



ALBERTA PROVINCIAL YOUTH DIALOGUE

17 CALLS FOR THE 17 SDGS

Alberta Provincial Youth Dialogue

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FOR THE 17
SDGS**

OVERVIEW

Alberta educators are at a crossroads. Historically, partnerships with experiential learning programs have provided opportunities for youth to learn and engage with global issues and teachers have had access to year-long plans. Given the COVID-19 situation and public health restrictions, nonprofit and other organizations with a mandate for youth engagement have been unable to enter schools and some have cut programming altogether. Therefore, there is a significant need to fill the gap when it comes to youth engagement for global citizenship.

This youth-led project asked the question, “How do Alberta youth want to learn about and engage in global issues?” Over the course of 6 weeks, high school classrooms from 10 lead schools across the province of Alberta, met on a weekly basis to research and identify key issues (working both synchronously, via video conferencing, and asynchronously, using a specially designed interactive student portal, discussion boards, blogs, etc.). Following this series of collaborations, youth met in a province-wide virtual town hall to facilitate a larger group discussion about key guiding questions. Finally, select student leaders met at a provincial writer’s retreat to synthesize the thoughts, ideas, and calls for action of their peers into the enclosed report, “17 Calls for the 17 SDGs.”

This by-youth report provides an in-depth insight into youth engagement for global citizenship, including how educators, community organizations, and multi-level government actors can support Alberta youth in their global citizenship education and action.

As part of ACGC’s Inspiring Action for Global Citizenship program, this paper helps to enhance contributions of Alberta youth to Canada’s international development efforts towards gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, reducing poverty and inequality, and the achievement of the SDGs.

“In order to find a feasible method to ensure that individuals are receiving the basic necessities to survive, we need to find ways to educate youth and the community on methods and ways of creating change. Youth and individuals need to start learning about how to view these issues from a de-stigmatized lens. Finding long term solutions rather than short term solutions is one method of change. This includes action items such as ensuring governments and institutions take accountability for the policies set in place that determine the outcome of one's well-being.”

Ayesha, 16, Edmonton

HOW DO ALBERTA YOUTH DEFINE A GLOBAL CITIZEN?

“Through our school and family life during the COVID-19 pandemic, we learned that we might not depend on only the national, provincial, and municipal governments, but that we must have compassion for other people and think, come up with answers, and act by ourselves as part of our own responsibility.” Billee, 15, Cochrane

Throughout November 2021, WE, students from across Alberta met online and learned all about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as what it means to act upon them. An important part of these online conversations was understanding the concept of ‘What is a global citizen?’ Many students all across Alberta suggested various definitions on what they believed a global citizen to be. Belle, from St. Albert, stated, “A global citizen sets the example and they are the first to become what they want others to be, takes responsibility to get informed, handles the news with critical thinking, is aware of social inequalities, gets active for environmental and global issues, respects human rights and values teamwork and cooperation, appreciates his own culture and tradition and complements them with global values.” Alexia, in Chestermere, added that being a global citizen involves, “Being aware of what’s going on in the world. Seeing the world from the perspective of others. Having knowledge of other people’s cultures, skills, lifestyles.” In comparing all of the suggested definitions and traits, we see that youth in Alberta think of young global citizens as those who are aware of the world in relation to their own experiences within the country that they reside in. To add upon that concept, global citizens are also aware that something actively done or learned in one part of the world helps the world

in general, whether it be action towards climate change, poverty, health, or education.

Our recommendations:

1) In the media, the SDGs should be spoken about- and referenced more often. This way, children and young people (as well as adults) will become more familiar with what exactly they are, and how they relate to our current world issues. *For example, when the news spotlights an issue, they should mention to which SDGs the topic-relates.*

2) The government should indicate which SDGs are being addressed or impacted in topics during press updates, policy announcements, and Q&As. By saying which SDG's are involved in a topic, it would help people remember, understand and see how they interrelate. *For example, they could state that a current governmental housing initiative is focussed on SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities; or that a decision to invest in water treatment facilities is in response to SDG 6 & SDG 3.*

3) In classrooms and curriculum, the SDGs should not only be covered in-civics and social studies-classes, but also when talking about various academic subjects, such as science, math, and language, in order to educate how the different SDGs link to each other and how they are connected to nearly everything in the modern world.

4) In communities, opportunities for intergenerational collaboration should be prioritized. Older adults within our communities need to come alongside youth who are taking action on the SDGs. It is not just up to youth alone to make change or advocate for change to take place. Adults are the voting base and can hold governments to task for not skirting their responsibilities. *For example, youth-led climate strikes will not get us all the way.*

5) Organizations working on the SDGs should talk about the them not just in terms of ideas, but also skill-development, so that young people may see how it relates to their future job-wise and life-wise. By showing Alberta youth how to translate SDG volunteer work and action into lifelong communication skills, or decision-making, or ethics in marketing, etc., we will see how the goals fit into our personal philosophies and also career ambitions, and as a result, prioritize them.



WHAT ARE THE TOP SDG ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY ALBERTA YOUTH?

Personal TOP ISSUES

- [Climate Action]
- [Responsible Consumption and Production]
- [Sustainable Cities and Communities]
- [Quality Education]

Provincial TOP ISSUES

- [Climate Action]
- [Affordable and Clean Energy]
- [Good Health and Well-being]
- [Clean Water and Sanitation]

National TOP ISSUE

- [Climate Action]
- [Clean Water and Sanitation]
- [Sustainable Cities and Communities]
- [Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions]



In November & December 2021, WE, the youth involved in this project sent a provincial survey to our fellow students across Alberta High Schools. We received over 125 responses, where youth revealed their current priorities around the Sustainable Development Goals. From Fort McMurray to Crowsnest Pass, out of the 17 SDGs, the top four issues identified by Alberta youth were: *Climate action, Responsible consumption and production, Sustainable cities and communities, and Quality education.* Looking deeper into this information, the student survey participants then compared their personal priorities to those that they saw as belonging to their provincial and national communities. The highest ranking, with 40% of youth responding, stated that they felt the top SDG priority for both Alberta & Canada as a whole was *Climate Action*. Following that,

Alberta youth ranked *Affordable and Clean Energy, Good Health and Well-being, and Clean Water and Sanitation* as the other top provincial priorities; and *Clean Water and Sanitation, Sustainable Cities and Communities, and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions* as the other top national priorities.

It is clear from this data that *Climate Action* must be addressed locally, provincially, and nationally. Youth across Alberta have stated that it is what we see as the largest issue collectively for our communities and the largest issue individually. To create a better province and a better nation, we believe that our governments need to take more responsibility and action towards SDGs that involve the environment and sustainable transitions to clean energy. Alberta youth also emphasized the leadership role that our federal government needs to take towards achieving peaceful, just, and inclusive societies for all (SDG 10).

Our recommendations:

6) All levels of government - locally, provincially, and nationally - must be directed towards climate action (SDG 13).

7) Provincial-level actors have particular responsibility to focus on climate, sustainability, clean and just energy transitions, and health & well-being of all our community members (SDG 3, 7, 13)

8) National-level actors should focus on an investment in clean yet affordable energy, creating an equitable and safe environment as well as health factors as a whole



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE/ IMPROVE IN EDUCATION TO ALLOW ALBERTA YOUTH TO BECOME BETTER GLOBAL CITIZENS?

“Schools need to not just speak about the SDGs, they need to model equitable living. For example, they should prioritize using only fair-trade ingredients in the cafeteria and teachers lounges (coffee), not just teach us about what those concepts mean.” Alexia, 17, Chestermere

Education serves as a catalyst to create and implement change for youth not only in Alberta, but in the entirety of the world itself. Teaching youth about our current social, political and economic circumstances should not only be a priority, but a right. However, most policies or legislation drafted often contain nuances and intricate language. This actively bars youth from being able to understand what is currently happening in the world around them. The curriculum needs to actively cover and inform youth about important and critical topics such as the Sustainable Development Goals. These goals not only help provide a framework for impactful advocacy, but also learning. When asked about what needs to be improved in education to allow youth to become global citizens, a student in St. Albert stated, “having teachers who not only address the subject, but also current world issues and affairs.” Additionally, Ayesha, from Edmonton stated that, “Accessibility serves as a massive barrier between youth and their ability to get involved within current affairs.” She is referencing how she feels that opportunities can be either limited or exclusive, prohibiting youth from acting as global citizens.

Alberta youth share the common idea that education can allow transparency and information to be provided for youth to become better global citizens. This includes focusing on ensuring that students are educated about matters pertaining to climate change, anti-discrimination, financial literacy, and mental health. Furthermore, in these discussions, Alberta students voiced their concerns about not being able to access resources about these topics through school. Alexa, from Chestermere provided an insightful statement about how actively involving the SDGs within her school work provided a greater level of insight on important issues. She stated “Working with the SDGs in various school projects has been one of the ways I have gained the most awareness of the seriousness of climate change and the importance of sustainable living.” This is a vivid example of how implementing the SDG can aid the improvement of education. Through providing resources for these topics, not only will youth be informed, but they will also have the tool set necessary to implement change as global citizens.

Our recommendations:

9) In classrooms and curriculum, youth should be allowed to indulge themselves in learning opportunities that address the SDGs. Furthermore, youth should have access to resources pertaining to climate change, anti-racism, financial literacy and mental health. These resources should include a list of organizations and documents that define and actively work towards these topics in Alberta. This will give youth the opportunity to create community connections whilst learning about the SDGs

10) The government should provide an outlet for students to get involved in ensuring that these SDG’s are being incorporated through the youth lens. For example, this can be through a feedback forum or even holding space for youth to get involved within provincial or municipal governments. Youth should have a way to access and hold government officials accountable.

11) In the community, youth and community stakeholders need to work collaboratively to not only lessen the pressure on organizations, but to also provide valuable experience for youth. The only way Alberta youth can become better global citizens is to learn about the community we reside in. This means it is imperative for all community members to have a level of understanding and belonging to ensure these SDGs are being achieved.



WHAT ARE THE CURRENT AND EMERGING BARRIERS FOR ALBERTAN YOUTH WHEN IT COMES TO ACTING ON GLOBAL ISSUES?

“It is important that adult stakeholders bring different stakeholders together, preferably in open community meetings. This is necessary in order to have a discussion about water conservation and the different activities we can do to achieve a cleaner future. In these meetings, it would be important to represent many different age groups, backgrounds, etc., but youth cannot organize these on our own. This will enable us to come up with solutions that will help the environment but also be attainable in communities and not destroy ways of life.” Peyton, 16, Calgary

When it comes to acting on global issues, these are some of the current and emerging barriers that affect the youth in Alberta: accessibility, education, and societal stigma. Youth from all over the province have voiced their concerns regarding accessibility as one of the major barriers hindering youth from acting on global issues. This is evident through the concerns raised by youth during the SDG Series that was held late November. Many youth have acknowledged the fact that, in order to act on global issues, especially remotely, there needs to be access to technology.

In order to act on global issues, youth need to be well informed. Ashritha, a student from Edmonton, stated that students need to be engaged “... not only locally but globally, so that youth are also educated about what is happening in the world and how it affects us.” In the survey conducted, we asked youth what their top SDG

goal was. More than 50% of youth across Alberta highlighted that a quality education was either their top issue or a large issue. It is evident that youth want to participate in global issues, they just don't necessarily know where to start. A quality education will allow youth to participate within local and global issues through educating them on the ongoing work within the community. During our discussions, Emma and Sophie from Fort McMurray stated, "Through learning about history, we have been able to learn from what has happened in the past and to consider what kind of society we should build in the future." When youth are well educated and are provided with more accessible legislation and research, they will be able to overcome this barrier. This demonstrates how huge of a barrier education plays in shaping youth engagement within global issues.

Additionally, another barrier that was brought up repeatedly throughout the SDG series was the societal stigma that surrounds the youth perspective. Many talked about how they would love to get involved, however they fear that their perspectives might be disregarded because of their age. This narrative is one of the biggest self-identified barriers that youth face in terms of actively being involved with any kinds of issues. One of the ways that this can change is through organizations and government structures actively incorporating youth perspectives. When conducting engagement and outreach, oftentimes youth are rarely consulted or even acknowledged throughout the processes. Youth need to be included in the consultation of the policies that shape our future well-being. More than 70% of youth in the survey we conducted stated that the SDG 10: Reducing Inequalities is either their top issue or a large issue. This demonstrates the youth want to be involved within this process. Furthermore, preconceived notions such as youth being "immature," further hinders participation. In order to overcome these barriers, bureaucratic structures and institutions must learn how to actively include youth voices in decisions.

Our recommendations:

12) Covid-19 has been one of the biggest barriers in terms of youth participation. Due to the lack of physical engagement, only youth who have access to technology can participate within the community adequately during this pandemic. It is critical to establish a technological framework that supports youth participation within the community despite the pandemic.

13) Funding is another critical factor that serves as a barrier to participation. Most organizations are more than willing to take on volunteers, however they are not equipped with adequate resources to then provide support. It is crucial that on the municipal, provincial and federal level funding be allocated towards organizations to create space for youth to participate by increasing staff and training opportunities.

14) Accessibility is another barrier that hinders youth from being able to participate and contribute to embedding or learning about the SDG goals. Access to organizations and opportunities are extremely limited. Youth want to get involved, however the majority of the time they either don't know where to look or opportunities are exclusive.



HOW CAN EDUCATORS, ORGANIZATIONS, DECISION-MAKERS, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS REMOVE BARRIERS, PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES, AND SUPPORT YOUTH TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP SKILLS AS ACTIVE GLOBAL CITIZENS?

“We need to educate for democracy to form competent citizens for the working world, capable to accept challenges and adapt to the change and uncertainty. We need to enrich the curriculums in political, citizenship, and critical thinking areas.” Zachary, Camrose

Throughout October and November of 2021, WE, Alberta youth striving to make a difference in our world, have collected data from youth throughout all of Alberta pertaining to our beliefs on what should be done and the extent to which we can do it. Various ideas have been submitted as to how Alberta stakeholders can help better the world in which we live, and how youth should develop skills in leadership as active global citizens. When asked about issues pertaining to poverty, Ayesha a student from Edmonton stated, “... it is crucial to include and magnify the voices heavily impacted by the issue. Experiences are what connect and provide insight into topics such as poverty. This leads to ensuring engagement and outreach is a form of relationship building rather than being systemic or extractive. It is also important that as youth that we are engaging within these topics in an ethical and equitable manner...” When discussing how educational stakeholders could possibly inspire youth to

change, Ashritha, from Edmonton, explained how stakeholders should be, “Linking learning to everyday life. It gives motivation and understanding why it needs to be learned...Speaking not only locally but globally, so that youth are also educated about what is happening in the world and how it affects us.”

In comparing and contrasting the ideas given to us by inspired youth, it is easily identifiable that we Alberta youth share ideas that stakeholders should increase public education in the fields of climate change and the world around us, in order to increase our knowledge and desire to be involved in changing the community for the better. Teachers across the province should also be better equipped with information of how the SDGs relate to all sorts of various school subjects, including math, art, and all sorts of sciences. There should also be credits awarded to youth leading action projects within their communities, as well as more scholarship opportunities. Not only that, but there should be more opportunities for youth to be able to connect more to their peers as well as the earth itself, through nature excursions and other group activities where youth can work together.

Our recommendations:

15) Resources should be curated for schools and organizations to distribute so that students are well informed about the opportunities that are available within the community. This includes information such as youth grants, organizations and internships.

16) The curriculum that is taught in school should be reflective of current world issues which highlight the SDG's. This would allow youth to learn about issues that are currently affecting not only their wellbeing but also the wellbeing of youth across the globe. It is critical that subjects are explored through the lens of different perspectives.

17) Learning how to become leaders is another way that can help youth develop skills to become global citizens. It is important to teach youth how to navigate certain spaces and what leadership looks like either through mentorship or learning resources. In order to ensure that youth can participate in global matters, it is important that they are educated on what participation looks like to begin with. Providing guidance or even mentorship programs that allow youth to develop their leadership and interpersonal skills would allow them to immerse themselves as active global citizens within the community.

