How might we utilize partnerships and the Sustainable Development Goals to create transformative change in post-secondary institutions?

MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY 1910 | Institute for Community Prosperity

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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 17 **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** are:

- A call to action
- A global, shared vision for the future
- Endorsed by the United Nations (UN) and its 193 member states
- Interconnected and complex

(Division for Sustainable Development Goals [DSDG], n.d.-b)

- Part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- Usable by every sector as well as individuals (Division for Sustainable Development Goals [DSDG], n.d.-b).

Data

- Data is needed to evaluate success of solution efforts for the SDGs
- More data is needed to identify consistent synergies and conflicts with SDG targets (Magendane & Kapazoglou, n.d.)
- As of 2021, Canada has a strategy (Statistics Canada, 2021) and funding program (Employment and Social Development Canada [ESDC], 2021) in place for achieving the goals.
- STARS Aligned (Kistner et al., 2020) and the SDG Accord (Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education, 2021) are two means of progress-tracking in post-secondaries

PEOPLE · PLANET · PROSPERITY · PEACE · PARTNERSHIP

Themes: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships, and "Leave no one behind" (General Assembly, 2015) ... Yet Indigenous Peoples are already being left behind (Littlechild as cited in Doherty, 2021).

The SDGs should be **localized** to prioritize a community's needs for that particular context (Nilsson et al., 2018).
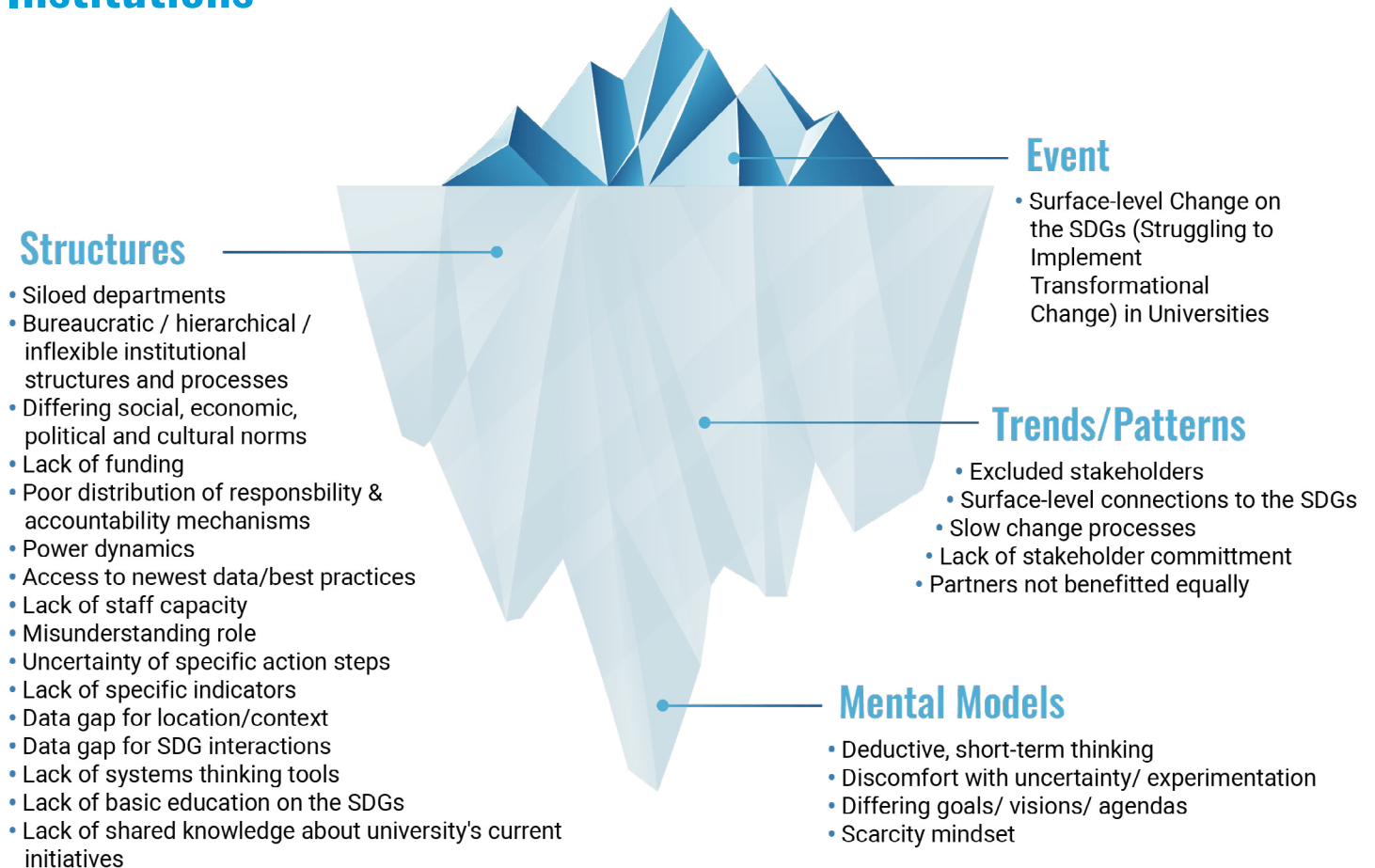
Canada's progress on the SDGs

Major challenges · Significant challenges · Challenges remain · SDG achieved · Information unavailable
Decreasing · Stagnating · Moderately improving · On track or maintaining SDG achievement · Information unavailable

Notes: The full title of Goal 2 "Zero Hunger" is "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture".
The full title of each SDG is available here: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainabledevelopmentgoals

Figure 1

University Role

- Research -> policy, data-oriented solutions, and progress reports (ESDC, 2021d).
- Shape future leaders
- Challenge usual ways of thinking (El-Jardali et al., 2018).

Barriers to Implementing the SDGs in Post-Secondary Institutions

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

Event

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

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

Post-Secondary Recommendations

- Map SDGs to current university efforts (SDSN, 2020; Long, 2021)
- Strategize university-wide (SDSN, 2020)
- Sign commitments (e.g. SDG Accord; Universities Canada, 2021)
- Participate in self-report surveys (e.g. VNRs, STARS Aligned; International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2021; Kistner et al., 2020)
- Create diverse, scalable, and long-term initiatives (Bahadur & Puch, 2021)

- Assign an organizational space for sustainable development work (SDSN, 2020)
- Action-based learning and solution-oriented practices (SDSN, 2020)
- Join international and multi-stakeholder partnerships (SDSN, 2020)
  - Shared vision & trust (British Council & ACU, 2021)
  - Complementary resources (Partnership Accelerator, 2020)

Contact the MRU SDG Student Hub to learn how you can get involved with the SDGs!
linktr.ee/mru.sdghub

SDG Initiatives and Examples in Post-Secondary Settings

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

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