



Andrew Johnson 00:40 Welcome back to the podcast everyone! And welcome to any first-time listeners out there. We're happy to have you all and hope that you learn something alongside us. Today, we have [JP Bervoets who is Vice President](#) at the [Community Foundations of Canada](#), also known as the CFC, a network of 191 community foundations that are operating across Canada.

We just hosted a small gathering here at the office, and JP led a fantastic discussion around the [UN's sustainable development goals](#), also known as the SDGs, and how individuals and foundations can embrace that framework as part of their own work. We're going to continue that conversation and introduce this topic here on the podcast. So, welcome JP.

JP Bervoets 01:23 Thanks for having me.

Andrew Johnson 01:24 A little bit of background for our listeners: we've been partnering with the CFC since 2014 in various forms. We share a lot in common, especially when it comes to things like strengthening the communities around us, and obviously taking a long-term view. And before we get into the SDGs, I wanted to have you help our listeners understand who and what the CFC is.

JP Bervoets 01:47 Community Foundations of Canada is a national network that represents a 191 community foundations across the country. These are public place-based foundations that are really built on the idea that local community members are best situated to understand and find the issues that they're faced with in their communities, and to actively work towards solutions [for] them.

As a national network, we actively work alongside community foundations and other partners—both to strengthen the capacity for philanthropic organizations across the country, but to also create specific opportunities for foundations, partners, and others to work together to address some of the challenges that are shared in communities across the country.

That involves everything from advancing outcomes around food security to helping foster a strong sense of belonging; helping to welcome and settle newcomers and refugees in communities across the country; and so on.

Andrew Johnson	02:31	Great, thanks for that. Why don't we just get right into the meat of this podcast: what are the sustainable development goals?
JP Bervoets	02:38	The sustainable development goals represent 17 ambitious goals that were adopted at the United Nations in September of 2015. They're really a universal call-to-action to help end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by the year 2030. They were signed by Canada and 192 other countries around the world, who are now working together to understand what the best pathways are to have an impact around the 17 significant issues at a global level over the next decade.
Andrew Johnson	03:04	That's a really great and succinct way of describing what we're dealing with here from an SDG standpoint. What exactly is the purpose of all of this? I mean, when I think about it—for centuries, humans have been progressing, innovating, developing, and bringing ourselves up in terms of a quality of life. Do we not trust the human endeavour there? Why does it matter to have these SDGs in place?
JP Bervoets	03:28	<p>One of the things that I would think about—with respect to our own work at Community Foundations of Canada—is the extent to which a shared language helps us partner more effectively with one another. And we're realizing that a lot of the issues that the SDGs tries to address—whether that's solving poverty or ending hunger; addressing a change in climate; or thinking about the ways in which we can strengthen opportunities for good work and for a stronger economy—these are complex issues. And they're not issues that can be solved by any single organization by any single sector.</p> <p>One of the things the SDGs does so well, is it actually creates a shared language and opportunity for not only different segments within a given sector, like civil society ([e.g.], philanthropy), to connect more effectively with international development organizations; or across sectors—so, a shared language that governments, private sector, and civil society can speak together—but it also creates a new opportunity for us to share a common language at a global level.</p>
	04:17	There's so much innovation that's taking place in the context of, for example, the work that foundations are doing at a global level, many of whom have chosen to adopt the SDGs as their framework. It's their framework for how they discuss the issues they are exploring, how they measure their impact...so by adopting the SDGs as an organization here in Canada, it allows us to now speak a common language, not only across sectors, but with many of our counterparts globally.

Andrew Johnson

04:39

Okay, great. So that concept of a shared language is certainly something that we appreciate here at Mawer, and I think our listeners will too, because we've spoken to it on this podcast [previously](#). What are some examples—or an example—from your standpoint with the SDGs about embracing a shared language, or the benefits of that?

JP Bervoets

04:59

I think down to the very architecture of how the SDGs were designed. They're really designed to help break down a lot of the traditional silos that exist in our work, and in how we work towards given outcomes at a community level. The SDGs, first of all, break down silos between places. A lot of these global indicator systems in the past have really separated developing and developed countries, whereas the SDGs is as much a domestic and a local community agenda as it is a global agenda. It requires us to think both locally and globally.

It breaks down silos between definitions. Oftentimes a word like "sustainability," or "sustainable development goals," conjure up images of a specific focus, for example, on the environment. The SDGs across the 17 goals—and the 232 indicators that exist within that framework—really think about sustainability from the standpoint of not only the environment, but also our economy, and the social dimensions of a framework like this.

05:49

It helps break down silos between issues. If you look up the sustainable development goals on Google, you'll see 17 brightly coloured boxes with words like, "no poverty" or "ending hunger" in them. But when you actually look at the specific indicator framework through which we're asked to measure our progress towards some of these goals and targets, it shows how interconnected and how indivisible a lot of these issues are.

We can't advance outcomes around poverty if we're not thinking about food insecurity, or if we're not thinking about inequality in our communities, or if we're not recognizing the extent to which, perhaps, a change in climate is shifting food production systems. So, it really helps us think differently about the issues that organizations often work towards and are working towards, perhaps, in silos.

The SDGs also breaks down traditional silos between sectors. In a Canadian context, we actually saw a lot more engagement and momentum from the private sector around the SDGs right when they were adopted in 2015 than we saw from government or from civil society.

06:42

The idea now that both at a domestic level as well as a global level, private sector, government, and civil society can think about and measure its progress towards specific issues through a shared language is highly valuable—and I think actually unprecedented.

And lastly, the kind of...mantra of the SDGs is for “no one to be left behind.” What it actually forces us to do is not just think about our impact at an aggregate level, but to really think about how we’re advancing specific outcomes for those traditionally left out of a national picture, often being the communities that are most marginalized in society.

So, it really requires us both to fundamentally shift how we’re thinking about specific issues, but to also do so with the benefits of a shared language that is both local and global, that is cross-sectorial, and that helps depict the extent to which specific issues are interrelated.

Andrew Johnson 07:26 First of all, wow! That is a great overview, and multiple examples of the importance of a shared language, but also the power of having a shared language to mov[e] large groups of individuals—and in this case, foundations, governments—toward common goals. Certainly something that we can appreciate, so thank you for that.

I did want to shift gears a little bit because we did mention at the outset: you are from the Community Foundations of Canada, most of our listeners are Canadian... how are we doing as a country? It certainly (from my perspective) feels as though Canada would have a head start in a lot of these categories or a lot of these goals. How are we doing here?

JP Bervoets 08:06 It's a really great question, because again, when you think about Canada and look at many of the different global indicator frameworks that exist, we're often alongside, for example, countries in Scandinavia—sitting at the top of some of these indicator frameworks. The SDGs and the way they're designed... again, in requiring us to think about who's being left behind or left out of a national picture, actually paints a very different perspective on how we're doing as a country.

Right now, if you look across all 17 goals, Canada's on track only to meet goal four: quality education; and goal seven: affordable and clean energy. And we actually have a pretty significant gap with respect to the progress that's needed for all Canadians over the next decade. So...we're not doing that great.

Andrew Johnson 08:45 What are some examples of some of the areas where there are large gaps, and what are we seeing, from your standpoint, on trending towards [potentially] achieving those goals?

JP Bervoets

08:54

First and foremost, I think one of the things that's worth acknowledging is that we actually don't know how we're doing. Again, Canada is being asked alongside 192 other countries to measure its progress across 232 indicators using a specific and shared language. And we know that there's a significant data gap in Canada. So, we actually aren't able right now to measure how we're doing with respect to the partnership infrastructure that's needed to advance the goals. (Goal 17 is building partnerships.) We don't have enough data to understand how we're tracking towards the 'sustainable cities and communities' outcomes; we have roughly half of the data that we need to understand at a disaggregated level across the country how we're doing. And similarly, on responsible consumption and production, we just don't have the data we need to know how we're doing. There's a significant gap right now in even understanding how Canada's doing and whether we're advancing or retreating, I guess, from our commitments towards this agenda.

09:44

But then beyond that, we know that there are specific goals in which Canada has a lot of work to do. So, for example, goal two is "no hunger." Hunger is not an issue that you often think about as something that's significant at an aggregate level across Canada. But, for example, if we fail to address food insecurity in Canada's Arctic, we're actually not going to meet our requirements under goal two. So again, the "no one left behind" mentality of a framework like the SDGs requires us to think differently about how we're having an impact, and with whom. And as a result of, (I think), that requirement...we're simply further than we need to be at this stage in working towards these outcomes.

Andrew Johnson

10:17

Okay, well that caught me off guard a little bit, because I was anticipating Canada being, as we usually are, as you said at the outset, kind of ranked a little highly in a lot of these cases. What are some examples of the areas that we could be doing better or at least understanding where we can get better?

JP Bervoets

10:33

Goal six in the context of the SDGs is clean water and sanitation. And yet in 2017, there were at least a hundred drinking water advisories in First Nations communities across the country. We have goal one, "no poverty." In 2015, over 5 million Canadians, or one in seven people, lived in poverty. This included over a million children.

Goal five is "gender equality." In 2014, women reported 1.2 million violent incidences including physical assault, sexual assault, and robbery. And we know that over the last 15 to 20 years, Canada's greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 18%. So, these are all just specific examples of spaces in which Canada is failing to meet its obligations under something like the Sustainable Development Goals. And there are many more.

There's both a data gap, but we also have a lot of data. And that data's showing significant gaps, again, depending on who you are or where you are in the country, that there's a lot of work to be done in order to meet these goals.

Andrew Johnson

11:22

At the risk of sounding like an out of touch person here, a lot of those things that you just relayed to us are somewhat shocking to me. I think one of the more important things that's going to come out of...not just the shared language, but just getting out and talking about the SDGs in general, is [it's] going to bring a lot more people into this understanding of exactly where Canada fits on our journey towards helping achieve these Sustainable Development Goals that we've laid out from a global perspective.

I wanted to get your sense of what's happening right now with the SDGs, in particular here in Canada. What are your observations from your standpoint on the CFC working with a lot of local community foundations around Canada? What are the trends that you're seeing?

JP Bervoets

12:09

We're at a really exciting point right now in the context of Canada's engagement with something like the SDGs. If you'd have asked me this question a year or two ago, Canada was definitely lagging behind. The federal government hadn't said a lot about this agenda and actually in 2018, the Auditor General released [a report](#) which indicated that in a lot of different ways, Canada hadn't built the infrastructure it needed to work towards these goals. That report indicated that in a Canadian context, we had a narrow perspective on what sustainable development meant and looked like; we had no federal governance structure to help advance outcomes toward these goals; limited or no consultation had taken place with communities; we had no system to measure or monitor our progress...and so on.

There were some strengths, certainly, as well. But Canada hadn't said a lot. And actually, at an institutional level, very few people were talking about the SDGs.

12:56

Really, what's happened over the [few] last years though, is that we've seen a pretty significant shift—both in the way that Canada at a federal level [and] at a national level is thinking about and actioning its adoption of the SDGs, and then also what's taking place at the community level.

So, first at a national level: Canada finally has started to report to the United Nations. In 2018, it submitted its first voluntary national review, which was a first attempt to summarize in fact, how are we doing and where some of the biggest gaps [are] in the Canadian context. We now have an SDG unit that's meant to help coordinate collaboration across government departments in support of meeting the SDGs.

We've launched, recently, towards a national strategy, which is a first attempt at interpreting the kind of broad consultation that's been taking place at the community level across the country and laying out a pathway towards a cohesive national strategy so that Canada can meet these goals by 2030. So, since that Auditor General report, we've seen a pretty significant shift in how government has engaged with the SDGs.

13:49 What's actually much more interesting than that is there is an organization called the [British Columbia Council for International Cooperation](#), and a couple of years ago, they released a report called "[The Hidden Mosaic](#)," [which] really reflected the extent to which organizations and individuals across the country are already thinking about the SDGs; were working on the SDGs; were collecting SDG aligned data; and actually weren't connecting with one another. In 2017, we went out across the country and hosted something called "[The National Conversation Series](#)" on Canada and the SDGs. And really this was our question: have you heard about the SDGs? If so, how are they showing up in your work? And we were actually really surprised by what we heard. 89% of the organizations that participated in an event or an online survey agreed that this would be a useful framework for advancing their work. 94% recognized a need to have some continued conversation or infrastructure to support more collaboration around the goals because these were conversations that were taking place internally within their organization, not externally in the community.

14:44 But two fifths of the organizations that responded were already collecting SDG aligned data—and this was back in 2017! So there truly was this "hidden mosaic" of people that were engaging and activating around the SDGs, even in the absence of a formal infrastructure at the government level. So we've continued to want to surface that hidden mosaic, and really demonstrate the extent to which there's this momentum in Canada.

There's a really great map called the "[SDG Movement Map](#)," which again, the British Columbia Council for International Cooperation has made, and they've tracked over 11 and a half thousand organizations across the country that have adopted and are working towards the SDGs. In a community foundation context as well, we're seeing more and more community foundations leverage the SDGs—both as a shared language and a shared measurement framework to help advance their work.

So there's just an incredible amount of energy and momentum right now in working towards these goals.

Andrew Johnson

15:31

That whole overview really mirrors my understanding of the role that Community Foundations of Canada plays here in Canada with the community foundations network. You've got, in this case, 191 foundations all working somewhat uniquely in isolated and place-based [circumstances], specifically. And the CFC comes in and really rallies and brings people together into a common conversation, shared resources, and again, shared language—moving towards common goals, [such as] how we can better our country, and in this case of the SDGs, how can we contribute [to] that at a global level?

16:05

I wanted to also hit on a couple of things before we let you go, and one, in particular, [that] is more of a selfish question. It's around what can a corporation like Mawer do? What can an investment firm, or a professional firm in general, do? You mentioned something about asking the question, "how are these SDGs showing up in your work?" Well, if you were to ask us that, my answer would be, "I don't know." [laughs] I guess what I'm asking you is how can I have an answer to that, and what are some things at a very high-level, very entry-level can a corporation do, or the private sector do?

JP Bervoets

16:40

A few observations: I think first and foremost, back to the idea that the SDGs are a shared language—even if you think they're an imperfect shared language, it's a pretty exceptional attempt at creating one that operates at a global level and that could operate across sectors. So, I think first and foremost, just putting your hand up and being willing to play within that shared ecosystem, is an important first step. There are a lot of things that you can do as a company both internally and externally to demonstrate, then, an interest in helping to advance these goals. Internally, that could look like a review of some of your own corporate policies and how they're connected to goals around gender equality for example, or reducing inequality, or promoting good health—creating opportunities for employees to get engaged in some of the issues that they care about. So, there [are] a lot of things that you can do from an infrastructure standpoint within Mawer to help connect your work and your colleagues' work to something like the Sustainable Development Goals.

17:32

There's also a lot of resources I [can] point to—I mentioned that one of our observations was that the private sector, in a Canadian context, had actually moved or at least was more visible with respect to their engagement with the SDGs long before civil society or government got there. And as a result of that early mover status, there's a lot of resources out there; a lot of being curated through a network like the [Global Compact Canada](#), which is actually...we're making visible best practices for corporate engagement in the SDGs.

So, there's a lot of material that I'd certainly encourage organizations to check out. You don't have to start from scratch. There [are] some great best practices out there. And again, the first thing I think is just being willing to play in that space and recognizing that there's now about a 10 year horizon left before 2030 to help make and implement some of those changes.

18:14 Another thing that I think is probably worth considering, and it's something that we've been exploring as one of the networks of philanthropy in Canada, is how can we support direct action towards these goals? So we know that at a global level right now, there's a \$2.5 trillion per year funding gap in meeting these goals. And so as a result, the burden doesn't simply rest with government or even with traditional financing vehicles like philanthropy to move the needle and to help advance outcomes connected to these goals.

One of the questions I would ask then, if I'm Mawer, is "to what extent can institutional capital be deployed in a positive way to help advance outcomes connected to some of these goals?" So that's not a question I have an answer to, but it's something that might be worth exploring. And that, I think, is probably going to be a question that emerges as more and more organizations are thinking about adopting the SDGs.

Andrew Johnson	19:01	That's great. And that's not a question that I have an answer to either, but it is, in your words, something that I think is worthwhile exploring. You did mention a few resources—did you want to maybe point people in the right direction of a few that come to the top of mind for you?
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JP Bervoets	19:17	So I'll start with a shameless plug: Community Foundations of Canada, alongside a growing that work of partners, has been stewarding something called Alliance 2030 . And the idea behind this is really in response to what we heard from so many of the organizations we met with, [which] was that, "I'm working on the SDGs, but actually I have no avenue to continue that conversation and to connect and collaborate with others that are working towards the SDGs." So we built a digital space, alliance2030.ca . And alongside that, a host of programs that help connect academia, private sector organizations, philanthropic organizations, civil society, and government departments—all of whom are either exploring, trying to learn about, or activating around specific goals.
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We'd encourage you to check out [alliance2030.ca](#). It takes two minutes as well to just create a profile on the site, or to even sign up for the newsletter. And what that's going to do is just help create a communications channel for you to follow up on how Canada's doing as we progress towards 2030, on specific opportunities to get involved, and on specific best practices that might be relevant for your company or organization.

Andrew Johnson

20:15

Thanks for that. I think this is an episode that's going to spark a lot of questions for many of our listeners, so having those resources to point to is going to come in handy for a lot of people. For our listeners, we will put up some links in the show notes so that you can head there after you listen. I think that's actually a great place to end things, JP! I wanted to thank you on behalf of our listeners, on behalf of everyone here at Mawer, for taking the time to sit with us and have a great trip back to Toronto.

JP Bervoets

20:39

Thanks so much.