

# Bringing Canadian Civil Society Together

*Around the Sustainable Development Goals*



The [National Conversation on Canada and the SDGs](#) was a day-long meeting hosted in Ottawa on June 27 by the Canadian Council for International Co-Operation (CCIC) and Community Foundations of Canada (CFC), along with a number of co-convenors. The event brought together [national and provincial civil society networks](#) to discuss the United Nation's agenda around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and how it might be used as a unifying framework to align community-building efforts within Canada.

With opening remarks from CCIC and CFC, as well as event co-convenors the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), participants heard an overview of the current Canadian context, information about the SDGs and how they differ from their predecessor the Millennium Development Goals, as well as stories of how the SDGs are being used by other countries to align different policy initiatives across government and among civil society.

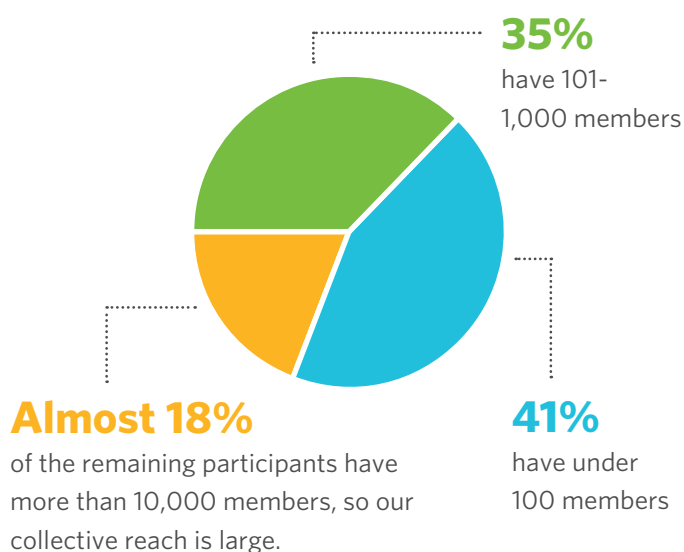
Following the opening remarks, the results of a [pre-event survey](#) were shared with participants, giving a sense of who was in the room. Many participants were already aware of the SDGs, and actively engaged in awareness-building and related programming around them. In fact, the vast majority saw the SDG framework as valuable for advancing their work. These statistics helped inform the roundtable conversations that followed in both English and French. These included discussions about which SDGs organizations were already working on, what the opportunities were to collaborate, and how civil society and government could best work together to advance the SDG agenda in Canada and abroad.



## What do we know about the groups that joined the national conversation?

46 organizations completed the pre-conference survey and 40 of those organizations attended the meeting in-person. The survey was developed to get a sense of where and how groups were engaging around the SDGs.

The majority of participants are from networked organizations with under 1,000 members in their core constituency. Of the 34 who responded to this question:



Most organizations are national (**67%**) in focus, with some provincial and international.



The majority of participants rated their knowledge of the SDGs as good or very good, but almost **40%** said they could improve their understanding.

These discussions led into the final portion of the event, where five speakers from different government departments participated in a Q&A and roundtable discussion with participants. The speakers were representatives from Environment and Climate Change Canada, Global Affairs Canada, Status of Women Canada, Statistics Canada, and the International Development Research Centre. The first three of these government departments are part of an Inter-Departmental Working Group on Canada and the SDGs, coordinated by the Privy Council Office, alongside Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada.

Our post-event survey showed that this event inspired new ideas for action, and provided a unique opportunity to network and connect with others. The majority of participants felt that there was value in convening a network of organizations working on the SDGs, and that this network could act as an interlocutor between government and civil society, while also providing additional opportunities for connection, collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

### Organizers and Co-Conveners

This event was an initiative of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation and Community Foundations of Canada. It was co-designed and is co-convened with Alliance 150, Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, International Institute for Sustainable Development, Philanthropic Foundations of Canada and the United Nations Association in Canada. Canada's International Development Research Centre contributed to the discussion session with government officials and was also the generous host of the event.





Many organizations are actively engaged in SDG awareness-building and related programming.



### The SDGs with the most focus:



Partnerships



Education



Climate Action



Gender Equality



Health

### The SDGs with the least focus:



Clean Water and Sanitation



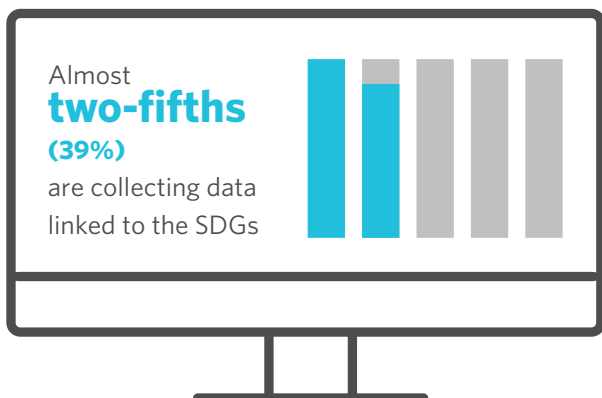
Life Below Water and On Land



Affordable and Clean Energy



Zero Hunger and Responsible Consumption



89% agreed that the SDG framework is useful to advancing their work, while others need to learn more.

The survey also includes a range of perspectives on the role government can play around SDG implementation.



### Further Reading: Our National Conversation in the News

- [\*It's time Canada report how it's following global Sustainable Development Goals, Andrew Chunilall and Julia Sánchez\*](#)  
Andrew Chunilall and Julia Sánchez
- [\*Do we need to engage civil society organizations in implementing SDGs?\*](#)  
Livia Bizikova and Fraser Reilly-King, International Institute for Sustainable Development
- Canada 150 and the SDGs op-ed — coming soon

# How did we do in our first national conversation?

Of the 18 participating organizations who responded to the post-event evaluation survey:



The majority agreed the conversation inspired new ideas for action, and provided a good opportunity to network and connect with others (many of whom they hadn't connected with previously).

## More than 70%

of respondents felt that their level of understanding of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs improved as the result of the gathering.



### Half of those who responded to this question

indicated they will begin referencing the SDGs in their work as a result of this meeting; the other half are considering it.



## The 18 respondents gave the highest priority to:

*Information and intelligence sharing around the SDGs*

12

*Mapping who is doing what, where and with whom*

9

*Acting as an interlocutor with the government around SDG implementation*

8

*Exchanging good and best practices*

8

*Networking and facilitating collaborations*

8



**94%** of survey respondents felt it was either valuable or very valuable to convene a network of groups working on the SDGs.

## In contrast, there was less agreement over what.

59 of respondents see **partnerships for sustainable development (SDG 17)** as the core focus of this network. However, many qualified that answer, suggesting that the network should be a platform to facilitate collaboration and partnerships to advance the fulfilment of all goals.



## Quick Links: National Conversation on Canada & the SDGs

- [Concept Note for National Conversation](#)
- [Agenda for National Conversation](#)
- [List of Participants](#)
- [Pre-event survey of conference participants around Canada and the SDGs](#)
- [Photos from the event on Flickr](#)



## Canada at the High Level Political Forum



Every year, governments, civil society and the private sector meet for ten days at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York. The HLPF is the central body within the United Nations responsible for sustainable development and has a mandate to follow up and review Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

Celina Caesar-Chavannes, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, and Adam Vaughan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), joined 77 other Ministers and Deputy Ministers from around the world from July 17 to 19, 2017 for the ministerial segment of the HLPF. CCIC, along with other stakeholders including three of the Provincial and Regional Councils for International Co-operation, met both Ms. Caesar-Chavannes and Mr. Vaughan. The Parliamentary Secretaries both talked about how Canada was fully supportive of the SDG agenda and its universal nature, but were not at the table able to share any of the government's plans around implementation - beyond the new Feminist International Assistance Policy.

### In response, CCIC signaled that it would like the government to do the following:

- Agree to provide a voluntary national review (on implementation of the SDGs) in 2018.
- Officially convene an inter-departmental committee on the SDGs coordinated by the Privy Council Office and reporting to the Prime Minister's Office.
- Develop a national action plan for implementing the SDGs with a national framework of indicators, including at the sub-national level.

## Canada's Voluntary National Review

On September 12, the Canadian mission to the UN announced that it will be presenting Canada's Voluntary National Review at the 2018 High Level Political Forum.



### What next?

- CCIC and CFC are planning a second national conversation November 17th, 2017 in Toronto with a broader network of organizations—going beyond just civil society.
- We will be launching a periodic SDG newsletter sharing information, intelligence and updates—please [subscribe now](#) to give your consent to receive future messages from us.
- We hope to participate in [Together 2017](#).