

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 labour and trade union representatives in moving the green agenda forward and building a more inclusive green economy.*

OPINIONS FROM LABOUR AND TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES

The **framing of green initiatives affects how they are received by the public**. More popular transit and green building initiatives are pushed by policymakers for their cost-effectiveness, while the less popular transition to renewable energy is presented as a prerequisite for environmental sustainability.

A **stabilization of Ontario's energy policy** is required to create job stability.

Green energy is monopolized by the private sector. Ontario's regulatory framework has led to a privatized green energy sector. Ontarians pay above market rates for green energy to incentivize private investment, and high energy costs lead to significant job loss. The government should run green-energy projects itself to minimize consumer costs and deliver good jobs.

Ontario's current energy grid is not set up to meet system demands using only renewable energy generation. Solar and wind power are intermittent with lower capacity, and must be combined with other energy sources to meet consumer demand consistently. Increased advancement in renewable energy storage is needed before a full transition to renewable energy is efficient.

There is currently **not a major push for green jobs or green innovation** within the existing workforce. There are complicated considerations for many workers, particularly those in the traditional energy sector and extractive industries who have had first-hand experience with environmental destruction and pollution, but whose livelihood is also directly connected to this work.

There is a **widespread belief that green jobs initiatives do not produce work for union members or current trades workers**.

*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.

Building the true cost of consumption into the economy is the only way to generate lasting, behavioural change.

The **attitudinal shift necessary for environmental considerations to become part of mainstream workplace culture** might mirror that of previous social movements such as the evolution of the occupational health and safety movement. In the past, health and safety issues were acknowledged but not acted upon, and now workers feel confident in refusing unsafe work or protecting fellow colleagues.

There is a need for **more discriminate use of the term ‘green’**. The label of ‘green’ has quickly become a buzzword, and the lack of agreement over its definition has rendered it meaningless. Genuinely innovative ideas lose credibility when the term ‘green’ is attached to them due to its ambiguity.

Some representatives suggested that equity is driven by policy, and that the **policies governing the green economy are currently not developed enough for equity considerations to be prioritized**. The attitudinal shift required for the public to accept that the labour intensive green economy creates more jobs than the current capital intensive economy dominates policymakers’ agendas and equity in training and employment will come later.

OPINIONS FROM OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Policymakers stressed that **green jobs do not have to take jobs away**. Being a resource-based economy, the notion that Canada must choose between good jobs and the environment is quite prevalent. However, policymakers are confident that workers in declining industries can be placed in the new economy. The bottom line is that pipe workers can still be pipe workers, we just need to find new materials to make the pipes out of.

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