

# A Green Economy for Canada: Consulting with Canadians

Executive Summary – April 2011



CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR  
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## Executive Summary

### Background

The Rio 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), also referred to as the Rio+20 Earth Summit, will take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from June 4-6 2012. A main theme of the conference will be “a Green Economy in the Context of Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development”. The term “Green Economy” is an emerging concept and there is no current consensus about its definition.

The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP) conducted the following national research study to seek the perspectives of diverse Canadian stakeholders on what a Green Economy could mean for Canada in the lead-up to Rio+20. Between November 2010 – February 2011 CIELAP conducted 27 interviews with participants from Canadian provinces, territories and municipalities; professional business associations, and non-government organizations using an interview schedule. These same questions were also responded to by 32 individuals from the broader public using an online survey. The content below summarizes what was heard.

### Defining a Green Economy

All those who were interviewed had given thought to Green Economy concepts and many of their institutions are applying Green Economy ideas. Very few are using the term “Green Economy”.

- Canadians are approaching Green Economy concepts from different reference points including: concern over climate change; interest in leveraging environmental and economic gains; a realization that this direction makes economic sense and appeals to citizens; seeing an opportunity for innovation that addresses the world’s needs; and a desire to diversify economies and minimize risk.
- It was noted that the Green Economy should not be seen as separate from the main economy; we’re talking about *the* economy and we need to focus on making it greener.
- Just over half of those interviewed stated that they are looking at the issue holistically; as a way to link environmental, economic, and social objectives. Participants commented that a Green Economy could be a unifying concept and help governments and stakeholders work outside of silos.
- Approximately one third of participants commented that a definition or principles for a Green Economy would be useful to give direction and streamline communications efforts. A strong national dialogue on this issue would help.
- In responding to a list of potential principles of a Green Economy, participants emphasized *ensuring fairness and equity and addressing unjust disparities; systems-based and holistic, integrating all three spheres of sustainability; and strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability.*

### Potential Gains for Canada

Nearly every interview participant and all of the online survey respondents expressed that Canada could make significant gains at home and abroad by putting more emphasis on a Green Economy.

- At least 67% of those interviewed stated that Canada could increase its competitive advantage and that other economic gains could include: jobs; major cost savings; attracting stable and long term foreign investment; increased job satisfaction and retention; greater business productivity; earning revenues from improved ecosystems; and local economic stimulation.
- At least 63% of participants clearly offered that Canada could make significant gains for its reputation if it was seen as being a leader in a Green Economy.



- Respondents from all sectors highlighted the significant health and environmental benefits that are inherent in a shift to a Green Economy.

Some participants expressed concern that Canada was not taking full advantage of these opportunities.

### **Successes, Best Practices and Lessons Learned**

Canadian provinces, territories, municipalities, businesses, and other stakeholders are making impressive advances towards a Green Economy using approaches that include a mix of financial mechanisms, regulation, procurement, investments in R&D and infrastructure, and education and skills training. Participants shared a number of lessons learned in their efforts to advance a Green Economy including: the need for good education and messaging; the need to adopt a systems perspective; that sustainability and Green Economy initiatives need to be positioned outside of any one pillar; that engagement of communities and businesses is difficult and can benefit from sustained engagement and strong support at the highest levels; and that Green Economy aims and initiatives need to be concrete and measurable.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

When asked what major obstacles were standing in the way of implementing a greener economy:

- Approximately 45% of those interviewed across sectors pointed to the current direction and lack of leadership at the federal level. Among its implications, this lack of leadership is producing uncertainty and challenges for businesses.
- Lack of public understanding was put forward as a major challenge in at least 60% of the interviews, across all sectors. Participants recommended that future communications efforts should highlight: that there are significant economic and social gains to be made; that such a transition does not need to be frightening; and that we're talking about *the* Economy, not a part of it.
- Three of those interviewed noted that getting the economic pillar right will be the biggest driver of a Green Economy and that those decisions that succeed will have made economic sense.
- Approximately one third of those interviewed commented on how change will be hard because of the inertia and mentality for maintaining the status quo. Building a Green Economy will require taking a great idea, exciting interests, building a business case, and creating momentum.
- Participants highlighted tensions among and between stakeholders and governments and suggested that jurisdictions need to work together to design policies and initiatives that work for all of Canada and build our reputation as a country. Participants referred to some exciting initiatives in this spirit, including the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement and Western Climate Initiative.
- At least six interview participants noted that the separation of environment, economy and society into silos is a major challenge. The Yukon government's Climate Change Secretariat and Alberta's *Land Stewardship Act* offer possible models for horizontal governance.

### **Roles for Governments and Stakeholders**

All of those interviewed felt that the Government of Canada has a strong role to play in a shift to a Green Economy including: being a model for other stakeholders; helping establish a vision and focus; helping provide a clear policy framework and price signals; investing in technology, R&D, and green business; representing Canada internationally; and facilitating partnerships and collaboration.

Participants noted that other governments and stakeholders also have a large role to play in such a transition and that different players can: share knowledge, best practices and lessons learned; continue to encourage partnerships; champion sustainability and provide leadership that could be modeled to

other jurisdictions and stakeholders; advocate for change; innovate and push new ideas forward; research and communicate potential solutions to policy makers; and act locally.

### **Rio+20 and Priorities for Canada**

Many recommendations were put forward regarding what the Canadian delegation could take as its priorities to Rio+20 including: showing leadership on a Green Economy and the three pillars of sustainability; taking stronger action on climate change measures; involving Canadian stakeholders and governments; promoting technology investment and transfer; promoting Ecosystem Goods and Services; and encouraging a better understanding and clarification of the concept of a Green Economy as well as how this concept could be carried out at all jurisdictional levels.

One industry participant noted that Canada should focus on concrete, practical, short-term deliverables rather than grand-sounding statements. Two provincial / territorial representatives commented that Canada needed to focus on action at home first by developing a national Green Economy policy and action plan to drive national successes. THEN we could go to Rio+20 to share this plan with the world.

### **Suggested Next Steps**

Stakeholders and governments from across Canada believe that we have much to gain by moving towards a Green Economy and much to lose by ignoring what is already a global transition in process. The initiatives and best practices shared by participants reveal that governments, NGO and business leaders are already implementing policies and other measures in this direction. CIELAP offers the following suggested next steps in response to what was heard:

- 1) **A call for Federal leadership:** Provincial / territorial and municipal governments as well as leaders from industry and NGOs in Canada are expressing a serious readiness and willingness to transition to a Green Economy. The Government of Canada could play a strong supportive role by: listening to and working with stakeholders, who have many keen ideas to share, to advance a shared understanding of a Green Economy in Canada; as well as by using the levers it has available to realize the benefits of a Green Economy path.
- 2) **Advance a strong national dialogue and development of a shared vision in advance of Rio+20:** Throughout the interviews participants expressed that if we are to advance the concept of a Green Economy in Canada, there is an absolute need to define and/or develop a set of principles to provide better clarity and vision about how to use the concept as an enabler for change. A strong focussed national dialogue that engages all interested Canadians would help enable our country to arrive at some consensus and understanding about the meaning of the Green Economy and how it could be pursued in a Canadian context. This process could include discussion about key messages and approaches and help establish consistent and comparable measures of progress.
- 3) **Establish clear price signals and invest in technology, R&D and green business:** Participants put forward the critical need to establish clear price signals and “get the economic pillar right”. The Federal Government can help provide rules of the game and price signals that guide the market towards more sustainable practices. The development of a well-articulated and coordinated Green Economy policy for Canada could also help in this effort. Given the divides in jurisdictional responsibilities, collaboration between all levels of government is needed.
- 4) **Federal leadership on the international stage:** Participants of this study advocated for Canada to play a strong leadership role at the Rio+20 World Summit on the issue of a Green Economy and to actively promote the three pillars of sustainable development.