



Canada 2030: An Agenda for Sustainable Development

Report Highlights



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About the study

In 2015, governments will negotiate a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which expire in 2015. Like the MDGs, the SDGs will comprise goals, targets and indicators against which countries and the world will track progress on sustainable development. But unlike the MDGs, the SDGs are set to be universal in nature, applying to all countries, including developed countries like Canada. The implementation of the SDGs is also expected to allow countries space to identify their own national priorities within the broad sustainable development framework. A key question in this context is how the SDGs will be effectively applied across countries at different stages of development. In an effort to address this question, this report examines what the SDGs could mean for Canada. It is part of a broader multi-country initiative – the Post-2015 Data Test – which looks at how the SDGs could be applied and measured across a range of low, middle and high-income countries.

The key objective of this study is to identify the opportunities and challenges that may arise for Canada from the implementation of a universal, country-relevant SDG framework, including those related to measuring progress. The study unpacks Canada's national priorities for candidate SDGs in seven areas – poverty, education, employment and inclusive growth, energy and infrastructure, environmental sustainability and disaster resilience, governance, and global partnership for sustainable development. It provides an overview of key data sources and identifies the factors for realising progress in the Canadian context. Importantly, the report also examines the implementation challenges Canada may face as a federal state in which provinces and territories have jurisdiction over goal areas such as education.

The report makes a number of valuable contributions. First, it serves as a comprehensive overview of Canada's sustainable development challenges, broadly understood in terms of economic, social and environmental well-being. Second, the report also takes stock of the current state of Canada's national statistical system and data availability for monitoring progress on the SDGs. Given the breadth of issues addressed, the report is divided into sections according to candidate SDG areas and measurement issues. Each goal sections can be read on a stand-alone basis for readers interested in particular candidate goal areas and their implications for Canada. Finally, the report provides a concrete example of how a universal, country relevant sustainable development agenda could be applied to high income countries.

Key Findings

The proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are relevant for Canada.

Addressing the well-being of Aboriginal peoples is prevalent across SDGs. Issues related to gender equality are also cross-cutting.

Global minimum standards are not particularly relevant for Canada's national priorities.

Most Canadian stakeholders have little to no knowledge of the post-2015 agenda.

Nevertheless, efforts to address sustainable development concerns in Canada are established and ongoing for many candidate goal areas.

Key findings

The study finds that the candidate SDGs are relevant to the Canadian context and broadly correspond with national sustainable development challenges.

Recognising that the SDG framework is set to give countries space to identify and target national priorities in the implementation of the SDGs, the study includes an examination of Canadian priorities across seven candidate goal areas. Challenges related to the social, economic and environmental well-being of Canada's Aboriginal peoples appear across six of the seven goals. Similarly, the study finds that issues related to gender equality are cross-cutting for a significant number of potential SDG areas.

A number of global minimum standards have been identified for the SDG framework, such as ending extreme poverty as measured by the proportion of the population living on less than US\$1.25 (purchasing power parity) per day and ensuring that all newborns are registered with civil authorities. For the most part, global minimum standards are not particularly relevant for Canada's domestic priorities, though some, such as ensuring universal access to infrastructure, may be relevant, particularly in Canada's North.

The conversation on the post-2015 agenda has been limited in Canada. Environmental and development-oriented federal government departments and civil society actors tend to be directly engaged in the international discussions. However, domestic stakeholders, such as provincial and municipal governments, the private sector and civil society organisations that focus on Canadian issues, are not aware of the post-2015 process and its relevance to their work domestically. This is unsurprising given that such global frameworks have historically been applied to developing countries and have had little impact on Canada's domestic priorities with the exception of guiding Canada's approach to international development cooperation.

Nevertheless, the study reveals that, while not directly linked to the SDG process, a rich history of work on issues related to the SDG agenda – such as addressing poverty and climate change – exists in Canada through a patchwork of national, sub-national and local initiatives by governments and non-governmental stakeholders.

The study includes an evaluation of the availability of good quality official data, including disaggregated data, to measure progress on the post-2015 agenda. It also looks at dimensions of the data availability–transparency–accountability nexus, examining possibilities for how stakeholders can use data to hold government to account for progress on post-2015.

Canada has an excellent, relatively independent statistical system that is well placed to measure progress on the post-2015 agenda. Most indicators examined under the study are already available or can be easily calculated. Data gaps are most prevalent for goals related to governance, the environment, and energy and infrastructure. Disaggregated data are nearly always available for age, sex and sub-national levels (such as provinces/territories, metropolitan areas, federal electoral districts) but less readily available by minority group and income level.

Though challenges exist, unofficial data are not necessarily needed to fill gaps in measuring progress. Statistics Canada and other government departments and agencies are well positioned to address data gaps if afforded the necessary resources to do so. The use of unofficial data sources to measure progress on post-2015 may present a risk given that they do not necessarily follow the same level of rigor and transparency as Statistics Canada.

For the targets and indicators examined in this study, data on goals related to poverty, education and employment are excellent and very good for all other candidate goal areas. Nevertheless, there is room to improve the relevance of data produced through greater consultation with users by data providers.

Unsurprisingly, given the agency's *raison d'être*, sources of data from Statistics Canada identified through the data mapping process typically do better in the data quality assessment than data from other government departments and agencies. Official data providers outside Statistics Canada tend to have gaps in terms of the availability and presentation of metadata including methodologies, concepts and other information about survey instruments, consultation with users and reporting on data reliability.

While Canada is well placed to measure progress on the post-2015 agenda, a number of challenges exist. In the recent past, the federal government has not demonstrated a commitment to ensuring the availability of good data, as shown by cuts to Statistics Canada's human and financial resources and the controversial decision to terminate the mandatory long-form census. The capacity of Statistics Canada to continue producing high-quality data has been questioned, particularly in light of changes to some survey instruments that have jeopardised the continuity and comparability of important datasets. Nevertheless, the quality of unaffected survey instruments – those which have not been impacted by cuts or significant changes to methodologies – remains high.

Key Findings

Official data are available for 78 per cent of the 133 indicators examined in this study.

With the appropriate resources, Statistics Canada and other government departments and agencies have the capacity to address data gaps.

Data quality is excellent for goals related to poverty, education and employment and very good for all other candidate goal areas.

Lower data quality is associated with data sources from other departments and agencies while data from Statistics Canada are of excellent quality.

While Canada has an excellent statistical system, it has seen deterioration in recent years.

Key Findings

The enabling environment for civil society advocacy has become increasingly closed due to funding cuts and stricter regulations on the political activities that charitable organisations can undertake.

There is no question that the level of access to official data is excellent for all stakeholders in Canada and that users' capacities to use data are good. Canada has a free, open and independent media that plays an important role in holding government to account. At the same time, the enabling environment for civil society has become increasingly closed in recent years as charitable organisations have seen funding cuts and stricter regulations on the activities that they can undertake, particularly with respect to advocacy.

Implications for Canada

To date, the Canadian government has championed a post-2015 framework that focuses on the poorest and most vulnerable in developing countries, ensures a continued emphasis on maternal, newborn and child health, and effectively promotes job creation and sustainable economic growth. These priorities reflect Canada's current approach to development cooperation. While these issues are important for the SDG framework, Canada's inputs tend to reflect its priorities for developing countries rather than its priorities for realising sustainable development at home, such as addressing the situation of Aboriginal peoples and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Given the universal nature of the framework, there is a need to move beyond the development perspective to ensure that national priorities also inform the global agenda. This is important for ensuring that the post-2015 agenda is relevant for high-income countries, particularly Canada, in addition to developing countries.

The SDGs, as they are currently articulated, capture gender equality dimensions of sustainable development with a standalone goal as well as cross-cutting targets under other candidate goal areas. Canada should continue to support this approach to integrating gender equality into the SDGs as a means to ensure due attention to this issue both at home and abroad. While the SDGs emphasise social inclusion, there is no specific goal or target for indigenous peoples. The well-being of Aboriginal peoples is cross-cutting for many of the candidate SDGs in Canada. This suggests scope for a potential "made in Canada" goal that aims to spur efforts to realise better outcomes for Canada's Aboriginal communities.

Implications for Canada

The federal government's approach to the SDGs should move beyond a development-focused perspective.

Application of the SDGs in Canada requires special attention to Aboriginal issues beyond what is currently outlined in the proposed SDGs.

Global minimum standards may serve as an important guide for Canada's post-2015 international development cooperation priorities.

Implications for Canada

Ongoing efforts on sustainable development in Canada provide a roadmap for SDG implementation.

SDG implementation has the potential to harness and build off of existing policies and coordination mechanisms across jurisdictions.

The federal government should consult more broadly on the SDGs with Canadian stakeholders, including sub-national governments, the private sector and civil society.

Statistics Canada will have a central role to play in the collection and coordination of data for monitoring progress against the SDGs.

The realisation of global minimum standards will require significant resources. For example, ensuring that no person is living on less than US\$1.25 (purchasing power parity) per day will require domestic and international resources to make progress in many countries. Global minimum standards will likely play an important role in galvanising international efforts for key sustainable development challenges. For Canada, global minimum standards could serve as a useful guide for future development cooperation priorities.

Different levels of government and non-state actors have made significant efforts to identify and address Canada's sustainable development challenges. A good basis exists for establishing Canada's SDG roadmap. However, a key challenge is bringing these efforts together in a national plan, particularly for certain goal areas such as poverty, environment, and energy and infrastructure, where less consensus exists between governments at the federal and provincial/territorial levels on the nature of challenges and their solutions. This issue is exacerbated by the unique division of responsibilities across federal and provincial/territorial jurisdictions in Canada, though coordination mechanisms exist between and across different levels of government.

Canada will need to negotiate a set of national priorities that balances perspectives between various levels of government and creates space for provinces, territories and municipalities to build on ongoing efforts. Greater consultation on the post-2015 agenda is needed. Such efforts could inform Canada's position in the SDG negotiations and increase buy-in on the framework across government departments and levels of government, which should aid in the implementation of the SDG agenda.

While the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada will likely play a key role in reporting on Canada's implementation of the SDGs to the United Nations, Statistics Canada will have a central role to play in the collection and coordination of data for monitoring progress. This is unsurprising given the highly centralised nature of Canada's statistical system. A significant proportion of the data needed to monitor the SDGs is collected by Statistics Canada, particularly in the areas of poverty, education, employment and governance. While Statistics Canada also collects data on the environment, energy and infrastructure, and global partnership, other agencies and departments will also play a role in data collection for these goal areas, building on existing data collection.

Most indicators for measuring progress on post-2015 examined in this study are currently available or can be made readily available relatively easily. However, additional efforts will be needed to calculate and report on certain indicators and collect additional information, particularly in the areas where data gaps are greatest.

There is room to improve data providers' consultation with data users. Statistics Canada is already taking a number of steps to this effect. There is significant room to improve the data quality of other departments that provide data. The adoption of Statistics Canada's policies and procedures related to the preparation and presentation of metadata, including reporting on quality of data sources, errors and revisions, would greatly improve the quality of data on the environment, energy and infrastructure, governance and global partnership, goal areas that have a paucity of data.

Efforts are needed to preserve the excellence of Canada's statistical system. Statistics Canada needs to be provided with the necessary financial and human resources to improve on and continue to provide good quality data to inform decision making. This is especially important given the heightened role that Statistics Canada will likely play in supporting monitoring of and reporting on the post-2015 framework.

There is no question that inclusivity is an important part of the post-2015 agenda. Significant efforts have been made to ensure that all stakeholders – citizens, civil society, various levels of government, and the private sector – are consulted on the new agenda. Furthermore, non-state actors are seen to be playing a critical role in holding governments to account on their implementation of the SDGs at the national level. In its adoption of the SDGs, Canada should ensure that all domestic stakeholders participate in the identification of national priorities. Efforts are needed to establish an effective enabling environment for civil society organisations to provide input on the SDG agenda, carry out independent research and advocacy efforts related to the SDGs, and play a critical role in holding government to account.

Implications for Canada

Efforts will be needed to improve data availability for goals relating to governance, the environment, and energy and infrastructure.

Efforts are needed to improve the quality of data collected by departments, agencies and ministries across Canada. Adoption of Statistics Canada data quality standards across departments and agencies would greatly improve this.

Statistics Canada should be provided with the necessary financial and human resources to improve on and continue providing good quality data.

An enabling environment for civil society to engage on the SDG framework and hold government to account should be established.

Implications for the SDG Framework

A universal set of SDGs that allows differentiation can work across countries with different levels of development and priorities.

A key challenge will be getting domestic stakeholders engaged. SDG implementation should support and enhance existing sustainable development activities.

Global minimum standards may serve as a valuable guide for international cooperation efforts.

Contributions to global partnership can be measured at the country level.

High-income countries could play a critical role in supporting SDG monitoring.

Implications for the Sustainable Development Framework

A key question regarding the SDG framework is how it can allow country differentiation under a universal set of SDGs. This study finds that the SDG framework covers Canadian sustainable development challenges. However, targets and corresponding indicators may need to be adjusted to ensure relevance in high-income countries. The use of a global set of targets and indicators, coupled with national targets and indicators that represent country priorities, may offer a concrete way forward that ensures the universal framework resonates across countries with different levels of development and priorities.

While the SDG framework may resonate in high-income countries, a key challenge will be getting domestic stakeholders engaged. The Canada case study reveals a need to move the domestic conversation beyond the federal government. Ensuring that the universal framework resonates across countries with different levels of development requires input from countries based on their domestic experiences. Furthermore, lack of engagement on the SDGs may represent a potential missed opportunity for domestic constituencies to spur action on sustainable development by using the SDGs to support existing drivers of change. Finally, the SDGs may also serve as an opportunity to connect domestic and global constituencies on issues related to sustainable development, affording greater opportunities for shared actions and lesson sharing.

It is clear that many policies and strategies that address key elements of the post-2015 agenda exist across different levels of government. As countries move toward national implementation of the SDG framework, the SDGs should leverage existing plans and initiatives and build on past successes. Ensuring that the SDG framework allows country differentiation will be important in this context.

The Canada case study reveals that global minimum standards may not be particularly relevant for high-income countries. However, they will likely play a critical role in galvanising efforts to address key global challenges. Global minimum standards could serve as a roadmap for international development cooperation efforts and activities carried out under the global partnership for sustainable development.

Historically, commitments related to global partnership have been measured at the global level. Moving forward, post-2015 presents an opportunity for measuring commitments to global partnership at the country level, as the Canada case study reveals. Such an approach could strengthen global monitoring and accountability by tracking countries' individual contributions.

Data challenges for measuring progress on the SDG framework will be less significant for high-income countries. Countries with robust statistical

systems could support other countries to monitor implementation of the framework through lesson sharing and targeted capacity development.

