

## THE GREEN GAP: TOWARD INCLUSIVITY IN TORONTO'S GREEN EMPLOYMENT

The Green Gap was a multi-year collaborative community-based research project focused on the inclusion of racialized people in Toronto's transition to green jobs and the green economy.

In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with members from five stakeholder groups, including: (1) **green energy business leaders**; (2) **green energy and green jobs policy key informants**; (3) **labour organizations and trade union key informants**; (4) **green jobs training program organizers**; and (5) **green job seekers from diverse racialized communities**.

The study sought to foster community dialogue and build a more inclusive green economy by addressing three research questions:

- What are the multiple social constructions of green jobs by various stakeholders?
- What do green jobs mean for racialized communities?
- What do various stakeholders see as solutions to moving the green agenda forward?

The following is a summary of the key insights and dialogue emerging from stakeholder interviews and focus groups around the role of green businesses in moving the green agenda forward and building a more inclusive green economy.\* The green business leaders involved in this study included stakeholders from not-for-profit organizations, small entrepreneurial ventures, and corporations.

### OPINIONS FROM GREEN BUSINESS LEADERS

**The green economy cannot be separated from the regular economy;** the fundamentals of cost benefit analysis are always going to rule. Ideally the green economy has to shift to the point where it makes sense economically to be green. When initiatives are divorced from economics they are less likely to actually happen if the benefits do not outweigh the cost. We do not need a new green economy; we just need the regular economy to produce environmentally desirable outcomes.

**Smaller organizations with limited resources find it difficult to prioritize equity considerations.** With specific regard to local hiring initiatives, there was a belief that it is difficult to have equitable representation while still having proper training, and that larger multi-national companies are more likely to be able to devote resources to equitable hiring procedures.

Profit does not always have to be the main driver for businesses. Some **businesses incorporate social responsibility and environmental consciousness into their business models from the start**, and this attracts investors who are interested in building portfolios that reflect their values and ethics.

There are **limited market incentives for companies to voluntarily submit to higher standards**. Most companies will only submit to mandated regulations and standards because the long-term savings of voluntary standards are overshadowed by their upfront costs. Additionally, customers often do not understand third party certification ratings and do not want to pay more for them.

**The success of green businesses is driven by consumer demand.** Consumers are complicit in creating a cheap, disposable culture that relies on unsustainable manufacturing practices. They need to take responsibility for their consumption and be willing to demand better and pay more for it.

\*DISCLAIMER: Please be advised that the views and opinions expressed in this summary are those of the study participants and are not necessarily representative of the stakeholder groups as a whole.

**A more sustainable approach to city building is needed.** While green building practices improve the environmental impact of buildings, they may also create an unintended impact by raising the cost and making them less accessible to marginalized groups. All developments need to be considered in terms of the impact that they have on individual communities and the city at large.

**The necessity of entrepreneurial skills in green business poses a barrier to many jobseekers.** All specialized fields require specific levels of skills and training; however, entrepreneurial skills do not come easily to everyone. More technically-oriented training programs do not necessarily help jobseekers to develop these skills, requiring them to pursue additional training options.

**Environment-themed courses in universities often do not provide jobseekers with technical skills** and are not considered useful by many employers.

**There is an opportunity for the government to encourage entrepreneurship through incubator models to prevent brain-drain and promote green innovation.** Especially where there is a failure to recognize foreign credentials, increased government support for entrepreneurial ventures would allow newcomers to apply for grants to start their own green-businesses as an alternative to retraining.

### *OPINIONS FROM OTHER STAKEHOLDERS*

Jobseekers expressed the **need for entry-level green jobs with upward mobility.**

Jobseekers called for **more equitable hiring processes.** Equity and merit are not mutually exclusive and one does not need to come at the expense of the other.

Training and education representatives stated that **getting newcomer jobseekers and workers from local communities onto the job site is not enough.** Local hiring initiatives often do not start far enough in advance for workers to acquire the training necessary to play long-term roles in projects. Additionally, there needs to be on-site support from supervisors and the potential for mobility within organizations for newcomer workers after they have been hired.

Jobseekers and labour and trade union representatives asserted that **businesses' hiring practices do not reflect true job skill requirements.** Increased credentialism in Toronto has created accessibility issues for members of lower-income communities and marginalized groups.

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#### *RESEARCH TEAM*

- Cheryl Teelucksingh (Principal Investigator), *Ryerson University*
- Blake Poland, *University of Toronto*
- Grace-Edward Galabuzi, *Ryerson University*
- Winnie Ng, *Ryerson University*

Please visit <https://greengap.org/> for more information about the study.