also spoke about how the SDGs intertwine in their impact. She pointed out that over the last five years, an investment of \$30 Billion in Canadian early childhood education has led to six provinces offering \$10 a day childcare services. The addition of childcare spaces has contributed to alleviating some of the barriers mothers face in returning to work. As of fall 2022, Canada had the highest female work participation rate in Canadian history.

>20%
Reduction in Canada's
Poverty Rate

2.3M
fewer Canadians
living in poverty

653K
fewer Canadian
children living in poverty

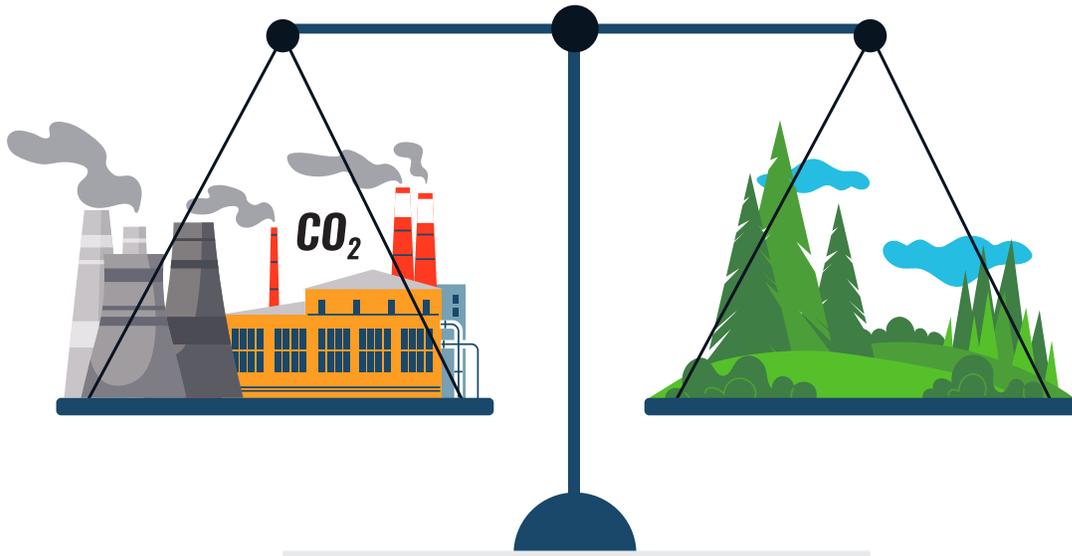


PHOTO:
A panel discussion at the
2023 Together | Ensemble
conference in Ottawa.

A significant
amount of work
still lies ahead.



Areas of Hope



Wins for Climate Action

Panelist [John McArthur](#), Director of the [Center for Sustainable Development](#) at the Brookings Institution provided additional context to Canada's progress on SDG 13 Climate Action.

"We have a carbon price in Canada – this is a generational victory with a long battle to get there. We've gone from 1% of our maritime area protected to roughly 15% of our maritime area protected. That is a transformational step forward even if there is much work to be done for it to be everything it needs to be."

There are also tangible examples of progress happening at the provincial level. [Heather Stephens](#), the Chief Operating Officer at [Emissions Reduction Alberta](#), shared both the challenges and the progress of moving towards achieving the SDGs.

"We've heard from a recent UN report that we have a lot of work ahead of us. Many of the SDGs are off track. Progress on climate change, in particular, is falling short. Despite the less than ideal SDG update from the UN, we have lots to be proud of in terms of the progress we've made on emission reductions."

She went on to share examples of technology changes that are helping to accelerate Alberta and Canada's progress in meeting several SDG goals. Alberta is set to become a leader in hydrogen technology with plans to build a net-zero hydrogen complex as well as a zero-emission hydrogen powered locomotive along with two hydrogen production and refuelling stations. Both these projects are a first in North America. Meanwhile, the Province's investment in solar, wind and hydro means Alberta will be entirely off coal for electrical generation in 2023 – a full seven years ahead of the federal target date.



Carbon Pricing
is a generational victory

~15% of Canada's maritime area
is now protected

Businesses on Board for SDGs Implementation

While governments at the federal, provincial and local level continue to work on solutions, businesses are taking an active role in incorporating the SDGs into their sustainability strategies. Business leaders from across Canada shared their insights and recommendations on risk governance, as well as their efforts towards accelerated and collaborative action to meet the targets of the 2030 Agenda.

While these leading Canadian companies are at different stages of supporting the SDGs, each is focusing on specific goals. Whether it is making efforts to reduce their carbon footprint, improve working and living conditions for employees and suppliers or offering solutions to help increase sustainable food production, these business leaders all share a drive to be an active part of achieving Agenda 2030.



Tim Faveri, VP Sustainability at [Nutrien Ltd.](#) explained that as the world's largest manufacturer of fertilizer, Nutrien sees a direct link to how they can impact many of the SDGs, including zero hunger. "Our purpose is to feed the future and it starts with the soil beneath our feet. Our products provide nutrients to the soil to help meet the global challenge of feeding 10 billion people by the year 2050 ... Through sustainable agriculture, environment and climate action, and inclusive agriculture, we work directly with more than 500,000 farmers or growers to help increase food production sustainably for generations to come."

Global Challenge *feeding 10 billion people by 2050*

A large, vibrant green leaf graphic that frames the bottom right portion of the page. The leaf is detailed with visible veins and is set against a background of other green foliage.

Our purpose is to feed the future and it starts with the soil beneath our feet.

Where do we go from here?

Learning from Others

Minister Gould talked about the need to look at how other countries are tackling the challenges we also need to overcome.

“Canada can be better at learning from others in terms of getting stuck in our ways. It’s hard to modernize and transform and get to a place where we are delivering services for the 21st century ... Let’s have a more global outtake and take best practices from a broader set of countries.”

She specifically called out that we should look beyond the “usual” countries, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, the USA and New Zealand, but look towards African, Asian and South American countries for innovative ideas.

Minister Gould also called out the need for governments to learn from each other and to work together – across departments and across jurisdictions – to respond to issues and emergencies and find a new way forward.

Finding the Links between the SDGs

Teddy Y. Samy, Director of the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA) at Carleton University suggested that we need to think about how funds can be spent more efficiently by recognizing how SDGs are linked to each other.

“What is the objective we are trying to achieve? [The SDGs] are interdependent, and we don’t think about the interlinkages. You can map out fairly well where every dollar you spend will have a multiplier effect on other SDGs. Clean energy will impact poverty. Quality education will impact the other goals. It’s good for us to step back and look at the context specific of what you’re trying to do. You can’t have the same policy across the board. Look at the needs of communities at the local level. What is the biggest impact you can have? Since we don’t have an infinite amount of dollars to spend, it’s important to maximize the impact.”



The debate isn't whether to get there, the debate is how to get there – it's up to everyone to see how we get there differently.

Danika Littlechild

Moving from Rhetoric to Transformative Action

John McArthur shared his thoughts on the steps needed to move forward into action. “[There are] three problems every society in the world is trying to move forward on. The first is recoupling the prosperity that every family needs to succeed with a sense of well-being in their own lives. The second is decoupling the prosperity that is essential for families from the environmental damage that is still coming with it. The third is ‘we-coupling’ that we’re all in this together. In SDG language, that means ‘leave no one behind.’”

Danika Littlechild, Assistant Professor at Carleton University who teaches in the area of environmental and social justice, called for a need to move from rhetoric to transformative action. She noted the need to move away from actions already underway and instead to set stretch goals that require more steps and more work.

“[There is] lots of hard work at the federal level, but it’s not enough. Every time they make a policy announcement, and just as it should include what does this mean for Indigenous people, it should include, what does this mean for the SDGs. What is the metric against which this will be assessed in 2030? How will this then occur versus what was happening anyhow? It can be applied to every level of community and at all levels of government.”

Asking questions drives accountability. It helps to move promises forward from ideas into action.

PHOTO:
Sharing vision for the future of Alberta's
Transit at the 2023 Together|Ensemble
conference in Edmonton.



LOCALIZATION

Shifting power to local community action

While policy and resources from governments at the federal, provincial or municipal level are necessary to drive Canada forward in achieving Agenda 2030, local action will have a fundamental impact in reaching our goals. When local organizations create achievable plans and programs, they can tackle root issues that benefit the lives of people within the community.

Moving from Rhetoric to Action

Alicia Richins, a Sustainable Development Strategist, discussed the value of having local community groups build their own plans for reaching SDG goals.

“Cities and towns are taking the SDGs into their own mandates and are organizing community wide participatory research to understand how local needs align with the global agenda and to capitalize and report on the economic development in a way that leaves no one behind and includes diverse stakeholder and implementation and accountability mechanisms.”

This idea was echoed by John McArthur from the Center for Sustainable Development at Brookings Institution. He called for ways to help people better understand the SDGs and their impact.

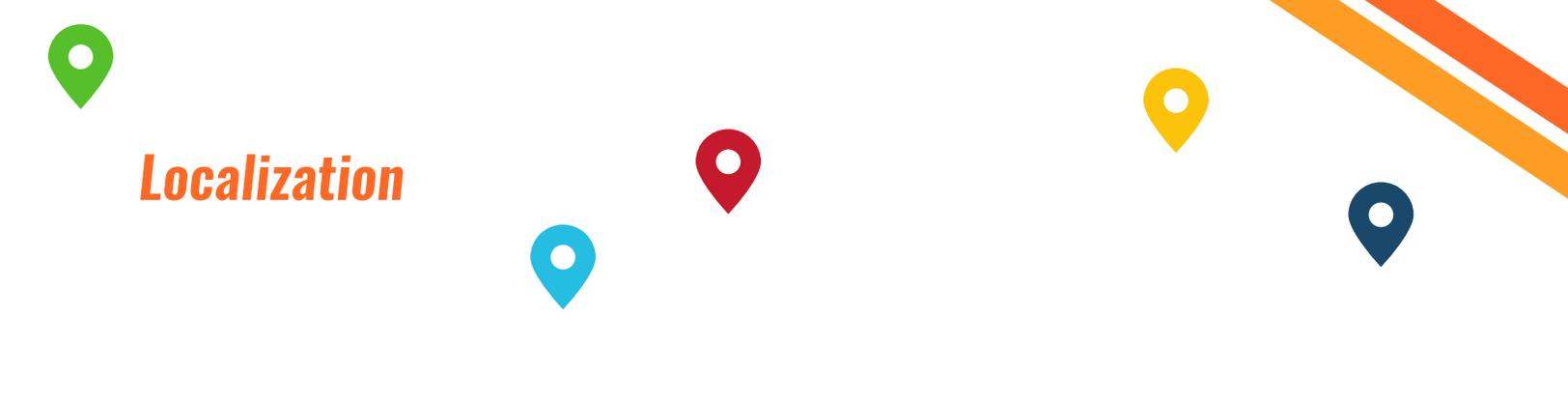
“People are often impeded from approaching the SDGs because they think they are too big and too far off. They don’t have sense for what the SDGs mean for them personally. The way forward involves creating next steps for communities with goals and resources they can achieve locally.”





The way forward involves creating next steps for communities with goals and resources they can achieve locally.

PHOTO:
A brainstorming session at the 2023 Together|Ensemble conference in Halifax.



Localization

Holding Space to Shift Power

The resources and support to create and achieve SDG targets need to include shifting power to the people most impacted by the efforts. **Shannon Kindornay**, Chief Operations Officer at [Cooperation Canada](#) talked about how, with appropriate funding, tools and technical expertise, communities can take ownership to imagine the future they want to see.

“We need to hold space for the way we shift power and change how we work collectively to enable more localized realization of the SDGs. It’s a shift from empowering to shifting power, and the importance of putting power in other people’s hands.”

Responding to Local Need

When local groups have the power to plan and act, they are also prepared to act quickly to respond to a crisis, which is particularly important to prepare for the reality of and emergencies stemming from climate change.

Carla Arsenault, Principal at the [Nova Scotia Community College \(NSCC\) Marconi Campus](#) emphasized how local institutions are critical for building coping capacity, which is the ability to scale up quickly with an effective response to an emergency. This is a fundamental requirement for dealing with climate catastrophes. While federal and provincial responses are needed, local institutions like NSCC are playing a critical role.

“NSCC is taking on the roles that were traditionally the realm of service clubs, churches and community groups, but demographics are changing. There is a role for post secondary institutions to step up and be part of the solution. It’s about putting the community in community college.”

Using Technology to Understand the Impacts

Technology can play an important role for local communities to build rich networks that will help us achieve the SDGs. **Nadim Choucair**, Co-Founder of the [Global Goals Directory](#) described how an AI aided SDG Classification engine allows us to map local ecosystems of stakeholders and surface their relation to each of the 17 SDGs. At a minimum, this engine provides a “directory” of all local organizations in any given city, county or chosen geographic boundary, and the SDGs that organization relates to.

“Mapping the local ecosystem is not equal to localization. Organizations with a presence in a certain city may have 95% of their impact taking place somewhere else. For example, there are organizations based in the United States working on Ebola response in another country. But, there is tremendous untapped opportunity to explore how to support the local ecosystem to create impact globally AND locally!”

Planning Globally, Acting Locally

Canadian businesses are also putting local communities into their global sustainability plans. **Brooke Tucker-Reid**, Global Head of ESG Strategy and Reporting at [Manulife Financial](#) shared that while Manulife’s plans are global in scope, they are also involved in working with local groups around the world.

“We have big global goals, but we also want to support the work and impact of local groups. We track all of our engagements and are currently involved in 89 collaborations globally. For example, in Boston, we brought together the parks and recreation community to talk about and support their own unique issues.”



Fostering International Success

Localization also means helping developing nations build their own domestic resource mobilization. **Teddy Y. Samy**, from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University discussed the need to help nations that have the greatest concentration of poverty to build better and more efficient systems, including taxation for the long term.

“You need to have accountability between those governing and those being governed – in many places, that bond does not exist. You have to build [systems] so we don’t have to constantly reinvest. If you don’t have domestic resource mobilization, the state cannot provide services. If you don’t have services, you don’t have trust in the apparatus.”

Transitioning with a Worker and Community-Centered View

Local communities and groups are at the centre of the transition to net-zero emissions. Localization also means ensuring the people most affected have a voice in the transition. When policy changes are far removed from local communities, the impact can be devastating. Worker and community voices need to be at the centre of plans to move to net-zero.

George Benson, the Senior Manager of Economic Transformation at the Vancouver Economic Commission, discussed how the move to net-zero, even without significant job losses, will result in change and disruption within communities.

“With a worker-centered approach, we are ensuring people end up better off materially, healthfully, socially on the other side of this transition from where they started.”

In the worst-case scenario, if the move to net-zero is not done thoughtfully and does not take the local impact into consideration, it will result in an “economic death spiral” for communities. Workers cannot be expected to just accept “any job”. Good wages cannot be replaced with minimum wage. Retraining and upskilling need to be available to allow anyone who faces challenges to be a genuine participant in the net-zero economy.

“If we want [just transition] to be workable and have people on board, they have to be at the table,” explained **Janet Andrews**, Secretary-Treasurer of the New Westminster & District Labour Council. “The biggest barrier is inequity – globally, locally and within Canada – we need to make sure at every step that it is equitable, and that we listen to the voices who will point out where it is inequitable.”



Localization means ensuring the people most affected have a voice in the transition.

PHOTO:
The organizing team at the 2023 Together|Ensemble conference in Saskatchewan.



RESPECTING THE WAY

Honouring Indigenous leadership in the path forward

Indigenous peoples, communities and leadership must be at the forefront in all efforts to achieve the SDGs and Agenda 2030. These communities are often at the highest risk of being deeply impacted by a lack of action. Conversely, the SDGs must be implemented in a way that benefits and does not hurt Indigenous peoples and communities.

“From an Indigenous point of view, failure to meet these goals is life and death.”

Gary Merasty, the Chief Executive Officer of The Peter Ballantyne Group of Companies shared the stark reality of life in Indigenous communities.

“People are dying in our communities yesterday, today and tomorrow. The failure to achieve these types of goals are literally life and death for us. [While] trying to advance common sense solutions to address a lot of the issues and challenges in our communities for decades – we’ve battled apathy, partisanship, ignorance, and systemic racism – others talked about solutions about our backyard without really involving us.”

He explained that embracing Indigenous leadership involves putting a deeper focus on transitioning our economy to incorporate good health, well-being, connection to land and place. “[It’s a] shift away from a capitalist view where land is to be exploited, profit is king, accumulation of wealth is key, concentration of that wealth is desired, and wage labour is a commodity.”

However, he cautioned that the pursuit of SDGs and a low carbon economy may do more to hurt Indigenous, lower income and northern populations. With the high cost of renewable energy systems and transmission lines paired with rampant inflation means the cost of living for Indigenous people in northern communities is skyrocketing.

To avoid catastrophes for these communities, a commitment to meaningful collaboration and supporting Indigenous leadership is the only way forward.

PHOTO:
A small group discussion at
the 2023 Together|Ensemble
conference in Vancouver.

A commitment to meaningful
collaboration and supporting
Indigenous leadership is the
only way forward.



Respecting the Way

Benefiting Indigenous Communities

When it comes to transitioning to a net zero economy, the stakes are not the same for all Indigenous communities.

On the topic of “just transition,” **Nathan Grandjambe**, the Senior Manager of Indigenous Economic Prosperity at the Vancouver Economic Commission explained that his community settled a land claim back in the 1980s that led to investing in the oil and gas industry.

“[This investment] has been a major driver for our nation to be socially and economically mobile. It’s been a big part of how many of us have been able to get an education and work experience within our own nation, which is huge for a remote community.”

While he sees the need to move towards sustainable energy, Grandjambe advised that we must reframe the conversation to discuss adding energy sources rather than expecting to completely move away from oil and gas. His nation has also invested in a 1.5 megawatt solar plant to reduce dependence on diesel generators to produce electricity, which will also foster energy sovereignty. He recognizes that this opportunity is not available to all communities, and that leadership includes helping nations that don’t have the same resources.

“It’s important to look for the intersections of who is left out of these opportunities and how we can lift up more people than just those who have the capacity to lift themselves.”

Investing in Indigenous Leadership

“Localization, decolonization, and reconciliation: these things are relative. They’re like cousins. Indigenous peoples need to be seen as partners and leaders in sustainable development with an equal working relationship with each other.” **Katelynne Herchak**, the Indigenous Governance Officer of VIDEA positioned the need for Indigenous inclusion. “At the end of the day, all of us want the same things for our families and our communities. Supporting Indigenous knowledge is going to be a very helpful tool down the road.”

She pointed out that respecting Indigenous leadership can also require rethinking the definition of an SDG. For some Indigenous peoples, it could mean learning their language. It also means investing in Indigenous communities that are already successfully doing the work. They are the experts in their home communities and understand how things work and what works. Their efforts will have the largest impact for supporting SDG work.

Indigenous peoples need to be seen as partners and leaders in sustainable development.

PHOTO:

A live-streamed session from the 2023 Together|Ensemble conference in Saskatchewan.



Including Indigenous Peoples with Every Aspect of the SDGs

“So much of how we express our representation and participation is very closely tied to law. Our experience has been that if you are not in the operative text, you will be left behind.”

Danika Littlechild an Assistant Professor at Carleton University pointed out that historically and currently, the laws and policies that govern the experiences of Indigenous peoples have been developed without their involvement. To move forward, Indigenous inclusion, participation and leadership must be included in the process. This involves challenging everyone, including allies in civil society, to call out and talk about Indigenous peoples with every citation of the SDGs and to normalize their inclusion in the context of goals where they are not included.

*It’s problematic to say
“leave no one behind”
but refuse to name us.*

PHOTO:

Conference attendees network at the 2023 Together|Ensemble conference in Vancouver.



CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Preparing for what's to come

Climate Change is our New Reality

Alex Cadel, the Nova Scotia Specialist at [CLIMAtlantic](#) presented compelling facts about how our climate is changing. We must focus on resilience as well as taking action to reduce our impact on the environment.

“The climate won’t stop changing until greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere stops increasing. Even then we’ll be dealing with an altered planet for quite some time ... Carbon dioxide and other gases often take decades and even centuries to naturally be withdrawn from the atmosphere. When we make the choice to emit greenhouse gases, we should also recognize that we have signed ourselves up to deal with the consequences of that for generations to come.”

Regardless of how emissions change, projections of the impact remain stable for what we can expect in the short term. The earth is getting warmer. The hottest days will be much hotter and more uncomfortable, we will see less extreme cold temperatures with more extreme heat events. Precipitation is changing with increased risk of floods, tropical storms growing in frequency and intensity, and ocean levels and water temperatures rising.

At the same time, our infrastructure is not designed to deal with extreme heat, increased flooding or more frequent storms, and more intense storm surges.



PHOTO:
Breakout table discussions
at the 2023 Together|Ensemble
conference in Ottawa.

We must focus on resilience as well as taking action to reduce our impact on the environment.



Climate Resilience

Fighting Creeping Normalcy

Choyce Chappell, the Prince Edward Island Provincial Coordinator at the [Atlantic Council for International Cooperation](#) pointed to the challenge of how we've become used to the changing climate.

"It's like the frog boiling in the water. If it all changed in one year, we'd be alarmed, but because it's happening slowly, we start to think it is almost normal – that it has always been this way. The fact that we are not working as quickly as we should, it's not just a lack of willingness, it's about the creeping normalcy."

Have we reached a tipping point where the danger signs can no longer be ignored? The Honourable Minister [Karina Gould](#) pointed out that at the time of the Together|Ensemble 2023 conference, every province in Canada was battling massive wild fires.

"The justification for making investments to protect our environment and the clean energy transition are vital and important. We're not going to meet the other objectives if we don't have clean air and clean water."

"We are making the investment in clean energy transition a top priority."

Life and Death Circumstances in the North

For Northern Indigenous communities, a lack of action has led to deadly consequences for entire communities. As [Gary Merasty](#) from [The Peter Ballantyne Group of Companies](#) pointed out, extreme weather such as tornadoes and dangerous heat events are becoming all too common. When those events hit the north, they don't have the resources to react adequately. The effects of climate change are already being felt on the land and people.

"The heat dome in BC [in 2022] killed 600 people – think about that happening in the north where there is no cooling capacity. It's only a matter of time before we see it in our northern communities. Hunting, fishing and harvesting are on the verge of extinction potentially because the land is changing so drastically."

He points to a lack of funding and political wrangling as circumstances that make the situation worse. A lack of resources is the greatest barrier to building climate resilience across Canada. Many communities across the country must overcome funding pressures, the challenges of reaching remote communities and dealing with responses that require bringing in personnel from outside of the province or even country to restore normalcy.

"Provincial northern communities are in political limbo. They are the first to get funding cuts and are considered later in the process to get benefits. They are treated as an afterthought as the provinces and feds debate about who is responsible for northern infrastructure. These are challenges across Canada's North."

CLIMATE ACTIVISM

Indigenous Feminist Movements Leading Climate Responses and Solutions



PHOTO:
A panel discussion on climate activism taking place at the 2023 Together|Ensemble conference in Vancouver.

Dealing with social issues is an important part of combatting climate change and building resilience.

Moving Forward So No One is Left Behind

Often, when the discussion focuses on solutions for combatting climate change, the impact on jobs is seen as the main argument against taking action. **George Benson** from the [Vancouver Economic Commission](#) discussed the need to act with equity in mind.

“Job losses are not an automatic consequence of climate policies. Rather they are the result of the lack of investment, of social policies and crucially, anticipation. The real choice is not jobs or the environment. It is both or neither.”

The fear of job loss and disruption often means the people who are most vulnerable to climate change don't recognize it as being relevant in their lives

because they are dealing with urgent issues and daily pressures. **Alex Cadel** from [CLIMAtlantic](#) made the point that dealing with social issues is an important part of combatting climate change and building resilience.

“Climate change resilience is more than keeping the lights on and mitigating flooding. It's also providing diversified employment opportunities, making sure [people] have access to education and health outcomes, quality housing, connection with the land, and the opportunity to have a voice in decisions that are impacting them. It involves a whole lot of people coming together.”

YOUTH ACTION

Intergenerational collaboration is the key to success

*The role of young people is to **innovate**, to **challenge** the status quo and **take risks**. By doing so, they help us and work with us to come up with bold solutions to complex problems that our communities need.*



Ilona Dougherty, Managing Director of the Youth & Innovation Project at the University of Waterloo presented a call-to-action as well as a practical guide for facilitating intergenerational collaboration. She provided a glimpse into what neuroscience and developmental psychology can tell us about young people's unique abilities and how best to support young changemakers to amplify their positive social and environmental impact.

The most dangerous phrase is 'we've always done it this way' – doing things the way they've always been done or because we're afraid of change doesn't fix problems.

PHOTO:
Sharing insights at the
2023 Together | Ensemble
conference in Vancouver.

Younger brains are better at coming up with bold, out of the box ideas and using better and different ways of looking at problems and thinking.



Youth Action

Looking for New Solutions

Given the challenges of climate change and the struggle to achieve the SDGs, it's time to look at all avenues for creating change. That includes changing how we view young people, how we value their contributions and how we support their ideas.

Dougherty explained that while popular belief is that the brain isn't fully developed until age 25, research shows that brain development is not linear. Some parts of the brain peak and start to decline at age 25.

Functions such as planning and strategy, contextual knowledge (which helps us to frame our decision making), emotional intelligence and the ability to perform tasks for implementation improve with age. However, younger brains are better at coming up with bold, out of the box ideas and using better and different ways of looking at problems and thinking.

"The unique abilities that young people have line up with the abilities needed for bold problem-solving. Young people don't need to be trained or taught how to innovate or come up with bold solutions to complex problems. What they need is supportive environments that encourage them to contribute and support them in areas where they might be weaker."

Tapping into Youth Passion

John McArthur from the Centre for Sustainable Development at the Brookings Institution described the value of intergenerational leadership.

"We need leaders of all ages and all sectors. We need to be thinking about the wisdom of our elders in all walks of life. We need to tap into the pioneering spirit

of youth to think differently about how the world can look different by 2030 and beyond. Students care, and the young people are usually right – we need to listen to the young people and tap into their fresh perspective and harness their energies."

With intergenerational collaboration, we can create spaces that support young people to build skills and strength so they can bring big and bold ideas. On the flipside, young people can assist in areas where we begin to decline as we get older.

Dr. Jean Andrey, Professor Emeritus and former Dean of the Faculty of Environment at the University of Waterloo discussed the importance of mobilizing youth through groups like SDSN Youth.

"We need to create awareness of the SDGs in tomorrow's leaders. SDSN Youth was created in 2015 and is mobilizing youth from across 127 countries with programming that is engaging tens of thousands of young people. This is the energy that will drive the SDGs forward."

As **Gary Merasty** from The Peter Ballantyne Group of Companies pointed out, in the north, youth leadership is a reality that must be harnessed and supported.

"Northern people have a unique public policy. For one, we have a small population over a wide geographic area. We also have a demographic conflict where the average age is under 22. In the rest of Canada, the demographic is over 45. This means that there is conflicting public policy in looking at aging care versus services for youth, which is often met with the response that it's 'too expensive to build it in the north for such a small population.'"



Mobilizing
youth from 127 countries

Engaging
10K+ young people

What Does it Mean for the SDGs

Tapping into the wisdom and abilities of youth is an important tool for achieving the SDGs. To be successful, it will require finding a way to recentre and reintegrate the worlds of young people and adults.

The task ahead means reorganizing institutions to allow people of all age to come into contact with one another as often as possible.

Ilona Dougherty's strongest recommendation is to ensure young people feel supported and not pushed away. That may include finding ways to create more space within organizations and dismantling hierarchies. The goal is to find ways for generations to work cooperatively and make everyone feel welcome and valued. This involves handing over power, trusting young people, and getting over the fear of trying new things.

"Sometimes it means passing over the torch earlier than you are ready – it is incredibly difficult to do well. It means sharing our power, getting out of our own way, and recognizing and owning your own insecurity. Young people will make us uncomfortable, but that's the change we need to achieve the SDGs. It will only work if we let young people with bold ideas be who they are and let them share the spotlight with us. Trust young people and own how uncomfortable it is to be told the way you are doing things isn't working anymore."

PHOTO:
Sharing SDG priorities in
Edmonton, Alberta at the 2023
Together|Ensemble conference.

**Find ways for generations
to work cooperatively
and make everyone feel
welcome and valued.**



Appendix 2023 Conference Agenda

Wednesday, June 7

10-11 a.m. EST

Conference Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

The Second Half of the SDGs Panel Discussion

Speakers:

[John McArthur](#) | Director, Center for Sustainable Development, Brookings Institution

[Danika Littlechild](#) | Assistant Professor, Carleton University

[Alicia Richins](#) | Sustainable Development Strategist, Alicia M. Richins Consulting

11 a.m.-12 p.m. EST

AI & SDGs : A Two-Way Relationship

Presented by Université Laval and Centre Interdisciplinaire De Recherche En Opérationnalisation Du Développement Durable (CIRODD)

Speakers:

[Juste Rajaonson](#) | Professor, Université du Québec à Montréal

[Jennifer Garard](#) | Deputy Director, Sustainability in the Digital Age, Future Earth Canada

[Nadim Choucair](#) | Co-Founder, Global Goals Directory

Moderator:

[Jason Fournier](#) | Activities Coordinator, Université Laval

12-12:30 p.m. EST

----- Break -----

12:30-1:30 p.m. EST

The Next Half of the 2030 Agenda: What can Canada do differently?

Presented by Canadian Association of International Development Professionals and Carleton University

Opening Remarks:

[Hon. Minister Karina Gould](#) | Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

Panel Speakers:

[Hon. Minister Karina Gould](#) | Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

[Katelynne Herchak](#) | Indigenous Governance Officer, VIDEA

[Teddy Y. Samy](#) | Director, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA), Carleton University

[Shannon Kindornay](#) | Chief Operations Officer, Cooperation Canada

Moderator:

[Vilupti Corlis](#) | Senior Advisor United Nations

2:45-3:30 p.m. EST

Just Transition: Creating an Inclusive and Green Economy Together

Presented by Vancouver Economic Commission and the University of British Columbia

Speakers:

[Nathan Grandjambe](#) | Senior Manager, Indigenous Economic Prosperity, Vancouver Economic Commission

[Tessa Jordan](#) | Program Head, Sustainable Business Leadership programs, BCIT

[Janet Andrews](#) | Secretary-Treasurer, New Westminster & District Labour Council

[Max Cohen](#) | PhD Candidate in Geography, University of British Columbia

Moderator:

[George Patrick Richard Benson](#) | Senior Manager, Economic Transformation, Vancouver Economic Commission

3:30-5 p.m. EST

Online Roundtable Discussions: Accelerating Progress and Doing Things Differently in the Second Half of the SDGs



Watch all session recordings on the [Together/Ensemble YouTube channel](#)

Thursday, June 8

10:10-11 a.m. EST

Building Climate Resilience in Atlantic Canada: Community Perspectives

Presented by Nova Scotia Community College

Speakers:

[Alex Cadel](#) | Nova Scotia Specialist, CLIMAtlantic

[Choyce Chappell](#) | Prince Edward Island Provincial Coordinator, Atlantic Council for International Cooperation

[Carla Arsenault](#) | Principal Marconi Campus, NSCC

Moderator:

[Kirk Herman](#) | Environmental Engineer, NSCC

11 a.m.-12 p.m. EST

Amplifying the Impact of Young Changemakers

Speaker:

[Ilona Dougherty](#) | Managing Director of the Youth & Innovation Project, University of Waterloo

12-1 p.m. EST

Advancing the SDGs in Canada: Two Perspectives on Successes and Opportunities

Live-streamed from the University of Saskatchewan

Speakers:

[Dr. Jean Andrey](#) | Professor Emeritus and former Dean of the Faculty of Environment, University of Waterloo

[Gary Merasty](#) | CEO, The Peter Ballantyne Group of Companies

1-2 p.m. EST

The Future of Transportation in Alberta

Presented by the University of Alberta

Speakers:

[Heather Stephens](#) | Chief Operating Officer, Emissions Reduction Alberta

[Derek Hanson](#) | Director, Transit Fleet Maintenance, Edmonton Transit Service

2-3 p.m. EST

Tipping the Scales: How Business Leadership is Looking at Risk to Advance Action and Collaboration to Meet the 2030 Agenda

Presented by UN Global Compact Network Canada

Speakers:

[Jennifer Nakata](#) | Director of ESG, Ballard Power Systems

[Tim Faveri](#) | VP Sustainability, Nutrien Ltd.

[Brooke Tucker-Reid](#) | Global Head of ESG Strategy and Reporting, Manulife Financial Corporation

[Louis Roy](#) | President and CEO, Optel Group

Moderator:

[Steve Koserski](#) | Manager, Programs and Events, UN Global Compact Network Canada

3-3:30 p.m. EST

----- Break -----

3:30-5 p.m. EST

Workshop: “Finding Your Why” – Staying Motivated in Times of Challenge and Big Change

Speaker:

[Joel Hilchey](#) | Beanstalk Creative

Appendix 2023 Conference Agenda

Friday, June 9 | Online Side Events

10-10:45 a.m. EST

Accelerating teaching and learning on the SDGs

Presented by SDSN Canada

SDGs in the Classroom Curricular Innovation Hub

Presented by York University

11-11:45 a.m. EST

SDG 4 Quality Education in Canada: Canada's Forgotten Education & Taken for Granted Education System – First Nation Schooling On-Reserve

Presented by First Nations with Schools Collective

Engaging Youth in Advancing the SDGs

Presented by Children First Canada

12-12:45 p.m. EST

Activating Your Radical Imagination

Presented by Reimagine17

Catalyzing Collaboration and Partnerships

Presented by Catalyst 2030

1-1:45 p.m. EST

The Federal Sustainable Development Strategy: accelerating progress towards 2030 through an integrated whole-of-government approach

Presented by Environment and Climate Change Canada

The Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change and Sustainable Solutions

Presented by University of Waterloo

2-2:45 p.m. EST

Implementing the SDGs in Canadian biosphere reserves/regions

Presented by Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association

Inclusive Physical Space Framework

Presented by University of Waterloo

3-3:45 p.m. EST

Promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in short-term technical assistance initiatives

Presented by Alinea International – Technical Assistance Partnership-Expert Deployment Mechanism (TAP-EDM) Project

Planning for Impact: The UNDP SDG Impact Standards for Enterprises

Presented by AMR Consulting

4-4:45 p.m. EST

Digital Leaders: Let's Talk AI & Social Justice

Presented by Digital Moment

Standards to Support Implementation of the UN SDGs

Presented by CSA Group





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