

DIVERSE PATHWAYS TO NET-ZERO

Executive Summary – October, 2021

THERE IS NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL PATHWAY TO NET-ZERO FOR CANADA. WE NEED TO PRIORITIZE PLACE-BASED SOLUTIONS.

Canada is committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. Yet, there is little acknowledgement that top-down policies and programs are not enough.

The level of effort and transformation required and the need for equity, diversity, and inclusion, requires a stronger understanding of these challenges at the community level – the front lines of change. Strong support and buy-in from communities is essential to ensure the transition to net-zero is quickly and widely implemented.

We need to quickly equip all Canadian communities with the resources and capacity they need to contribute to the target and be a part of the solution.

Canada's 4,000 plus communities are diverse in their political infrastructure, their need for services, products, and communication, and their socio-economic composition. Offering support one by one will not get us to the outcome of net-zero emissions by 2050.

Our research reinforces the critical role communities have in achieving net-zero. It highlights that little consideration about the roles of, and implications for, communities has been considered in modelling, plans, and policymaking to date. It also shows that community archotyping can be an effective tool to refine what resources and capacity is needed in each community.

KEY FINDINGS

Behaviour and social acceptability greatly impact our ability to quickly scale up the net-zero solutions that already exist.

Integrating local concerns into policy design and considering community perspectives increases the social acceptability of net-zero transition programs and supports new consumer behaviour.

What we have is not enough. Cultivating conditions that accelerate technology and policy implementation is required.

Community engagement helps identify local barriers to technology and policy implementation. In addition, communities and local governments play important roles in developing synergies across sectors and creating opportunities for novel forms of systemic efficiency.

We need sound and tailored workforce transition programs based on growing sectoral needs associated with the net-zero transition.

Local governments and stakeholders have key roles to play in identifying market opportunities, mapping the geography of training needs, and helping ensure appropriately targeted, accessible training programs.

Financing gaps need filling.

The infrastructure required for net-zero transitions is being implemented at the community level. Local governments own and operate 60 per cent of Canada's public infrastructure, but their ability to maintain, renew, and reinvest in these capital assets is extremely limited. Fostering trust between communities and investors, mapping local investment opportunities, and supporting project aggregation begins with local engagement.

Policy needs to align across all levels of government.

Policy coordination is particularly needed for municipalities. These local governments play a critical role in Canada's low-carbon transition but are constrained by a lack of resources and policy authority. Empowering communities to pursue ambitious climate policies, identify local resource gaps, and highlight opportunities to enhance local policy making capacity remains key.

Net-zero transitions need to positively contribute to the elimination of equity, diversity, and inclusion issues.

Net-zero transitions are and will continue causing disruptions. These disruptions will have implications on household spending, with costs most likely to be disproportionately felt by already disadvantaged households and communities. Community-based analysis and engagement, including with Indigenous communities, has the potential to identify local community needs and risks. Ensuring that the delivery of programs and subsidies are accessible for all, including marginalized populations, is an important challenge.

Stressing the positive health impacts requires more attention.

In addition to environmental and economic benefits, the net-zero transition generates improved health and quality of life outcomes. Community engagement can better inform the relationship between economic and climate policies, climate change and health.

Understanding the transition means getting more granular.

Despite acknowledging the reality of diverse pathways in Canada, models and recommendations tend to be aggregated at either national or provincial levels. As a result, local level dynamics are not well understood and the role local governments play in accelerating or impeding transitions is neglected. A framework of community archetypes capturing important local characteristics and their contribution to diverse transition pathways initiates a deeper understanding.

While net-zero literature emphasizes the need for diverse transition pathways, it tends to conceptualize diversity at national and provincial levels of analysis. Unfortunately, this overlooks the role of communities in achieving net-zero. A complete picture must account for the diverse conditions facing local communities. Developing representative community archetypes allows Canada to refine solutions down to the specific net-zero pathway for a community meeting that archetype description. Narrowing the range of solutions allows local organizations and businesses to contribute to net-zero emission goals effectively and inclusively.

Communities and local governments are catalysts in advancing the diversity of net-zero pathways. Community perspectives must be part of a comprehensive approach to achieving Canada's net-zero transition.

These are early steps. Gaps remain in how communities can realistically achieve a net-zero transition and we need to better understand how a suite of indicators can reflect and help guide communities as they undertake the transition.

Research and extensive engagement are required to leverage community perspectives. The Diverse Pathways to Net Zero initiative aims to capture, champion, and communicate community pathways and achievements. Over the next three years, the project will fill a critical gap in moving net-zero transitions toward achievement.

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