



What is the history of this issue and how does it impact First Nations?

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) is a United Nations Resolution unanimously adopted by the General Assembly in 2015 and affirmed over 40 times. The Agenda comes with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that articulate global action to eradicate poverty and sets a forward-looking path to a sustainable, prosperous planet with resilient peoples.

While the SDGs are seen as a huge improvement to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), First Nations were not directly involved in the consultation process, and there is still much to be done to ensure that their priorities are adequately reflected in the SDGs. Regardless, many gains have been made at the international level through the replacing of the MDGs with the SDGs. Foremost is the fact that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are rooted in the principles of universality, human rights, participation, equality and leaving no one behind, all core priorities for Indigenous Peoples. The SDGs have the potential to be transformative for Indigenous Peoples, if their implementation, especially at the national level, respects these principles, particularly if they are used along with other international instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UN Declaration). The SDGs are exceptionally pertinent to hold States like Canada accountable for their obligations to human rights protections, non-discrimination and equitable progress across the goals, especially among Indigenous Peoples.

In February 2021, the Government of Canada released [Moving forward together: Canada's 2030 Agenda National Strategy](#) to lay the foundations for the implementation of the SDGs domestically. The strategy acknowledges the health and socio-economic disparities facing First Nations, and aims to support existing federal commitments focused on Reconciliation such as the implementation of the UN Declaration, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the Calls to Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. However, much work remains to ensure that concrete steps are taken in the right direction and that First Nations are involved in the process.

While AFN has provided input on the 2030 Agenda National Strategy, there is a need for greater engagement to further inform the implementation of this strategy or for First Nations to consider developing their own SDG strategy and framework, once a mandate is in place. Additional work revolves around using the SDGs to advocate for closing the gap, expanding data to inform policy development, and holding Canada accountable for its human rights performance internationally.

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How has the AFN's recent advocacy affected this area?

In 2019, ESDC and AFN agreed to work to create awareness, capacity and partnerships around the SDGs among First Nations. Since then, AFN has been able to provide preliminary inputs to the 2030 Agenda National Strategy, but further engagement is needed to ensure an informed and endorsed strategy.

Moreover, AFN has been supporting mandates that align with the individual SDGs and using engagement opportunities to highlight the connection between different issues and the SDGs. In this regard, AFN hosted a session on the SDGs at the National Forum on Income Assistance, connecting the SDGs with poverty and income inequality. Through internal meetings and Chiefs Committees, AFN will also link the SDG work with the work on climate change, environment, food security, health and education. As the theme of this year's UN High Level Political Forum is focused around sustainable and resilient recovery for COVID-19 to achieve the SDGs, AFN will also link the SDG work with the ongoing work on COVID-19 and its impact on First Nations.

AFN has been involved in a number of initiatives focused on indicators, frameworks and data, with an external Table on First Nations Data set up to share information on such initiatives. Among these initiatives is the National Outcomes Based Framework (NOBF), which is intended to ensure the new fiscal relationship is delivering results by measuring progress on closing the gap. The NOBF work can also support the development of an SDG framework for First Nations once there is a mandate in place. AFN will also continue to use the SDG work to advocate for improving data to measure First Nations well-being, as well as to include them in the Quality of Life framework being developed by Finance Canada.

Where do we hope to go in the future?

AFN will continue to advance progress on individual SDGs through its ongoing work, continue engagement with ESDC in the development and implementation of the 2030 Agenda National strategy and build towards a resolution that will provide AFN with the mandate to advance work on the SDGs. This will help in the following areas:

1. *Canada's Performance on Human Rights*

The 2030 Agenda sets out broader principles focused on human rights and rule of law, which, in the Canadian context, offer an opportunity for Canada to improve its human rights performance by ensuring that First Nations' inherent jurisdiction and legal traditions and systems are respected. Para 8 of the 2030 Agenda resolution envisions a world with universal

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respect for human rights and human dignity, rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination for all. However, Canada's performance on these human rights has been deficient especially when looking at Canada's obligations under other covenants. Every treaty body that reports on Canada has found that a great deal must be done to improve standards of living and human rights for Indigenous Peoples. The SDGs can be seen as one mechanism to reaffirm the UN Declaration, and hold Canada accountable for its human rights performance.

2. Affirming the UN Declaration

The 2030 Agenda reaffirms the importance of human rights instruments and implementing the Agenda "in a manner that is consistent with the rights and obligations of States under international law" (para 18 of the resolution). For Indigenous Peoples, this instrument is the UN Declaration, which sets out minimum standards that States must meet, as well as standards that are informed by the larger body of international human rights law such as binding international human rights Treaties and how these have been interpreted and applied to the situation of Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, the UN Declaration affirms the right of self-determination of Indigenous Peoples and their rights to their own development. As stated in Article 23 of the UN Declaration, "Indigenous Peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development." Both the 2030 Agenda resolution and the UN Declaration are thus mutually reinforcing.

3. Improving data collection to measure and address the gap

Many international treaty bodies have expressed numerous concerns about the gaps in the quality of life experienced by many Indigenous People compared with other Canadians. The SDGs can work alongside existing First Nations frameworks to advocate for improving data to measure and then address the socio-economic gaps between First Nations and non-Indigenous Canadians and advocating for data to measure and address these gaps. This is especially important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated inequality, making the coordination and cooperation on the collection and analysis of data even more important.

4. Reinforce focus on Individual issues

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals themselves reflect many of the issues faced by First Nations in Canada and can be used to reinforce these individual issues. Moreover, the SDGs offer a holistic framework whereby many issues are interrelated. For example, efforts made

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to end poverty and hunger (Goals 1 and 2), will improve healthy lives (Goal 3), but they require progress across a number of issues such as improving education, gender equality and economic growth (Goals 4, 5 and 8). The SDGs can thus highlight the holistic and interconnected nature of the challenges faced by First Nations and be used to reinforce the advocacy for individual issues.

5. Domestic implementation of the SDG strategy

Canada has recently launched *Moving forward together: Canada's 2030 Agenda National Strategy* to lay the foundations for the domestic implementation of the SDGs. While commitments to reconciliation have been reinforced under the strategy, First Nations will need to continue advocating for their involvement in the decision-making process around the SDGs to ensure that Canada's implementation respects First Nations' right to self-determination and their own priorities for sustainable development, while also ensuring that the strategy upholds the basic principles of the 2030 Agenda, including equality, participation and human rights protection, and a decolonized concept of the rule of law. Given that the national strategy recognizes alternative models of sustainable development, there is also an opportunity for First Nations to develop their own SDG strategy and framework, which outlines their own vision for sustainable development, once there is a mandate in place.