
Report 2—Canada’s Preparedness to Implement the
United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals

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What we examined (see Focus of the audit)

In September 2015, the 193 member states of the General Assembly of the United Nations, including Canada, unanimously adopted the resolution “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” The 2030 Agenda contains 17 aspirational goals for achieving social, economic, and environmental sustainable development worldwide. These sustainable development goals aim, for example, to eradicate global poverty, achieve gender equality, foster economic growth, protect the environment, and build effective, accountable, and transparent institutions.

This audit focused on whether the Government of Canada was prepared to implement the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Why we did this audit

This audit is important because it provides a baseline from which to measure the federal government’s progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the sustainable development goals in future audit work. Federal leadership and cooperation with other levels of government and Canadians are needed to achieve the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of the sustainable development goals. A plan and a system to measure, monitor, and report on the progress in achieving the goals are essential in order for Canada to fulfill its commitments to Canadians and the United Nations.

What we concluded

We concluded that the Government of Canada, as represented by Employment and Social Development Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Global Affairs Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Status of Women Canada, and the Privy Council Office, was not adequately prepared to implement the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Government of Canada made a clear commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda and took some action at the departmental level. However, at the end of our audit, there was no governance structure and limited national consultation and engagement on the 2030 Agenda. There was no implementation plan with a system to measure, monitor, and report on progress nationally. Statistics Canada had developed a data framework to measure results on the 232 global indicators. However, results were not available because the data had not yet been compiled.

Subsequent Event

On 27 February 2018, the Government of Canada published Budget 2018, which proposes to provide \$49.4 million over 13 years, starting in 2018–2019, to establish a Sustainable Development Goals Unit and to fund monitoring and reporting activities by Statistics Canada.

- The Sustainable Development Goals Unit will enable better coordination among all levels of government, civil society, the private sector, Indigenous peoples, and other relevant stakeholders on Canada's efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Support for Statistics Canada’s monitoring and reporting activities will ensure that Canada’s domestic and international efforts to achieve the sustainable development goals are captured, and that no one is left behind.

Budget 2018 also proposes to provide up to \$59.8 million over 13 years, starting in 2018–2019, from existing departmental resources, for programming to support the implementation of the sustainable development goals.

What we found about...

Governance for the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Overall, we found that the Government of Canada had not developed a formal approach to implement the 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals. The five federal organizations identified to lead the 2030 Agenda preparations worked together with the Privy Council Office after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda to begin preparing a national approach. However, despite some specific action at the departmental level, there was still no federal governance structure based on clearly articulated departmental roles and responsibilities by November 2017. We found no communication plan and no engagement strategy on how to include other levels of government and Canadians in a national dialogue on the 2030 Agenda. We also found no implementation plan or system to measure, monitor, and report on the progress in achieving the goals.

This finding matters because clear federal leadership and a governance structure will be required to manage the federal response and coordinate a national approach with other levels of government and Canadians. Consulting widely and engaging other levels of government and all Canadians on the 2030 Agenda are important to enhance commitment and participation and to ensure that the needs of the poorest, most vulnerable, and furthest behind will be heard and met. A plan to implement action across sectors that includes contributions from other levels of government and relevant stakeholders, and a system to measure, monitor, and report on national progress, are essential to achieve the sustainable development goals.

- **Canada lacked a federal governance structure and a plan to implement the 2030 Agenda**

Recommendation. The Government of Canada, as represented by the five organizations leading the 2030 Agenda preparations—Employment and Social Development Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Global Affairs Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and Status of Women Canada—in consultation with the Privy Council Office, should develop and communicate a governance structure to manage the implementation of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The governance structure should establish a clear lead and articulate the roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities of other responsible and accountable federal organizations.

Recommendation. The Government of Canada, as represented by the five organizations leading the 2030 Agenda preparations—Employment and Social Development Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Global Affairs Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and Status of Women Canada—in consultation with the Privy Council Office, should establish an inclusive communication plan and engagement strategy for the federal government to raise public awareness of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and consult and engage other levels of government and Canadians. Activity results should be reported transparently to the public and taken into account when establishing national targets and an implementation plan.

Recommendation. The Government of Canada, as represented by the five organizations leading the 2030 Agenda preparations—Employment and Social Development Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Global Affairs Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and Status of Women Canada—in consultation with the Privy Council Office and Statistics Canada, should establish and communicate an implementation plan to achieve the national targets and sustainable development goals in Canada. This plan should include

- clearly defined and attributed accountabilities for involved federal organizations;
- provisions for effective cooperation with other levels of government and with relevant stakeholders;

- clear national targets;
- coherent actions, which, implemented together, will add up to achieve the national targets; and
- a system for measuring results and for monitoring and reporting on the progress in achieving national targets to the end of 2030.

Departmental actions

Overall, we found that Employment and Social Development Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Global Affairs Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and Status of Women Canada consulted with Canadians on specific policies and programs related to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, these organizations had not analyzed the extent to which their policies and programs could contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda's targets and goals.

This finding matters because for departments in a position to lead, consulting and engaging with other levels of government and Canadians on specific policies and programs are important to ensure that Canadians' needs are addressed. In addition, anticipating the effects of policies and programs is needed to set realistic targets and identify policy and program gaps.

- **Lead federal organizations did not analyze the extent to which their policies and programs could contribute to the 2030 Agenda's targets and goals**

Recommendation. Employment and Social Development Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Global Affairs Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and Status of Women Canada should analyze the extent to which their policies and programs can contribute to the targets and goals of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Data framework for measuring results

Overall, we found that Statistics Canada developed an appropriate framework to collect data that will be used to measure Canada's results against the United Nations' 232 global indicators. The framework provides a basis for decisions on what data to collect. Results were not yet available at the time of our audit. We also found that Statistics Canada was developing an online portal, expected by spring 2018, to share Canadian results on the global indicators. Statistics Canada had identified possible sources of data to report on 68% of the global indicators by November 2017.

This finding matters because a framework in which global indicators are defined and information on data is organized is essential to measure Canada's performance on the global indicators. Without Statistics Canada's validation of Canada's global indicator data, the United Nations' reports could inaccurately depict Canada's performance.

- **Statistics Canada developed a data framework for the global indicators, but results were not yet available**

Recommendation. We made no recommendations in this area of examination.

Entity Responses to Recommendations

The audited entities agree with our recommendations, and have responded (see List of Recommendations).

Related Information

Report of the	Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development
Type of product	Performance audit

Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment • Climate Change • Public Administration
Entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment and Social Development Canada • Environment and Climate Change Canada • Global Affairs Canada • Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada • Privy Council Office • Statistics Canada • Status of Women Canada
Completion date	23 November 2017
Tabling date	24 April 2018
Related audits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report 1—Progress on Reducing Greenhouse Gases—Environment and Climate Change Canada—2017 Fall Reports of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to the Parliament of Canada

For more information

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