



# ARTICLE | EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND POVERTY

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The devastating effects of climate change will be felt most profoundly by those who least contributed to the problem, namely those living in poverty and other marginalized populations. How can communities address climate change in a way that ensures no one is left behind? And how can they end poverty in a way that has a positive environmental impact? This article supports communities in taking a holistic approach to tackling these interrelated challenges.

## FROM CLIMATE ACTION TO CLIMATE JUSTICE

There is widespread consensus among Canadians that we need to take urgent action on climate change. Since August 2018, more than 500 governments in Canada have recognized that climate change is a [serious emergency](#) that requires dramatic and immediate action. In April 2021, the federal government announced a new, more ambitious climate target of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 40% from 2005 emission levels by 2030 – something that is increasingly seen as necessary given the emerging science.

Fortunately, many municipalities are taking a leading role in addressing climate change through action plans for mitigation and adaptation. Over 450 municipalities have joined the [Partners for Climate Protection](#) and have developed more than 428 local climate change action plans. More than 300 Canadian municipal leaders are also working collectively through the [Climate Caucus](#) to advance climate policies to drive systems level transformations within communities.

As the urgency of the climate issue has come into focus, so too has the reality that Canada's most vulnerable populations will be the hardest hit by climate change and extreme weather, despite having contributed the least to it. Climate justice pushes us to find solutions to climate change that improve opportunities for those populations



and ensure that no one is left behind. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or Agenda 2030, is helpful in that regard. The framework provides a social justice and equity lens on the Paris Agreement, helping us think about the synergies and trade-offs between the interrelated issues of climate, energy, poverty, inequalities, health, food security, and economic vitality.

Efforts to address climate change through adaptation and mitigation need to centre poverty reduction and voices of those with lived experience. Poverty reduction collaboratives (e.g. the 330+ communities that are part of Tamarack's Communities Ending Poverty network) can be a strong link within communities to connect these efforts. Not only will this lead to greater climate justice, but it also provides a framework and processes to engage more citizens and sectors into climate action.

“The Sustainable Development Goals provide an equity lens on the Paris Agreement”

## OPPORTUNITIES TO MULTI-SOLVE

As the [Global Risk Report 2020](#) highlights, we live in a complex and interconnected world. Recognizing areas of connection and overlap between ending poverty and addressing climate change is essential for addressing both in ways that are sustainable into the future. Addressing climate change without addressing poverty, for instance, can impact social stability, while missing out on opportunities to put forward policies and actions that can improve both.

Alternatively, taking a whole-of-society approach to addressing resilience, climate change and poverty reduction can [help reduce vulnerability and make Canada stronger](#). By connecting these two issues, community-based strategies can take advantage of [multisolving](#) – solutions that solve multiple problems with just one intervention. Fortunately, we are seeing movement towards this in areas of [food security](#), [affordable energy](#), [housing](#), and [transportation](#).

The opportunities for multi-solve approaches to address climate action and poverty reduction are still being developed and best practices are still emerging. However, there are key lessons from work in food security, transportation, energy poverty and housing that are outlined below:

### Food Security

While we know that climate change will have an impact on food systems, there is a [lack of understanding around of specific health risks that this will pose in Canada](#). The impacts of climate change on food security are complex; however, we know that increased food insecurity will have a greater impact on vulnerable populations leading to worsened health outcomes. Meanwhile, ensuring sufficient access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food can be done in a way that is consistent with climate mitigation efforts, as food production and food waste are large sources of carbon emissions.



Harvest Algoma in Sault Ste Marie

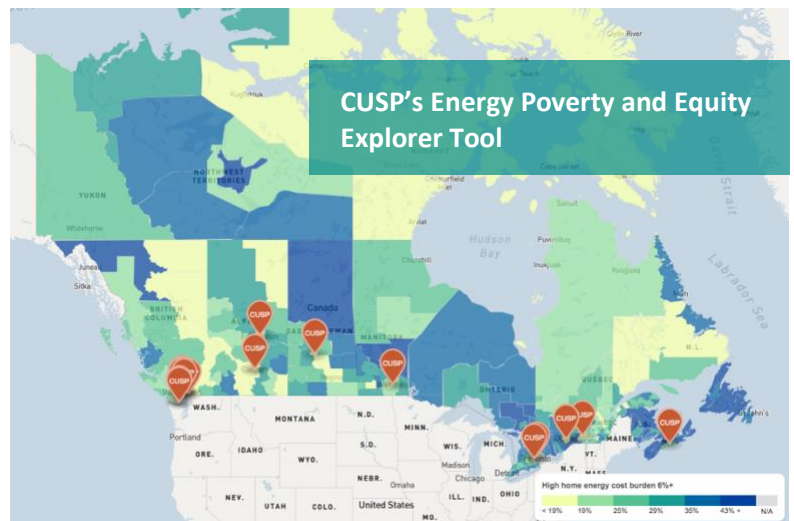
Fortunately, addressing food insecurity can provide a multi-solve solution to supporting individuals experiencing poverty, while strengthening local food systems and reducing our ecological footprint. For instance, Harvest Algoma, as part of the Sault Ste Marie' poverty reduction strategy, [is increasing the amount of food rescued, opening the door for regional surplus distribution and increasing farmers' yield](#). The above supports climate adaptation and addresses food insecurity together.

## Transportation

Transportation is Canada's fastest growing source of GHG emissions. It is also the largest community GHG sector, driven in large part by the use of personal vehicles. Affordable transit is an important mechanism to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that occur in municipalities, while also being a significant [driver for poverty reduction](#). By developing affordable transit systems that support the needs of vulnerable populations, municipalities can improve their economic position, address environmental concerns, and improve social cohesion. These systems open the doors for employment and affordability for individuals experiencing poverty, connect people in the community, and support foot traffic for small business, while reducing the need for private vehicle use. Affordable transit, then, is a great example of a multi-solve solution.

## Energy Poverty

Approximately [20% of households in Canada](#) struggle to meet their home energy needs. Energy poverty is connected to other major issues of equity and affordability, which can be addressed together locally to reduce poverty. With funding from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the [Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners](#) (CUSP) network is working with 16 municipalities to develop and deliver programs for clean energy that will help to address [energy poverty](#) while also supporting renewable forms of energy production. CUSP also developed the Energy Poverty and Equity Explorer Tool to share relevant data about these issues locally. One thing that the tool has made clear is that energy poverty is not only an income poverty issues; race, gender and other factors are also key determinants. This work is impactful as it addresses immediate needs for clean energy, increases affordability for vulnerable populations, and makes it easier to adopt new clean technologies.



## Housing

Canada's housing stock is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Many communities will face hotter and drier summers, more sporadic weather and an increase risk of flooding. This will have a serious impact on affordable housing and [disproportionately affect the most vulnerable](#). Fortunately, housing providers like [BC Housing](#) are leading the way on both adaptation and mitigation efforts that will address climate change and housing affordability. Through *livegreen*, BC Housing is integrating its financial, social and environmental decision making, while innovating its construction, renovations and

management to address the social and environmental impacts of climate change. It is also acting as a change agent supporting [others to take actions toward sustainability](#). As an example, through a partnership with the BC Non-Profit Housing Association called *CleanBC: Social Housing Incentive Program*, BC Housing is helping affordable housing operators reduce their greenhouse gas emissions while supporting the affordability of those units. Today [54% of affordable housing](#) units are designed to meet the energy and sustainability targets set provincially.

## TAKING ACTION LOCALLY

We must work immediately to address the human contributions to climate change and the impacts of the climate crisis on our communities. By implementing multi-solve approaches to address climate change and poverty reduction, local communities can increase their vibrancy, end poverty, and build back better through green solutions to food insecurity, transportation, energy poverty, housing, and other issues.

Here are a few questions to reflect on when considering how to apply this thinking in your community:

- What opportunities do you see in the areas of food security, transportation, energy poverty and housing to address both climate change and poverty?
- In which other areas might there be opportunities to multi-solve for poverty and climate change?
- What obstacles or barriers do you foresee when taking a holistic approach to these inter-related issues?
- How might you engage diverse groups (e.g., those with lived and living experience, community organizations and non-profits, local government, business, residents) to co-create solutions in your community?

To learn more about Tamarack's Climate Transition's work and what is happening in communities across Canada to address the Sustainable Development Goals through a whole-of-society approach visit <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/communityclimatetransitions>.

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