Sharing the Vision:

Partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals in Post-Secondary Institutions

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SHARING THE VISION: Partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals in Post-Secondary Institutions

As a Catamount fellow, I have been exploring the question "how might we utilize partnerships and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to create transformative change in post-secondary institutions?" This paper provides background on the development of the SDGs, alternative perspectives exploring some problems with them, measures for tracking progress, interactions between goals, barriers, tips for effective partnerships, and recommendations for adopting the SDGs with a focus on post-secondary environments.

The purpose of this research is to better understand the potential of the SDGs and how they can be leveraged to create systemic change in post-secondary institutions, such as Mount Royal University (MRU). My community partner, Connie Van der Byl, the director of the Institute for Environmental Sustainability (IES) at MRU will use this information to help create, improve, and suggest interdisciplinary opportunities with students, faculty, and external partners.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) is the main source worldwide for anything SDG-related (SDSN, n.d.-a). Sustainability experts across the world from private and public sectors, civil society, and academia lead the organization. The subdivision SDSN Youth is responsible for the SDG Students Program which has hubs in post-secondary institutions across the world to empower youth to understand their role in the SDGs (SDSN, n.d.-b).

As the MRU SDG Student Hub Coordinator, I have been establishing a club since the fall of 2021 where students co-create events to learn about, engage with, and take action on the SDGs, with mentorship from SDSN Youth. This role has complimented my in-depth Catamount research and provided me with practical experience and a student lens on important issues and barriers for enacting interdisciplinary change. As I continue in this role for another year, I will apply my learnings from this research: namely, more collaboration and creating a localized strategy for the hub, plus advocating for MRU to do so as well.

If you are an MRU Student who wants to make a difference, I invite you to become a member and co-create events with us! If you are not an MRU Student, we would love to chat with you and collaborate to create meaningful action initiatives for the goals. Please find the MRU SDG Hub contact information in Appendix A, or go to linktr.ee/mru.sdghub.

If you want to dive deeper into the SDGs and universities, take a look at the background information (Appendix B) and recommended resources linked in Appendix A of this paper.

Background

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a framework comprising 17 distinct but interrelated goals that encourage efforts to address complex 21st century problems. The SDGs were developed in 2015 in collaboration between the United Nations (UN) and its 193 member states (almost every country or nation-state around the world) as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Division for Sustainable Development Goals [DSDG], n.d.-b). This was an important time period for international collaboration and policy-making, as other global frameworks such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change were being crafted around this time (DSDG, n.d.-b). The SDGs are significant because of the wide scale of endorsement by state leaders, ideally forming a shared vision to create a future that benefits all members of the earth, plus the earth itself.

The SDGs were designed for intersectional and collaborative action. Even the definition used for sustainable development is phrased in a simple way so it is not a barrier for non-experts to get involved. The common definition for sustainable development is: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 41).

The SDGs are made up of *targets*, several subgoals targeting more specific issues under each goal, and *indicators*, global statistics to track progress on each target (General Assembly, 2015). Key themes in Agenda 2030 include people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships (General Assembly, 2015). People, planet, and prosperity represent the interconnected social, environmental, and economic fields of the goals, respectively. Peace and partnerships are guidelines for implementing the goals, and are the key focuses of goal 16 and 17, respectively. I have focused much of my research on Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17) because collaboration through multi-stakeholder partnerships appears to be a core value in the framework.

The idea that everyone is needed to achieve the goals is very much embedded into the essence of the goals (Bervoets, 2018). "Leave no one behind" became a slogan associated with the goals, which stemmed from a pledge within the 2030 Agenda. This concept refers to systematically marginalized groups and the idea that progress on the goals is not true progress unless every demographic's unique needs and perspectives are included in the process and that they are helped, not harmed, by such progress (General Assembly, 2015).

People Left Behind

However, not everyone agrees the SDGs are as inclusive as they aspire to be. The UN is arguably continuing the history of colonial exploitation by taking Indigenous ideas of sustainability without adequately benefitting or including Indigenous Peoples in the process (Schnurr, 2021; Doherty, 2021). Weber (2017) argues that the 2030 Agenda has a political agenda to implement "highly contested neoliberal ideas" (p. 399) that will sustain inequality and prioritize general universal or global success on the goals over calls to solve problems through systemic change. I think it is important to recognize that the SDGs might not be able to fully achieve transformational change because they do not critique the colonial and unequal system they are founded from.

Indigenous Peoples were not given as much consideration in the SDG consultation process as member-states because the UN is structured only for nation-level involvement, and Indigenous Peoples are not yet considered as separate, self-governing nations (Doherty, 2021). Danika Littlechild, a Cree lawyer, sees merit in the SDGs provided the Canadian Government can also prioritize reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, which seems like a difficult task as they are already struggling to do so (Doherty, 2021). As Littlechild states, because many SDGs do not directly address specific systematically marginalized groups in all the areas where the goals apply, these groups might continue to be excluded in solution efforts.

Based on this information, if post-secondary institutions choose to work with the SDGs, I think they must actively include systematically marginalized groups, addressing their needs as part of the localization process. It is also important to recognize the particular context of the university, reflecting on who is *not* actively included in decision-making processes and committing to change the narrative. This might mean decolonizing and Indigenizing sustainability education and partnering to create Indigenous-led initiatives for sustainability practices. The Knowledge 4 Change Salish Sea Hub does this in partnership with the University of Victoria, the Victoria Native Friendship Center and the Victoria Foundation (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). Their participatory research model focuses on SDG-related capacity-building in communities, shifting power to Indigenous Peoples, 2SLGBTQ+, older adults, youth and other groups often excluded in research.

SDGs have particular relevance in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) as these countries often suffer most severely from problems such as poverty and effects of climate change (British Council & Association of Commonwealth Universities [ACU], 2021). Equitable international partnerships warrants further research regarding power dynamics and wealth distribution (British Council & ACU, 2021).

Figure 1

Note: A group of people being left behind. By J. Sung, 2017, Unsplash.

SDG Dashboard & Trends

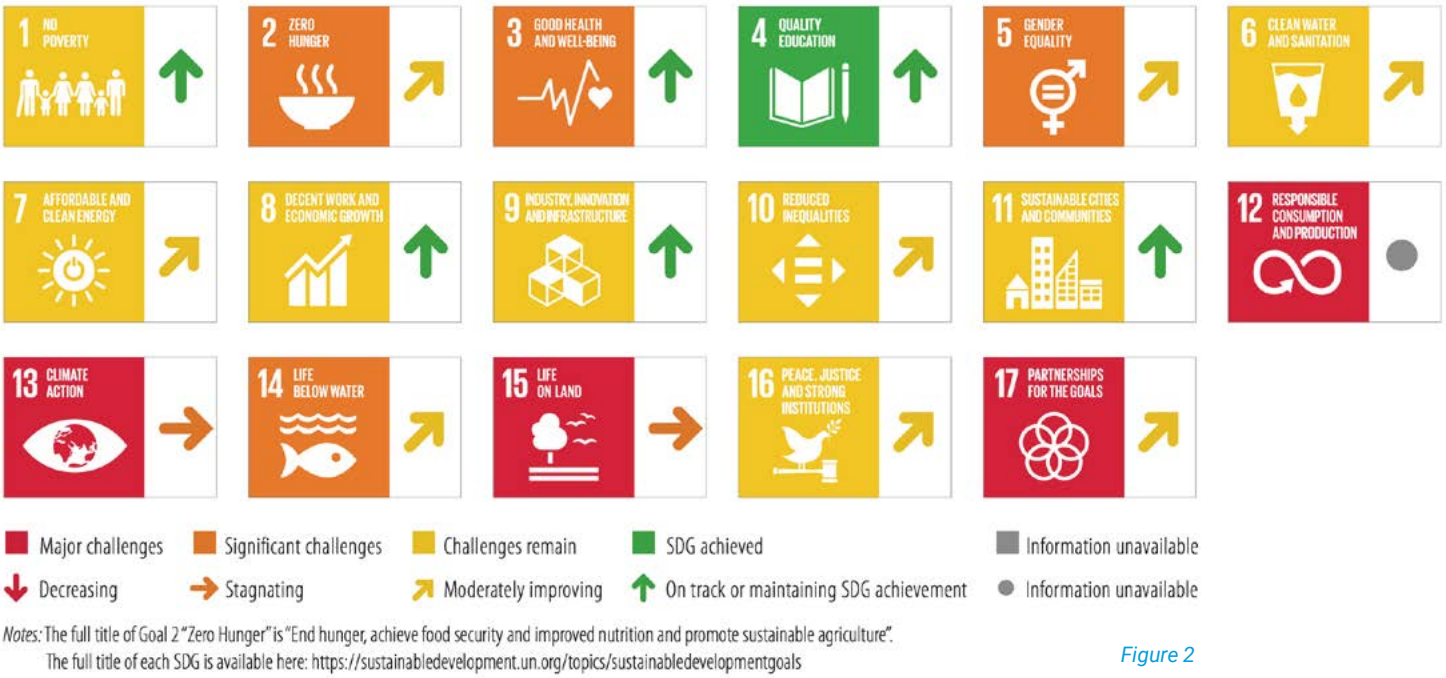


Figure 2

Note: Canada's progress on the SDGs as of 2021. From *Sustainable Development Report 2021* (p. 158), by J. Sachs et al., 2021, Cambridge University Press (https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009106559.010). CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Tracking Progress

Data is an important component in identifying which efforts towards the SDGs are working and which are not (Statistics Division, 2021). Digitization is especially important in this process, particularly for increasing public access to information about the goals (Statistics Division, 2021).

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development is the main platform used to review and track yearly progress on the goals, primarily via Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports within countries (DSDG, n.d.-b). VNRs have increased participation of stakeholders in the nonprofit sector for the goals (International Institute for Sustainable Development [IISD], 2021). But many country-level governments are struggling to implement a progress-tracking system for the goals (IISD, 2021). Less than half of the 193 nations have indicators that can be compared to the global database (Statistics Division, 2021).

As Bervoets (2018) explains, Canada is either failing or not on track to meet most of the goals by 2030 when considering systematically marginalized populations. The SDG framework is useful in this sense as it is bringing attention to areas that need improvement that sometimes get hidden (Bervoets, 2018).

As shown in Figure 2, Canada has achieved only Goal 4 (Quality Education) and is on track to meet Goals 1 (No Poverty), 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) (Sachs et al., 2021). Canada is failing most for Goals 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), 13 (Climate Action), 15 (Life on Land), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Canada's progress on all the other SDGs is somewhere in between. Notably, Canada lacks updated data for all of Goal 12's targets.

However, it is important to note that on a federal level, Canada does have a plan in place to achieve the goals. A preliminary strategy released in June 2019 involved 30 calls to action upon the federal government based on a three-month consultation process (Employment and Social Development Canada [ESDC], 2021d).

The 2021 edition, Moving Forward Together, outlines the vision and an implementation plan for achieving that vision (ESDC, 2021b). Within the Employment and Social Development branch, there is a specialized SDG Unit to lead the implementation. The implementation plan details the involvement of government departments, an annual report, creation of an advisory committee, inclusion of the general public and other stakeholders, as well as the SDG Funding Program (ESDC, 2021b). The SDG Funding Program, established in 2018, promotes partnerships for the goals and supports initiatives from various stakeholders (ESDC, 2021a). The budget for this fund is $59.8 million (ESDC, 2021a) and it has funded 127 projects as of July 2021 (ESDC, 2021c).

Statistics Canada (2021) developed the Canadian Indicator Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals in 2021. This framework combines key ideas from the SDGs and Canada-specific needs, as well as existing or new indicators to track progress. It has an associated database open to the public, which is an important step in including everyone in the SDG knowledge-sharing process.

Post-Secondary Tracking

STARS, or Sustainability Tracking Assessment Rating System is a self-report rating system for post-secondary institutions that takes social, economic, and environmental performance into account (Kistner et al., 2020). STARS Aligned is a guide that shows possible credits that align with the SDG targets for each goal and also indicates what is not covered by the system (Kistner et al., 2020). Because MRU already uses STARS (we have a silver rating; Rolfe, 2020), this would be a great opportunity to connect to the goals.

Times Higher Education (2021) Impact Rankings are a global system for tracking progress on the SDGs in universities. This ranking system might be more meaningful for the public (as STARS is geared toward institutions) and may be important when future students are searching for universities that align with their values to consider applying for.

Problems with Quantitative Indicators

Hickel (2020) believes the SDG Index (now called the Sustainable Development Report), which ranks countries according to their performance on the SDGs, is biased towards wealthier, westernized countries that rank higher despite their environmentally unsustainable consumerism practices.

Numerical representations do not tell the whole story behind the data; we might not even be measuring the right thing, or that thing might not be a direct result of the interventions introduced (Crossette, 2019).

Interactions

The recommended approach for taking action on the SDGs is to use systems thinking to address more than one goal at a time (Magendane & Kapazoglou, n.d.). The goals are interconnected, which means a change in one will affect many others. Nilsson et al. (2018) suggests the use of an interaction framework and database to explore how goals work together synergistically in local and global contexts to improve policy-making and partnerships. At this time, there is not one recommended framework for working with interactions.

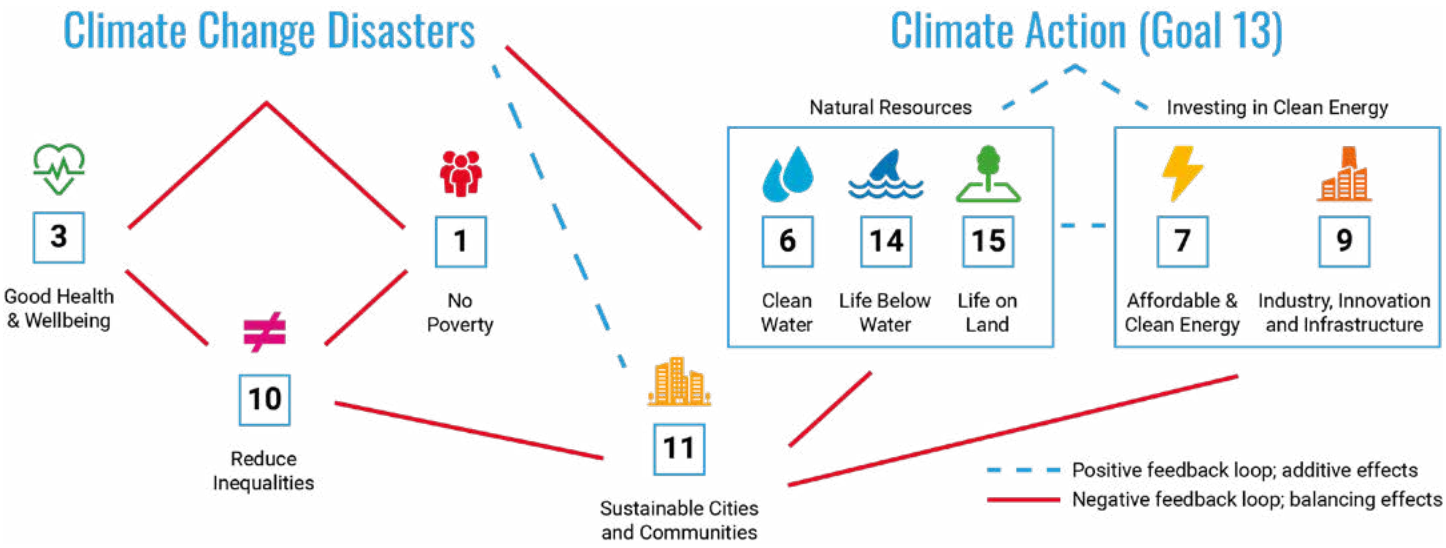
Nor is there consensus in the literature regarding which goals are synergistic, though the majority seem to be, creating opportunities for transformative action (Nilsson et al., 2018). With an exception, Goal 1 (No Poverty) will likely create ripple effects to help achieve many of the other goals (Magendane & Kapazoglou, n.d.).

This lack of consensus might be because of the newness of the goals, limiting the long-term data available to understand the actual effects of goal-related actions (Magendane & Kapazoglou, n.d.). It may also be due to varying contexts and limited knowledge researchers have on the problems involved in the goals (Nilsson et al., 2018).

Despite the universal and global nature of the SDGs, it is recommended that the goals are implemented by prioritizing needs for a particular context (Nilsson et al., 2018). This process is called localization. It is a necessary step in ensuring all levels of society can contribute to the goals.

See the image portraying Goal 13 (Climate Action) as an example of some interactions between the SDGs (also see Soergel et al. (2021) for a more in-depth examination).

Systematically marginalized communities (Goal 10; Reduced Inequalities) face the worst effects of climate-related disasters, such as displacement, which can drastically increase poverty (Goal 1; No Poverty; McCarthy, 2020). Climate action is directly related to Goal 6 (Clean Water), Goal 14 (Life Below Water), Goal 15 (Life on Land) regarding the protection of natural resources and switching to cleaner energies (Goal 7; Affordable and Clean Energy) to invest more in (Goal 9, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure). The shift to cleaner energy will also decrease fossil fuel reliance, decreasing pollution in cities, a target in Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Less pollution also means better health, impacting Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing).



Barriers to Implementing the SDGs

One main barrier to implementing the SDGs is the lack of clarity for steps needed to achieve the SDGs (Horan, 2019). Additional barriers include societal structures preventing multilateral stakeholders from collaborating, as well as moving past business-as-usual short-term needs to a long-term investment in the SDGs (Horan, 2019).

Similarly, the Partnership Accelerator (2020) states that competition via the scarcity mindset, the idea that resources are limited and to be hoarded rather than shared, may be a barrier to creating a shared vision among stakeholders. And Oh (2021) worries that because no specific stakeholders are explicitly pointed out in the official targets or indicators, and there is no "compliance mechanism," we may fail to achieve the SDGs.

Post-Secondary Barriers

A major system barrier in the university context is that disciplines are often "siloed" (SDSN, 2020). Interdisciplinary approaches to learning can be challenging in traditional programs as degrees are designed for deep, specialized learning in one particular field (Bahadur & Puch, 2021). Similarly, universities are bureaucratic institutions, but the rules and regulations can inhibit the ability to collaborate across departments (SDSN, 2020). This structured approach and other university priorities may not readily encourage the innovation or systemic changes needed to achieve the goals.

Additional challenges in implementing the SDGs at a university level include funding, governance, collaboration, and training to create expertise so leaders can disseminate the knowledge to other university bodies (Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education, 2021). See Appendix C for more barriers institutions face in implementing the SDGs.

Post-Secondary Recommendations for Implementing the SDGs

As stated in Moving Forward Together, research from post-secondaries is used to influence policy, data-oriented solutions, and reporting on Canada's progress, such as in the HLPF (ESDC, 2021d). Post-secondary institutions have unique opportunities for research and SDG-relevant projects because they are hubs for research from many disciplines that likely already relate to the SDGs (El-Jardali et al., 2018). They are also innovative spaces that aim to create future leaders and challenge usual ways of thinking (El-Jardali et al., 2018).

Strategizing

It is important to build credibility across the university by demonstrating similarities between the goals and current university practices (Colleges and Institutes Canada, n.d.). Linking the goals to current university efforts also helps better communicate the university's image and values, as well as showcase connections to local and global causes (Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education, 2021), which is helpful in drawing in possible partners, funders and potentially future students as well. SDSN (2020) as well as Long (2021) suggest mapping the university's current efforts that align with the goals and identify areas for improvement as a first step. Collecting and analyzing data is therefore essential in order to track progress and adjust efforts as needed.

Forming a university-wide strategy for sustainable development is the best way to embed sustainability into education, according to SDSN (2020). In combination with localization and cross-disciplinary efforts, strategizing could be an opportunity to develop an interaction framework to target multiple goals at once, as is relevant for the university.

An example of a university-wide strategy is Thompson Rivers University's Campus Strategic Sustainability Plan. They outlined existing campus initiatives, a shared vision, specific steps needed to reach their goals, and uniquely themed priorities in a way that assigned responsibility to specific departments, such as waste management and curricula, aligning to specific targets within the SDGs (Thompson Rivers University, 2019). I highly recommend leafing through it (see Appendix D).

Signing wide-scale commitments like the international SDG Accord can help in developing strategies (Universities Canada, 2021). The SDG Accord can be signed by any academic stakeholder, and helps those who sign recognize their role and capacity in advancing the SDGs. It also serves as a platform for post-secondaries to share key learnings (Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education, 2021), in part through voluntary self-report surveys that contribute to the SDG Accord's overall report on progress and struggles of post-secondary institutions implementing the goals (The SDG Accord, n.d.).

Partnerships and Initiatives

Aside from recommendations for general partnerships, like developing a shared long-term vision and trust (British Council & ACU, 2021), Jeffrey Sachs recommends joining international partnerships (SDSN, 2020) such as Colleges and Institutes Canada, Universities Canada, and SDSN. As with the SDG Accord, these partnerships provide access to the latest research and opportunities for critical conversations about effective strategizing for implementing the SDGs.

The Partnership Accelerator (2020), a collaboration among various UN bodies promoting best-practices for partnerships, highlights the importance of selectively choosing partners to create transformative systemic change that could not happen without collaboration. Each partner should be a complementary stakeholder to provide resources the other is missing and act according to a shared understanding. An example of this in universities is the aforementioned Salish Sea Hub, as research informs community action.

Jeffrey Sachs recommends creating an organizational space for sustainable development work within a university as well as programs for education and deep engagement with sustainable development (SDSN, 2020). Sustainability offices working with the SDGs are expanding beyond the environmental sector and collaborating with more departments across the university for transformative action (Universities Canada, 2021).

Aligned with the interdisciplinary approach, SDSN (2020) recommends action-based learning and solution-oriented practices. For example, living labs connect students to community initiatives to build practical skills and experience but also connect private, public, or non-profit sectors to helpful research (Bahadur & Puch, 2021; Sustainable Development Solutions Network [SDSN], 2020).

Many diverse programs will be necessary to bring the goals to life, as each program has a different level of reach. See Appendix D for a table of possible initiatives and examples in post-secondaries. For example, fellowships and internships offer an opportunity for intensive hands-on learning and engagement with real problems, but those programs are expensive to run, take trial and error to design, and have capacity for only a certain number of students (Bahadur & Puch, 2021). Integrating the SDGs into existing courses, student-led initiatives, and general awareness campaigns are helpful to reach more students but will likely not produce transformative learning. Education and initiatives for the SDGs need to be scalable, long-term, and embedded as a regular educational practice for the goals to be achieved.

Conclusion

Overall, my research showcases the importance of data for tracking progress on the goals, collaboration between sectors and multi-stakeholder partnerships, various educational and action-based initiatives, and having a strategy for a localized and achievable vision for the SDGs.

Because the SDGs are now being used in many sectors, and because all countries have agreed upon them, it is necessary to recognize our role as individuals, academics, and partners in the fight for the goals. The SDGs are an opportunity for collaboration, sharing resources and solution efforts, and scaling our efforts to affect more complex problems. It is up to us to do our best to incorporate systems thinking and systematically marginalized populations into SDG-related initiatives to leave no one behind in achieving the goals. 2030 is just around the corner, but I fully believe if we act now, sharing the vision of the future we want, nothing can stop us from making a difference.

Based on my research and familiarity with MRU, I recommend that MRU starts its sustainability journey by mapping its current programs and co-curricular existing initiatives. Perhaps this will be the next project for the SDG Student Hub. I think using STARS Aligned would be a good first step to begin including SDGs in the university. The Catamount Fellowship and Launchpad, for example, are innovative programs that could easily incorporate elements of the SDGs. I also think it would be incredibly beneficial if the Institutes (particularly the Institute for Environmental Sustainability, the Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship [IIE], and the Institute for Community Prosperity [ICP]) communicated more, so the social and environmental focuses could merge and ICP's systems thinking and IIE's solution development knowledge could be shared to create something truly transformative!

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Appendix A: Recommended Resources

General

- **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): What they are & why they're important.** Pillar Nonprofit Network. https://youtu.be/qAIolKgDPrA

An easy-to-understand overview of the SDG framework as a unique tool for collaboration and change. Bervoets also discusses Canada's lack of progress and what some organizations are doing about it.

- **The SDG partnership guidebook:** A practical guide to building high-impact multi-stakeholder partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals. The Partnering Initiative. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26627SDG_Partnership_Guidebook_0.95_web.pdf

Tools and recommendations for partnering for transformative change on the SDGs. Contains an overview of possible stakeholders such as the private sector, civil society, government, etc. and their roles in a partnership. It does not contain much information regarding academia but seems largely applicable to any long-term partnerships.

- **Engaging citizens for sustainable development: A data perspective.** United Nations University Institute on Computing and Society. https://sdghelpdesk.unescap.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/UNU-CS-DataSD-Report-Engaging-Citizens-20181004-compressed.pdf

An exploration of the roles of citizens and community stakeholders in contributing to the SDGs, particularly regarding data and progress tracking.

- **Projects funded by the Sustainable Development Goals Funding Program.** Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/sustainable-development-goals/projects-funded.html

Check out current projects or initiatives in various provinces across Canada and learn what kinds of projects the funding program covers.

Post-Secondaries

- **SDG action: Practical knowledge for a fairer, safer, sustainable world.** Sustainable Development Solutions Network. https://sdg-action.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SDG-Actions-SDGs-2021.pdf

Similar in format to a magazine, this publication features short articles on international progress on the goals and current events. The SDGs are indexed across the various articles. It explores themes including health, cities, finance, climate, natural resources, and society.

- **Accelerating Education for the SDGs (ESDGs) in universities: A guide for universities, colleges, and tertiary and higher education institutions.** Sustainable Development Solutions Network. https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/be6d1d56/files/uploaded/accelerating-education-for-the-sdgs-in-unis-web_zZuYLaoZRHK1L77zAd4n.pdf

This in-depth guide explores how to implement educational initiatives for the SDGs in post-secondaries from an institutional perspective. It also includes various examples of case studies and initiatives on the goals.

- **Accelerating Education for the SDGs (ESDGs) in universities: Case studies.** Sustainable Development Solutions Network. https://blogs.upm.es/education4sdg/

This website contains global examples of within-curricula, co-curricular, community-based, and staff-based programs for the SDGs in universities.

- **Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals at Canadian universities: A snapshot of activities, initiatives and strategies adopted by institutions across the country.** Canadian Bureau for International Education. https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/IR-PLC-Report-Advancing-the-Sustainable-Development-Goals-at-Canadian-Universities-2.pdf

Case studies showcasing select Canadian universities and their initiatives for the SDGs.

- **STARS Aligned: Using the Sustainability Tracking Assessment & Rating System to report on contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.** Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. https://www.aashe.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/STARS-SDGs6.pdf

This guide explains how STARS, a sustainability tracking system that many post-secondaries are already using, can integrate the SDGs, and outlines the benefits and barriers in doing so. They compare where the SDGs overlap with STARS criteria but also what is not covered by STARS, providing tips and examples for how to fill those gaps.

- **Thompson Rivers University campus strategic sustainability plan 2020–2025.** Thompson Rivers University. https://www.tru.ca/__shared/assets/campus-strategic-sustainability-plan-2020-202547354.pdf

Thompson Rivers University's sustainability plan effectively localizes the SDGs, creating themes based on their own campus priorities. They aligned the themes with the SDGs and connected several specific actions to fill the gaps between where they are now and where they would like to be in the future.

- **Canada K4C Hub (Salish Sea).** United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. https://www.unescochair-cbrsr.org/canada-k4c-hub/

The Salish Sea Hub maximizes the effectiveness of their research through cross-disciplinary partnerships, joining academia with the local community and Indigenous stakeholders. They also shift power and provide capacity-building opportunities for systematically marginalized groups to lead in knowledge creation.

Student Initiatives

- **MRU's SDG Student Hub**. Mount Royal University. https://linktr.ee/MRU.sdghub

MRU students can become a member of our SDG Student Hub to participate in events for education, awareness, and action on the SDGs. If you're not an MRU student but are involved or interested in sustainable development and want to collaborate, please contact us at sdghub@mtroyal.ca

- **University of Waterloo's SDG Student Hub (Impact Alliance).** University of Waterloo. https://www.impactalliance.ca/

The Impact Alliance is a great example of student-led efforts on the SDGs, including an annual solutions hackathon, newsletters based on current events and hot topics, and a student leadership guide.

- **Mobilizing youth for the Sustainable Development Goals: Tools for creating a Sustainable Development Goals alliance on your campus.** Reimagine17. https://www.reimagine17.com/_files/ugd/6c98c1_d95ebdefc9cc46c98782f4edc15b99dd.pdf

This guide explores best practices and tools for student leaders working with the SDGs in post-secondary institutions, including information about organization and management, partnerships, hosting events, and applying for funding.

Appendix B: Additional Information on the SDGs

The Millenium Development Goals

The SDGs are a revamped and expanded version of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which lasted from 2000-2015 (DSDG, n.d.). The MDGs primarily focused on poverty reduction in developing countries. Developing countries are still a big focus in the SDGs as people in those locations often have less access to basic needs and essential services, struggling more from poverty. "No Poverty" is Goal 1 of the 17 SDGs and is described as "the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development" in the 2030 Agenda (General Assembly, 2015, p. 3). The Partnership Accelerator (2020) describes the MDGs as short-term and symptom-based relying on top-down intervention. Conversely, the SDGs promote a long-term systemic and collaborative cross-sector approach (Partnership Accelerator, 2020).

Different Sectors

Horan (2019) argues that a combination of leadership approaches, both top-down governance and bottom-up grassroots efforts are needed to achieve the SDGs. Bottom-up approaches can combine a lot of diverse partners but top-down intervention is needed to find remaining partners and make wide-scale change.

The Private Sector

The Partnership Accelerator (2020) describes the private sector as moving towards shared value models, or a type of business that focuses on more than just profit, or profit that comes from long-term purposeful engagement with sustainable development. It is a profitable market because as the public incorporates sustainability and ethics into their values, businesses will have to adjust their practices. Exploring the SDGs could also be a new, innovative opportunity to appeal to the public (Partnership Accelerator, 2020)

Despite for-profit companies' interest in using the goals, many are struggling to effectively implement them into their company strategies (Scott & McGill, 2018). Scott and McGill (2018) believe this is due to a lack of "strategy, tools, and culture" in developing action plans and progress-tracking measures (p. 7). The authors add that among the 72% of companies that mentioned the SDGs in their reports, most touch on only the surface-level goal or incorporate only goals that they are already progressing on, rather than using the SDGs as an opportunity to take further action.

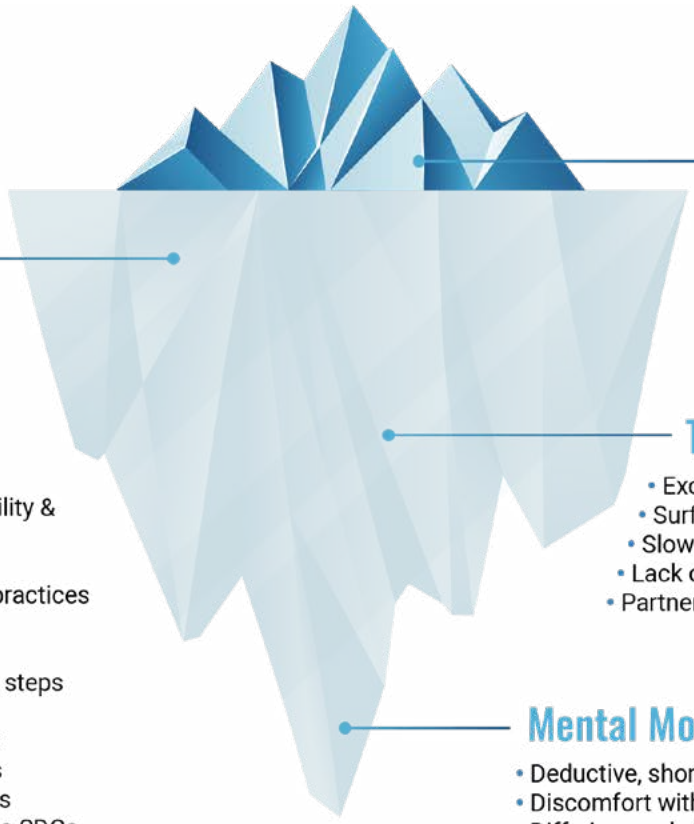
The Nonprofit Sector

Nonprofits are examples of bottom-up, locally-relevant initiatives that help balance other types of stakeholders working on the SDGs (Thinyane, 2018). For example, they are often politically involved and can help hold the government accountable. Community-based organizations serve to connect individuals, particularly those belonging to marginalized groups, to important causes that relate to the goals. Nonprofits often provide unique opportunities for individuals to build leadership skills and actively make progress towards the goals through volunteer or mentorship activities.

Based on my (light) research, I struggled to easily find nonprofit involvement with the SDGs. This could be an interesting topic for further research in understanding the struggles of nonprofit organizations to adopt the goals or advertise their involvement with them.

Appendix C: Barriers to Implementing the SDGs in Post-Secondary Institutions

Figure C1



Event

- Surface-level Change on the SDGs (Struggling to Implement Transformational Change) in Universities

Structures

- Siloed departments
- Bureaucratic / hierarchical / inflexible institutional structures and processes
- Differing social, economic, political and cultural norms
- Lack of funding
- Poor distribution of responsbility & accountability mechanisms
- Power dynamics
- Access to newest data/best practices
- Lack of staff capacity
- Misunderstanding role
- Uncertainty of specific action steps
- Lack of specific indicators
- Data gap for location/context
- Data gap for SDG interactions
- Lack of systems thinking tools
- Lack of basic education on the SDGs
- Lack of shared knowledge about university's current initiatives

Trends/Patterns

- Excluded stakeholders
- Surface-level connections to the SDGs
- Slow change processes
- Lack of stakeholder committment
- Partners not benefitted equally

Mental Models

- Deductive, short-term thinking
- Discomfort with uncertainty/ experimentation
- Differing goals/ visions/ agendas
- Scarcity mindset

Appendix D: SDG Initiatives and Examples in Post-Secondary Settings Table D1

Types of Initiatives	Initiative Examples (with Program Info Linked)
Embedded in curricula	Fleming College of Applied Arts and Technology: Sustainability Outcomes
Sustainable Development degree programs	Masters of Arts in Sustainability
University Strategy	Thompson Rivers University: Campus Strategic University Plan
Sustainability Office/Departments	Columbia University's Earth Institute (policy, engineering, climate)
Co-curricular Programs	SDG Summit (education on the SDGs)
Student Clubs/Partnerships	SDSN Youth: SDG Students Program - SDG Hubs
	ReImagine17
Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)	SDG Academy
Fellowship/Leadership Programs	Kwantlen Polytechnic University: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Open Pedagogy Fellowship
	SDSN Youth: Local Pathways Fellowship
	University of Calgary's Sustainability Leadership Innovation Program
Reporting/Reviews	Stars Aligned
	Thompson Rivers University - Platinum STARS Rating (p. 2).
	THE Impact Rankings
	SDG Accord
Internship/Co-ops	ImpAct Internships program
Work Experience	Canadian Colleges Supporting Six Caribbean Countries Combat Climate Change: Skills to Access the Green Economy Program (SAGE)
Int'l: Exchange programs, field trips	Global Skills Opportunity
Living Labs (Action/Community-based learning)	University of Alberta's Campus as a Living Lab
Entrepreneurship/Hackathons	University of Victoria: Salish Sea Hub
	SDSN Youth: Youth Solutions Program
	University of Waterloo's SDG Impact Challenge
Sustainability Training (Faculty)	AASHE's Centers for Sustainability Across the Curriculum
International Partnerships	University Global Coalition
	CiCan
	Universities Canada
	SDSN