



**Prioritizing Indigenous
Leadership to Advance the
SDGs in Nogojiwanong |
Peterborough**

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KWIC and GreenUP respectfully acknowledge that the Williams Treaties First Nations are the stewards and caretakers of these lands and waters in perpetuity, and that they continue to maintain this responsibility to ensure their health and integrity for generations to come.

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SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS

What are the UN Sustainable Development Goals?

The 2030 Agenda was adopted by the United Nations general assembly in 2015. It is a framework of seventeen interconnected goals, referred to as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs focus on economic, social and environmental themes including sustainable development, poverty, and climate change. At the heart of the 2030 Agenda is the idea of equity, or ‘Leaving No One Behind.’ For more information about leaving no one behind and the Sustainable Development Goals Framework, please visit the [UN SDGs website](#).

About this project

In March 2019, Kawartha World Issues Centre (KWIC), GreenUP, Fleming College, and Trent University hosted a Community Forum called Understanding the UN Sustainable Development Goals: Canada’s Commitment and the Local Connections. Later that year, KWIC applied for Sustainable Development Goals Program Funding, in partnership with GreenUP, in order to build upon the foundation established at this forum. The grant was awarded in March 2020 and concluded in March 2021.

Advancing the 2030 Agenda Peterborough/ Nogojiwanong has four main objectives:

- 1. Raise awareness of and support for the 2030 Agenda;
- 2. Enhance multi-stakeholder efforts toward the Agenda by building partnerships and bridging efforts across sectors;
- 3. Ensure that progress on the 2030 Agenda leaves no one behind, including vulnerable and marginalized groups; and,
- 4. Foster and integrate Indigenous knowledge into approaches and efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Five Action Teams were established to further these objectives in relation to priorities identified at the 2019 forum. Four of the teams focused on specific SDGs: No Poverty (SDG 1), Quality Education (SDG 4), Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6), and Climate Action (SDG 13). The fifth group, called the Indigenous Leadership Action Team (ILAT), and guided and supported the work of the other four teams.

The Indigenous Leadership Action Team emerged from a strong interest amongst participants at the 2019 Community Forum to meaningfully prioritize Indigenous knowledge, practice, and leadership as we work in partnership to achieve the UN SDGs. Together, the Action Team has imagined ways to build momentum toward centering Indigenous leadership and leaving no one behind. This report introduces how Indigenous peoples are involved in the SDGs and summarizes the Action Team’s insights and recommendations.

*In this report, the term ‘Indigenous’ will be used with both an upper and lower case ‘I’. Indigenous with an uppercase ‘I’ refers to the definition from the Constitution Act, 1982, subsection 35(2) referring to the First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada. The term indigenous with a lowercase ‘i’ refers to any peoples originating or occurring naturally in a particular place; native (Oxford Languages Definition).

Indigenous Peoples in the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda, which strongly focuses on human rights and reducing inequalities, is especially important for indigenous peoples around the world who are marginalized and oppressed. While there are no SDGs specifically made for indigenous peoples, they are referenced six times in the final resolution. (See Indigenous Peoples and the 2030 Agenda Infographics)

To move this work forward, “There is a strong commitment in the 2030 Agenda to empower and engage indigenous peoples in implementing and reviewing progress in achieving the goals.” (2) Canada’s commitment to the 2030 Agenda affirms the need for the government, stakeholders and Indigenous peoples to work together to create a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world. By reviewing and evaluating the implementation of the SDGs, Indigenous communities can hold governments accountable to these targets on the world stage.

Indigenous Peoples in SDG Data & Indicators

Indigenous communities are often left out of official national statistics, leaving significant gaps in data that impairs the ability to accurately track national progress. One solution is to collect disaggregated data, which refers to data that is collected for separate groups to track inequalities and progress specific for certain communities (2). The 2030 Agenda calls for “the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts” (target 17.18). Disaggregated data is clearly needed to effectively monitor progress for the national context.

To overcome these data gaps, Indigenous communities can collect their own data to effectively track progress, and ultimately respond to the priorities and aims of their own communities and Nations (3). The First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) can provide tools and resources to support communities in collecting their own data. Nationally, this framework is set out by the [First Nations Principles of OCAP®](#) (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession) which are a set of standards that establish how First Nations data should be collected, protected, used, or shared (4). They are the *de facto* standard for how to conduct research with First Nations.

The Impact of Covid-19 on Indigenous Peoples

Covid-19 has impacted the world and our ability to advance the 2030 Agenda, and it poses additional threats to Indigenous communities. Indigenous Elders are especially vulnerable to Covid-19, and every time Indigenous communities lose knowledge holders, their collective survival, continuity of knowledge, and distinct ways of life are impacted (5). Additional risks that Indigenous peoples face from the pandemic include a combination of, “health conditions as well as lack of access to protective equipment, sanitation and health and medical services” (5). The 58 Indigenous communities that continue to have long term drinking water advisories in effect are an example (6).

To protect themselves, many Indigenous communities have self-isolated. There are further systemic inequalities exposed when the national response to the virus doesn’t reach Indigenous communities in regards to accurate information, financial support, food packages, relief items and virus testing. Resourcing and assistance from the state is not equally distributed, which leaves many communities fending for themselves. Additionally, the national response to the pandemic is not designed with Indigenous people’s participation, and enforcing strict lockdowns in Indigenous communities, “result in the loss of livelihoods, hunger, worsening poverty, criminalization, land grabbing, increasing violence against Indigenous women and girls, among others” (5). There are also serious struggles with groups with vested interests in coming into Indigenous peoples’ territories during the pandemic.

To end the discrimination and injustices amplified by the pandemic, there must be accelerated action and delivery of the 2030 Agenda through Indigenous leadership in addressing these issues that are unique to each community. Indigenous peoples must be key decision makers in the response to Covid-19 for their communities, in the implementation of SDGs, and in progress evaluation at all levels. (5)

Localizing is the process of taking into account subnational contexts in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, from the setting of goals and targets, to determining the means of implementation and using indicators to measure and monitor progress.

Source: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/commitments/818_11195_commitment_ROADMAP%20LOCALIZING%20SDGS.pdf

Where Does Canada Stand?

In their voluntary national review, Canada claims they provide support to ensure Indigenous peoples are key partners in achieving the 2030 Agenda. The Government states they are forging new relationships with Indigenous peoples, “based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership” (7). Canada states, “For too long, Indigenous peoples in Canada have had to prove the existence of their inherent rights and fight to have them recognized and fully implemented” (7). In an attempt to address this issue, Canada drafted a Recognition and Implementation of Indigenous Rights Framework in 2018. However, it was rejected by Indigenous Nations across Canada for many reasons, including the rushed approach and emphasis on the supremacy of the Canadian Constitution (10).

If Canada is to advance the 2030 Agenda leaving no one behind, Canada must do better to build meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples and empower communities. In the 2030 Agenda, “73 out of the 169 targets have substantial links to the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” (2) The pathway to building good relationships can be realized through the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) Calls to Action, and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Final Report. To advance the SDGs, we must address and eliminate the stark inequalities, marginalization and poverty faced by Indigenous communities so we can all heal and move forward in a good way together.

INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP ACTION TEAM AND PRIORITY SDGs

The Indigenous Leadership Action Team met three times between October 2020 and January 2021. Together, we discussed how local efforts to advance the SDGs can and should be centred around Indigenous knowledge and leadership and ensure that no one is left behind. We began ‘localizing’ or adapting the SDG Framework to better reflect needs and priorities within our communities. We looked at each priority SDG from a lens on how it applies to Indigenous communities or not, and what local First Nations are doing to further each one locally.



SDG 1: No Poverty

As a direct result of colonization and forced assimilation, Indigenous peoples experience the highest levels of poverty in Canada. Tracking poverty is complicated in Canada without a national definition of poverty. Poverty can be defined in absolute terms (the accessibility of resources necessary for survival) or relative terms (in relation to some average standard of living within a specific region or community) (1).

For the Indigenous Leadership Action Team (ILAT), although poverty literally means not having enough to meet your basic needs, how we live and the social constructs we live in will impact the way we meet those needs. This is why the definition of poverty from an Indigenous worldview is very different from the Western concept. For example, Indigenous communities do not base wealth on monetary resources. Wealth to Indigenous peoples means you have what you need physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually, and are in good relationship with your community, ancestors, future generations, and non-human relatives. For Indigenous peoples, no poverty means the community is looking after each other and ensuring everyone has access to what they need to thrive in all aspects of our being.

Assets that are available locally to advance No Poverty for Indigenous peoples include:

- The many social services that Hiawatha and Curve Lake First Nations provide to their members including affordable housing and healthcare
- Initiatives and organizations that provide food: such as the wild meat collection and distribution in Curve Lake and Hiawatha First Nation, and “Cooking on a Budget” cooking lessons in Hiawatha
- Peterborough Indigenous Community Support Group - Hiawatha and Curve Lake First Nation members and Urban Indigenous Agencies meet to touch base and allocate resources
- Friendship centres off territory and community centres on territory

Those who are often left behind and not given a voice in this work include:

- Folks living with mental health and addictions stemming from colonialism
- Elder care - especially in the COVID-19 context



SDG 4: Quality Education

Indigenous peoples, in particular Indigenous women and girls, face many obstacles within the formal education system. At the same time, Indigenous languages and knowledge systems are often not reflected in formal education. SDG 4 provides an opportunity to ensure inclusive, equitable, quality education and to promote life-long learning opportunities for indigenous children, youth, adults, including indigenous persons with disabilities (3).

For the ILAT, it is very important that: Learning on/about/from the land and culture through Indigenous languages (Anishinaabemowin locally) is vital for Indigenous communities; Language is the ontology and epistemology and methodology for life; Intergenerational education is key (learning between Elders and youth, for example); Recognize and respect the fundamental and cultural differences to approaching education; Working together requires an understanding of both Western and Indigenous standards, definitions and worldviews of what it means to have quality education; Curriculum content should be relevant and apply to local communities, telling the truth of our shared history.

The ILAT identified the need for more access to affordable Indigenous community and land-based education. They also called for educational reform for non-indigenous sectors of society to ensure learning outcomes are relevant for Indigenous children and also historically accurate.

Assets that are available locally to advance Quality Education for Indigenous peoples include:

- Organizations and learning centres that offer Indigenous education such as the Peterborough Native Learning Centre.
- Individual Knowledge Holder’s organizations such as Canadian Bushcraft, based in Hiawatha First Nation.
- Indigenous education in cooperation with Western educational institutions. Good examples of this include the many opportunities based in Trent University such as the First People’s House of Learning, the TRACKS Youth Program, the Annual Elder’s Gathering and the Indigenous Women’s Symposium.

Those who are often left behind and not given a voice in this work include:

- Indigenous youth and adult learners
- Racialized and marginalized communities and individuals
- Low income people and families



SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

Water is becoming a scarce resource due to privatization and pollution, with no recognition of Indigenous peoples’ inherent and legal rights to water within their territories. Likewise, Indigenous peoples are often discriminated against with regards to access to drinking water and sanitation. Thus, Indigenous communities’ rights must be recognized and their capacity should be strengthened so that they can fully participate in improving water and sanitation

management. SDG 6 aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all and must therefore include a special focus on the situation of Indigenous peoples and their approach to water governance (3).

For the ILAT, it is very important to: Honor the sacredness and spirit of Nibi (water); Acknowledge women’s particular responsibilities to Nibi; Dedicate and protect space for Indigenous knowledge in water management; Connect water governance to treaty and inherent rights; and, Emphasize the interconnectedness between water and health as a matter of equity.

Assets that are available locally to advance Clean Water and Sanitization for Indigenous peoples include:

- The Sacred Water Circle
- Water Walks and prayer for the water. Prayer can change water molecules.
- Peterborough's Watershed Protection Plan that includes Curve Lake and Hiawatha First Nations
- Water Declaration of the First Nations in Ontario (2008)
- Advocacy from Indigenous peoples and allies, finding solutions to water issues and protecting water ecosystems

Those who are often left behind and not given a voice in this work include:

- Curve Lake and Hiawatha have boil water advisories.

Being downstream, Hiawatha First Nation disproportionately suffers from the Peterborough wastewater treatment plant’s discharge.

- Local Indigenous communities need capacity to develop protocols and policies to protect water according to their worldviews.

Organizations that need to heed these policies and protocols include: Trent Severn Waterway, Trent University, Peterborough Utilities, Ontario Parks, Parks Canada, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.



SDG 13: Climate Action

Climate Change poses extreme threats to the health of the Earth and the survival of so many species, including humanity. Indigenous peoples' relationships with their territories and their diverse, sustainable food systems is exactly what we all need to emulate to take effective climate action, “It is, and always have been, Indigenous communities that know how to best take care of the land and protect it” (9). SDG 13 aims to take urgent action to combat climate change

and its impacts, and particularly focuses on Indigenous peoples’ contributions to mitigate climate change while supporting their resilience and adaptive capacity (3).

This is what Climate Action means to the ILAT: Traditionally, when we take life (eg. hunting, trapping, gathering), we put our semaa (tobacco) down for that spirit. If we take a tree, we plant another tree in its place. Related teachings: Everything is connected. What we do to the earth we do to ourselves. There are consequences to our behaviour. Don't take more than you need and take care of ecosystems. Our "resources" are not capital but are relatives that humans are responsible to treat with respect. We need to teach the youth and all peoples to have a good reciprocal relationship with other beings.

Assets that are available locally to advance Clean Water and Sanitization for Indigenous peoples include:

- Alderville Black Oak Savannah - Alderville First Nation and the Provincial Government of Ontario exemplifies appropriate co-management practices
- Manoomin (Wild Rice) revitalization: Williams Treaty partners, First Nations’ Rights & Resources Committees and Manoomin harvesters
- Indigenous land keeping/management practices and food systems are supported by numerous institutions and organizations including the Near Urban Nature Project, Ontario Youth Conference for Mother Earth, Conservation Through Reconciliation Partnership, Kawartha Land Trust, etc.

Those who are often left behind and not given a voice in this work include:

- All life in nature: Nature shows us what is healthy and what we need to do
- Hunters, trappers, gatherers - Indigenous peoples living on the land can share what they see, hear, and feel from climate change to support monitoring and adaptation

TRANSFORMING THE SDGS WITH INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

To advance the SDGs in Canada means to improve the conditions for Indigneous peoples, it must be done by and for Indigenous communities to be truly empowering, equitable, and sustainable. This requires the administration of the inherent rights and self-determination of Indigenous peoples and their Nations, whose holistic approach to development and progress would benefit all. The SDGs must adapt to Indigenous peoples' knowledge systems and learn from their land-based societies. The responsibility falls upon Canada to give resources back to the original peoples, including, “not only the fiscal capacity to make necessary, community-specific and culturally-relevant decisions, they must also have the legal autonomy to do so without interference or imposition from other bodies of power” (9). This would free the people and the land from colonial oppression that has caused the dire situation that we collectively face.

Indigenous peoples understand the world through Indigenous knowledge - a worldview that is sustainable and equitable at its core. Indigenous knowledge is a living process that is meant to grow and adapt, passed on through generations, and the quantity and quality of knowledge transfer is subjective to each individual. Indigenous knowledge is shared through experiential learning, sacred places, ceremonies, oral tradition, songs and dance, which makes Indigenous language vital to passing on Indigenous knowledge (8). Indigenous knowledge resides in the language, along with the culture, history and heritage.

The Indigenous Leadership Action Team called for more ways to share their knowledge, culture, and understanding of our responsibilities to care for the Earth, water, one another, and all our relations, including connections to the SDGs. For example, the ILAT identified the connection between the SDGs and Mino Bimaadziwin, meaning, “the Good Life”. Mino Bimaadziwin encompasses the values, norms and conceptualisation of how we live and progress

that has been passed down from Indigenous ancestors, “which comprises aspects such as the rights to land and resources, culture, identity and self-determination” (8).

The ILAT also identified the need for Indigenous communities to create their own metrics to indicate progress towards their own definitions and goals, respecting the diversity of their peoples. This will ensure that localizing the SDGs benefits Indigenous communities equally, that targets are relevant and culturally appropriate, and do not negatively affect Indigenous peoples' rights and development (3, p. 27). One barrier our team struggled with was the structure of the SDGs being siloed into 17 separate goals to be interpreted linearly. They prefer to see the goals represented cyclically instead of in boxes, to better illustrate how the goals are all interconnected and relate to each other.

Finally the ILAT identified the need for cross-cultural learning and working together. Anne Taylor shared principles she learned from Dr. Henry Lickers, Haudenosaunee Edler of the Seneca Nation, Turtle Clan, concerning engagement with Indigenous communities called the 3 Es:

- **Equality** – having an equal voice at the table;
- **Empowerment** – are you teaching us in a way that we can then take over teaching to others?;
- **Equity** – are you funding us to engage in the work or are you setting us up for failure?

Elder Henry’s principles indicate what ethical engagement looks like. Our project’s Indigenous Consultant, Gary Pritchard Jr., expands upon these principles in the Indigenous Collaborative Programming report. The importance of engaging Indigenous peoples in achieving sustainable development on their territories is non-negotiable, and learning how to do this from Indigenous peoples themselves is how this is achieved.

Next steps that were identified by the ILAT include:

- More access to cross-cultural land-based learning to build stronger relationships with each other and the landscapes.
- Create more resources and opportunities for youth to be involved.
- Identify Indigenous champions locally, and models that are working in this area.
- Create better relationships between local decision makers and Indigenous communities.
- Start with small, achievable targets, then aim for longer-term, more ambitious targets.
- Create policies that mandate engaging with Indigenous communities.
- Don't just 'bring in' Indigenous Knowledge within the existing system, entirely shift it.
- Move beyond 'us and them' to have a collective viewpoint on how we live and move forward together.

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