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 training and education representatives in moving the green agenda forward and building a more inclusive green economy.* The training and education representatives involved in this study included university and college faculty and bridge training program employees providing green job training to jobseekers.

OPINONS FROM TRAINING AND EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVES

Training centers and education institutions are not settlement or employment agencies. In many cases, these organizations work with people who are experiencing multiple barriers, and they struggle to meet the demand when they have to provide services outside of their traditional mandate. Even in organizations where equity considerations are a priority, participants' skills and experience ultimately need to correspond with the goals and objectives of the training programs and the professional networks that they work with.

It is increasingly **difficult to create and maintain employment partnerships with businesses in the face of growing acceptance of unpaid internships.** The promise of free labour and the relatively low commitment associated with internships have made them increasingly attractive to employers over traditional paid positions.

Training is fueled by the jobseekers coming to centers rather than a reflection of the labour market. Training centers develop programming and employer engagement strategies based on the jobs that their clients are seeking, but the jobs are not necessarily available.

The lack of clarity surrounding the green employment sector has created rampant **confusion over what jobs are actually available.** There is huge interest from jobseekers in the green economy, however, there is no agreement over what jobs are included under this purview. Understandings of green jobs seem to fall into one of two categories: (1) only jobs requiring specific green training and skills that are directly focused on driving sustainability or improving or restoring environmental quality (e.g. environmental research, renewable energy, waste management); and (2) any job taking into account environmental considerations (e.g. environmentally-conscious financial planning services, environmentally-friendly shipping companies).

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

Jobseekers pointed out that **the green economy is not a culturally exclusive phenomenon**. Many racialized immigrant groups accessing programs at green training centers come from countries where environmental innovation and transitions are taking place. There is a default assumption that Canadians must educate newcomers about environmentalism, rather than taking advantage of the opportunity to learn from other cultures.

Policymakers suggested that **green values need to be mainstreamed into formal and informal education.** All training and education programs should include green components so that all workers have this skill. Providing younger generations with this information earlier will translate upwards to older generations. The internet has made knowledge ubiquitous; ideas are shared freely, and online networks should be taken advantage of to disseminate knowledge. Collaborations between advocacy groups and the government are also a useful strategy to introduce people to new ideas. The transition to a green economy must be culturally meaningful, recognizing the role and influence of different cultural institutions.

Jobseekers suggested that **training programs need to provide an analysis of the green employment sector.** There is uncertainty surrounding what green jobs are available and what steps jobseekers need to take in terms of certification, licensing, and entrepreneurship in order to be eligible for them. Jobseekers believe that there are jobs available but that the training programs are not connecting them.

Jobseekers commented that **green training programs have very loose connections to the job market and employers**. Networking opportunities are often limited to other jobseekers.

Labour and trade union representatives asserted that **green jobs training programs need to be consistent with green policy and hiring practices.** The benefits of efforts to provide green training to marginalized populations facing barriers to employment are moot if there are not green jobs or opportunities corresponding to this training.

Jobseekers stated that the skills, training, and education provided by training programs are **too broad and are geared toward entry-level** positions rather than specific professions.