



ARTICLE | COMMUNITIES LOCALIZING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Across Canada, from coast to coast to coast, communities are exploring ways to build a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient future that is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as Agenda 2030. They are doing so through diverse means – from art and storytelling to developing Voluntary Local Reviews to integrating the SDGs into local plans. This article profiles three stories of communities that are leading in advancing Agenda 2030 locally, extracted from the forthcoming resource, *10 – A Guide to Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals in Your Community*, to be published in late August 2021.

WHY THE SDGS, WHY NOW

The Sustainable Development Goals are a set of 17 interconnected global goals that serve as a shared vision for a better and more sustainable future. Created in 2015 by the United Nations, they are universal goals for humanity to achieve by 2030.

In late 2019, world leaders declared 2020-2030 as the Decade of Action, calling for a worldwide push to achieve the goals. Soon after the Decade of Action began, COVID-19 transformed everything. The pandemic and associated lockdowns reversed progress that had been made toward the goals in countries around the world, including Canada, while also exposing cracks in the system as numerous inequities were brought to light. As we continue on the path from recovery to resilience, the SDGs are more urgent now than ever before.

The stories below, from Kelowna, British Columbia, the northern territories, and Quebec City, highlight three unique ways to connect the local to the global and galvanize action for the SDGs.

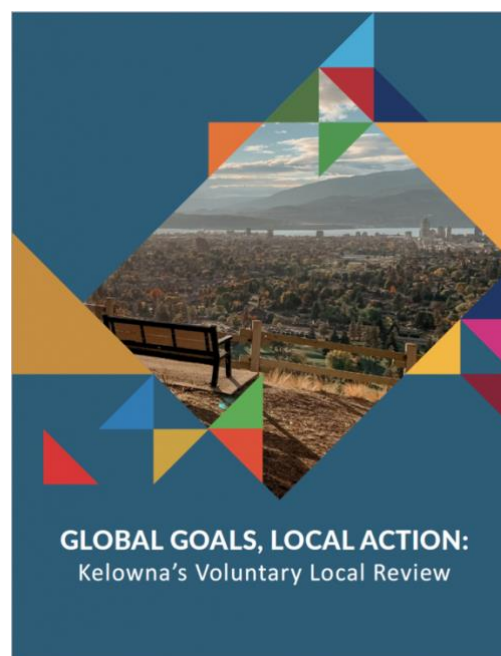


KELOWNA – LEADING THE WAY WITH CANADA’S FIRST VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW

When Kelowna published its [Voluntary Local Review](#) (VLR) in April 2021, it became the first Canadian community to do so—paving a way for other cities and communities to advance the global goals. Kelowna’s VLR, led by the British Columbia Council for International Cooperation (BCCIC) alongside the Global Empowerment Coalition of the Central Okanagan (GECCO), was developed through municipal, regional, provincial and federal government agencies, civil society organizations, academics, and Indigenous organizations engagement.

The VLR started with an extensive scan of local SDG initiatives underway community-wide, followed by review of the City’s sustainability agenda. Simultaneously, the team undertook a full review of subnational SDG data from a host of Canadian organizations, collecting applicable data and identifying established Canadian targets and indicators. Where data gaps existed, experts in the field were consulted and proxy indicators were developed. The team reviewed and aligned the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s \(TRC\) Calls to Action](#) with the SDGs. The TRC documents the damaging impacts of Canada’s colonial history and residential school system, and outlines a path towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Through consultation with the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society, and insights and learnings from the First Nations Health Authority among other First Nations programs and initiatives, the team identified barriers in achieving the SDGs, alongside community-level support required to address them.

Through this intensive research and consultative VLR process, the team developed a set of 28 outcome based, quantifiable city-level indicators localized to Kelowna’s geographical and sociocultural context. Based on these indicators, trends are shown, and challenges and progress on achieving each SDGs clearly outlined. Examples of effective programs underway within the City of Kelowna, the Regional District of the Central Okanagan, Province of British Columbia, Indigenous organizations, and CSOs are showcased, and recommendations for improved success, highlighted. Kelowna’s VLR is comprehensive without being overwhelming. It tells Kelowna’s SDG story through detailed data, while highlighting many successful and replicable programs and initiatives that are transforming the community. It connects the global goals to local action in a way that informs, inspires, and mobilizes other communities.



NORTHERN TERRITORIES – HARNESSING THE POWER OF STORYTELLING THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

In 2019 the Northern Council for Global Cooperation (NCGC) asked nine photographers working across Canada's three northern territories to showcase the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals through photography and storytelling. The photographers profiled initiatives in their communities — from civil society, government, business, community organizations, and youth — that show some of the

ways that Northerners are working together to achieve a more sustainable and just planet. The result is a powerful [collection of images and narration](#) directly from communities in Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut.

Each photographer worked with their community to determine how best to represent these goals from their unique perspective. "What do the SDGs mean to you?" elicits a wide range of responses, which differ greatly depending on who one asks. Northern perspectives on the SDGs are particularly unique, given the North's distinct realities, cultures, worldviews, and geography.



Mason Mantla: Behchoko, NWT

Storytelling is a powerful tool for change – it can educate, inspire, and galvanize action while shedding light on how the global goals are interpreted in a local context. NCGC's SDG Photography Project is a leading example of how storytelling can bring life to the SDGs and share insights on what the goals mean to specific communities in a language that is universal and accessible to all.



Shayla Snowshoe: Fort MacPherson, NWT

NCGC also developed an interactive [SDG map](#) with hundreds of organizations working on the SDGs across the territories, which helps paint a picture of how Northern communities are already contributing to the SDGs while also enabling new connections to be made. The SDG Photography Project and the Northern SDG Map are just the beginning of NCGC's work towards localizing the SDGs in the North. Building on the momentum of those projects, they are currently curating a global studies program for northerners with a core focus on Indigenous worldviews and the unique ways in which the North is connected to the world.

QUEBEC CITY – ALIGNING ITS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY TO THE SDGS

Quebec City's [Sustainable Development Strategy](#), released in June 2021, is a leading example of how cities and communities can align their own strategic planning with the global goals.

The City of Quebec partnered with University of Quebec in Chicoutimi (UQAC) to pilot a unique approach to prioritizing targets at the local level. Three criteria were established to prioritize which SDG targets were most relevant: 1) Performance – the degree to which progress had been made; 2) Importance – how essential it is to the community; and 3) Skills/competency – the level of responsibility and authority that the City holds over its achievement. Priority targets were those that scored low on performance, high on importance, and where the City had the authority and capacity to intervene.

Representatives from 27 groups covering 23 administrative divisions within the City participated in the prioritization. The team also engaged the broader community to incorporate their input. The process led to 25 targets being prioritized for Quebec City, spanning 16 of the 17 SDGs. The Sustainable Development Strategy includes a detailed analysis of local sustainable development actions and initiatives related to the 16 SDGs that were retained.



The Sustainable Development Strategy also outlines five common, societal challenges faced in Quebec City and beyond: social cohesion, health, decarbonization, resilience and transition. A Climate Action and Transition Plan and a Solidarity Action Plan were developed to address these challenges. Within the Strategy as a whole and each of the Action Plans, the SDGs are the guiding framework. Beyond simply aligning its overall vision with Agenda 2030, Quebec City's Strategy has gone much deeper than most in terms of integrating the SDGs into every element, from the vision and timeline to the targets and actions. Partnering with the research sector and benefitting from its academic rigour was a key factor contributing to Quebec City's comprehensive approach.

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.