

## Brainstorming Session: What are the next steps for Canada in terms of 'green transitioning?'

### Discussion Summary #2

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With the support of the Laurier Centre for the Study of Canada at Wilfrid Laurier University and the Balsillie School of International Affairs, this workshop brought together contributors with diverse knowledge and experience to share their research findings and undertake a collective 'taking stock' of the current state of governing the Green Transition in Canada. Reflecting the complexity of this sustainability governance challenge in Canada, the research team was interdisciplinary and diverse; contributors were political scientists and public policy experts, as well as geographers, lawyers, business professors, economists, sociologists, biologists and international relations specialists, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts.

Specifically, the project contributors were tasked with investigating, in their own subject matter areas, whether they see evidence of *transformational changes* with respect to: (1) *perspectives* and knowledge systems (how dominant values and attitudes, ways of understanding frame our choices); (2) decision-making *processes* (who is making decisions affecting our future and how they are made); and (3) *policies* (courses of action undertaken by government, including objectives, instruments and program design). Contributors were brought together to assess, compare and integrate their individual findings under these three 'umbrellas' in order to identify cross-cutting insights with regard to the opportunities for, and obstacles to, transformative change as well as to develop a set of policy recommendations on the way forward.

The afternoon brainstorming session aimed to investigate the necessary "next steps" for the Canadian Green Transition. The CEPP5 project team was divided into three separate groups to facilitate a more direct and personal discussion between contributors. The online website tool PADLET was used to synthesize, organize, and present the ongoing dialogue to all participants. Despite being placed in separate groups, posting to PADLET allowed participants to simultaneously view the ideas being posted by other groups during the brainstorming session. The "next steps" brainstorming session focused on the three key aspects of the Green Transition explored in the project: first, the shift to low carbon energy generation and economic activity that recognizes the inherent value of biodiversity; the focus on social development and equity in terms of providing support to marginalized and racialized communities as Canada transitions to a greener economy; and the full commitment to establishing and maintaining

respectful relations with Indigenous Peoples whose sovereignty, ways of knowing and approaches to land stewardship must inform in fundamental ways, and provide a basis for, our transition approaches.

## Low carbon economy that protects biodiversity

Given the clear need for robust decarbonization initiatives across Canada to achieve ambitious climate and environmental targets, the CEPP5 project team deliberated extensively on the topic of a low carbon economy.

When discussing the *perspectives* concerned with decarbonization and environmental protection, participants noted the importance of developing a more comprehensive, positive and integrated vision of the Green Transition to guide program and policy efforts. Several contributors emphasized the need to move beyond the narrow electrification and “carbon tunnel” frame, to combat the current over-emphasis on the pursuit of the low-carbon economy and energy system by paying attention to other key aspects such as biodiversity, equity, Reconciliation and health. In addition, this vision should be one which highlights the opportunities that the transition can provide, encouraging different groups to envision themselves as connected to a new, low carbon economy. The vision should also clearly set out what is to be achieved (i.e., what is the role of electrification, exactly, in the transition?) and guide experimentation and investments in technologies, governance arrangements and new programming, thereby ensuring that various synergies among policies are maximized. Contributors strongly emphasized that the government of Canada must look at the climate-biodiversity problem through a larger lens that continuously questions: “are we advancing sustainability?” to develop effective, robust, and just policies.

One way to accomplish this *process-wise*, as one contributor suggested, is to bring practitioners and government actors together in particular sectors to come up with new visions, to create “Do Tanks”. Contributors agreed that all institutions need to collaborate and integrate across departments in decision-making processes. Another recommendation to further enhance Green Transition progress throughout government was to create an independent, royal commission to reform a public service that is ill-equipped to address a wicked problem like climate change. The establishment of a royal commission could provide an independent investigation into how government can be better organized and incentivized to undertake crucial matters concerned with the Green Transition. The contributors also identified the need for a much more robust public system to monitor, gather and share data on environmental indicators. The development of a cumulative environmental effects centre, for example, would assist in decision-making processes by providing a multi-nodal perspective on environmental protection.

Other recommendations were that Canada build on previous institutions that currently focus on the Green Transition, but also establish new relationships between institutions, departments, and ministries to build more robust capacity. Looking to other jurisdictions, such as Australia, was suggested here. In this vein, increased use of regional development processes and the establishment of more bottom-up governmental processes was proposed to encourage a collaborative approach and address concerns about democratic and representational deficits. It was also noted that ENGOs play a critical role in ensuring the accountability of decision-making actors to Green Transition goals and objectives, and they need to be properly resourced to perform this function.

With respect to *policies*, CEPP5 contributors expressed the need to expand policy and technological innovation and experimentation in environmental governance with different actors and at different scales. Indeed, one contributor asked of their group: “if you don’t try, how can you know if it will work?”. In Canada, it was noted that, ‘innovation zones’ have emerged at the municipal level, whereby officials are attempting to include creative and non-traditional strategies in their planning processes, such as climate budgeting. We need to build on these efforts.

An additional recommendation was to consolidate the *Net-Zero Accountability Act* to become more robust, and to build a legitimate accountability mechanism that could be linked to the interjurisdictional Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change. Contributors all expressed concern around the fact that there is currently no overarching instrument to ensure accountability, cohesion, and commitment to the Green Transition in Canada. They emphasized the need for the construction of a detailed framework and/or frameworks to ensure transparency and legitimacy throughout all pathways.

## Social equity

Throughout the group discussions focused on enhancing social equity perspectives in the Green Transition, the need to establish a new ‘tradition’ in Canada related to social justice and equity was emphasized. The dominant frame for decision-making is one which prioritizes economic prosperity and lacks a focus on important social purposes. This orientation is perceived to be ‘normal’ because there are no alternative visions that are strong enough to re-orient discussions. Without a shift toward social justice and equity, Canada will continue to gravitate around competitive economic mechanisms and disregard the vital social, cultural, and environmental components of the transition. The contributors then challenged this, asking how “we can facilitate the cultural transition necessary to truly focus on the social and environmental objectives instead of the traditional mindset focused on economic growth?”.

A social justice and equality lens is one which is more holistic, according to contributors, considering the gender, income and racial implications of proposed solutions (e.g., who is going to get jobs at the new EV plant in St. Thomas?), as well as issues like the link between food security and income, migrant worker livelihoods, human rights and opportunities for youth. In addition, a key recommendation made

was to include the health sector in the Green Transition as a way of further advance equity and sustainability outcomes. The climate and environmental crises can be framed through a health lens to further advance equity and sustainability objectives. It was noted that the health sector is a potential ally that includes influential groups such as doctors and lawyers, and has been overlooked by advocates of the Green Transition.

With respect to *processes*, CEPP5 contributors re-affirmed the need to include local communities in decision-making processes and respect Indigenous rights, which can serve to increase the social acceptability of the decisions that need to be made to further the Green Transition. Community and Indigenous involvement and rights recognition are critical for building high levels of trust between community, companies and the government, which leads to better long-term relationships. It was argued that municipal governments also need more meaningful, up-front citizen participation in the creation of municipal action plans for example, in order to further their climate-related objectives.

When discussing *policies*, there was support for a stronger rights-based approach to build accountability for the social justice and equity elements of federal Green Transition programs and plans. For example, it was stated that the scope of the federal approach to environmental racism is too narrow, and requires the integrated use of existing tools like GBA+ to effectively support inclusive policy and programming implementation. Other ideas for furthering social justice and equity policies in concrete ways included having Treasury Board or Privy Council Office mandating environmental justice analysis across government; tying together farmer income and sustainability; more targeted policies for low-income individuals in sectors heavily impacted by the Green Transition; and even turning abandoned oil and gas wells into geothermal sites, using the same workers.

## Indigenous partnerships and initiatives

During deliberation on perspectives concerned with Indigenous partnerships and initiatives, contributors stressed that Indigenous peoples, Indigenous organizations, and Indigenous governments must be included in deliberative processes to fully participate in Green Transition efforts. The notion of self-determination was highlighted as a crucial component of Reconciliation efforts, along with the inclusion of Indigenous practices and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). Land-use questions such as “should a pipeline go through this territory?” should be replaced with questions that put perspectives of Reconciliation and Indigenous rights and ownership at the forefront of the discussion. This is very difficult in a context where considerable development has occurred on Indigenous lands – such as in the agricultural sector in Western countries where lands were taken from Indigenous peoples and given to farmers.

When discussing the *processes* required to address Indigenous inequity, CEPP5 contributors discussed the importance of recognizing the rights of Indigenous communities to determine their own priorities and choose which projects they want to participate in. To advance this objective, participants suggested that the government recognize Indigenous self-determination, invest in Indigenous institutions, and allow Indigenous communities to design policies that are tailored to their own specific needs, on a timeline that makes sense for these communities. This requires training individuals in Indigenous communities so that they possess the necessary knowledge to analyze the issues and understand options/solutions, though this is very difficult to undertake in an equitable and decolonized manner. Altering processes in the federal system to incorporate an Indigenous level of governance was also proposed.

Universities were said to play a significant role in capacity-building to help advance Reconciliation objectives, but it was also emphasized that Indigenous youth and/or learners should not have to leave their communities and heritage to gain that capacity. Indigenous students that are connected to their communities can play an important role in addressing local problems. It is important for the government to recognize that Indigenous peoples possess exceptional knowledge, and there needs to be appropriate mechanisms for the navigation and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives throughout the academic space. Infrastructure deficits on Indigenous reserves must be improved by the federal government to ensure Indigenous peoples have the opportunity to learn, develop, and thrive in their own community.

With respect to *policies*, CEPP5 contributors emphasized the need for environmental remediation of impacted communities that have experienced environmentally damaging practices. The need for consistency between federal and provincial governments and their respective policies in terms of limiting exploitation of Indigenous lands and culture was also underlined. To conclude the discussion, all participants agreed that decision-making power should be transferred to Indigenous communities to establish self-determination and advance Reconciliation efforts from the Crown.

## Additional ideas

Contributors noted additional ideas for accelerating the shifts needed for the Green Transition:

- Ensuring that governments tap into bottom-up groups through financial incentivization as a way of moving toward more collaborative processes
- Preparing for how work will migrate across sectors, e.g., out of oil and gas and into AI sector
- The climate lens needs to be a much stronger tool that is applied across government planning and decision-making

- There needs to be well-developed methodologies and infrastructure for compiling environmental data and measuring cumulative impacts which feeds directly into land-use and industrial decisions
- Public officials need to recognize that new technologies can facilitate change and experimentation is critical – this needs to be a priority

## Stepping back

Following the brainstorming session, CEPP5 contributors recognized that the “next step” solutions provided in the PADLET primarily identified non-governmental actors as the key players of the Green Transition. It was noted that the Canadian government is clearly a key player, but there are other bodies that can advance Green Transition goals and activities in a sustainable and equitable manner that is Reconciliation-focused. It has become evident that the Canadian government cannot undertake this task alone, and the immense endeavor requires more creativity and innovation than what public officials typically have in their own toolkit. Despite progress from the public service, government departments and agencies operate under considerable constraints and within structures that oppose transformation. As one contributor noted, “government leaders are constantly concerned with being at the frontlines and don’t want to be precedent-setting.” This is where non-state actors have become critical, as they bring forth new innovative ideas that push boundaries and establish a secure space for precedent-setting.

The CEPP5 team also recognized the need to frame the Green Transition in a positive way as an opportunity. Over the next few years, the Canadian government needs to ‘cut the curve’ and expedite the pace of current processes to limit the severity of the climate and environmental crises for future generations. It has become apparent that research and policy analyses that are hyper-fixated on the many challenges associated with the Green Transition will trigger emotions of despair, hopelessness, and resignation. To feel as though they can truly make an impact, Canadian citizens must be compelled to action through positive engagement and stories of success. In this vein, the CEPP5 text can act as a call to learn what you can from this book and then engage within your own community to future advance the Green Transition!