

## **Canadian Sustainability Indicators Network (CSIN)**

### **Learning Event #26 Summary**

### **Outcomes of the OECD Istanbul Meeting**

**October 17, 2007, 11:00am – 12:30pm Central**



Assembled by the CSIN Secretariat  
[www.csin-rcid.ca](http://www.csin-rcid.ca)

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*\*The following summary, while by no means complete, offers a snapshot of the Learning Event presentation & discussion which took place on October 17, 2007.*

## **1. About CSIN Learning Events**

The Canadian Sustainability Indicators Network is a group of over 400 indicator practitioners from across Canada and around the world working in a variety of governmental and non-governmental contexts. Practitioners share resources over a listserv and website, and participate in regular knowledge sharing opportunities, called “Learning Events”. CSIN’s unique approach to engaging practitioners is reflective of a larger goal to forward the discourse and practice of sustainability indicator development in Canada.

Learning Events are conference calls held in tandem with online PowerPoint sharing. Relevant topics related to sustainability indicator development are explored using a presentation with discussion format. Participants from all levels of government, academia, NGOs, consultants and business bring perspectives and knowledge resources.

Participating in the network is free and easy: simply request to be placed on CSIN’s listserv of 400 indicator practitioners. You’ll receive notices of upcoming events, along with reports and announcements from members. Past event summaries and presentations, as well as listserv archives are available from CSIN’s website: [www.csin-rcid.ca](http://www.csin-rcid.ca)

More information about CSIN is available at our website or by contacting the CSIN Coordinator Christa Rust by email: [crust@iisd.ca](mailto:crust@iisd.ca) or telephone #204-958-7719.

## **2. Snapshot**

The 26<sup>th</sup> CSIN Learning Event on Scenarios was well attended. There were a total of 42 members signed up for the call, although the actual number that participated may be slightly different. Participants for this event were made up of the following sectors: academia, Canadian federal and provincial governments, non-governmental organizations and private organizations (Annex A: Learning Event Participants).

### About our Presenter

Jon Hall has been leading the OECD's Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies since it began in 2005. He came to the OECD from the Australian Bureau of Statistics where he spent seven years, mainly leading a ground-breaking project to publish the first set of measures of Australia's progress, a publication that went on to top the Bulletin magazine's social category in their 'Smart 100' awards.

He has a degree in math and a master's degree in statistics from the UK and an executive masters in public service administration from the Australian and New Zealand School of Government. An Australian and British citizen, Jon has also worked for the British public service, for the World Food Program in Zambia and as a spectacularly unsuccessful house painter, security guard and waiter in the USA.

Jon is co-authoring a book for the OECD on measuring progress and another, in his spare time, on where to watch mammals around the world.

### What is the Global Project?

The OECD's Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies exists to foster the development of sets of key economic, social and environmental indicators and their use to inform and promote evidence-based decision-making, within and across the public, private and citizen sectors. These indicator sets can be at the sub-national, national and international levels. The project is open to all sectors of society, building both on good practice and innovative research work, organized by the OECD in co-operation with national and international organizations.

### Why a Global Project?

Is life getting better? Are our societies making progress? Indeed, what does "progress" mean to the world's citizens? There can be few questions of greater importance in today's rapidly changing world. And yet how many of us have the evidence to answer these questions?

For a good portion of the 20th century there was an implicit assumption that economic growth was synonymous with progress: an assumption that a growing GDP meant life must be getting better. But we now recognize that it isn't quite as simple as that. Despite high levels of economic growth in many countries many experts believe we are no happier than they were 50 years ago; that people trust one another - and their governments - less than they used to; and that increased income has come at the expense of increased insecurity, longer working hours and greater complexity in our lives. Much of the world is healthier and people live longer than they did just a few years ago, but environmental problems like climate change cast a shadow over an uncertain future. Indeed, it sometimes seems that for every action to demonstrate societal progress, an equal but opposite reaction demonstrates precisely the opposite. And when the experts disagree, what hope do the citizens have to engage in democratic debate about their future and make the right choices at the ballot box? Access to accurate information is vital when we come to judge our politicians and hold them accountable. But access to a comprehensive and intelligible portrait of that most important of questions - whether or not life has got and is likely to get better - is lacking in many societies.

Concerns about this have been growing. And over the past 10 years or so there has been an explosion of interest in producing alternative measures of societal progress. These alternative measures go beyond GDP to represent a broader view of the ways in which societies are progressing and regressing. They are based on the core values of a society, not those of a single political party or an elite few, and certainly not only on the narrow criteria of neoclassical economics. Such sets of progress measures can help governments focus in a more joined up way on what really matters: they can foster a more informed debate on where a society is, where it wants to head, and – crucially – the choices it needs to make if it is to get there. By measuring progress we can foster progress.

### ***3. The Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies***

The OECD brings together the governments of 30 member countries committed to democracy and the market economy. The organization has long recognized the importance that evidence, and indicators, can and should play in designing better policies. Increasingly the OECD has begun to shift its attention beyond the gross domestic profit (GDP) and set its sights on a broader set of measures of well-being. The presentation on the Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies is an exploration of the OECD project which is seeking to become the world wide reference point for those who wish to measure, or assess, the progress of their societies from a more synthetic – and more realistic- perspective.

Initiatives to do just this are being run in many countries, rich and poor. They are being run by governments, by civil society, by academics and the private sector. Some of the most successful have been run in novel partnerships that span the different sectors. They are being run at the country and international levels. Some are being done for local communities. But for the most part, those working in this field are working in isolation. They have few opportunities to discuss with their peers their common experiences or develop best practice. When practitioners do meet, their vocabularies and methodologies often differ to such a great extent that discussions usually result in more heat than light. The world needs leadership and the OECD's Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies will provide it.

In June 2007 the OECD, in collaboration with the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Commission and the Organization of the Islamic Conference ran a World Forum in Istanbul “Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies”. Some 1200 people, from over 130 countries attended. Presidents and ministers rubbed shoulders with the leaders of civil society. Captains of industry met the heads of charitable foundations and leading academics. They shared a common interest in wanting to develop better measures of how the world was progressing.

**Jon Hall's presentation is available on CSIN website Learning Event #26:** [http://www.csin-rcid.ca/learning\\_events.aspx](http://www.csin-rcid.ca/learning_events.aspx)

**“Measuring the Progress of Societies” video link:**

[http://www.oecd.org/document/51/0,3343,en\\_21571361\\_31938349\\_39070515\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/51/0,3343,en_21571361_31938349_39070515_1_1_1_1,00.html)

#### **4. Discussion Questions**

Q. Could the power point that was distributed to the Learning Event participants be shared with our colleagues or others who would find it of interest?

*A. Yes, please feel free to distribute it.*

Q. Being the Canadian Sustainability Indicators Network, we focus on sustainability indicators. I did not hear a sustainability focus that much in your presentation. I would like to know where sustainability comes up in terms of the global project?

*A. It comes up all the time; the OECD is thinking about this in some detail. For the moment we define progress as an umbrella term that encompasses sustainable development, well being, quality of life etc. A sustainable development approach might be the best way for some to think about progress. Others may want to focus on wellbeing (which has less of an inter generational aspect)*

Q. Are you including cities in the global project?

*A. Yes. In Australia, for example, there is evidence that projects seem to work best at the local level. When you spread out across a large country such as Australia or even Canada, you lessen the ownership people can have – people can become more involved with indicators that have a more local focus.*

Q. How is this project integrated into the Beyond GDP Conference taking place in November?

*A. The Beyond GDP Conference<sup>1</sup> is taking place in Brussels in November. The conference is the next stage of the project for Europe. It is in part a follow-up event to the Istanbul Meeting to ensure that we start doing what was identified in June 2007.*

Q. Will part of the project include specific reporting? Will OECD develop focused recommendations to influence current reporting?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.beyond-gdp.eu/>

*A. We are reluctant to tell people what they need to do. We will not start doing progress assessments for countries. We have thought about producing key outcome measures across the OECD but this is a sensitive area. We are however encouraging people to think about different ways to measure their own progress. There are plans for the development of a common reporting framework in the next few years, and from that we may be able to produce reports and have a technical web-based search and compare platform. But progress is of course a quite sensitive and political term so we need to move carefully and with the agreement from our many stakeholders.*

Q. Did Indigenous issues get mentioned at the Istanbul meeting, was there any focus?

*A. Yes, there was an Australian paper present from the Australian Productivity Commission, but I was unable to attend that one. I can send you a link to the paper (see Annex C for link). The Indigenous model of progress can be quite different from that of the non-Indigenous population – at least that is what we thought when we discussed this in Australia. I do not think that the Global Project will examine this in great detail (indeed different Indigenous peoples might have very different notions of progress). Of course we would like to help Indigenous populations take part, perhaps through encouraging them to develop their own measures of progress to see whether and how they differ from that of others in a country.*

Q. How do we stay informed on the OECD Global Project?

*A. You can sign up for the OECD Newsletter for regular updates.*

*[http://www.oecd.org/document/9/0,3343,en\\_21571361\\_31938349\\_36790281\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/9/0,3343,en_21571361_31938349_36790281_1_1_1_1,00.html)*

*Information can also be distributed through the CSIN Listserv.*

Q. Beyond statistical agencies finance and planning, the users of the information would have to be convinced & involved. How will the relationship be run?

*A. We are working with as broad a community as we can. It isn't just statisticians who are interested. In Australia for example the Treasury produced its own framework for well-being. One lesson for this kind of work is it opens the doors to new ways of statisticians, policy makers and civil society working together, to talk about what progress is and what it means. The process identifies the gaps and different priorities for the statistical work program and can also build new*



*relationships helping the various partners better understand one another. This is a selling point to encourage people to participate.*

## **5. Suggestions & Comments**

- My suggestion is that the OECD gets involved more in reporting. The OECD has a lot of clout. Business is starting to pay attention; you are reaching the media and getting to the public.
  - OECD has the Global Project website & blogs. We are working out how to report. Materials on the website are available to share.
- Most challenges become more complex with geographical scales.
- Challenge is to translate this into one standard. Important to demonstrate progress in key areas striving for greatest impacts on the ground where they are understood.
- As the Global Project moves, perhaps a regional process in preparation for the next world forum can take place. CSIN is premier network for indicators in Canada. Perhaps a concrete way of keeping discussions going is the opportunity to have a face to face meeting on the OECD Global Project at a regional level here in Canada.
- Movement is there we just need to make these links and learn from each other.
- Need to realize that it isn't always possible to come to agreements on everything, but at the same time remember that there are commonalities that do exist.

## ***Annex A: Learning Event Participants***

(Includes those who signed up for the call and were unable to attend)

1. Christa Rust, CSIN Coordinator
2. Jon Hall, OECD
3. Darren Swanson, IISD
4. Laszlo Pinter, IISD
5. Dale Rothman, IISD
6. Vivek Voora, IISD
7. Stuart Slayen, IISD
8. Douglas Worts, Art Gallery of Ontario
9. Susanne Jakobsen, Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation
10. Tony Genco, Downsview Park Inc.
11. Audrey Henderson, Knowledge Empowerment
12. Michael Keating, Sustainability Reporting
13. Doretta Charles, INAC
14. Vincent Mercier, Environment Canada
15. Dara Finney, Environment Canada
16. Barb Buckland, Environment Canada
17. Arthur Sheffield, Environment Canada
18. Richard Verbisky, Environment Canada
19. Sarah Kennedy, Environment Canada
20. Peter Farrington, Environment Canada
21. Alexis Morgan, World Wildlife Fund Canada
22. Shirley Thompson, NRI University of Manitoba
23. Steve Litke, Fraser Basin Council
24. Rebecca Vines, Clayoquot Biosphere Trust
25. Tom Niemann, BC Ministry of Forests and Rang
26. Wendy Kalkan, M.D. of Pincher Creek No. 9
27. Amanda Brownlie, The City of Calgary
28. Christie Stephenson, Ethical Funds
29. Samantha Anderson, International Centre for Sustainable Cities
30. Geoffrey Woolcock, Griffith University
31. Katherine Cinq-Mars, PhD candidate, Dept. of Political Science, McGill University

32. Abebe Worku, Ethiopian Association & Community Wellbeing and Empowerment Toronto
33. Colleen McCracken, Sustainable Calgary
34. Ilze Andzans, Sr. Environmental Specialist Toronto Water
35. Israel Dunmade, Mount Royal College
36. Natalie Ambler, York University Grad Student
37. Rhonda St. Croix, Friends of the Earth - Canada
38. Milena Placentile, Shintai Zweck
39. Ellen Woodley, Liana Environmental Consulting
40. Anjanette Zielinski, Manitoba Conservation
41. Élizabeth Paulet, NRC Biotechnology Research Institute
42. Christy Foley, Government of Alberta

## ***Annex B: Resources on Global Project***

### **Website Links:**

- OECD Istanbul World Forum - Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies

[http://www.oecd.org/document/51/0,3343,en\\_21571361\\_31938349\\_37115187\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/51/0,3343,en_21571361_31938349_37115187_1_1_1_1,00.html)

### **Articles:**

- "Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Australia"

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/31/21/38756410.pdf?contentId=38756619>