

**Greening civil society organizations:  
Challenging the international development and humanitarian assistance sectors in Canada  
to become leaders in operational greening**

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### Acknowledgements

Cooperation Canada launched its "[Greening CSOs](#)" project in 2020 to raise awareness of environmental mainstreaming and climate-conscious operations among Canadian civil society organizations (CSOs), identify and document CSO experiences and consult CSOs on the barriers and opportunities for greener operations and programming as well as environment and climate oriented policy and advocacy efforts. The overall aim of this research and practice initiative was to support Canadian international development and humanitarian CSOs to emerge as global leaders in environmental mainstreaming and climate-conscious operations. An Advisory Committee of diverse representatives from civil society and academia provided guidance for this work.

Financial support was provided by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency in Canada, Aga Khan Foundation Canada, Atlantic Council for International Cooperation, Canadian Coalition on Climate Change and Development, Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Centre d'étude et de coopération internationale and the David Suzuki Foundation. Representatives from these organizations also provided valuable insights as members of the Advisory Committee.

This report was written by Arianna Abdelnaiem, Research Assistant, and Shannon Kindornay, Director of Research, Policy and Practice at Cooperation Canada, and Luiana Temba, graduate student, HEC Montreal. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of Cooperation Canada, its members or members of the Greening CSOs Advisory Committee.

### Highlights

Ambitious commitments to address the global climate emergency and accelerate efforts towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have challenged all stakeholders to focus their efforts and adjust their approaches in new ways. The impacts of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic further challenge Canadian and international actors to ensure that proposed solutions contribute to just, equitable and sustainable recovery from the crisis. International development and humanitarian civil society organizations (CSOs) are challenged to move beyond social and economic dimensions of sustainable development to integrate environmental and climate change considerations into their work. Yet, the extent to which Canadian CSOs in the international development and humanitarian sector are updating their approaches for environmentally conscious decision-making is unclear. To address this issue, Cooperation Canada launched its Greening CSOs initiative over March-November 2020 to raise awareness of climate smart and environmentally responsible approaches, establish a baseline of sector efforts and identify opportunities, challenges and good practices towards greener CSO operations.

Based on an online survey of over 50 CSOs, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and inputs from good practice case studies as well as peer learning sessions with diverse stakeholders across the Canadian international development and humanitarian sector, the Greening CSOs initiative examined efforts by the sector to green operations, communications, policy engagement and advocacy and programming. It also looked at how the sector incorporates cross-cutting considerations, such as the adoption of environmental and climate change action alongside human rights-based and feminist approaches. Recommendations relating to each area of analysis under the study are listed below. Importantly, the Greening CSOs initiative is a starting point for the sector to begin moving towards global leaders in environmentally conscious and climate smart approaches. As noted in the report that follows, additional research is needed to inform sector approaches and opportunity exists to significantly ramp up peer learning and engagement in this area. Recognizing that this initiative represents a starting point towards a greener international development and humanitarian sector – and that more research and work is to be done, as highlighted throughout this report – the following recommendations emerge.

### Operations

- ✓ **Concern for environmental degradation and addressing climate change should be translated into organizational policies, supported by appropriate programming, partnerships, engagement with donors and other stakeholders and systems to ensure accountability for commitments.**

While international development and humanitarian CSOs recognize the importance of the climate emergency and addressing environmental degradation, this has not fully translated into organizational policies, dedicated staff, adoption of green operational practices and appropriate monitoring and evaluation.

- ✓ **Ensure effective engagement by leaders in operational greening and assign responsibilities for implementation of green initiatives to appropriate staff, in line with organizational capacities and resources.**

Senior leadership is required to ensure impetus for greener operations with staff appropriately mandated to contribute according to their roles and responsibilities within the organization. The emergence of free and low-cost greening tools, as well as cost-saving approaches, offers an opportunity for all organizations to begin making progress on greening.

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- ✓ **Identify and harness lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to further propel green work environments and double down on support for localization.**

An opportunity exists for Canada's international development and humanitarian sector to demonstrate how it has moved beyond business as usual to build back better by harnessing innovations adopted during the global COVID-19 pandemic, particularly virtual approaches that mitigate and reduce environmental impacts as well as new ways of working that support localization.

### Communications, policy engagement and advocacy

- ✓ **Examine existing communications, policy engagement and advocacy efforts to identify intersections with environmental sustainability and climate action, and adjust messaging and approaches accordingly.**

CSOs have yet to fully integrate considerations for environmental sustainability and climate action into their communications. Recognizing that organizations have diverse advocacy and policy engagement priorities, the environment and climate action nevertheless intersect with all international development and humanitarian efforts. Engagement in sector coalitions related to the environment and climate change offers an important opportunity for organizations with more limited capacities to engage in joint policy and advocacy initiatives.

### Programming

- ✓ **Strengthen the integration of environmental considerations and climate action into CSO programming through investments in capacities and by making use of existing tools and resources.**

While organizations have made investments to improve organizational capacities towards green programming, gaps in human and organizational resources remain. Diverse options exist for increasing capacities including through the use of free or low-cost tools and resources.

- ✓ **Engage funders on the importance of green programming and integrating environment and climate change considerations into existing and new programming.**

Engagement with existing funders on the importance of the environment and climate change is a helpful starting point in efforts to shift to more environmentally conscious and responsive programs and partnerships.

- ✓ **Call on Global Affairs Canada to update guidance and tools related to environmental sustainability and climate action in dialogue and consultation with CSO partners.**

Dialogue between CSOs and Global Affairs Canada is important for further identifying the practical challenges faced by CSOs, setting shared, realistic expectations and offering opportunities for co-creation and joint solution finding in terms of efforts to promote greener CSO operations and programs.

### Cross-cutting considerations for greener CSOs

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- ✓ **Identify interlinkages and opportunities to support mutually reinforcing action on human rights, gender quality and global solidarity, among other priorities, and environmental sustainability and climate change action.**

Existing priorities in the context of international development and humanitarian action are nearly always linked to outcomes in terms environmental sustainability and climate justice. CSOs should ensure their efforts across different sub-sectors are guided by holistic, intersectional approaches that recognize the linkages between social, economic and environmental justice.

- ✓ **Signal organizational interest to engage in communities of practice related to greening, participate in peer learning and share lessons learned as part of efforts to promote sector-wide progress.**

Peer learning and experience sharing were identified by CSOs as important ways to propel progress on greening. Existing sector and sub-sector coalitions offer an important starting point for member-led communities of practice.

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### Introduction

Ambitious commitments to address the global climate emergency and accelerate efforts towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have challenged all stakeholders to focus their efforts and adjust their approaches in new ways. The impacts of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic further challenge Canadian and international actors to ensure that proposed solutions contribute to just, equitable and sustainable recovery from the crisis. Canadian civil society organizations (CSOs), including in the international development and humanitarian sector, are important stakeholders in contributing to positive change. At the same time, these organizations are challenged to adjust their programming and advocacy efforts to ensure alignment with the transformative principles of the 2030 Agenda as well as their operations.

Indeed, new realities challenge international development and humanitarian CSOs to move beyond social and economic dimensions of sustainable development to integrate environmental and climate change considerations into their work. Developing countries are the most impacted by climate change and often have limited capacities to address its consequences. Environmental degradation and climate change have the potential to reverse significant sustainable development gains around the world. While CSO programming has advanced to include a focus on climate adaptation and mitigation,<sup>1</sup> there has been less emphasis on the environmental consequences of daily operations. Nevertheless, leaders in the sector are beginning to recognize that climate smart, environmentally sustainable operations contribute to organizational mandates, cost effectiveness and credibility.

The carbon footprint of the sector is real as organizations make decisions regarding the international meetings they will attend, work from home policies, going 'paperless' in the office, and if and how they will work through equitable, local partnerships to deliver sustainable development outcomes. As advocates for greater government commitments to climate change action and environmental sustainability, CSOs are also challenged to become front runners in these areas, demonstrating their own commitments to climate smart, environmentally responsible operations alongside efforts by governments in Canada and the private sector. [Commitments by the government of Canada](#) also have implications for Canadian CSOs, including in terms of pursuing climate-smart programming and partnerships that result from Canada's commitment to the Feminist International Assistance Policy and its international climate financing commitments. Government [provisions](#) require Global Affairs Canada's partners to adhere to existing and emerging federal regulations, such as the [2019 Impact Assessment Act](#).

### Introducing the Greening CSOs initiative

While there are many "push and pull" factors that support efforts towards greener CSOs operations, the extent to which Canadian CSOs in the international development and humanitarian sector are updating their approaches for environmentally-conscious decision-making is unclear. To address this issue, Cooperation Canada launched its Greening CSOs initiative in 2020 to:

- raise awareness about climate smart and environmentally responsible approaches among and for international development and humanitarian CSOs;

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, stories showcased in the Canadian Coalition on Climate Change and Development's 2020 [submission](#) to Canada's international climate finance consultations and the Food Security Policy Group's [Leaders in the Field](#) research initiative that showcases examples of climate-smart programming in agriculture.

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- establish a baseline of sector efforts towards environmental and climate mainstreaming in operations, policies and advocacy efforts and programming;
- identify opportunities, challenges and good practices towards greener CSO operations;
- collect and make available diverse tools and resources to support Canadian CSOs; and
- facilitate peer learning and exchange.

The research initiative also considered the policy and regulatory environment in which Canadian CSOs operate, including the factors that influence the uptake of green operations by CSOs, notably overarching government of Canada policies and funding regulations.<sup>2</sup>

This report presents the findings from a survey of over 50 CSOs, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and inputs from good practice case studies as well as peer learning sessions with diverse stakeholders across the Canadian international development and humanitarian sector. It complements and consolidates a range of CSO Greening initiative outputs (Box 1). The report begins with a brief overview of the research approach. The bulk of the report focuses on key findings and lessons learned from the research. It then concludes with an overview of recommendations for CSOs.

### Box 1. Key resources from Cooperation Canada's Greening CSOs initiative

#### ***State of Play infographic***

The [State of Play](#) provides a short summary of key survey findings from the 51 organizations that responded to Cooperation Canada's Greening CSOs survey over July-September 2020.

#### ***Leadership for a greener international development and humanitarian sector: Sustainable civil society organizations***

This [policy brief](#) focuses on the role of CSO leaders in supporting greener operations and programming. Drawing on survey findings and the business case for greener CSOs, the policy brief provides three strategic recommendations for leaders to take action.

#### ***Green partnerships in international cooperation: A review of Global Affairs Canada policies and guidance for civil society***

This [policy brief](#) presents relevant findings related to the Government of Canada's commitments and relevant regulatory and policy frameworks from Global Affairs Canada, that impact CSOs' ability to green their operations and programs. It includes recommendations for how Global Affairs Canada can better support CSOs as green partners.

#### ***Repository of tools and resources***

Cooperation Canada created a [repository of greening tools and resources](#) to support the sector. A [short video](#) was also produced to provide guidance to the sector on how to maximize use of the repository.

#### ***Articles***

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<sup>2</sup> See [Green partnerships in international cooperation: A review of Global Affairs Canada policies and guidance for civil society](#) (2021).

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### Three takeaways on faith and greening in Canada's international cooperation sector

Presents takeaways from a peer learning session held in October 2020 focused on the intersection between faith-based mandates and sustainable operations and programs.

Three takeaways for greening your organization: The role of environmental impact assessments and green teams Presents takeaways from a peer learning session held in November 2020 focused on promoting greener operations.

### Top 10 greening tools for the international cooperation sector

Presents the top 10 tools and resources identified by Cooperation Canada from its repository to support greener operations and good practice.

### Top 5 green building certifications for CSOs

Through a consumer report-like approach, this article presents options for CSOs to move towards greener buildings.

### ***Good practice case studies***

Aga Khan Foundation Canada: Integrating environmental sustainability into programming and reducing the environmental impact from building operations.

Canadian Foodgrains Bank: Tracking organizational carbon emissions and contributing to a project helping those facing climate change impacts.

Médecins Sans Frontières: Measuring and mitigating negative environmental impacts.

Manitoba Council for International Cooperation: Adopting sustainable business (organizational) practices.

Centre d'étude et de coopération internationale: Adaptation to climate change and sustainable management of the shea industry.

SOCODEVI: Environmental policy to contribute to the protection of the environment and the fight against climate change.

### **Research approach**

As a participatory research project, the Greening CSOs initiative aimed to maximize engagement with Cooperation Canada members and others through a mix of desk-based and participatory research methodologies. Guided by an Advisory Committee (Box 2), research was carried out over March-November 2020.

### **Box 2. Greening CSOs Advisory Committee members**

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**Maman M. Bachir**, Project Manager, Centre de coopération internationale en santé et développement

**Altaf Bhulji**, Senior Manager of Operations, Aga Khan Foundation Canada

**Stephen Cornish**, Chief Executive Officer, David Suzuki Foundation

**Denis Côté**, Policy Analyst, Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale

**Carol Devine**, Humanitarian Affairs Advisor, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières

**Janelle Frail**, Training and Development Officer, Atlantic Council for International Cooperation

**Al-Nasir Hamir**, Program Manager, Aga Khan Foundation Canada

**Naomi Johnson**, Senior Policy Advisor, Canadian Foodgrains Bank and co-chair, Canadian Coalition on Climate change and Development

**Steve Matthews**, Executive Director, Adventist Development and Relief Agency in Canada (ADRA Canada)

**Dr. Emmanuel Raufflet**, Professor of Management, HEC Montréal

**Amélie St-Amant-Ringuette**, Project Manager specializing in environment and climate change adaptation, Centre d'étude et de coopération internationale

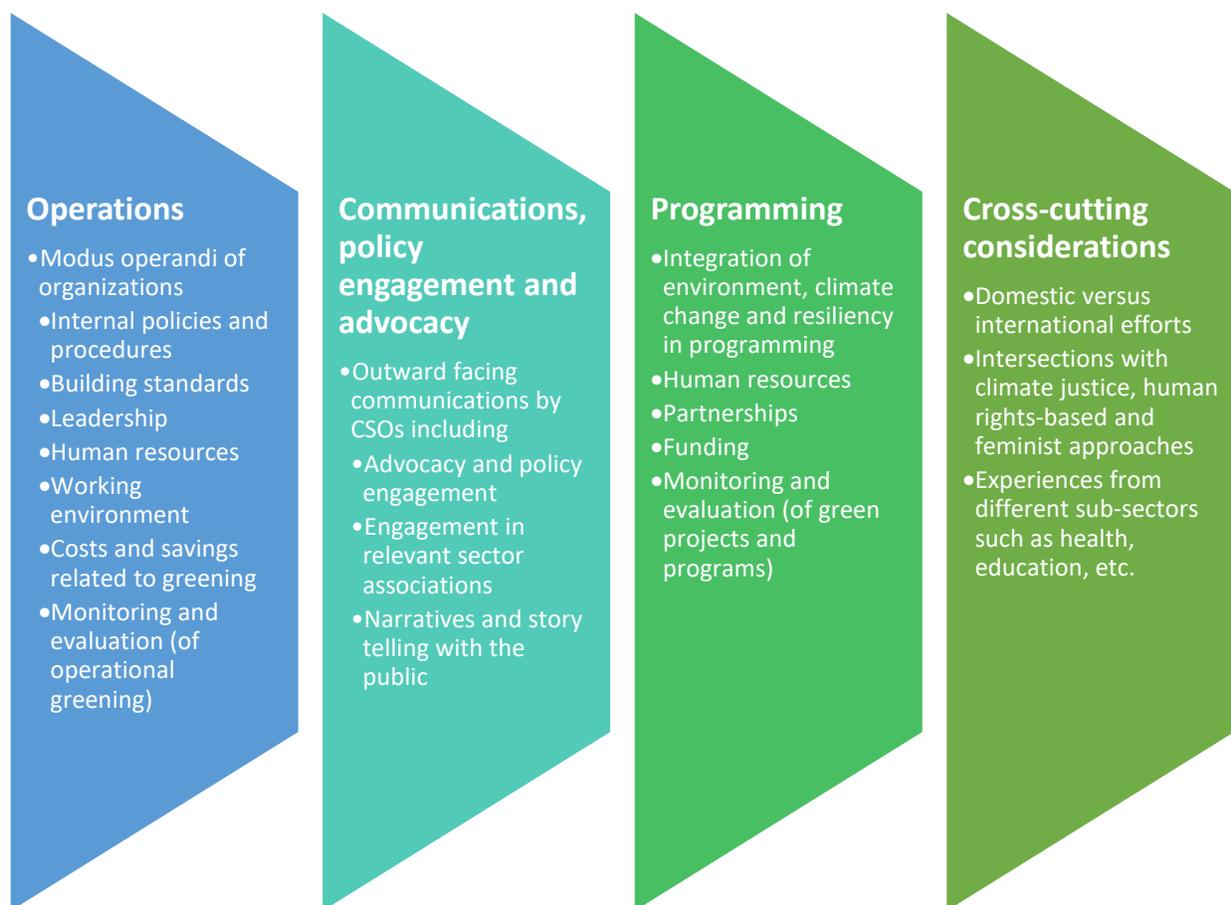
**Laura Wiebe**, Sustainability Specialist, Manitoba Council for International Cooperation

### Areas of analysis

Figure 1 provides an overview of the key areas of analysis examined under the Greening CSOs initiative. The research was deliberately purpose driven to support the needs of the international development and humanitarian sector. Cooperation Canada consulted with its members on the initial framework for analysis in March 2020, and further revised its main areas of focus based on feedback from the Advisory Committee.

### Figure 1. Areas of analysis under the Greening CSOs initiative

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### Methodology and data collection

#### *Literature review*

The research was informed by a desk-based review of existing approaches, resources and tools that support efforts by CSOs to green their operations, advocacy and policy work and programming. Through this review, over 120 tools were identified, reviewed and made available for the sector through an online repository. In addition, the research team reviewed relevant policy and academic literature to inform the study. The study also included a detailed review of relevant laws and government policies and guidance to examine how the existing regulatory and policy environment impacts the ability of Canadian CSOs in the international cooperation sector to green their work.

#### *Survey*

Over July-August 2020, Cooperation Canada carried out an online survey to identify the current state of greening as well as barriers, challenges and good practices others could adopt. The survey was completed by 51 organizations with 45% of respondents representing large organizations (30+

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employees), 26% medium (11-29 employees) and 29% small (10 employees or less).<sup>3</sup> Seventy-one percent of respondents identified as Cooperation Canada members. The survey included all areas of analysis outlined above and was informed by inputs from the Advisory Committee. The number of respondents for each survey question varied, as respondents could skip questions, and is indicated accordingly in each figure.

### *Interviews and focus group discussions*

Survey participants were asked to indicate their interest in a follow-up, in-depth interview. Over September-November 2020, interviews and focus groups discussions were carried out with 12 CSOs. Interviews were tailored based on initial survey responses and interviewees were engaged according to their areas of expertise (operations, policy and advocacy work, programming and/or cross-cutting issues). However, interviewees provided inputs on most areas of analysis. Cooperation Canada also engaged Global Affairs Canada throughout the research project through informal conversations as well as a semi-structured interview with an environmental specialist in the Partnership for Development Innovation branch.

### *Peer-to-peer engagement and experience sharing*

Two peer learning sessions were held over October-November 2020 to facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange on CSO experiences and good practice. The sessions looked at [faith and greening](#) and good practices related to [greening operations](#) (notably baseline assessments and the use of green teams). Presentations and discussions during these sessions informed the overall research. In addition, CSOs shared their experiences through seven good practice case studies, which cover all areas of analysis and are available on the initiative's [website](#) (see also Box 1).

### **Limitations and gaps**

Due to limitations in terms of the timing and available scope for the research, the Greening CSOs initiative did not include as many peer-to-peer exchanges as originally hoped. The focus group discussions and peer learning sessions provided rich information that informs the findings presented below. However, the project would have benefited from additional discussion regarding approaches to advocacy, storytelling and policy engagement as well as further attention to how organizations are effectively addressing cross-cutting issues in their work – such as how they adopt holistic and integrated approaches to programming that promote progress on all three dimensions of sustainable development, including the social, economic and environmental. An opportunity exists to further unpack intersections between feminist, human rights-based and climate justice approaches. Efforts in the sector would also benefit from further information on the intersectionality of environment and climate change with the sector's other areas of intervention, as well as best practice examples in the context of specific sub-sectors – such as how organizations integrate environmental sustainability and climate change considerations with their mandates in education, health, governance or other areas. Finally, while some organizations referred to their engagement with Indigenous communities, the research would have benefited from a dedicated discussion in relation to engagements, both in Canada and with Indigenous partners abroad, to understand how CSOs are integrating Indigenous knowledge into their work. While 64% of survey

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<sup>3</sup> Cooperation Canada produced a "[State of Play](#)" based on the initial survey results, which provides a summary of the key findings from the survey.

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respondents noted their organization delivers programming in Canada, the bulk of information provided from interviews and focus group discussions focused on activities abroad. As such, this report does not fully flesh out experiences from organizations that have linked national and international dimensions of their environment and climate-related action.

### Key findings and lessons learned

Organizations have different motivations for greening their efforts. When asked which factors motivated their organization's greening, respondents predominantly pointed to reducing negative impacts on the environment (86%), the global climate crisis (80%) and reducing their carbon footprint (78%). Some organizations also linked their motivations to the interrelationship of organizational mandate and values with environment and climate change issues (67%), advancing the global Sustainable Development Goals (65%), or demonstrating leadership within the sector (60%). Organizations appear to be less motivated however by requirements from funders (27%) or partners (16%). As highlighted in a policy brief on [leadership for greening](#) in the sector, survey responses also suggest that current greening efforts tend to be fostered by staff initiative, rather than following a top-down approach and being strategically integrated.

### Operations

#### *Environment and climate change priorities*

While 80% of survey respondents rated minimizing negative impacts on the environment as important or very important to their organization, respondents also recognized that other organizational priorities can be more pressing. When asked about the challenges faced by organizations to further green their operations, 65% of organizations indicated that "other priorities are more pressing," ranking this challenge as relevant or highly relevant. Moreover, respondents indicated that the benefits of greening are relatively clear. For example, when asked if lack of understanding on the benefits of greening for the organization was a barrier to greener approaches, the majority of respondents (approximately 71%) rated this challenge as not relevant or of limited relevancy.

Interviews and short answer responses to the survey indicate that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the extent to which the sector has prioritized greening. Some organizations indicated that greening plans initiated prior to the pandemic were put on hold, though the impact of the pandemic itself also amplified the importance of transitioning to greener organizations given new experiences with virtual work environments and innovative ways of working with partners under travel restrictions. Some respondents also noted that there is a need to begin integrating the environment and climate-change within operations and programming similar to experiences within the sector with respect to mainstreaming gender.<sup>4</sup> Interviews with CSOs working closely with Indigenous communities indicate that these organizations seem to have commenced their transition to greener operations earlier and face less challenges to integrating green practices and operations than other organizations. Experience from faith-based organizations similarly points to the integration of the environment and climate change as part of faith-inspired international cooperation efforts as noted by interviewees and the peer learning session on faith and greening.

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<sup>4</sup> For a review of sector experiences with gender mainstreaming and the adoption of feminist approaches, see Roa, S. (2020). [Organizational and human resource capacity for addressing gender equality: Civil society engagement with the Feminist International Assistance Policy](#). CCIC, CASID and le CQFD de l'AQOCI.

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One interviewee noted that for their faith-inspired organization, caring for the Earth is connected to caring for each other, with implications in terms of integrating green priorities in relation to actions at individual, community and government or policy levels.

### *Environmental policies*

Most survey respondents have or are in the process of developing an environmental policy or action plan (69%). Some organizations pointed out that the development of a green policy surfaced following the finalization of their gender policy. In-depth interviews suggest the use of informal policies by some organizations with varying degrees of efforts towards formalization. One organization noted that while green priorities have not been integrated into internal policies and the organization's mandate, an informal green policy exists, drafted by the organization's green team. For another organization, while the environment is part of organizational culture, staff have only recently begun working towards a formal policy for headquarter level. In another instance, the organization is in the process of updating all policies, creating a window to green organizational policies. One interviewee from an organization with a clear environment-related mandate noted translating the organizational mandate into policies towards procurement, partnerships and overall operations has not been automatic.

Overall, research participants recognized that while the idea of being eco-friendly, sustainable and aware of humanity's impact on the Earth is generally understood and acknowledged by most staff, there is a gap in terms of urgency to formalize action to prevent and reduce environmental impacts. Even when official policies or guidelines exist, lack of clear communication from leaders on implementation can also serve as a barrier according to one interviewee. Moreover, one interviewee indicated contradictions between policies for headquarter and field offices. They noted that specific regional programs have green procurement policies while their procurement policy at headquarter level does not include green provisions. This contradiction reflects the existence of green provisions for programming with more limited attention to operations.

A handful of participants noted that even when policies are in place, implementation is not automatic. They advised that although policies were in place to ensure sustainability in travel or procurement for example, they were not always followed or even shared with partners. One participant observed that sustainability was rather approached in passing, verbally, and only discussed in detail if proposals presented red flags for environmental sustainability.

### *Responsibility for greening*

Overall, responsibility for greening initiatives is shared across organizations. Survey respondents noted that the task of identifying and prioritizing environmental issues within organizations sits most often with the Chief Executive Officer (43%) though 35% noted that all staff are expected to contribute (respondents were asked to select all that apply). In terms of planning and managing greening initiatives however, 27% noted that this responsibility lays with the CEO while the same proportion of respondents noted that multiple dedicated staff members have this responsibility. Just under 26% of respondents pointed to a green committee or team while approximately 24% noted that all staff are expected to contribute. Nearly 14% noted that a dedicated staff member is responsible for planning and managing green initiatives.

Roughly 47% of survey respondents noted that their organization has a green team or committee. However, only 10 of the 25 respondents (40%) noted that their green team is important or very important to overall operations and programming. For organizations that make use of green teams, interviewees noted the importance of ensuring sufficiently high-level leadership involvement. In

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one instance, the organization's green team is composed of program staff, managers, and members of senior leadership, all of whom participate voluntarily. For another, the committee includes two senior staff with the expectation of CEO involvement once recommendations are made. For an organization in which the green committee is largely composed of employees, the interviewee noted that efforts tend to rely on staff energy, highlighting the need for champions on the management side as well. Moreover, green teams are often not formalized committees within organizations and as such their lack of recognition from leadership hinders their momentum, and in some cases credibility. One interviewee advised that their organization's green team had a specific two-fold mandate: 1) to encourage the uptake of sustainable behaviors in the office and during travel and 2) to integrate the environment and climate change in human rights training. The integration of the environment and climate change into human rights training affords the organization an opportunity to reach wider audiences. However, although the intention to incorporate the environment in all aspects of the organization's work was shared, limited resources to integrate environmental considerations into the training programs or to seek expertise remained a barrier. Overall, green teams can serve as a promising means to trigger change. However, interviewees noted that change stops when momentum stops or when actions are confronted by insufficient allocation of resources towards positive change.

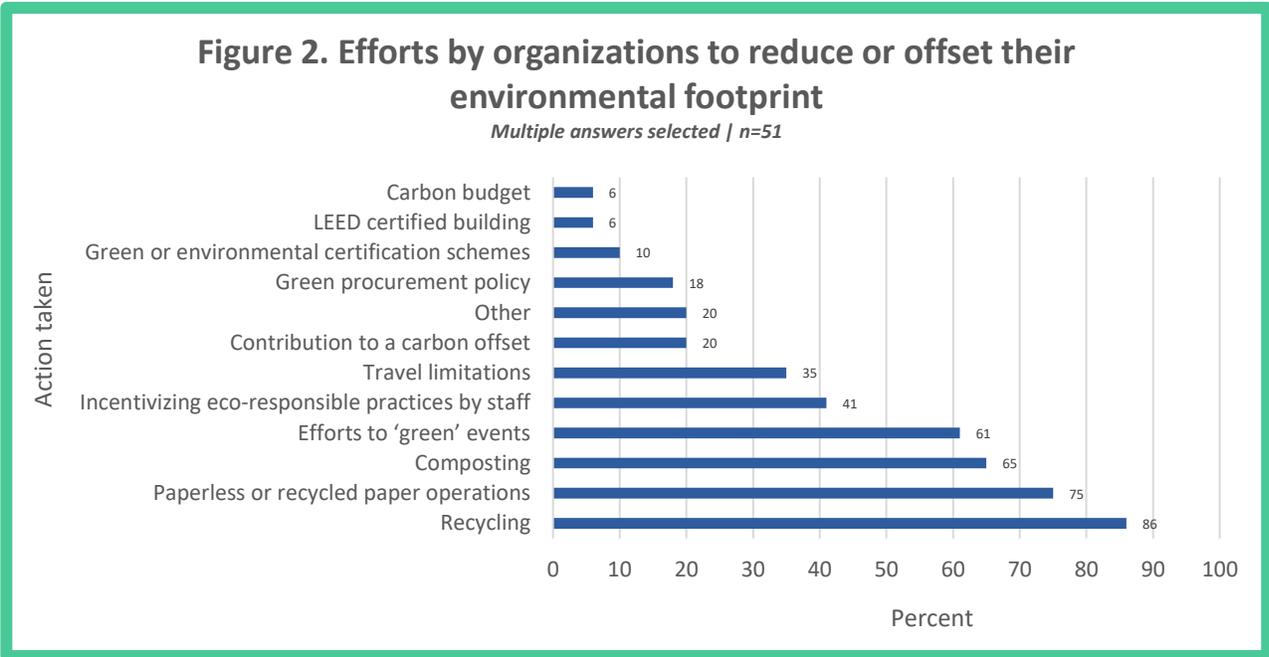
Impetus for greening can come from bottom-up and top-down approaches. However, regardless of the approach taken, leaders have a clear role to play in translating priorities to plans and action, including ensuring appropriate resource allocation.<sup>5</sup> For 41% of survey respondents, improved organizational leadership is a factor needed to green or further green operations and/or programs. Inputs during the research process from Advisory Committee members as well as interviewees similarly confirm the importance of strong leadership to advance progress on organizational greening.

### *Actions towards greener operations*

Survey responses reveal that targeted efforts to reduce or offset organizational environmental footprints mainly relate to recycling, operating paperless or using recycled paper, composting, carrying out greener events (plant-based catering, less disposable products used, virtual communications, etc.), as shown in Figure 2. Just over 40% of survey respondents also noted efforts to incentivize eco-responsible practices by staff such as carpooling, cycling and working remotely. A more limited number of organizations pointed to protocols to limit travel (35%), carbon offsetting (20%), green procurement (18%) and participation in certification schemes (10%). Very few respondents noted that they operate in a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified building (6%) or have established a carbon budget (6%). When asked about the importance of specific building factors, respondents were more likely to rank location as most important or important (73%) versus the walkability score of a building (29%) or its energy efficiency (13%).

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<sup>5</sup> See [Leadership for a greener international development and humanitarian sector: Sustainable civil society organizations](#) (2021) for a more fulsome discussion.



Limited attention to protocols aimed at limiting traveling is a concern for the international development and humanitarian sector. Travel is an important part of the sector’s carbon footprint contribution and tracking and limiting air travel serves as an important first step that organizations can take towards greener operations. One interviewee noted that tracking air travel carbon emissions led to the realization that the organization was contributing significant carbon emissions through travel within Canada. This led the organization to prioritize travel by train to and from Montreal and Toronto for Ottawa-based staff, for example.

When asked more specifically about carbon offsetting, 55% of respondents said they never offset the carbon footprint from their operations versus 30% that sometimes offset and 12% that always offset. When asked what would be needed to increase uptake of carbon offsetting, some research participants mentioned that funders, including Global Affairs Canada, are not keen on including budget lines for such activities. This means that efforts to carbon offset must come from general operating budgets and cannot be included as part of program costs. For some organizations, this puts carbon offsetting out of reach as already limited allocations to overhead costs reduce available discretionary funds. While carbon offsetting is an important step an organization can take as part of their greening efforts, many participants in the research process noted that an organization’s first step towards greening is mitigating their negative impacts on the environment and climate change in the first instance.

With respect to greener buildings and reduced energy use, interviewees and participants in the peer learning session on operations pointed to the importance of a baseline assessment to inform efforts. Baseline assessments are important for understanding not only the organization’s initial starting point, and as such options for improvement, but also for reporting on progress. Interviewees also pointed out that their efforts to greening are limited depending on whether they rent or own their building. Internal guidelines on energy efficiency are often provided by landlords. In some instances, interviewees noted they have no control over heating or cooling features of their offices, and as such utilities were dictated by landlords. Those that do own their building see themselves as having much more autonomy in decision-making for greener operations.

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Another strategy noted to reduce environmental impacts relates to practices of good partnership and development effectiveness. Some organizations noted that they rely on local expertise and knowledge as their point of departure in delivering services, rarely relying on Canadian expertise. This approach reduces travel from Canada to field offices and, importantly, raises opportunities for regional knowledge and expertise, often more relevant for local partners.

Staff initiative also seems to be an important factor in promoting green operations, particularly given limited funding available for internal organizational budgets (discussed further below). Interviewees tend to agree that a lot can be achieved without dedicated funding, particularly at the headquarter level in the areas of greener internal practices, reduced emissions from staff travel, etc. However, they also recognize that possibilities to accelerate progress require budgetary allocations. Several interviewees noted that no specific budget line exists for sustainability efforts.

Finally, one interviewee noted the need for the sector to be cautious of “white environmentalism” According to the interviewee, white environmentalism is the type of greening behavior that has been largely mainstreamed in Canada – focused on recycling, composting, carpooling and other relatively simple actions to protect the environment. This approach promotes a perception by the general public that by undertaking such actions, people are at the forefront of environmental issues and impedes people from taking part in wider action that might question the use of natural resources or challenge intersections between environmental degradation and social injustice.

### *Monitoring and evaluation*

While organizations recognize the importance of greening and have begun to take some steps towards greener operations, 69% of survey respondents noted that their organization does not monitor or evaluate their greening efforts. While organizations have not developed their approaches to monitoring and evaluation of greener operations, survey responses suggest that the lack of specific monitoring and evaluation tools is not the biggest challenge to greener operations. Only 36% of respondents ranked lack of monitoring and evaluation tools as a relevant or highly relevant challenge. As shown below, organizations seem to have dedicated more efforts towards monitoring and evaluating environmental and climate change as they relate to programming.

### *Challenges and opportunities*

Overall, survey and interview data point to both challenges and opportunities for greening operations (Figure 3). While lack of discretionary funds is an important challenge, interviews suggest that many organizations have adopted greener workplace habits at relatively low costs. Moreover, a diverse range of tools exist, available at no or low costs. Nevertheless, it should be noted that interviewees expressed concern regarding whether available tools can be used by organizations. One interviewee noted that providing guidance, tools and mechanisms to green processes is welcome, but cautioned that moving too quickly may overwhelm organizations that do not have the human resources and time to study the tools, select the most adequate ones, educate staff and implement them.

Opportunities and challenges for greening operations have also been presented by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. For most organizations, this has included more limited travel and the use of virtual platforms both of which have demonstrated possibilities for reduced headquarter costs as well as new ways of working with local partners. Virtual work environments have the potential to

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significantly reduce organizational impacts from reduced staff travel and energy use, for example. Many research participants noted that shifting from in-person events to online events has actually increased participation and accessibility. COVID-19 has limited but also expanded the possibilities for organizations worldwide to adapt, learn and benefit from efforts to build back better. However, it is worth noting that while interviewees welcomed the opportunity to reduce environmental impacts, they also recognized that maintaining a physical space is important for team building and in-person interactions that support collaboration and overall well-being. A perception exists that while organizations can reduce their environmental impacts through virtual workplace options, other factors, particularly related to team interaction and health, requires an ongoing (though more limited) physical workplace.

In terms of working with local partners, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced Canadian organizations to rely more heavily on their local partners. This presents an opportunity to further advance localization efforts for the sector, recognizing and valuing local expertise, and reduce international travel. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted calls by the sector, and others, for just, equitable and sustainable recovery efforts. An opportunity exists for the sector to demonstrate how it has moved past business as usual to innovate and adopt new ways of working in support of a green recovery.

**Figure 3. Opportunities and challenges for greening operations**



### Communications, policy engagement and advocacy

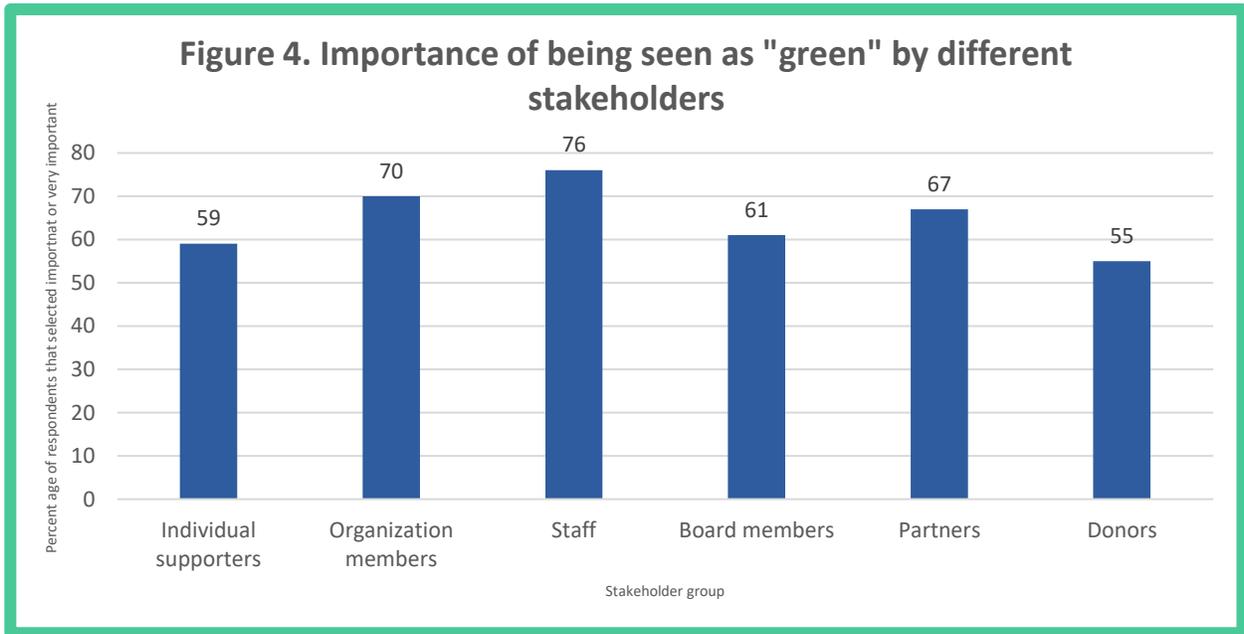
Canadian international development and humanitarian CSOs engage with diverse audiences on their work. They fundraise with governments, foundations, the private sector and individuals, champion diverse causes in their advocacy efforts, contribute to global citizenship education and engage with governments (and others) on international cooperation priorities, policies and programming in Canada and abroad. Given this, the Greening CSOs initiative sought to understand

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how CSOs have factored the environment and climate change into their communications with the public as well as broader advocacy and policy engagement efforts.

### *Communication related to organizational greening*

When asked whether their organization communicates about its internal efforts to green operations with supporters, target audiences or donors, only 41% of survey respondents reported doing so. However, 70% of organizations noted that they communicate their efforts related to programming. Organizations seem better equipped to communicate on environmental programs and their outcomes than on green operational processes (an issue that may reflect the lack of monitoring and evaluation for green operations in the sector). Yet, though there appears to be limited reporting on organizational greening initiatives, survey respondents indicated that “being green” matters for the diverse stakeholders they engage. As shown in Figure 4, more than 50% of respondents noted that being seen as green is important or very important for all stakeholder groups. These findings suggest a contradiction between the level of importance ascribed to green operations by external audiences and the level of effort that organizations are prepared to invest in actual greening practices and communication related to the implementation of greener operations.



Research participants noted that their communications related to the environment and climate change evolved over time. Some expressed that their activities and audiences have varied over time. With the environment and climate change becoming more prominent in the sector, they realized they needed to sharpen the quantity and quality of information provided as well as improve their targeting techniques. For one organization, carrying out an environmental impact assessment shed light on how little of their content was actually linked to the environment and climate change.

Some interviewees see efforts to better communicate about environment and climate change in relation to organizational mandates as a responsibility for CSOs. As one interviewee noted, “climate change and environmental concerns are not just a trend – we [the sector] need to convince the

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public of their importance.” According to the interviewee, one of the biggest challenges facing progress on these topics in Canada and in the world is the limited awareness of the connections between climate change and sustainable development outcomes. Messaging to the public about CSO programming and operations needs to clearly define connections between international cooperation work and the daily lives of people in Canada. There is a need to educate relevant CSO stakeholders on the impacts of the climate crisis for local partners and global progress overall. According to most interviewees, the urgency of environmental concerns has not been communicated as clearly and efficiently as possible. Besides, communication on these issues is not necessarily straightforward. One organization advised that linking water, sanitation and hygiene to the environment, for instance, seems instinctual, yet, there is a need to link these issues for audiences, an effort that was much more difficult than the organization had anticipated. Moreover, humanitarian action is not always sufficiently linked to drivers such as environmental degradation, beyond more obvious examples of extreme weather. According to some interviewees, messaging often needs to be very explicit about how sustainable development issues are related and/or reliant on environmental conditions.

### *Advocacy and policy engagement*

While survey respondents recognize the importance of the environment and climate change as priority issues, only 37% noted that these topics are important or very important for their organizations advocacy and/or policy engagement. Only one organization noted that all their efforts in these areas relate to environmental sustainability and addressing climate change. Just over 17% of survey respondents said that most of their advocacy and/or policy work relates to the environment and climate change while the majority – or 48% – said some. When asked if their organization participates in an environment or climate-focused sector coalition, 52% of respondents said no. Nearly 22% indicated that their organization is a member of the Canadian Coalition on Climate Change and Development (C4D) while just under seven percent noted membership in Climate Action Network Canada.

The survey findings suggest there is room for greater engagement by international development and humanitarian CSOs in environment and climate-change related advocacy and policy efforts. This includes in terms of participation in sector-wide associations dedicated to these issues and through an increasing emphasis on the linkages between existing advocacy and policy engagement efforts and the environment and climate change. Interviewees highlighted the importance of networking and participation through like-minded sector coalitions or working groups to identify partners with similar policy and advocacy campaigns. These forums offer opportunities to identify commonalities and shared objectives, build relationships and obtain report for campaigns and awareness raising initiatives. Interviewees from smaller organizations with more limited capacities highlighted the importance of sector coalitions given their more limited capacity to dedicate significant efforts towards public engagement and campaigning. Participation in such coalitions offers an opportunity for smaller organizations to broaden their reach.

For organizations that do engage in environment and climate change advocacy and policy work, one interviewee suggested that existing advocacy and policy campaigns do not consistently reach all types of audiences, particularly in partner countries such as village councils, government levels, religious leaders and others. They pointed to a need for targeted, yet flexible messaging aligned with local context to maximize impact. In one organization's experience, the launch of an environmental agenda was underpinned by a logistics team and applied equally and equitably throughout all countries of operation. The interviewee added that the ability to apply one agenda

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everywhere enabled consistency in desired objectives, but also in expectations, and served as an excellent tool to uphold values and awareness on the effects of climate change. Yet, one interviewee cautioned that there is a fine line between messaging approaches to ensure consistency while tailoring to contextual differences. Messaging needs to be presented in ways that are informative and relatable. In this context, being aware of local partners knowledge and capacity is critical as while partners may be experts in one area, they may have more limited awareness of approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation, for example. One interviewee noted that their communication approaches make use of a horizontal model that is respectful of local realities and grounded in first listening to partners and then responding.

In the Canadian context, interviewees similarly noted that targeted approaches are best for connecting with stakeholders, funders, partners and the general public. According to one interviewee, the question of climate change is increasingly divisive and tied to political party affiliations. To support policy and advocacy work tied to environment and climate change, it is important for CSOs to develop dedicated communications and advocacy plans, and to work together through shared messaging. Communication plans should outline different areas of communications, information recipients and their needs, and specific strategies to engage stakeholders according to their environmental concerns and interests.

Finally, interviewees also noted that advocacy related to the environment and climate change can be highly political and at the request of local partners. One interviewee noted that they have participated in campaigns to support human rights defenders and environmentalists at the request of their partners. In this instance, the organization's partner sought to harness the Canadian organizations' larger capacity and reach, lobbying and connections to call for urgent action.

### *Challenges and opportunities*

Figure 5 provides an overview of the opportunities and challenges identified with respect to greening communications, policy engagement and advocacy efforts. It highlights lack of investments in environment and climate change related work in these areas as a challenge for the sector. Nevertheless, the existence of relevant sector coalitions provides an opportunity for organizations to increasingly engage in environment and climate change related policy and advocacy work. While CSOs seem to communicate information related to green programs and their impacts, survey responses suggest an opportunity exists to broaden communications related to green operations, further expand public narratives and storytelling that links climate change and the environment to the issues reflected in organizational mandates and priorities, and engage in sector policy and advocacy initiatives.

### **Figure 5. Opportunities and challenges to support environment and climate change related communications, policy engagement and advocacy**

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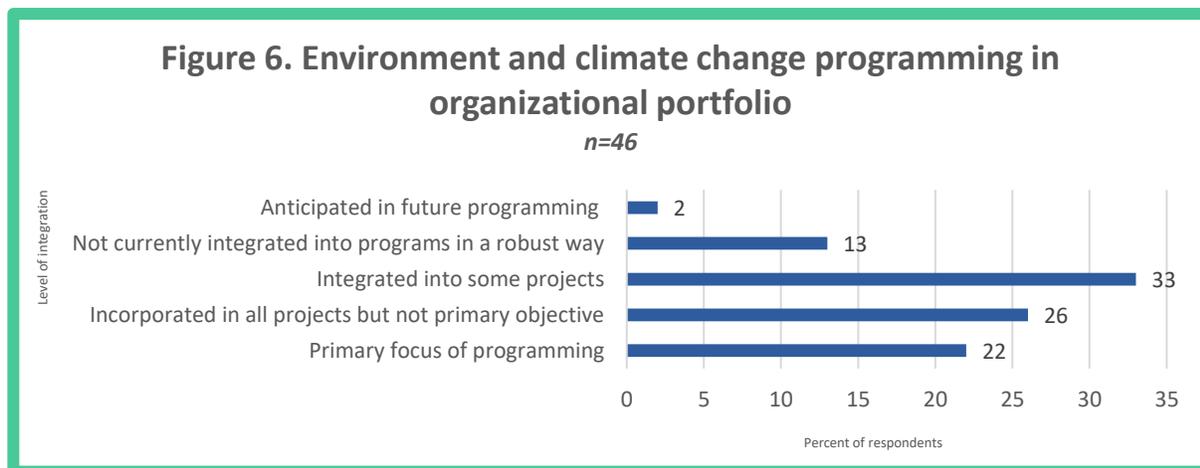


### Programming

The examination of programming under the Greening CSOs initiative included an examination of the extent to which organizations include the environment and climate action in their overall portfolio, integrate environmental and climate change considerations into programs and investments in partnerships and human resources supportive of green programs.

#### *Environment and climate action-related programming*

Figure 6 presents the extent to which survey respondents ranked the importance of environmental protection and climate action to their organization's overall portfolio. It shows that survey respondents represent a relatively diverse set of organizations in terms of the extent to which their programs focus on the environment and climate action. Among the survey respondents who addressed this question, 33% integrated the environment and climate change into some of their programs.



While a limited number of organizations have made environmental sustainability and climate action the primary focus of their programming (22%), when answering another survey question, most respondents noted that they always (43%) or often (31%) consider the environment when developing, designing, planning and/or selecting projects.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, forecasting against the impacts of climate change on program outcomes is less prominent. When asked if their organization makes use of climate or environment related projections and considers them against project and program sustainability, most respondents (41%) said only sometimes. Just over 30% of respondents said often while only 17% (eight organizations) said always. Nearly 11% of survey respondents (or five organizations) said they never make use of such projections.

#### *Capacities for environment and climate action-related programming*

Organizations rely on internal and external capacity to support green programming. Just over 52% of respondents noted that they sometimes seek partners that are experts in environmental practices, greening and/or climate change, while 33% often seek out such partners. For some organizations, CSOs partnerships with sustainable local partners can be dictated by existing core values and mandate, particularly in the case of organizations working in agriculture and nature conservancy. Interviewees from these types of organizations noted that the existence of sustainable partnerships is a criterion for projects to move ahead.

Over 43% of respondents noted the use of consultants, experts or associates to better integrate environmental considerations into project implementation. While the majority of respondents rated the organization's level of expertise on delivering environment and climate change programming as limited (17%), somewhat limited (13%) or neither limited nor significant (33%),<sup>7</sup> 39% of respondents noted that all staff are expected to integrate the environment and climate change into their work. Nearly 37% of respondents indicated that an environment and climate change specialist from within their organization supports integration into project implementation. The importance of having a dedicated environment and climate change specialist among staff was

<sup>6</sup> Just under 24% noted they sometimes consider the environment while only one organization said they never do.

<sup>7</sup> Only 30% of respondents ranked their organization's level of expertise at a 4 out of 5, with 5 representing significant. Three organizations, or 7%, ranked their organization's expertise as significant.

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noted by interviewees. Those without such a role in their organization argued that a full-time expert would be ideal, though financially difficult to maintain. A respondent mentioned that their learning committee provides guidance to program staff to integrate environmental concerns into programming. Organizations also indicated having specific guidelines for addressing environmental risks in project activities, and relying on local knowledge and partners to integrate environmental issues into programs.

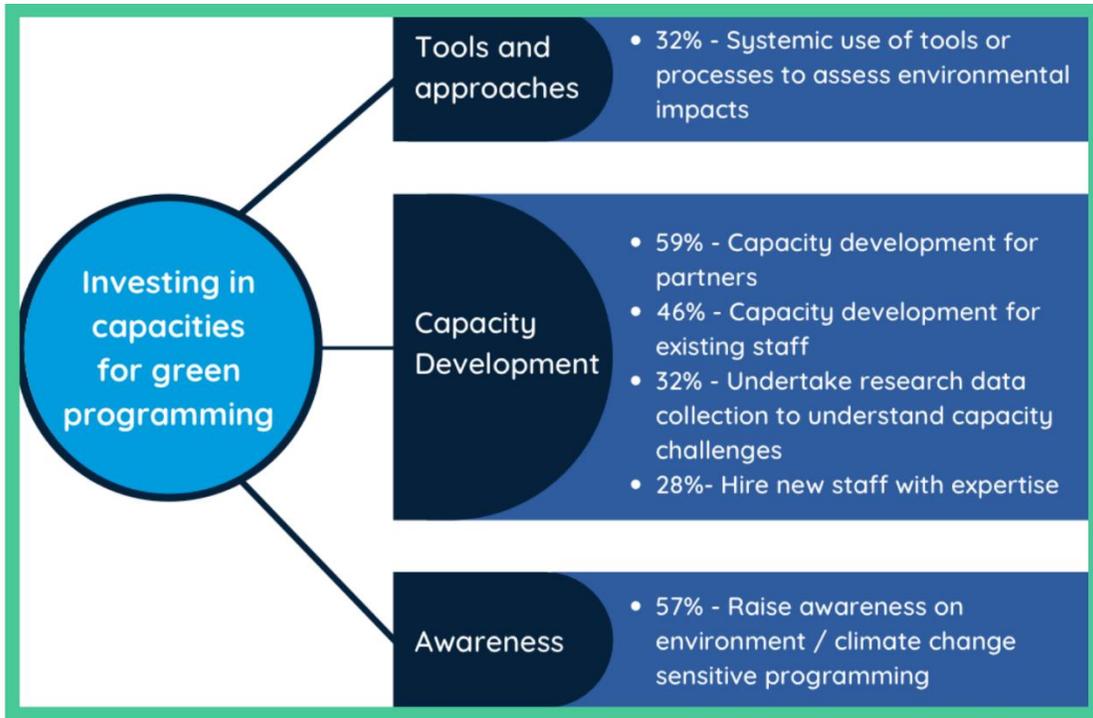
Survey respondents were also asked how their organization supports internal capacities to integrate the environment and climate change into programming. Figure 7 provides an overview of the main approaches noted. It shows that common approaches include capacity development for partners (59%), awareness raising on environment and climate change sensitive programming (57%) and capacity development for staff (46%).

While 32% of survey respondents noted the use of tools or processes to support assessments of environmental impacts, only half of the 12 interviewees noted the use of environmental impact assessments in project development processes. However, one interviewee pointed that while environmental impact assessments are a great way to raise awareness about impacts, they are not always relevant for the kinds of programming carried out by international development and humanitarian CSOs, citing the example of training initiatives that can be done virtually.

While diverse approaches to supporting capacities for green programming exists, 40% of survey respondents noted that lack of human resources remains a relevant challenge to integrating the environment and climate change into programming. A more limited proportion – 24% – saw lack of knowledge within the organization as a relevant challenge (an interesting finding given that most respondents did not rate their organization's level of knowledge as significant, as noted above). Moreover, while tools exist, some interviewees expressed that integration of the environment and climate change into processes, new projects and advocacy was not particularly efficient from the start or fully grasped by all those involved. In some cases, much of the content was new or required extensive discussions and feedback, in addition to requiring transmission to field offices and partners. The results of these efforts were not always readily available, which caused doubts for some in terms of the efficiency of new processes and raised the need for more human resources, funding and guidelines. Along this line, 82% of survey respondents noted that professional development opportunities are needed for their organization to further green operations and/or programs. Nearly 59% noted that how-to guides would be helpful for their organization.

**Figure 7. Approaches to investing in capacities for programming that is environment and climate sensitive**

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### *Partnerships for environment and climate action-related programming*

Just over 45% of respondents noted that ensuring partners and/or members (for membership-based organizations) compliance with environment and climate change protocols is a relevant challenge for integrating the environment and climate change into programming. Nevertheless, interviewees tended to point out that their relationships with local partners are the result of long-term and ongoing engagements. As their organization moves towards greener practices, one interviewee noted a willingness to invest in adaptation and dialogue with partners, rather than turn down project proposals that do not meet green requirements. Another interviewee, however, recognized that environmental track records are becoming increasingly important both for the partners they engage with and the organizations from which they accept funding.

Some interviewees underscored their use of local expertise to heighten capacity development with project participants, particularly partnering with regional community and Indigenous leaders and state authorities so as to ensure needs of target populations were heard beyond the local level. However, it was noted that such relationships are not initially easy, particularly when Canadian expertise is new or not valued as much as local expertise.

### *Funding environment and climate action-related programming*

Survey participants were asked which funders are most receptive to "green" initiatives. Over 45% noted Global Affairs Canada, followed by individual donors (36%), private Canadian foundations (32%), and international foundations, United Nations Agencies and the European Union, each of which were seen as receptive by 18% of survey respondents. Most respondents (64%) noted that funders never require green certification or other standards related to greening for project funding

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or implementation, though 34% noted this is sometimes the case. One interviewee commented that if major funders, such as Global Affairs Canada included greater emphasis on the environmental performance of partners, this would likely propel significant efforts in the sector.

In terms of experiences with funding applications and interactions with donors overall, some interviewees felt that smaller foundations and corporations, in comparison to government, are more flexible. Three interviewees noted that these funders provide more unrestricted funding, which contributes to improved implementation as organizations have greater ownership over decision-making, including with respect to ensuring improved environmental outcomes. Funding locked in for specific activities limits CSOs' capacity to be more responsive to emerging environmental concerns – and as such, may impede CSOs from having programming that is fully sustainable.

With respect to government funding, 39% of survey respondents noted that limited guidance available through Global Affairs Canada (GAC) (e.g., preparing environmental management assessments and plans) is a barrier to greener programs.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, 62% of survey respondents noted that improved dialogue and policy guidance from Global Affairs Canada is needed for their organization to green or further green its work. Indeed, inputs from interviewees suggest that CSOs and GAC would benefit greatly from further dialogue and engagement on greening more generally. Interviewees suggest that challenges persist for CSOs to ensure that their funding applications speak GAC's "right language". On the other hand, there was a view by some interviewees that those who review funding proposals at Global Affairs Canada are not always experts on the substantive matter at hand, particularly for organizations working in specialized niche areas. There is a need to ensure clear communication between CSOs and Global Affairs Canada on greening initiatives as well as clear guidance to avoid misunderstandings and lost opportunities for partnership.

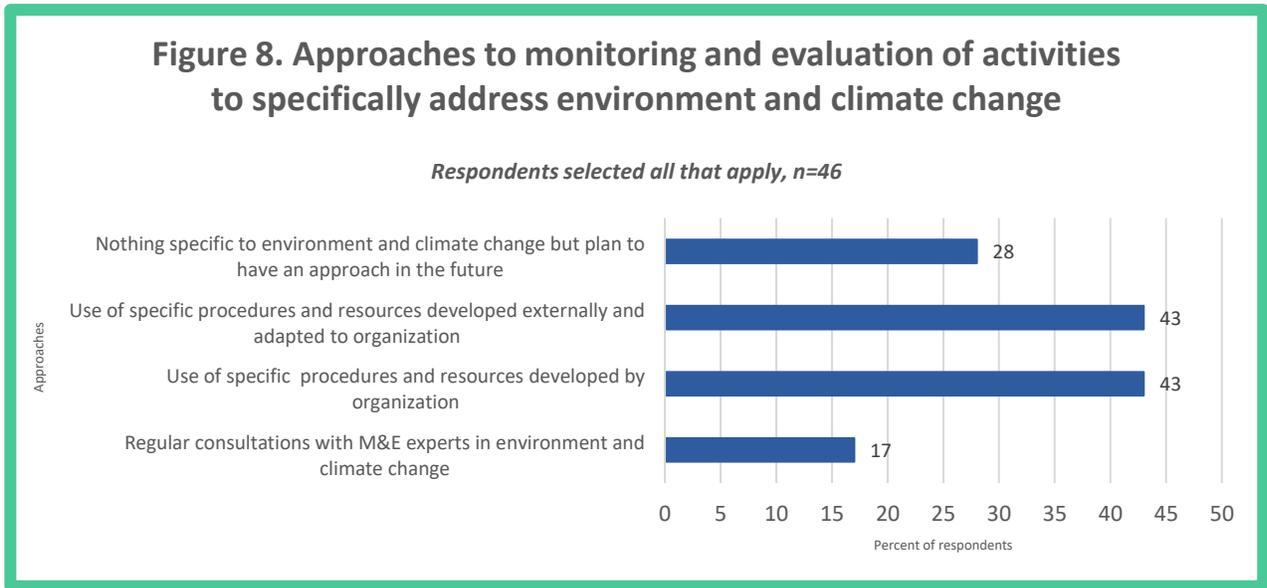
According to one interviewee, the sector has also faced significant limitations with respect to greening programs as changes in project proposal and application processes at Global Affairs Canada limit possibilities for organizations to directly engage with Global Affairs Canada experts on the environment (or gender for that matter). Changes have limited interactions between partners and GAC, with some organizations noting the need for opportunities to raise questions to effectively engage in new proposal processes. It is worth noting however that Global Affairs Canada guidance seems to be less of an issue for organizations that already have a strong mandate vis-à-vis the environment, according to inputs from interviewees.

### *Monitoring and evaluation of green programs*

Figure 8 provides an overview of the approaches noted by survey respondents to monitor and evaluate green programs. Respondents who addressed this question noted the use of specific internal (43%) and external (43%) tools, methods, guidelines, procedures and resources to support monitoring and evaluation. In turn, while answering another survey question, roughly 36% of respondents identified lack of access to monitoring and evaluation tools related to greening as a relevant challenge for integrating the environment and climate change into programming.

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<sup>8</sup> For a full review of Global Affairs Canada policies and guidance in this regard, see [Green partnerships in international cooperation: A review of Global Affairs Canada policies and guidance for civil society](#) (2021).



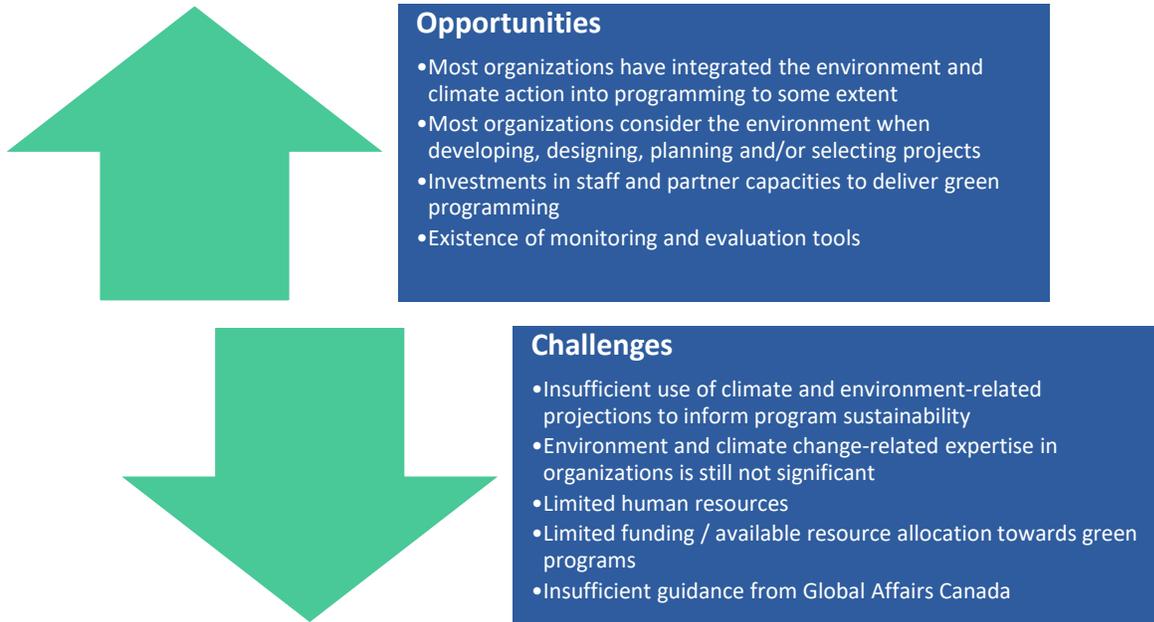
*Challenges and opportunities*

Survey respondents indicated that a key challenge to integrating the environment and climate change into programming pertains to financial resources. Financial resource allocation was identified as a relevant challenge by 60% of respondents. The same proportion of respondents (60%) noted available funding for green programs as a relevant challenge. One interviewee noted that once donors become more willing to support green programming, the sector will follow suit.

Figure 9 provides an overview of the challenges and opportunities for greening programs identified through the survey and interviews.

**Figure 9. Opportunities and challenges for green programming**

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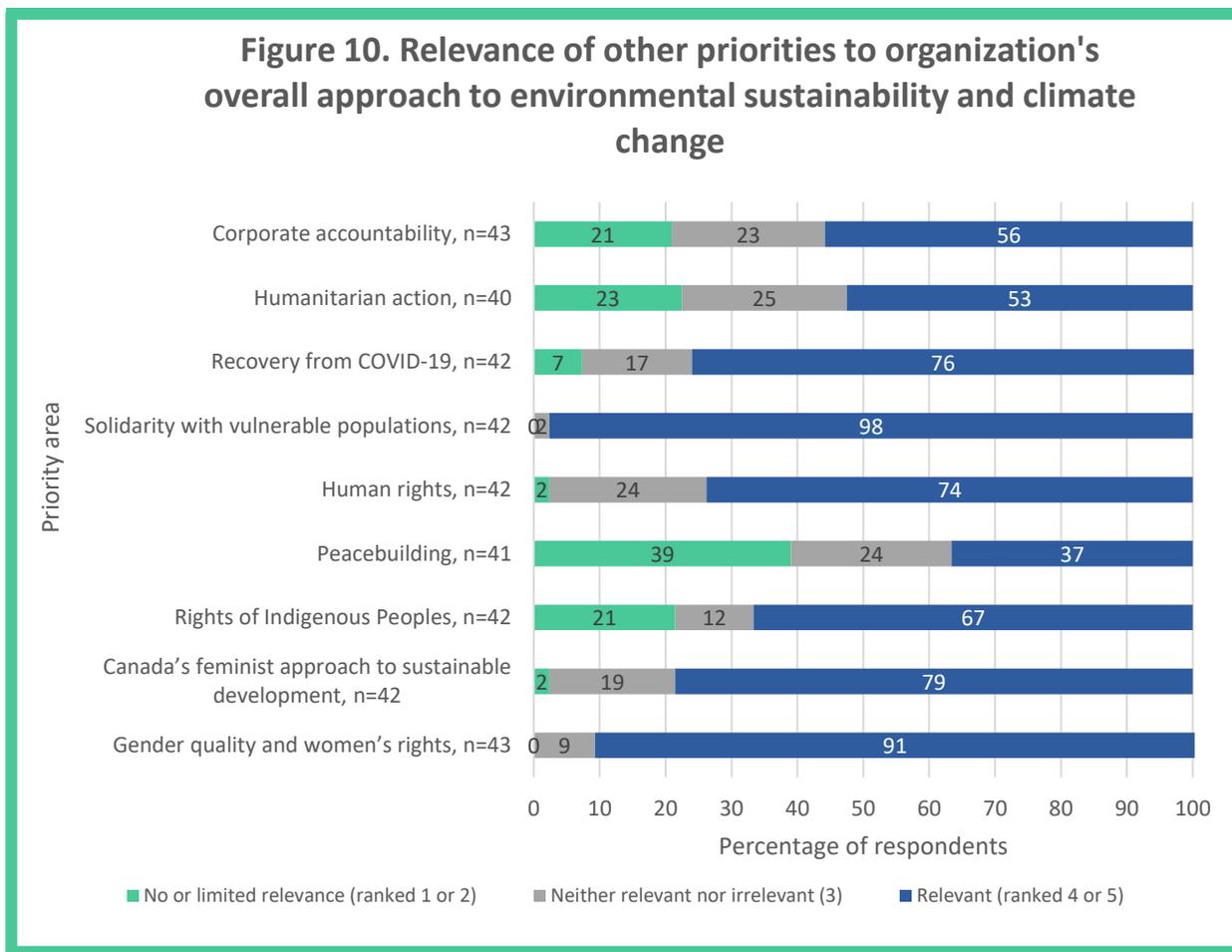


### Cross-cutting considerations for greener CSOs

As noted above, the Greening CSOs initiative sought to examine cross-cutting issues in terms of how international development and humanitarian CSOs green their work. These include how organizations view domestic versus international efforts, intersections between greening efforts and other social justice agendas such as human rights-based and feminist approaches and experiences from different sub-sectors such as health and education. As noted above, an opportunity exists to further unpack how CSOs address cross-cutting issues, particularly through the identification of good practices and peer exchange.

#### *Holistic approaches*

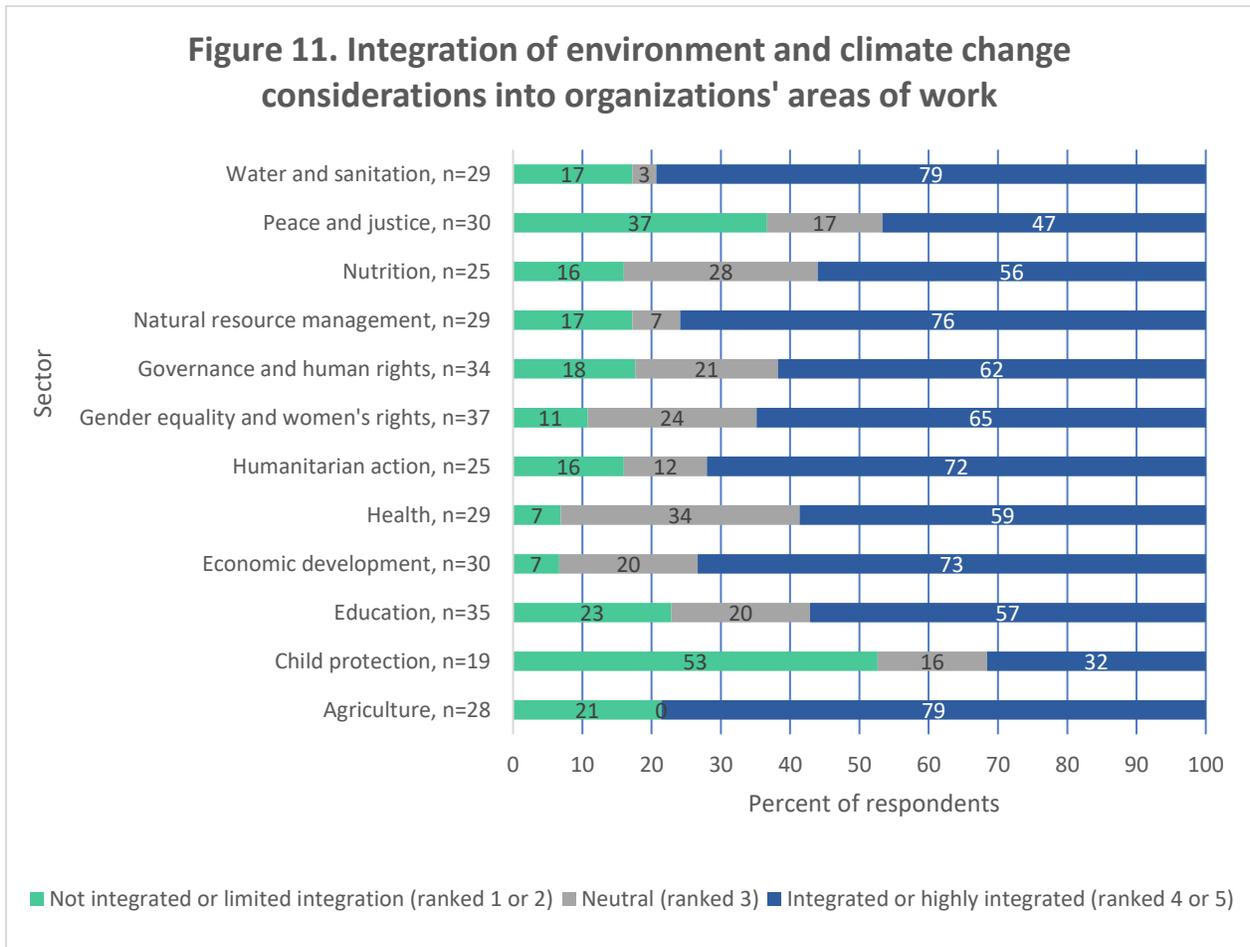
The 2030 Agenda calls on all stakeholders to adopt holistic and integrated approaches that incorporate social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. In this context, all organizations are challenged to ensure that their efforts adequately capture relevant intersections between Sustainable Development Goals. Figure 10 presents an overview of the extent to which survey respondents see other priorities as relevant to their organization's overall approach to environmental sustainability and climate change. It suggests that solidarity with vulnerable populations and gender equality and women's rights are priorities that most commonly intersect with organizational approaches to environmental sustainability and climate action. Intersections with peace building, humanitarian action and corporate responsibility appear to be less significant in terms of their relevance to organizations' overall approach to environmental sustainability and climate change.



Survey respondents were also asked about the main sectors in which they work, and the extent to which environment and climate change considerations were incorporated into their work with respondents asked to rank their responses on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing no integration and 5 representing highly integrated. Figure 11 provides an overview of the extent to which respondents feel their organization as integrated the environment and climate change into its work. Survey respondents covered most sectors, with most organizations working in the areas of gender equality and women's rights, governance and human rights, education, economic development, and peace and justice. Less survey respondents work for organizations whose efforts pertain to child protection, nutrition and humanitarian action.

Figure 11 suggests that organizations working in agriculture and water and sanitation are most likely to have integrated the environment and climate change into their work in these sectors. Sectors for which organizations are least likely to have integrated the environment and climate change are child protection, peace and justice, and nutrition. Nevertheless, accepting child protection and peace and justice, more than 50% of respondents that work across diverse sectors noted that their organization integrates or highly integrates environmental and climate change considerations into their work and only a limited proportion of respondents ranked integration at a 1 or 2 (i.e. not integrated or limited integration) for their organization. While there likely is opportunity to improve the level of integration of environment and climate change considerations

into programming across sub-sectors overall, survey responses suggest that efforts are already moving in this direction for most organizations.



Inputs from interviewees suggest that some organizations are making progress in adopting holistic approaches, though few interviewees framed their efforts in terms of alignment with the 2030 Agenda's transformative principles in this regard. For example, one interviewee noted their work was reflective of the whole ecosystem, in that humans, animals and environment alike were considered in all decision-making processes. Some interviewees argued that by linking human rights to the environment it has become clear for their organization that caring for the Earth is a shared responsibility, but it is one that is not distributed equally and different stakeholders have different responsibilities. For the sector more generally, a view emerged from some interviewees that the time has come for organizations to prioritize efforts to mainstream the environment and climate change similarly to what has been done for gender equality. Although some organizations displayed interconnectedness between their areas of work, some interviewees cautioned that responses to COVID-19 risk pushing the sector into silos as stakeholders rush to meet immediate needs. Part of building back better may require all stakeholders, CSOs included, to rebuild interconnectedness in programs and operations to better align with what is needed for environmental sustainability.

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### *Engagement with Indigenous Peoples*

Canada's commitments to environmental sustainability and climate action must be inclusive of all people, including Indigenous Peoples who hold significant knowledge and wisdom in the promotion of sustainability. For Canada, the path towards reconciliation includes a recognition for and valuing of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. Research participants under the Greening CSOs initiative did not provide significant inputs on engagements with Indigenous communities in Canada or abroad overall. However, the project did engage one organization with significant experience working with Indigenous partners. The interviewee provided a number of insights with respect to opportunities and challenges for the sector.

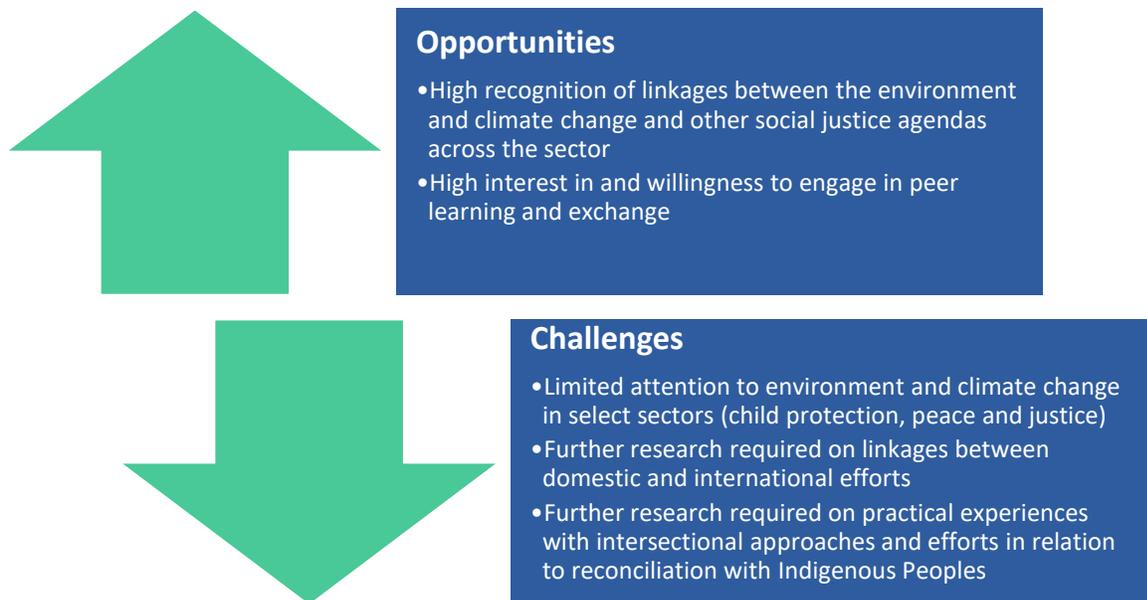
An opportunity exists for organizations to better engage with Indigenous knowledge in their approaches to environmental action and climate justice. According to the interviewee, their organization's experts on environmental issues included one staff member in a partner country and a First Nations elder that provides advice to headquarters. This ensures that efforts are informed by a diversity of expertise as well as a focus on intersectionality, bringing in local knowledge and Indigenous knowledge. However, such partnerships are not automatic. According to the interviewee, the organization has spent 10 years building partnerships with Indigenous Peoples with staff and executives meeting leaders once a week, "largely for no reason" but instead to "show up [...and] listen."

### *Peer learning and exchange*

When asked what organizations need to green or further green their operations and/or programs, survey respondents overwhelmingly pointed to knowledge sharing and exchange. Over 85% noted the need for good practice examples as well as peer learning from other members of the sector. Nearly 65% of survey respondents noted the need for a community of practice.

### *Opportunities and challenges*

**Figure 12. Opportunities and challenges for greening: Cross-cutting issues**



### Conclusions and recommendations

This report summarizes the key findings from Cooperation Canada's Greening CSOs initiative. It complements available policy briefs on CSO leadership for greening and the review of Global Affairs Canada's commitments, policies and guidance with respect to the environment and climate action. As such, it focuses more on the key findings with respect to CSO actions overall in the areas of operations, communications, policy engagement and advocacy, programming, and in terms of cross-cutting issues. Recognizing that this initiative represents a starting point towards a greener international development and humanitarian sector – and that more research and work is to be done, as highlighted throughout this report – the following recommendations emerge.

### Operations

- ✓ **Concern for environmental degradation and addressing climate change should be translated into organizational policies, supported by appropriate programming, partnerships, engagement with donors and other stakeholders and systems to ensure accountability for commitments.**

The Greening CSOs initiative shows that international development and humanitarian CSOs recognize the importance of the climate emergency and addressing environmental degradation. However, this has not fully translated into organizational commitments as seen through the existence of organizational policies, dedicated staff, adoption of green operational practices and through monitoring and evaluation.

- ✓ **Ensure effective engagement by leaders in operational greening and assign responsibilities for implementation of green initiatives to appropriate staff, in line with organizational capacities and resources.**

As noted throughout this report and in the Greening CSOs policy brief on CSO leadership, responsibility for greener operations fundamentally rests with senior leaders. While staff initiative can and should be encouraged, leaders signal the extent to which an organization will invest in becoming green. An opportunity exists to empower team members to support implementation of organizational priorities vis-à-vis greening. Recognizing that organizations have different levels of human and financial resources, the emergence of [free and low-cost greening tools](#) offers an opportunity for all organizations to begin making progress on greening. Subjecting green actions to cost-benefit analysis is also important as organizations move forward, particularly as greening efforts often result in cost savings.

- ✓ **Identify and harness lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to further propel green work environments and double down on support for localization.**

As organizations look towards 2021 and just, equitable and sustainable recovery from COVID-19, an opportunity exists to take stock of innovations adopted in 2020 in response to the global pandemic. While new ways of working presented both challenges and opportunities for organizations, an opportunity exists for Canada's international development and humanitarian sector to demonstrate how it has moved beyond business as usual to build back better, including through virtual approaches that mitigate and reduce environmental impacts as well as ongoing support for localization.

### Communications, policy engagement and advocacy

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- ✓ **Examine existing communications, policy engagement and advocacy efforts to identify intersections with environmental sustainability and climate action and adjust messaging and approaches accordingly.**

As noted above, organizations have yet to fully integrate considerations for environmental sustainability and climate action into their communications. This includes both in terms of communications around green operations as well as engagement in sector-wide advocacy and policy engagement on climate change and the environment. Recognizing that organizations have diverse advocacy and policy engagement priorities, the environment and climate action nevertheless intersect with all international development and humanitarian efforts. Engagement in sector coalitions related to the environment and climate change offers an important opportunity for organizations with more limited capacities to engage in joint policy and advocacy initiatives.

### Green programming

- ✓ **Strengthen the integration of environmental considerations and climate action into CSO programming through investments in capacities and by making use of existing tools and resources.**

As shown above, while organizations have made investments to improve organizational capacities towards green programming, survey respondents noted that gaps in human and organizational resources remain. A useful starting point is the [Greening CSOs repository of tools and resources](#). A diverse range of strategies exist for improving human resource capacities with organizations pointing to investments in new staff hires, training for staff and partners and working with new partners with relevant expertise.

- ✓ **Engage funders on the importance of green programming and integrating environment and climate change considerations into existing and new programming.**

A challenge noted by CSOs is limited funding for green(er) programs. Engagement with existing funders on the importance of the environment and climate change is a helpful starting point in efforts to shift to more environmentally conscious and responsive programs and partnerships.

- ✓ **Call on Global Affairs Canada to update guidance and tools related to environmental sustainability and climate action in dialogue and consultation with CSO partners.**

Survey respondents and interviewees emphasized the importance of engagement with Global Affairs Canada to support green initiatives. CSO dialogue with Global Affairs Canada can support further identification of the practical challenges faced by CSOs, set shared, realistic expectations, offer opportunities for co-creation and joint solution finding on how the department can better support green CSO operations and programs. In this context, it is important to ensure opportunities for diverse CSOs to inform and provide feedback on Global Affairs Canada guidance and tools.

### Cross-cutting considerations for greener CSOs

- ✓ **Identify interlinkages and opportunities to support mutually reinforcing action on human rights, gender equality and global solidarity, among other priorities, and environmental sustainability and climate change action.**

Existing priorities in the context of international development and humanitarian action are nearly always linked to outcomes in terms environmental sustainability and climate justice. Many of the

## GREENING CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION SECTOR

challenges faced today are explicitly linked to environmental destruction, often with women and girls and other historically marginalized populations most impacted. CSOs should ensure their efforts across different sub-sectors are guided by holistic, intersectional approaches that recognize the linkages between social, economic and environmental justice.

- ✓ **Signal organizational interest to engage in communities of practice related to greening, participate in peer learning and share lessons learned as part of efforts to promote sector-wide progress.**

The CSO Greening project identified peer learning and experience sharing as an important means to propel progress in the sector. Existing sector and sub-sector coalitions offer an important starting point for member-led communities of practice.