Cities – The engines for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals

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June 2017

Monitoring and Reporting on SDGs

Cities play a critical role in advancing sustainability through the actual implementation of solutions that bring together the social, environmental and economic aspects of development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are intended to offer a "supremely ambitious and transformational vision" for our common future till 2030 (United Nations, 2015). They are certainly ambitious: the SDGs cover all key aspects of sustainable development, from eliminating extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition to transforming production and consumption processes; reducing the use of resources, waste and pollution; combatting climate change; and meeting basic needs such as food, health care, education and culture.

Cities are uniquely positioned to tailor concrete sustainable actions to the situation and needs on the ground. Many current regional and global organizations recognize this role of the cities in implementing SDGs (United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network [UNSDSN], 2016; United Nations University [UNU], 2015).

Common wisdom says that what we do not measure, we cannot manage. From the earliest days of the SDG process, there have been calls to develop indicators to understand our baseline, as well as measure and report progress in achieving SDGs as soon as possible (Pinter, 2013). IISD has been active in collecting data and tracking progress in cities in terms of sustainability and well-being. SDGs take the relevance of this work to a new level, as the goals agreed by UN member states are now

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universal: in contrast with the Millennium Development Goals, they apply not only to developing, but also developed countries such as Canada. As part of IISD's efforts on tracking sustainable development, we would like to showcase this work and provide an additional contribution to Canada by looking at SDGs at the city level (IISD, n.d.).

SDG INDICATOR TRACKING INITIATIVE

WHILE THERE ARE A NUMBER OF DATA COLLECTION AND INDICATOR REPORTING EFFORTS IN CANADA FOR CITIES, NONE OF THEM ARE STRUCTURED AND VISUALIZED TO HELP UNDERSTAND BOTH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TRENDS AND PROGRESS WITH SDG IMPLEMENTATION. IISD'S TOOL MAKES USE OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS TO PROVIDE EASY ACCESS TO SDG INDICATOR TRENDS IN MAJOR CANADIAN CITIES. DATA ARE PROVIDED IN TIME SERIES AND NORMALIZED TO MAKE COMPARISONS BETWEEN CITIES EASY. THE CHARTS PROVIDE A SNAPSHOT OF PROGRESS TOWARD SDGS IN CANADIAN CITIES AS WELL AS OVERALL SUSTAINABILITY.

Over time, this initiative will give a view of how cities are progressing against the SDGs based on a growing list of globally comparable indicators, and therefore serve as a resource for the Canadian, provincial and city policy-makers and governments (as well as other agencies and civil society organizations) engaged in monitoring SDG implementation, planning and policy development and impact assessment.

SDG Indicators Monitored

The SDG indicator selection process at the international level is led by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG–SDGs) working in close collaboration with the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC). Currently, there are approximately 150 well-established indicators suggested to monitor progress toward the SDGs, with a further 80 indicators requiring further development.

These global indicators provide useful guidance and help facilitate comparability, but they cannot simply be copied over and used at the city level. This is mostly due to the lock-in related to the use of existing indicators and limited data availability for cities. However, developing the methods and capacities needed to report all indicators will take time, while it is urgent that we measure and report on progress now if we are serious about implementing the SDGs. Working with data available in Statistics Canada databases, we identified a set of 12 SDG indicators for 13 cities (Table 1).

Cities: Halifax, Moncton, Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa-Gatineau, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Victoria

Table 1. List of indicators at the city level in Canada linked to the global indicators

Goal		UN Indicator	Corresponding Canadian Indicator
1	1.2.1	Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age	Individuals below Low Income Measure (after tax)
3	3.5.2	Harmful use of alcohol, defined according to the national context as per capita alcohol consumption (aged 15 years and older) within a calendar year in litres of pure alcohol	5+ drinks (until 2012); heavy drinking (from 2013)
3	3.a.1	Age-standardized prevalence of current tobacco use among persons aged 15 years and older	Prevalence of smoking among persons aged 12 years and older
3	3.c.1	Health worker density and distribution	Total physicians per 100,000 population
4	4.1.1	Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex	Educational attainment: Post-secondary education (percent aged 15 and over with university degree, post-secondary certificate or diploma)
5	5.5.1	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments	Proportion of seats held by women in local government (including mayor)
8	8.5.2	Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities	Unemployment rate
8	8.6.1	Proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training	Youth unemployment rate
10	10.2.1	Proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median income, by age, sex and persons with disabilities	Low income gap: Average gap ratio (percent) Low Income Measure (after tax)
11	11.1.1	Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing	Core housing need
11	11.2.1	Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age, and person with disabilities	Individuals below Low Income Measure (after tax)
16	16.1.1	Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age	Homicides per 100,000 population

Trends in Meeting SDG in Canadian Cities

While SDGs identify targets for 2030—and implementation programs in many cases are just starting—taking into account historic perspectives is essential. Multi-year or multi-decade trends help view present-day baselines in a more dynamic setting and assess the possible response of indicators and the underlying issues to policy interventions. The lessons learned can be instructive for designing implementation and transition strategies toward the 2030 targets.

Another key design element of data series is comparability. Cities function under many different contexts, start from different baselines and apply often rather different strategies to deal with sustainable development problems. Comparing their performance using carefully normalized indicators can help identify similarities and differences in performance, spot top and bottom performers and ask questions about underlying reasons and opportunities for learning across the communities.

Data for the 13 Canadian cities are available from 1995 and allow us to look back over 20 years as a basis for planning implementation strategies and pathways for 2030. Figure 1 presents examples of trends. The data show that there is an overall declining trend in tobacco use among younger people, but it also confirms that the trend is not universal: clearly, some cities are struggling to achieve or maintain progress, and the rather wide fluctuations show that this is not a one-way street: success can be temporary, and smoking rates can increase after a period of reduction. The indicators in the database allow us to:
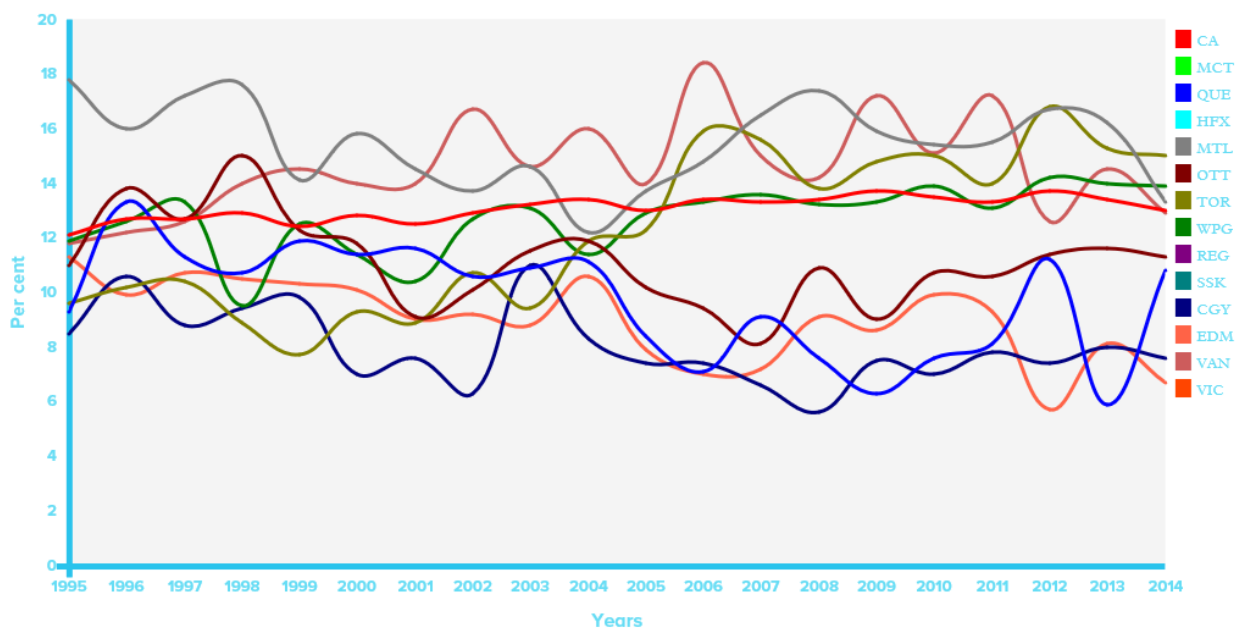
- Recognize the extent and rate of change needed to achieve 2030 targets.

- Assess progress over the last 20 years and thus indicate what was possible given financial resources, implementation efforts, political commitments and social commitments.

- Through continuous monitoring identify problems and adjust implementation efforts to correct transition pathways toward achieving the SDGs nationally and at the city levels.

Based on the examples, the data and trends will allow such things as assessment of the feasibility of reducing poverty under SDG 2, or smoking rates under SDG 3. For each city, it will allow us to compare their efforts over time using the indicators, as well as exchange experiences with other cities to learn from their success.
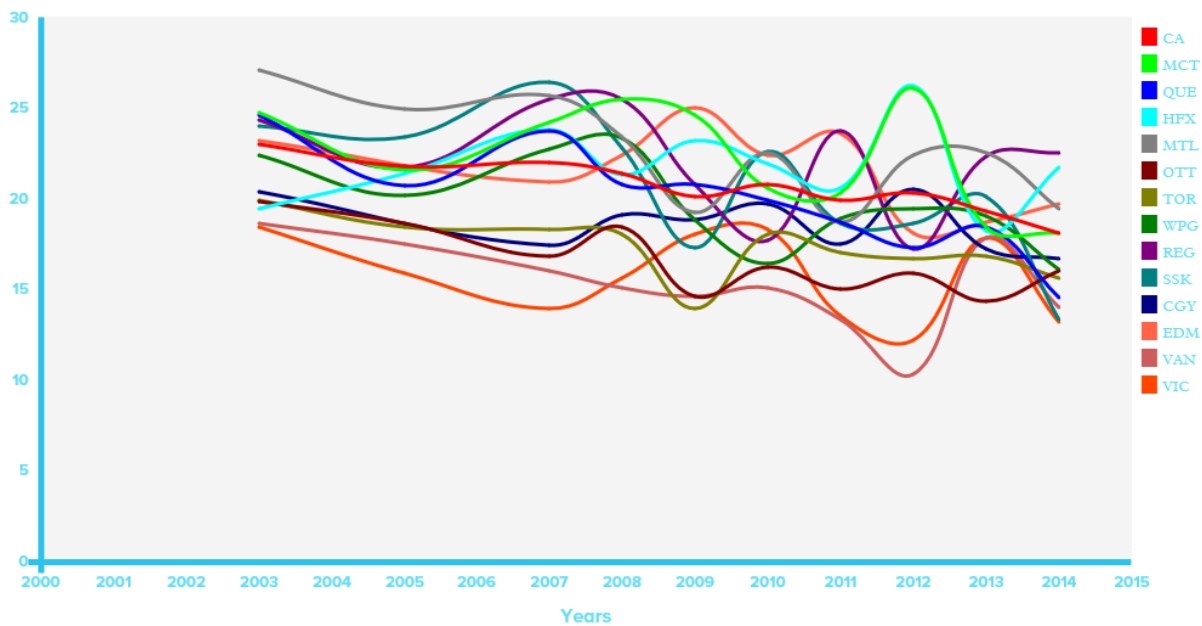
These charts also carry another important message for SDG implementation related to scale. While formally SDG targets are set at the national level, direct implementation is "outsourced" to many different levels of government. Cities represent an important level, but in a federal state such as Canada, provinces and territories will also play key roles. Showing the federal average along with indicator trends for other jurisdictions communicates the message that responsibility for making overall progress is shared and requires cross-scale, coordinated action.

UNSC indicator:	Indicator for Canadian cities:
1.2.1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age	Individuals below Low Income Measure (after tax)

UNSC indicator:	Indicator for Canadian cities:
3.a.1 Age-standardized prevalence of current tobacco use among persons aged 15 years and older	Prevalence of smoking among persons aged 12 years and older

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