

**THE SDSN CANADA YOUTH**  
National Consultation on SDG Engagement

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Sustainability Office**

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Université Laval

**Sustainability Office**

Simon Fraser University

## Funding

### Canada

This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Sustainable Development Goals Program.

## Grant partners



**SDSN Canada**

SDSN Canada is part of a global movement to build a network of universities, colleges, and knowledge institutions working together to create practical solutions to achieve the SDGs.



**TakingITGlobal**

TakingITGlobal (TIG) empowers youth to understand and act on the world's greatest challenges.



**Waterloo Global  
Science Initiative**

Waterloo Global Science Initiative (WGSII) has been catalyzing collective action since 2009. WGSII creates the conditions for collective global action. We take on the world's most pressing challenges by bringing together brilliant minds and offering the time and space for unexpected connections to emerge.



**Youth Climate Lab**

Youth Climate Lab aims to accelerate youth-led climate action. We are a youth-for-youth global non-profit organization that works to design, pilot and scale initiatives that build skills and create opportunities for youth in climate policy and entrepreneurship.

# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

**The SDSN Canada Youth – National Consultation on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Engagement is a Canadian university and college campus engagement and consultation process designed to:**

- Generate awareness of the SDGs and their relevance to a wide range of Canadian contexts.
- Consult youth on their perceptions of the SDGs and how they should be implemented in Canada.
- Engage youth on the role campuses can play in localizing implementation of the SDGs.

**The consultation process took place in Spring 2019 in two formats, each designed to have participants identify the unique experiences of youth across Canada and share thoughtful strategies to address these challenges:**

- SDG Town Hall (an online survey platform) enabled by TakingITGlobal.
- Three Policy Jams (facilitated in-person group discussions) hosted by SDSN Canada member institutions Simon Fraser University, Université Laval and the University of Waterloo and facilitated by grant partner Youth Climate Lab.



This project benefits SDSN Canada’s membership by providing insight on how to build an impactful and results-based program of awareness-building and student engagement on the SDGs. It also helps to create a proof of concept for how future engagement can be rolled out across the network membership and establishes critical communication pathways for campaign-based initiatives. Thirdly, it kick-starts a robust approach to youth-led initiatives across the SDSN Canada membership, acknowledging youth capacity to lead and providing a pathway for direct input into the SDG Unit’s national consultation process.

The project benefits Canada’s 2030 Agenda National Strategy by convening Canadian youth from coast-to-coast-to-coast to inform the Employment and Social Development Canada’s SDG Unit on how they expect the government to enable and accelerate national implementation of the SDGs.

In 2015, the 193 Member States of the United Nations (UN) adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs are a set of goals, targets and indicators intended to frame global efforts to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all by 2030.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Waterloo Global Science Initiative. (2018). Generation SDG Blueprint. Retrieved from: [http://wgsi.org/sites/wgsi-live.pi.local/files/GenerationSDG-Blueprint-WGSI\\_2018.pdf](http://wgsi.org/sites/wgsi-live.pi.local/files/GenerationSDG-Blueprint-WGSI_2018.pdf)

# CALL TO ACTION

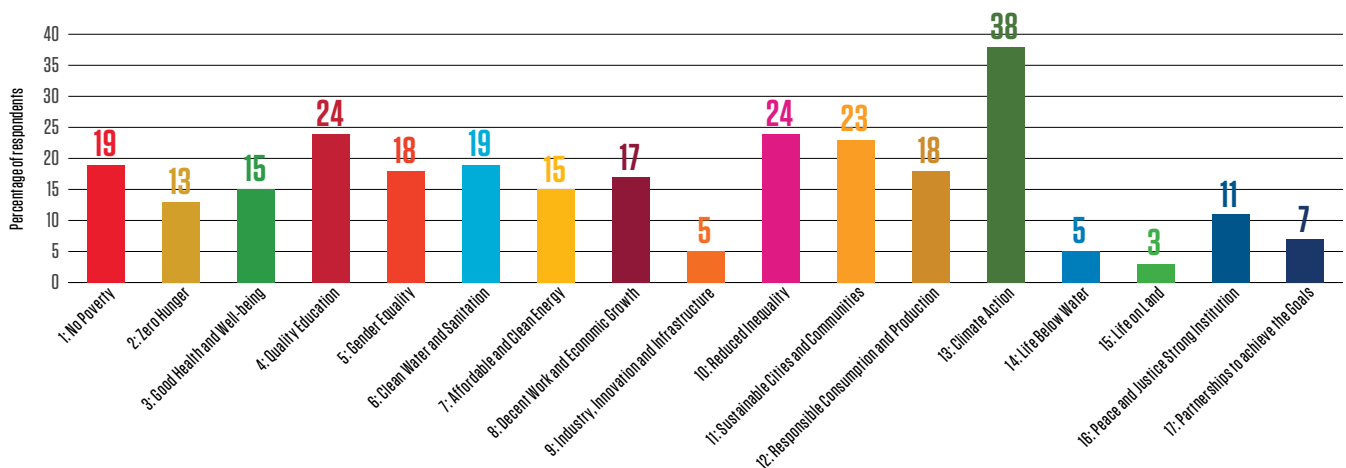
The results of the SDSN Canada Youth – National Consultation on SDG Engagement are clear – young people from across the country are confident that achieving the SDGs will lead to a better future for their generation. In order to get there, they see climate action as a critical priority, one that must be supported by creating a just and equitable transition that ensures no Canadian is left behind. Time is of the essence and the need to embrace this transition cannot wait any longer.

**Seven ideas for the future emerged from the consultation process. These ideas reflect the diversity of SDG-oriented actions needed on campuses, in communities, and on a national scale in order for Canada to make meaningful progress towards achieving the SDGs.**

1. Close the loopholes on tax avoidance.
2. Remove subsidies to carbon producing sectors so that the true cost of carbon-intense activity can be properly measured and reflected in the market.
3. Engage in electoral reform of federal election processes.
4. Create a framework for participatory budgeting at the federal level and long-term consultation that is designed to include vulnerable people.
5. Invest massively in green bonds to transform Canada’s infrastructure.
6. Create a Public Guarantee Fund<sup>2</sup> that takes a percentage of revenues generated through carbon pricing to act as a safety net to cover losses for businesses that make investments in energy transition or sustainable infrastructure (one time coverage only).
7. Work with university and college administrations to make campuses centers of excellence for sustainability (i.e. on-campus modelling of renewable energy use, divestment from fossil fuel investments, mandatory climate change courses, reduced waste).

Input from the SDSN Canada Youth – National Consultation on SDG Engagement provides a framework to continue to engage youth across Canada about the challenges of sustainable development and support the creation of opportunities to pioneer solutions. Canada’s universities and colleges have a big role to play in pushing the SDG mandate forward, and students provide an important anchor point for SDG discussions on campus. Young people everywhere are asking for more access to direct power and opportunities to take meaningful action because they can’t afford to wait any longer. Their future is at stake.

**Figure 1: Survey responses to the query “Which five SDGs do you feel are the most important to you?”**



<sup>2</sup> UNDP. (2019). Financing solutions for global development: Public guarantees. Retrieved from: <https://www.sdfinance.undp.org/content/sdfinance/en/home/solutions/public-guarantees.html>

# INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Four main themes were identified that highlight the major discussion points from the SDG Town Hall and Policy Jams. Taken together, these four themes illustrate the economic, social, and environmental dimensions required in order for the SDGs to be a successful driver of change in Canada. The themes are:

**Intergenerational relationships and justice** – the unique mix of urgency, resentment and hope that many youth today are wrestling with as they look ahead to their futures and the futures of the generations that will follow.

**Energy transition and climate action** – an immediate need to take action to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate changes to our planet’s climate.

**Improving systems** – the disengagement of youth towards political processes and their growing anxiety and distrust of political systems.

**Developing a new understanding of prosperity** – the societal definition of prosperity and the indicators used to measure it are out of step with the evolving social and cultural expectations around wellbeing and generational equity.

Each theme is framed according to the problem that needs to be addressed, followed by a vision for change by 2030. Actions and opportunities are also listed as specific policy recommendations.

## Intergenerational relationships and justice

The United Nations defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Equitable and robust intergenerational relationships are at the heart of the messages delivered by the youth who participated in this consultation process. Short term outlooks reinforced by four to five year election cycles as well as dependence on fossil fuels and their associated infrastructure and government-industry relationships were themes that emerged both in the Policy Jams and the SDG Town Hall.

Moving forward in a sustainable way requires us all to think constantly about what we owe to each other and to future generations. We need to frame our expectations of what living a good life means in the context of planetary limits and a holistic understanding of prosperity.

In a speech to the British Parliament on April 23, 2019 youth climate activist Greta Thunberg commented:

*“I was fortunate to be born in a time and place where everyone told us to dream big; I could become whatever I wanted to. I could live wherever I wanted to. People like me had everything we needed and more. Things our grandparents could not even dream of. We had everything we could ever wish for and yet now we may have nothing.*

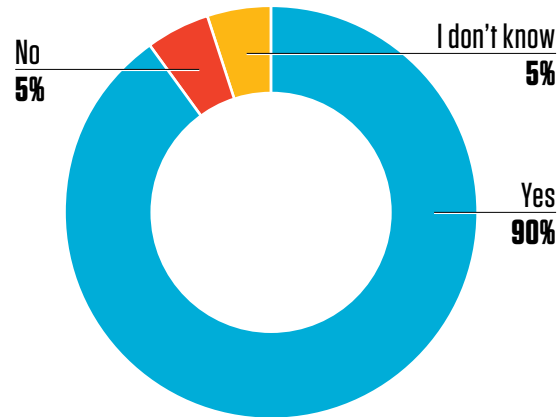
*Now we probably don’t even have a future any more.*

*Because that future was sold so that a small number of people could make unimaginable amounts of money. It was stolen from us every time you said that the sky was the limit, and that you only live once. You gave us false hope. You told us that the future was something to look forward to.”<sup>3</sup>*

This sentiment captures the unique mix of urgency, resentment and hope that many youth today are wrestling with as they look ahead to their futures and the futures of the generations that will follow.

<sup>3</sup> Thunberg, Greta. (2019). Speech to British Parliament. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/23/greta-thunberg-full-speech-to-mps-you-did-not-act-in-time>

**Figure 2: Survey responses to the query “I am confident that achieving the SDGs will lead to a better future for my generation.”**



### Vision to 2030

- Beginning now, all generations act with a sense of urgency to stop the irreversible damage to our planet predicted by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- We must prepare the next generation to be more open to change and sensitive to the challenges of sustainable development through education from elementary to post-secondary. This includes a focus on preparing educators to teach change readiness and resilience.
- Youth are more committed to participating in the improvement of our society when included as an equal voice at the decision-making table and provided with direct access to power.
- All decision-making takes a long-term and holistic view of sustainability and prosperity, in alignment with the Indigenous concept that “each generation has a responsibility to ensure the survival for the seventh generation.”<sup>4</sup>

### Actions and opportunities

- Use a proven youth engagement strategy, like the ones outlined by researchers Elaine Ho, Amelia Clarke and Ilona Doherty in their 2015 paper *Youth-led social change: Topics, engagement types, organizational types, strategies, and impacts*<sup>5</sup> that incorporates problem socialization, influence, intergenerational partnership, and direct access to power.
- Support non-partisan civic engagement and voter support groups like Apathy is Boring<sup>6</sup>, Future Majority<sup>7</sup> and Ryerson’s Democratic Engagement Exchange<sup>8</sup> that work to engage young people and other new voters in election issues and Canada’s democratic process.
- Support experiential learning opportunities, including co-ops, apprenticeships and summer jobs programs, that give youth responsibility, decision-making ability and intergenerational mentorship.
- Support board governance training initiatives, like Girls 20’s Girls on Board program<sup>9</sup>, that support young people by providing opportunities for skills development for governance boards and inclusive representation on boards.
- Support research and programming related to education for sustainable development through Tri-Council granting programs.

4 Clarkson, L., Morrissette, V., & Regallet, G. (1992). Our responsibility to the seventh generation: Indigenous peoples and sustainable development. Retrieved from: [https://www.iisd.org/pdf/seventh\\_gen.pdf](https://www.iisd.org/pdf/seventh_gen.pdf)

5 Ho, E., Clarke, A., & Doherty, I. (2015). Youth-led social change: Topics, engagement types, organizational types, strategies, and impacts. *Futures*, 67:52-62. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016328715000075>

6 Apathy is Boring. (2019). Homepage. Retrieved from: <https://www.apathyisboring.com/>

7 Future Majority. (2019). Homepage. Retrieved from: <https://futuremajority.ca/>

8 Ryerson Faculty of Arts. (2019). Democratic Engagement Exchange. Retrieved from: <https://www.ryerson.ca/arts/research-and-innovation/democratic-engagement-exchange/>

9 Girls 20. (2019). About Girls on Boards. Retrieved from: <https://girls20.org/programs/girls-on-boards/>

## Energy transition and climate action

The world faces a number of critical environmental challenges that threaten the future of humanity – the increasing prevalence and severity of natural disasters, the rapid loss of global biodiversity, widespread pollution from industry and industrial agriculture, melting glaciers, and a warming planet. At the root of these issues is the urgent need to take action to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions and the resulting changes to our planet’s climate. Time is of the essence.

Inaction on these issues is a more comfortable approach for many, but the need to embrace transition to new forms of energy generation and a carbon neutral society is very real and cannot wait any longer. We live in a time of transition, and those that acknowledge and embrace that will be better able to manage risk and harness new opportunities.

The need for an energy transition to combat climate is also happening at a time when the nature of work is changing due to new technologies and automation. With big changes taking place, it is critical to understand that these transitions need to meet people where they are, inspire them with a bigger vision, and ensure that justice and equity help spread the benefits to all.

### Vision to 2030

- A transition away from a fossil fuel economy to a clean energy economy in which renewable energy sources dominate the Canadian market.
- Decisive action taken at all levels of government to combat climate change and to invest in renewables to get Canada to a ‘tipping point’ where renewable energy sources are as easily accessed and used as non-renewable sources.
- A just energy transition, with support for energy workers and energy producing provinces most affected by the transition.
- Steady pools of financing for sustainable infrastructure development, including the interconnection of local transport networks.
- Increased awareness and transparency of national climate goals and progress, leading to increased resiliency and leadership within communities and businesses.

### Actions and opportunities

- Create clear regulatory signals regarding carbon disclosure and the related financial risks to help align our financial system with the economy we want, not the economy of the last century.
- Remove subsidies to carbon producing sectors so that the true cost of carbon-intense activity can be properly measured and reflected in the market.
- Create a Public Guarantee Fund<sup>10</sup> that takes a percentage of revenues generated through carbon pricing to act as a safety net to cover losses for businesses that make investments in energy transition or sustainable infrastructure (one time coverage only).
- Support infrastructure innovation with the roll-out a massive public awareness campaign about how our housing, transportation and energy needs are linked and a vision for a sustainable future with clear social and environmental benefits.
- Use Canada’s cleantech growth and expertise to power northern and remote communities with renewable energy micro-grids to support a transition away from diesel-powered communities.
- Work with university and college administrations to make campuses centers of excellence for sustainability (e.g. on-campus modelling of renewable energy use, divestment from fossil fuel investments, mandatory climate change courses, reduced waste).
- Incentivize the creation of more integrated municipal spaces with well-established transit corridors and more sustainable building code standards to support the densification and sustainability of daily activities by residents (e.g. shopping, dining, working).
- Support farmers to transition their livelihoods towards plant-based solutions to climate change (e.g. plant-based meats and lab-grown meats away from animal agriculture).

<sup>10</sup> UNDP. (2019). Financing solutions for global development: Public guarantees. Retrieved from: <https://www.sdfinance.undp.org/content/sdfinance/en/home/solutions/public-guarantees.html>



## Improving systems

For the SDGs to be an agenda of change, the systems of governance and implementation in Canada must improve. Overall, there is a feeling of a lack of transparency in governance, and that organizations working on sustainability issues are often isolated from each other. Understanding of sustainability issues and politics more generally among the population is also low.

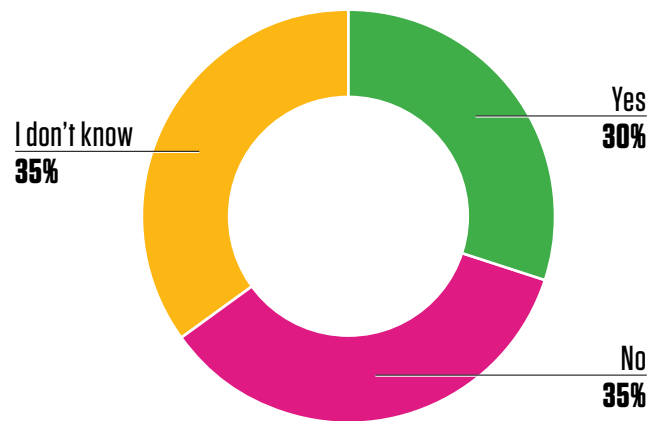
People feel powerless to create change when every path forward appears to be a zero-sum option — where someone always loses. Too often, policy decisions are made at the expense of future generations for the sake of today’s labour market and the corresponding potential of taxable income. This approach is not delivering a return on investment for the wellbeing of the citizenry, with more and more people reporting disengagement with the political process and their communities, along with growing anxiety and distrust. Just as fiscal conservatives decry deficits and seek to limit intergenerational debt, youth in Canada seek an opportunity to rebalance the economy to limit the planetary deficit.

### Vision to 2030

The erosion of our social fabric requires a specific remedy: deep commitment to an all-of-society approach to sustainable development; opportunities for ongoing, meaningful engagement at all levels of the political process; and a fundamental shift to openness and transparency within government and communities. This vision requires:

- A ‘humanized bureaucracy’ that decentralizes government processes, speeds up action and limits the creation of barriers to collaborate.
- Greater investment in young people to prepare them to be open to change and sensitive to the challenges of sustainable development.
- A life-long approach to sustainability education to create the social license for a long-term lense on policy-making.
- Reduced redundancy and increased cooperation between various groups working on sustainability issues.
- A policy-making culture that is transparent, human-centered and includes participatory budgeting process.

**Figure 3: Survey responses to the query “I am confident that I have opportunities to influence government processes.”**



### Actions and opportunities

Government institutions need to shift culturally toward more open, participatory and inclusive processes that consider intergenerational justice and equity. Increased transparency and accountability are by-products of this shift, two factors that are critical for creating an environment of trust and perceived equity. To achieve this:

- Engage in electoral reform of federal election processes.
- Create an independent office of communication accessibility within every government department. This office will be responsible for ensuring that there is no bias, misunderstanding or lack of communication between different departments and will help facilitate internal collaboration and partnerships.
- Create a framework for participatory budgeting at the federal level and long-term consultation that is designed to include vulnerable people;
- Establish and support networks that bring together organizations with similar mandates and agendas in order to share useful granting information, increase awareness of existing initiatives, and help to pool resources towards a common cause.
- Work with a pan-Canadian partner to implement sustainability education at the provincial level with a clear rubric for sustainability literacy.
- Support teachers and K-12 education through a sustainable development lens and focus on how to empower youth to participate in decision-making.

## Developing a new understanding of prosperity

Our societal definition of prosperity and the indicators we use to measure it are out of step with evolving social and cultural expectations around wellbeing and generational equity. Prosperity has been confused with constant growth and the mechanisms for achieving it beset with short-term thinking, planning and investment that result in profits that benefit only a small percentage of the population. Furthermore, the prosperity enjoyed by developed nations is often at the expense of the world's poor and vulnerable, an obvious replication of the colonial economic models that we recognize as deeply inequitable.

In developed nations, economic signals of deepening inequality are most noticeable at the local level, as indicated by the growing crisis in affordable housing, increasing food insecurity, underinvestment in transportation infrastructure, and diminishing economic resiliency. These issues are compounded by climate and tech disruptions creating a socio-economic age of uncertainty and increasing anxiety. A lack of vision and the corresponding political leadership adds to this anxiety. Distrust grows as we see governments bend to the will of corporate lobbyists who claim that the country's economic prosperity depends on their unsustainable activities.

### Vision to 2030

Developed nations have an opportunity to model equity-based prosperity by transitioning the systems and processes that have created the scale of inequality we are witnessing today.

- Financial incentives will need to align in the right direction, pushing institutions toward long-termism and a new economic system that operates within planetary boundaries.
- A shift to long-term planning and investment will help to highlight the interconnectedness of local issues with the global.
- Major investment in sustainable infrastructure will be foundational to unlocking greater economic equality for all and the physical, adaptive resilience required in the face of uncertainty.



### Actions and opportunities

- Align market signals with Canada's vision of a sustainable future. Currently, the market signals point in the wrong direction, entrenching our dependence on potentially stranded assets and subsidizing the carbon-intensive resources we are trying to replace.
- Close the loopholes on tax avoidance.
- Create an accounting of natural assets (i.e., natural capital) so that the true cost of core ecosystem elements can be properly measured and reflected in the market.
- Amend Bill C-69<sup>11</sup> and review CEAA 2012<sup>12</sup> to ensure that legislation fully considers the cumulative effects of development projects on natural areas.
- Adopt a standard for corporate sector reporting that aligns with the UN Global Compact's Ten Principles, existing Environment and Social Governance (ESG) criteria, and the SDGs.
- Incentivize the private sector's commitment to community-generated goals by focusing on efficiency and waste reduction strategies that are foundational to a circular economy.
- Focus on innovation in infrastructure, including reframing everything we know about housing, land use and transportation infrastructure.
- Invest massively in green bonds to transform Canada's infrastructure.

<sup>11</sup> BILL C-69: An Act to enact the Impact Assessment Act and the Canadian Energy Regulator Act, to amend the Navigation Protection Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. (2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-69/third-reading>

<sup>12</sup> Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012 (S.C. 2012, c. 19, s. 52). Retrieved from: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-15.21/>