

Bridging to Progress: Reinvigorating Transformative Change Towards Global Goals

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With only a few years for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, the world faces a critical juncture in assessing its advancements towards environmental and social equity. The impending reckoning prompts reflection on the positive impacts certain developments have had on people's lives, while also identifying areas where progress has been slow. To expedite transformative change, there is a pressing need for ambitious, bold, and accountable implementation priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic has cast a shadow over the progress made on the SDGs, as highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022—the latest authoritative UN document monitoring global progress. The pandemic has not only disrupted ongoing efforts but has also set back achievements across all SDGs. Environmental degradation and climate change, both felt in Canada and globally, weave through the very fabric of society, impacting our built environment, social relations, and future prospects, thereby affecting social and intergenerational justice. Interlinked crises – e.g. the global pandemic, climate change, nature loss, conflicts, and social injustices, has given rise to cascading challenges such as food insecurity, housing instability, and forced migration. These social shocks are further exacerbated by existing gender and racial inequities, amplifying the urgency to address these underlying disparities. Reinvigorating progress towards global goals necessitates a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Social transformation needs radical collaboration between communities, professionals from multiple sectors, researchers and educators.

To respond to this challenge, CIFAL York's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee organized a community connection dialogue in June 2023. The community dialogue was held during the Congress of Social Sciences and Humanities featured in the special university programming.

The community dialogue brought to the table professionals and community youth voices from Humber River - Black Creek Youth Council to explore avenues to translate vision into action for positive change. The event was a space for youth participants to critically engage and contribute to the knowledge-exchange in conversation with professionals and academics. A wide range of sectors was represented, including women in tech; public health and nursing; housing and social equity; secondary education; post-secondary education. The objective was to debate and co-design the foundation for radical collaboration to accelerate the implementation of the UN SDGs by 2030 and build new bridges between the university and society and between professional change makers and youth leaders with cross-sectionalities of women, LGBTQIA+, black voices. The event identified priorities for impactful short-term implementation of equity, diversity and inclusion as a core value and accelerator of social transformation.

This report provides an overview of the knowledge and insights shared by participating individuals and organizations working on advancing equity, diversity and inclusion with the community. Participants discussed efforts by individuals and organizations dedicated to these causes, and delved into various critical application areas and examples of strategies essential to the practice of equity, diversity, and inclusion, highlighting the contribution to the SDGs. Application areas encompass bridging education, housing and accessibility, 2SLGBTQIA+ and poverty, women and equity in the workforce and women in technology.



Figure: Critical application areas and strategies essential to the practice of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The application areas highlighted in this report are not exhaustive. Rather, they serve as entry points for fostering critical reflections and goal-setting towards positive societal changes aligned with the SDGs. The actions and initiatives discussed represent ongoing efforts and promising strategies underway within our communities. The synthesis of the discussions encapsulated in this report serves as a blueprint for scaling up ambition across sectors. It provides actionable insights and strategies that can be leveraged as a resource for application as well as inspiration for training activities within the CIFAL Network and beyond.

Bridging Education (Goals 4, 10, 11)



Humber River-Black Creek is a political district located in the northwest end of Toronto, including the area surrounding York University, key discussions were centered around the pressing social needs affecting the community. This district, situated in one of the city's most underserved regions, faces significant barriers to education and community well-being.

Institutions such as the Toronto District School Board have taken proactive steps to address these challenges, implementing policies that prioritize equity objectives and environmental sustainability. The TDSB has developed a tool to measure the social need found in different school communities called the Learning Opportunity Index (LOI), which it then uses to prioritize its equity objectives: “The LOI ranks TDSB schools based on measures of external challenges affecting student success.”¹ The LOI is developed using census data that is collected directly from parents and students by the TDSB itself. The data from the LOI school ranking is used at a number of resource intersections to provide more equitable learning

¹ <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/research/research/learning-opportunities-index>

opportunities throughout the board. In effect, the LOI is used as an equity tool to balance the opportunities different school communities have to offer to their students. Examples of how the tool is used to help school communities that are higher in the LOI (e.g. have higher social needs) include higher levels of staffing, the implementation of specialty programs in high LOI schools, higher investments in capital projects, and prioritizing for the roll out of sustainability projects.

In its yearly sustainability report, the TDSB makes a clear connection between the need to meet overall targets and the need to prioritize high LOI schools in future energy and sustainability projects:

The TDSB has already invested significantly in the retrofit of buildings and has clear carbon neutral targets that are aggressive by North American standards.² As part of its plan, the TDSB is currently developing plans to help bring better education into schools for staff and students. Central to this strategy is to reach out to high LOI schools to ensure that the progress made by the TDSB in its carbon footprint reduction is even across the system.

Housing and Accessibility (Goals 10, 11, 3)



Blue Door is committed to championing the critical role of housing, as emphasized in our recent participation in the congress aimed at advancing the UNSDGs 2030. In Blue Door’s participation, the global housing crisis was the focus, underscoring the challenges it raises for fostering self-determination while challenging systemic structures. Access to safe, affordable housing is not just a basic human need but a fundamental pillar for cultivating thriving and equitable societies. Discussions revolved around the potential of a comprehensive approach that integrates housing, health, and employment support to empower marginalized communities, promoting social inclusion, and enhancing overall societal stability and wellbeing. Commitment to EDI principles underscores our belief that everyone deserves a safe and supportive place to call home. We remain dedicated to advancing this vision within our communities and beyond.

Moreover, it is essential to recognize the intricate interplay between housing and broader issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. For example, while advocating for equitable housing policies, it is imperative to foster diversity within the organization, and engage in inclusive community initiatives. This contributes to transformative change from the inside out, as highlighted below on equity, diversity and inclusion and women in the workforce.

² <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/environment/>

2SLGTBQIA+ & Poverty (Goals 5, 1, 2, 3, 10, 17)



Poverty can be one of the most severe forms of oppression people can experience. Of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals³ (SDGs), 5 are directly related to poverty (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10), and many more are indirectly related (for example, SDGs 4, 5, 7). Discussions revolved on a study that is the first of its kind that examines the prevalence and effects of poverty on 2SLGBTQ+ populations in Canada taps into issues of social exclusion, discrimination, conflict and forced migration, etc. This study - undertaken by 2SLGBTQ+ Poverty project, a York University-led project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, will be but one of many that tries to address poverty-related concerns. Its uniqueness lies in the population of focus, being that of the 2SLGBTQ+ communities who have a long history of oppression based on colonization, criminalization, pathologization, moralization, stigmatization, and discrimination. The study consists of gathering data via a national survey and individual interviews with focus groups to follow in each of the provinces and territories, which are anticipated to reveal numerous intersecting issues for the 2SLGBTQ+ communities experiencing poverty. Through customized research design and methodology, questions regarding geographical and social location implications can be captured, as well as systemic concerns of nonrecognition and embedded cisnormative and heteronormative processes.

The project's community partners point to the need for the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to acknowledge and provide material support to begin addressing poverty in the 2SLGBTQ+ communities, paralleling the latter's recognition in human rights legislation. An ongoing commitment to justice, equity, decolonization, diversity, and inclusion needs to be aligned with addressing the SDGs on issues of poverty and their implications on 2SLGBTQ+ populations in Canada. Even though they are now recognized in human rights legislation across Canada, segments of the 2SLGBTQ+ communities have varied material experiences because of their social locations (i.e., socio-economic class status, gender, gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, age, (dis)Ability, ethnicity, race, religion, education level, etc.). As with all populations experiencing poverty, Canada as one of the world's richest nations, has an obligation to address this generally, and with already disenfranchised groups including 2SLGBTQ+ populations in particular. The far reaches of poverty are a threat to sustainable development at micro (individual), mezzo (community), and macro (national) levels, and as such the 2SLGBTQ+ Poverty in Canada research study is one tool in contributing to the strengthening of the SDGs.

³ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Alongside this project, insights from Canada’s Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan Survey⁴, findings showed glaring inequities when it comes to the unmet health needs of 2SLGBTQI+ people compared to the general population. As a result, part of the action plan provides \$100M over 5 years with a focus on capacity-building and project funding to prioritize these communities experiencing additional marginalization such as Black, racialized, and Indigenous, persons with disabilities, seniors, youth, official language minorities, and rural 2SLGBTQI+ people. Addressing these inequities requires extensive coordination and collaboration. What is needed for different groups or organizations to work together to address these issues? This question goes to the heart of the efforts and initiatives needed for transformative change. It is important to think of all relationships (the people that are being served and collaborative partners) as ongoing. Further insights included collaborative experiences at the Gilbert Centre for Social and Support services with The Barrie Native Friendship Centre that led to the creation of a Two-Spirit group; and the opening of a Gay Men’s Sexual Health Clinic through collaborations with Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. Through these partnerships, key takeaways have been that it is vital that organizations must value lived experiences by hiring and listening to people from the 2SLGBTQI+ community and by taking action based on their recommendations. To successfully do so requires organizations to remain flexible and adaptable as the needs of populations are ever-changing.

Partnerships are formed in a highly politicized and financially driven environment, which is why it is key to have love and openness as the values that drive organizational action. One way to build respect and trust in partnerships is to have transparent discussions about ways that each organization can and cannot contribute and to identify solutions that work for all parties. However, there will be times where it is absolutely critical for organizations to advocate and to take brave action on the most critical issues; even when it means being the first to do something different. It is this type of action that builds a solid foundation of trust with the people they serve.

Women & Equity in the Workforce (Goals 5, 8, 9, 10, 17)



According to the World Protest Tracker⁵ there were over 25 significant protests directly related to COVID. According to UN Women, women staged 2,711 protests on treatment and safety across 100 countries in the first year of COVID. When the magnitude of women’s collective voices during the time of a global pandemic gives a glimpse of the importance and focus on women’s rights. Countries with powerful feminist movements, and higher women’s

⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/free-to-be-me/federal-2slgbtqi-plus-action-plan/survey-findings/quick-stats.html>

⁵ <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/interactive/protest-tracker>

representation in government and law, have five times more gender sensitive measures. The value of self-determination is influenced by the decision makers.

The State of Economic Inclusion reported in 2021 that economic inclusion programs were on the rise in 75 countries around the world, reaching approximately 20 million households and nearly 92 million individuals - that according to McKinsey insights, have joined the consuming class. This is creating a powerful shift in the economic empowerment of women. If women were able to participate in the economy to the same degree, equally, as their male counterparts, it would add up to 28 trillion US dollars, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Angel Gurría, the former secretary-general of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, made the statement “Women are the most underutilized economic asset in the world's economy.” Equal participation is vital. But equality cannot be achieved until inequity – which encompasses a range of disadvantages and imbalances in availability and access to opportunities – is addressed. The participation of women – including the intersections of identity, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic class – in the economic sector, in government and policy making, in education, the legal sector, the tech sector, is a necessary condition for transformative system change. In recent years, there has been some improvement, but women are still not equally represented in political and government roles as well in technology where we see transformative advancements and innovations that impact health to economies. *Globally, we estimate that less than a third of leadership positions are held by women. In the United States and Canada, the situation is trending upward, with 37% and 35% of leadership positions being held by women, respectively, despite women comprising 47% and 46% of the workforce.*⁶ Women’s capital in these areas is by access, invitation and opportunity. *178 countries maintain legal barriers that prevent women’s full economic participation.*⁷ It is vitally necessary to build from the inside out our institutional structures to level the playing field.

Women in Technology (Goals 5, 8, 9, 10, 17)



We are arguably in the 5th industrial revolution. Women’s roles in technology, a field that has been historically dominated by men, continue to evidence challenges to women representation in leadership roles where decisions are made and systemic challenges to growth, advancement, bias, and pay equity. The evolution of the sector with A.I. as a catalyst for economic advancement, we see highlights to the current disparities with predominantly men owning the space of ‘expert’ and bringing forth the next wave of innovation, despite women working in the tech, product and engineering functions. With 28% female representation in

⁶ <https://economicgraph.linkedin.com/blog/women-are-still-underrepresented-in-leadership-and-the-technology-information-and-media-industry>

⁷ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

tech-related roles globally⁸, it remains a challenge to push forth representation, participation and development in a space where we need diversity. An additional layer to this is the lack of intersectional representation, visible and non-visible.

Thus, it is crucial to address gender discrimination in systemic processes in the system itself to create a more just, equal, and diverse society. Hiring, promotion and who is invited to the table at speaking events as 'experts' and who has access to opportunities to grow at the rate necessary to play in the field of technology. Practices have gender discrimination and biases built into them, which leads to unequal access and opportunities for women and the intersections of women.

Having diverse representation in the advancement of a business strategy matters, as it involves corporate governance and decision makers who can influence and prioritize platforms for inclusion programs and sensitive gender measures, to align with female retention, engagement, and progress. Even though more companies are paying attention to the challenges faced by women, the reality is that there is still progress to be made.

Never more has it been important to understand the root of uprisings: it is not percolating in the streets far away, but in our own homes, classrooms, communities, boardrooms and where any collective congregates. Women and voices have taken on a different look and power; a power that not only has influence but is a reckoning that industry must heed to, to take action on, to deconstruct to reconstruct. As Professor Andrea Davis (York University) highlights, to rebuild with accountability and equitable measures, the question we are left with then is '*...have we established a benchmark from which we cannot retreat or do we silently go back to "business as usual"?*'⁹

⁸ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mayarichard-craven/2023/09/26/women-in-the-c-suite-are-making-their-mark-in-the-tech-industry/?sh=2e559fd06c2b>

⁹ <https://academicmatters.ca/reckoning-with-the-legacy-of-universities-reflections-on-congress-2023/>



CIFAL York university programming panel held during Congress 2023. May 29, 2023.



The UN Sustainable Development Goals¹⁰

No Poverty (SDG 1), Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6), Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9), Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12), Climate Action (SDG 13), Life Below Water (SDG 14), Life On Land (SDG 15), Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16), and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

¹⁰ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

About CIFAL York

CIFAL York is part of UNITAR's global network of training centers for knowledge-sharing, training, and capacity-building for leaders, local authorities, and civil society. Established in 2020 as a partnership between UNITAR, York University and York Region, CIFAL York started its operation in June 2021 as the first CIFAL Centre in Canada. CIFAL York envisions a more sustainable, inclusive, and equitable world, empowering communities to overcome global challenges, while integrating the UN Sustainable Development Goals for shaping a better future. CIFAL York is dedicated to serve as a hub for knowledge exchange and capacity building among government officials, the private sector, academia, and civil society. CIFAL York works towards a global outreach and positive change through bridging gaps and facilitating a range of inspirational training and research opportunities across five focus areas: Disaster Risk, Emergency Management and Humanitarian Actions; Health Development, Environment, and Climate Change; Entrepreneurship, Digital Technology, and Economic Development; Equity, Diversity, and inclusion; and advancing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. CIFAL York is part of a global network of CIFAL centres and serves as a hub for cross-sectoral knowledge exchange and capacity building among government officials, the private sector, academia, and civil society across its focus areas.

About Congress 2023

The [2023 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences](#) (known as Congress 2023) hosted by York University in partnership with the [Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences](#), brought together 67 academic associations from humanities and social sciences disciplines. . This platform provides a unique opportunity for our researchers and organised research units to showcase their longstanding strengths in the humanities and social sciences, path-breaking interdisciplinary research, and historical commitment to social justice, while drawing on a rich tradition in the arts to curate an immersive cultural experience.

Building on the Congress theme, York is seeking to develop a suite of institution programming that will highlight these strengths in interdisciplinary research and community engaged arts. This programming was unprecedented in its effort to bridge the gap between academic research and wider society by positioning community art, activism and knowledge as central to the work of the humanities and social sciences.

Background and Credits

This report is based on the university programming panel held during Congress 2023. The panel titled “Climate change is not the change we want: Community dialogue for an inclusive and sustainable future” was organized by CIFAL York’s EDI Committee led by CIFAL York’s EDI Committee co-Chairs Professor Idil Boran and Julia Satov. We would like to express our gratitude to the Congress 2023 convenor Professor Andrea A. Davis and the congress organizing committee. We gratefully acknowledge CIFAL York’s EDI committee for their

enthusiasm and dedication in driving the activity and deliverable. Panelists participated in their individual capacity and engaged in knowledge-sharing from their respective areas of specialization and practice. We appreciate their valuable contributions and engaging discussions. Special thanks go to Professor Dawn R. Bazely, University Professor, Biology, York University, who graciously agreed to serve as moderator, for skillfully fostering productive discussions. We extend our thanks to community youth participants for their enthusiasm, energy, and fresh perspectives, which enhanced the diversity and inclusivity of the discussions. Finally, we would like to thank all those who contributed behind the scenes, including volunteers and in particular Francesco del Carpio at CIFAL York for administrative and operations support.

› **Panel Co-Hosts**

- Idil Boran & Julia Satov

› **Moderator**

- Dawn R. Bazely

Panelists

› **Sustainability & Equity in an Urban Context**

- Matias de Dovitiis

› **Sustainability & Equity in an Urban Context**

- Joseph J. Smith

› **Addressing Canada's Affordable Housing Crisis: Urgency, Solutions**

- Emily Rowe

› **2SLGBTQ+ Poverty in Canada: Improving Livelihood & Social Wellbeing**

- Nick J. Mulé

› **2SLGBTQ+ Health**

- Lee Truong

› **Community Youth Engagement & Accountable Institutions at All Levels**

- Amanpreet Chonkrian

› **Operations**

- Francesco del Carpio

Land Acknowledgement

Many Indigenous Nations have long standing relationships with the territories upon which York University campuses are located that precede the establishment of York University. The area known as Tkaronto has been taken care of by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. It is now home to many First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities. The current treaty holders are the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.