

## 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 government and policymakers in moving the green agenda forward and building a more inclusive green economy.\* The policymakers involved in this study included Toronto City Council staff, representatives from arms-length municipal government agencies, and charitable and not-for-profit organizations that do policy advocacy work at the municipal level.

### OPINIONS FROM POLICYMAKERS

The oil and gas industry and **the traditional energy sector produces a huge amount of employment** for Canadians.

**The Federal Government is not that engaged in environmental issues.** Municipalities have thus far been the leaders in sustainability initiatives and renewable energy initiatives. Toronto is the only city in Canada with a green economy advisor and there are more green buildings being built in Toronto than anywhere else in North America.

There are **tensions between jurisdictions** over who has the right to do green work. Conventional trades see green trade work as their own instead of an evolving sector.

Government **policy does not create new jobs**; rather, it builds scale in an industry, increasing demand for already existing jobs.

**Ontario's renewable energy industry is not self-supporting.** The Green Energy Act relies heavily on tariffs, Ontario content requirements, and the cooperation of trade partners. These conditions are artificial and do support long-term growth and success. A major focus on economic development needed to keep pace with population growth and increasing urbanization.

**Green jobs are local jobs.** Renewable energy is more suited to local generation for local demand.

Policymakers emphasized the difficulty in finding a balance between **increasing penalties and keeping businesses in Ontario**. The government needs to put pressure on businesses to become more sustainable, while also creating opportunities for them to grow.

A privatized energy sector allows for small-scale projects to attract relatively large-scale investment while still being governed by provincial regulations.

\*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.

## OPINIONS FROM OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Focus group participants expressed the need for a **more equitable bridge between community and government**. Politicians need to engage directly with their communities, asking them what they want and what resources they are willing to allocate; and communities need to be able to hold their politicians accountable for change.

Training representatives stressed that **Community Benefits Agreements need to be legally binding**. Agreements between developers, agencies, and community groups are a promising strategic tool for governments to ensure local and equitable hiring provisions; however, unless the community is a full partner with legal recourse, employment equity issues and training issues will continue to fall to the bottom of the agenda.

Focus group participants called for **increased government funding** for non-governmental organizations and local community businesses to support green initiatives; **increased investment** in research that will move the green economy along, including research into transportation, manufacturing, and waste management; and **increased subsidies** for green education and training programs targeting low-income earners and racialized jobseekers. The current lack of accessible grants and subsidies does not encourage green innovation.

Focus group participants expressed the need for a **clear, strategic vision for the green economy**. Currently there are several individual green initiatives in terms of renewable energy, retrofitting, transportation, building, and agriculture, but there is no overarching framework. A clear vision of what needs to be done, what changes this will involve, and how these changes can be operationalized through policy and regulations must be developed.

Focus group participants recommended **stronger legislation and enforcement of current green policies**. International green initiatives are often more successful due to more stringent regulations and higher taxes. In Ontario, deadlines for businesses' compliance with green policies are not fixed, green building certifications are not subject to consistent audits, and environmental penalties are not severe enough to change industrial activities.

Training representatives stated that there is a **lack of training programs in the private sector**. Businesses need to implement their own environmental training components and the government should regulate these by requiring training by law.

Focus group participants pointed to a **need for more transparency in government**. Accessible, accurate information needs to be mandated through education to promote more community participation. Government inflation of statistics and claims surrounding the green economy have led people to distrust claims.

Focus group participants raised the issues that the **costs associated with making individual environmental decisions are not accessible to all**, and it is difficult for citizens to understand why they are being charged for their individual environmental impact when major companies incur few penalties.

Training representatives asserted that **Ontario has to invest more strategically in its workforce**. Sufficient resources need to be directed toward Ontario's growing unemployment to address the problem politically and socially. Rather than defunding training and employment programs, the government needs to be increasing these programs to retain its workforce.

Focus group participants pointed out that **Canada's economic immigration point system does not accurately reflect the job market**. Newcomers are arriving with education and skills that are neither required nor beneficial in the current job market.

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### RESEARCH TEAM

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