



## Table of Contents

<b><i>Executive Summary</i></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Results</i></b> .....	<b>7</b>
Section A: Government Performance.....	7
Section B: Sustainable Development Goals .....	13
Section C: Sustainability Practices and Community Sustainability .....	18
Section D: Economic Sustainability .....	20
<b><i>Conclusion</i></b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b><i>References</i></b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b><i>Appendix 1: COVID-19 Impacts</i></b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b><i>Appendix 2: Methodology</i></b> .....	<b>29</b>

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## Executive Summary

This research brief presents the results of an online survey and follow-up focus groups conducted in 2020-2021 about Newfoundlanders and Labradorians' perceptions about the province's sustainability practices and potential to achieve a more sustainable future. The survey was carried out as part of the larger project, "Comparing Small Island States and Subnational Island Jurisdictions: Towards Sustainable Island Futures."

We adopt a "full-spectrum" definition of sustainability, which emphasizes the interconnection of the environmental, economic, social, and institutional (or governance) dimensions of sustainability (Foley et al. 2020). As such, the survey asked about participants' perceptions of multiple aspects of sustainability in Newfoundland and Labrador. Given the ongoing financial crisis facing Newfoundland and Labrador, we are particularly interested in perceptions of economic and institutional (or governance) sustainability, as well as how these relate to other dimensions of sustainability, including those articulated by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Overall, we find that concerns about economic sustainability overshadow other dimensions of full-spectrum sustainability. Specifically, research results show that:

- Economic sustainability is considered as the most crucial, yet poorly managed, aspect of sustainability in NL. The province is perceived as currently economically unsustainable, with the Muskrat Falls project highlighted as an example of poor decision-making related to economic sustainability.
- The majority of participants believe that economic sustainability is compatible with protecting local heritage and culture, protecting natural resources, and addressing climate change. Most participants agree that NL's economic sustainability would benefit from developing greater fiscal transparency and accountability.
- The provincial government is considered the most important institution for ensuring sustainability in NL.
- However, participants are largely dissatisfied with the performance of the provincial government, particularly regarding its role in managing NL's economy. Similarly, a majority of participants are critical of provincial economic policies and strategies, as well as the provincial government's ability to promote public awareness, or implement regulations concerning economic sustainability.
- Focus group participants often note that the province has not benefitted adequately from its relationship with the Government of Canada. Provincial-international relationships are also generally viewed as underdeveloped, though participants note positive examples of more informal and business-oriented international relationships.

- Among the 17 United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), those related to the local economy are seen as the most relevant SDGs to the province. However, the province is seen as disengaged from the SDGs as a framework for action. Participants generally give moderate to low evaluations to the performance of the provincial government to date in striving to meet the SDGs by the 2030 target date, with universal access to clean drinking water cited as a notable issue within the province. Climate action is rated as the least successful sustainable development goal in terms of progress in NL.
- The majority of participants report positive personal attitudes towards sustainability practices in their daily lives. However, sustainability actions at the community or provincial level are largely seen as insufficient with room for improvement.

Overall, our results show that economic sustainability is the most critical, yet poorly managed, dimension of building a sustainable future for Newfoundland and Labrador. At the same time, participants generally see economic sustainability as compatible with protecting culture and heritage and protecting natural resources. Similarly, participants generally see climate change and climate action as linked to the economic sustainability of the province.

There is an appetite for this gap to be addressed by the provincial government, which is viewed as the most important public institution for ensuring the sustainability of the province. This can be done through policy measures that help increase fiscal transparency and accountability in the province, as well as measures that further improve capacity-building and advice for economic sustainability across key sectors of Newfoundland and Labrador.

## Introduction

In 2020, we conducted an online survey on perceptions of multiple dimensions of sustainability in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). This was followed by focus groups carried out in 2021 with a sub-group of survey participants. This report presents the survey and focus group results, which are based on 109 survey participants from six key stakeholder groups (government, academia, business, NGO, youth/students, and unions/workers' groups). Three subsequent focus groups were held with 15 participants. Working from the framework of "full-spectrum" sustainability (Foley et al. 2020), we asked participants for their views on the province's performance regarding economic, environmental, social, and institutional/governance dimensions of sustainability, as well as their views about the province's potential to achieve a more sustainable future.

Overall, we are interested in how participants understand and evaluate the "full spectrum" of sustainability in NL, and particularly how perceptions of economic sustainability relate to other dimensions. Specifically, we ask:

*RQ1* How do participants view the roles of the provincial government and other institutions in building and ensuring sustainability in Newfoundland and Labrador?

*RQ2* How do participants view the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in relation to ensuring sustainable futures for Newfoundland and Labrador?

*RQ3* How do participants view the roles of government and themselves in building sustainable communities in Newfoundland and Labrador?

*RQ4* How do participants view economic sustainability in relation to the management of key sectors in Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as regarding fiscal transparency and accountability?

The survey and focus groups are part of the broader project, "Comparing Small Island States and Subnational Island Jurisdictions: Towards Sustainable Island Futures," which is supported by a Partnership Development Grant from SSHRC (PI: James Randall, University of Prince Edward Island). This project compares perceptions of various dimensions of sustainability among key stakeholders across six small island states (Cyprus, Grenada, Iceland, Mauritius, New Zealand, Palau, and St. Lucia) and six subnational island jurisdictions (Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, La Réunion, Lesbos, Guam, and Tobago). This comparative approach allows us to learn important lessons about the key similarities and differences in how small island states and subnational island jurisdictions navigate sustainability challenges (Randall and Boersma 2020).

Given the ongoing financial crisis in NL, we are particularly interested in the economic dimension of sustainability and how this relates to other dimensions, including the institutional/governance dimension. The Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project is a core piece of the financial crisis. As such, we have also engaged in a separate case study analysis of

governance failures and lessons to be learned from Muskrat Falls. We are also working in collaboration with the Icelandic case study team on a parallel comparative case study analysis of Muskrat Falls and the 2008 Icelandic financial crisis. This comparative analysis will be extended to a comparison of our respective survey and focus group results.

In the following sections, we report the survey and focus group results regarding sustainable governance (*Section A*), Sustainable Development Goals (*Section B*), community sustainability practices (*Section C*), and local economic sustainability (*Section D*). We also report differences across participant groups where the variation across groups is meaningful. However, as our survey uses a non-random sample, comparisons across groups should be interpreted with caution.



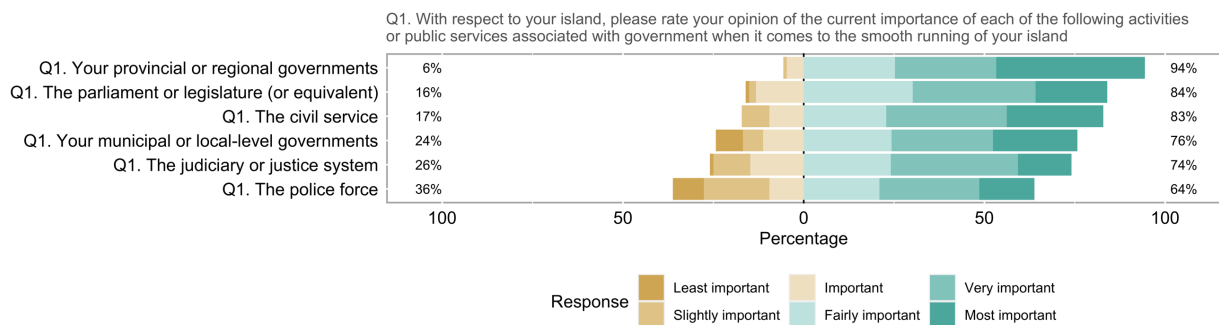
Photo credit: Malcolm Duchamp, Creative Commons.

## Results

### Section A: Government Performance

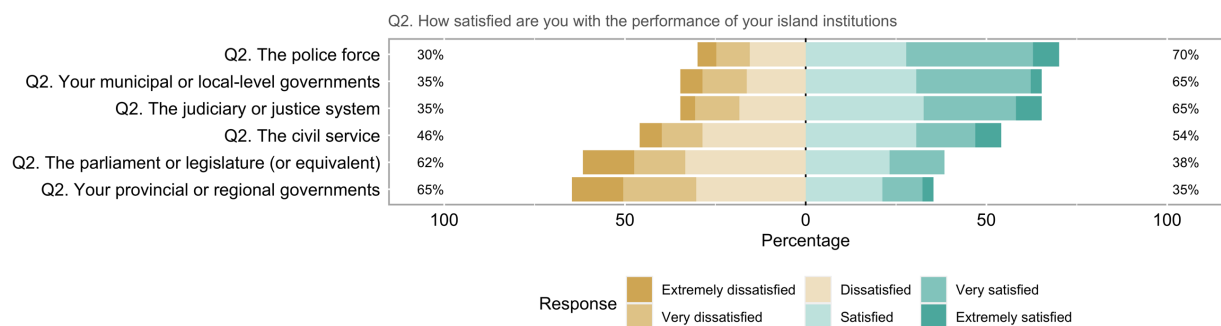
The first section concerns with the roles public institutions play in ensuring sustainability in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We first asked survey participants' opinions about the importance of — and their satisfaction with — six public institutions: the justice system, the legislature, the civil service, the police force, the provincial government, and municipal or local-level governments (Figure 1-a). **Most participants highly evaluate the importance of all six of these institutions**, among which **the provincial government is viewed as the most important institution** for ensuring the smooth running of the province (positively rated by 94% participants), while **the police force is relatively viewed as the least important** among the six institutions (positively rated by 64% participants).



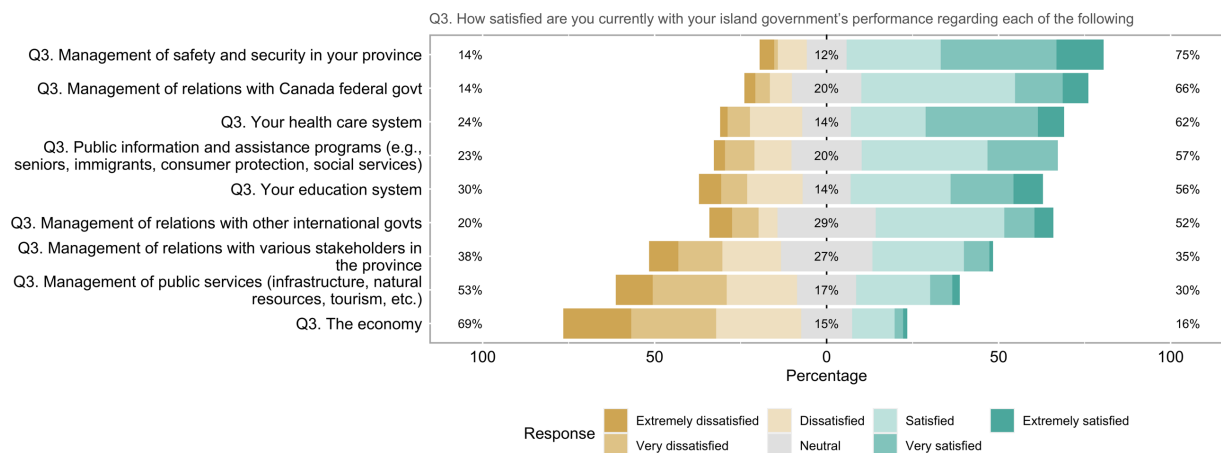
**Figure 1-a.** Participants' assessment of the importance of six public institutions in Newfoundland and Labrador.

While all these institutions are seen as important, participants' satisfaction with these public institutions shows more variation (Figure 1-b). **In general, participants are largely dissatisfied with the performance of the provincial government and the legislature** (dissatisfaction rates at 65% and 62% respectively). By contrast, **the other four institutions receive generally positive assessments from most participants**. Interestingly, **the more important an institution is considered, the less satisfactory it is rated by participants**. For instance, the provincial government is considered the most important public institution yet is also assessed as having the most unsatisfactory performance. Conversely, although participants rate the police force as the least important public service when it comes to the smooth running of the province, most participants give positive evaluations to the performance of the police (70%).



**Figure 1-b.** Participants' satisfaction with six public institutions in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We also asked participants to rate how satisfied they are with the provincial government's performance related to nine dimensions of governance, including the economy, public services, stakeholder relations, safety and security, public information, education, health care, relationships with the federal government, and relationships with international governments (Figure 2). **Participants are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with governmental performance related to the economy** (negatively rated by 69% participants). **Participants are also somewhat dissatisfied with the management of public services** (infrastructure, natural resources, tourism, etc.) and **the management of stakeholder relations** (53% and 38% negative ratings respectively). The other rest six dimensions receive generally positive evaluations from the participants. Among them, **the management of safety and security is rated as the most satisfactory aspect of NL provincial government's performance** (75%).

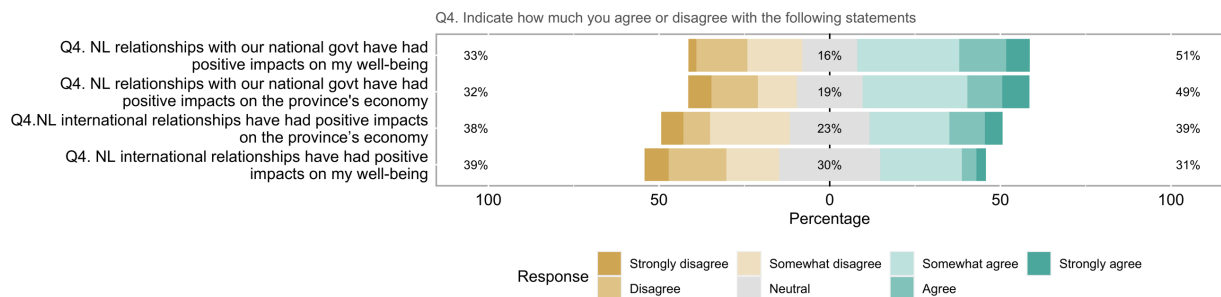


**Figure 2.** Participants' satisfaction with the provincial government's performance in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Lastly, we asked about the impacts of provincial government's relationship management with the federal government and other countries (Figure 3). **Around half of the participants agree that relationships between Newfoundland and Labrador and the Canadian national government have had positive impacts on the province's economy and individuals' well-being** (51%). **Provincial-international relationships are viewed slightly less positively**, with 39% of

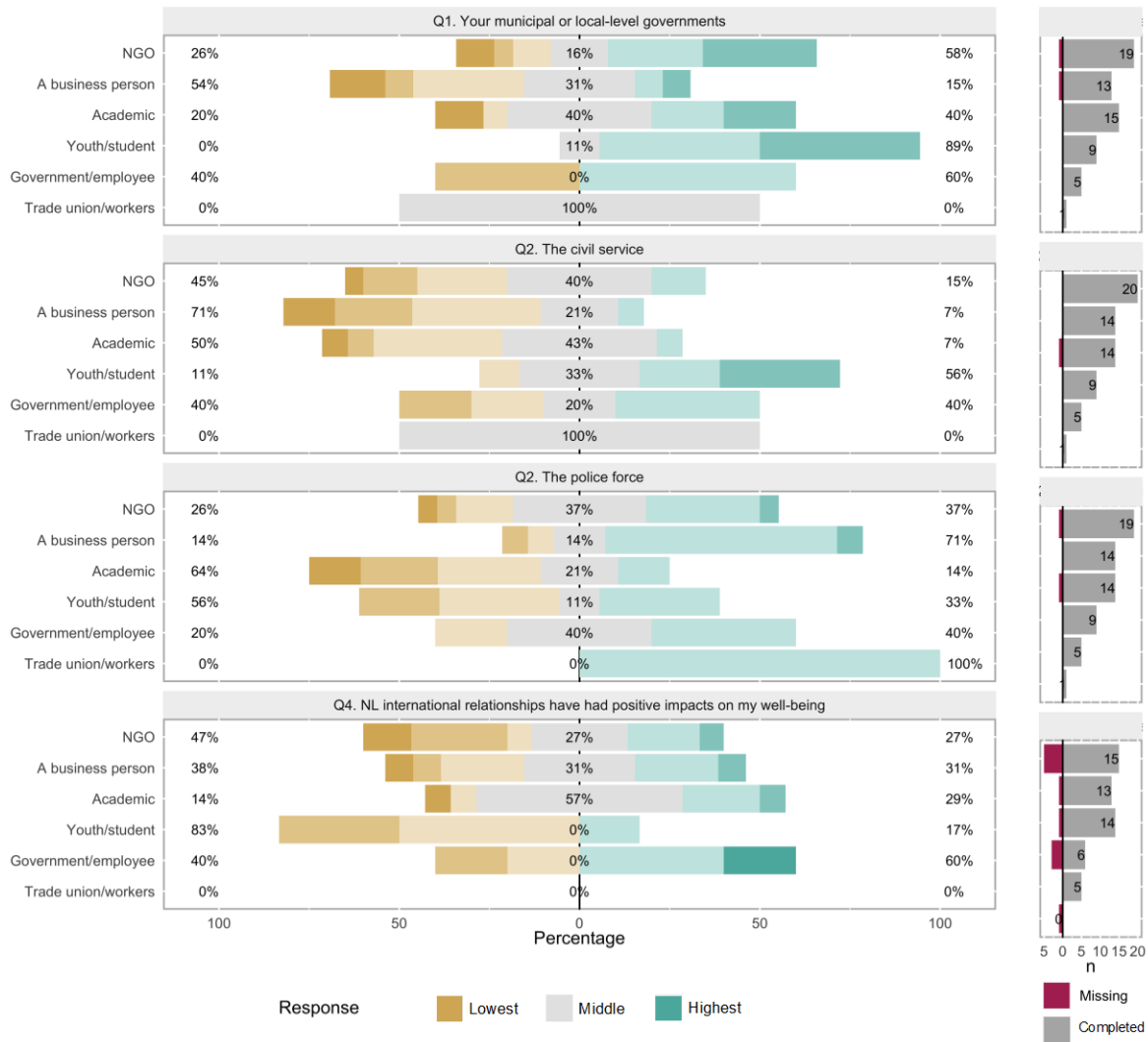


participants agreeing that international relationships have positive impacts on the province's economy, while 31% of participants agreeing that international relationships have a positive impact on individual well-being.



**Figure 3.** Participants' assessment of Newfoundland and Labrador's relationship management with the Canadian national and foreign governments.

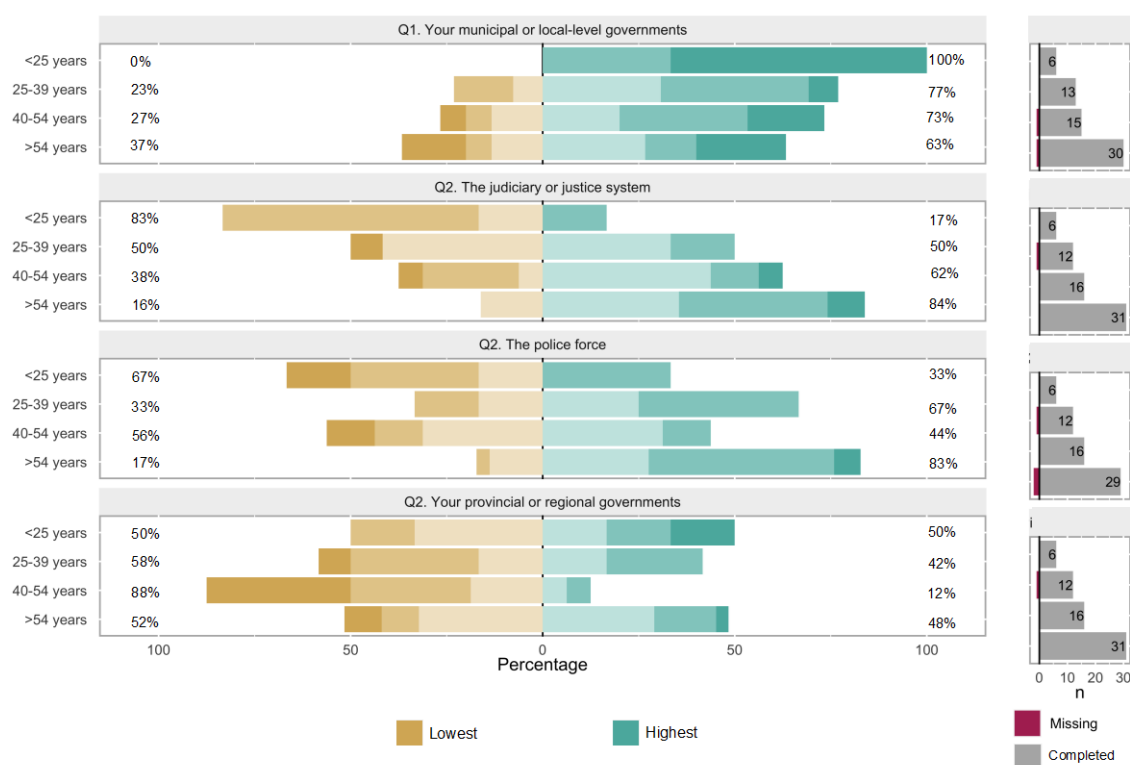
Regarding the performance of government and public institutions, **there is some significant opinion variation across stakeholder groups** (Figures 4), **particularly between the youth/student group and the business group**. When asked about the importance of municipal government and satisfaction with the civil service, participants with youth/student affiliations give predominately positive assessments (89% and 56% positive ratings respectively) while business-affiliated participants give mostly negative assessments (15% and 7% positive ratings respectively). Business-affiliated participants are significantly more satisfied with the police force compared with academic-affiliated participants (71% vs. 14%). Lastly, participants' views about international relationships also show significant differences across stakeholder groups. Most youth/student-affiliated participants (83%) disagree that NL's international relationship have had positive impacts on their well-being, while the majority of government-affiliated participants (60%) agree with the positive impacts of international relationship on their well-being.



**Figure 4.** Opinion variation across stakeholder groups regarding Newfoundland and Labrador's public institutions.

**We also observe age differences in participants' views about the provincial government and institutions** (Figure 5). First, there is a significant difference between younger and older participants in their views about the municipal government's importance and their satisfaction with the judicial system. The younger a participant is, the more likely he or she would consider the municipal government as playing a very important role, yet less likely to rate the performance of the judicial system as satisfactory. For instance, while none of the participants under 25 years old rate the municipal government's role as unimportant, 37% participants over 54 years old view municipal government as insignificant in terms of the smooth running of the province. Conversely, while 84% of the participants over 54 years old give positive ratings to the performance of the judiciary system, only 17% of the young participants under 25 years old agreed so. Second, participants from the younger (under 25 years old) and middle-aged (40–54 years old) groups have significantly lower satisfaction with the police force than do participants from the other older age groups (positive rates at 33% and 44% respectively, in contrast to 67%

from the 25–39 years old and 83% from the above 54 years old groups). Third, among all age groups, participants from the 40-54 age group have particularly low levels of satisfaction with the provincial government (88% responded dissatisfied).



**Figure 5.** Opinion variation across age groups regarding Newfoundland and Labrador’s public institutions.

### Focus Groups

Focus group participants were asked multiple questions relating to government performance: How would you assess the performance of the provincial government of NL? What areas has the provincial government performed well and in what areas has it not performed well? These questions were followed by discussion about how the relationship between the province and the Government of Canada has benefitted or not benefitted NL? Then, we asked in what ways relationships with governments around the world have benefitted or not benefitted NL?

Echoing the survey results, most of the focus group discussions emphasized critical assessments of the provincial government. Themes include that provincial government decisions are often based on political interests, rather than the public interest, and that there is a “poor quality” of politicians in the province (e.g., that it is often difficult to recruit/elect “high-quality” candidates into elected office). Other recurring critical comments are that the lack of coordination across

government departments is an issue; and that the province is currently falling behind other regions on issues of climate change, decarbonization, and energy transitions.

Though less frequent, there are also positive comments about the performance of the provincial government, including that the provincial COVID-19 response has been particularly well-managed. Participants acknowledge that the provincial government is working hard with limited resources, and that there is a positive trend towards greater support for entrepreneurship and innovation in the province.

In discussion about the provincial-federal relationship, the dominant view is that the province has not adequately benefited from its relationship with the federal government. Related comments include that NL is often an afterthought in federal politics and that the federal government does a poor job of representing the province's interests. Positive assessments of this relationship do come up, but much less frequently. For example, a participant notes the importance of federal-provincial engagement around the development of the oil sector as a positive example. Participants also observe that the provincial-federal relationship is up and down depending on which parties are in office.

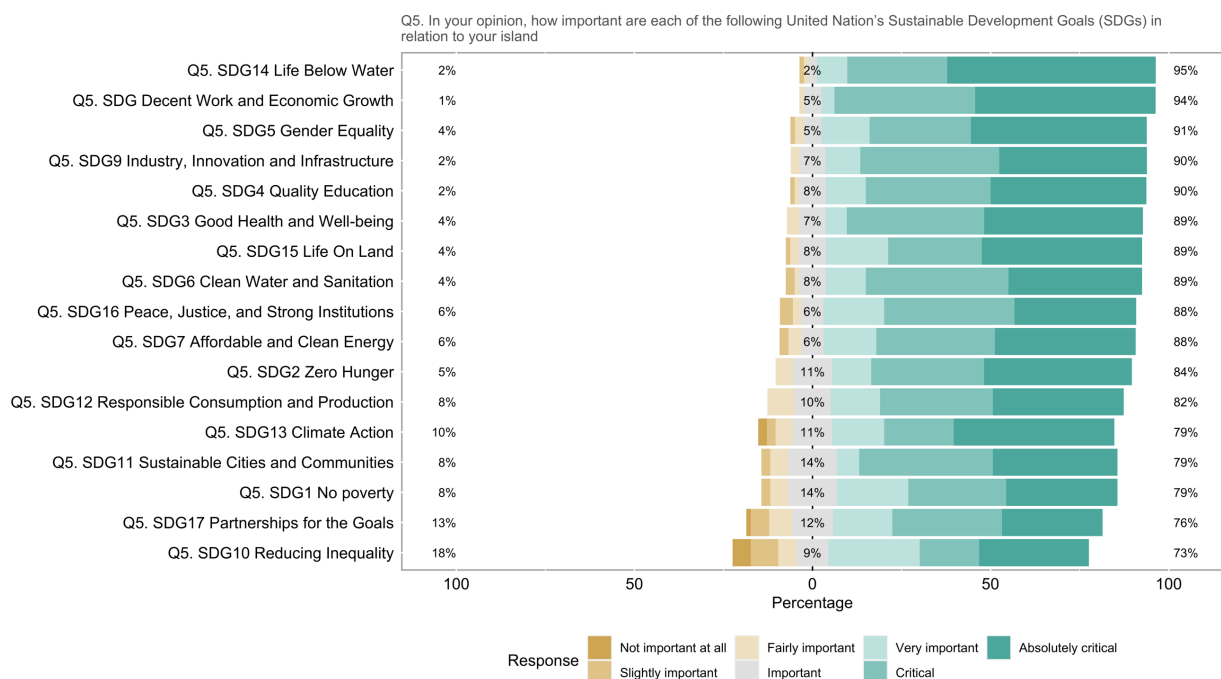
Other notable recurring comments about the federal provincial relationship are that the provincial government should be more actively engaged in fisheries co-management, and that there is a need for better-developed multi-level collaboration and engagement across levels of government.

In discussions about international relationships, the main theme across focus groups is that international relationships are generally not well-developed (along with related comments that the provincial government has not proven adept at managing international relationships). Conversely, however, there are observations that many international relationships are informal or business-oriented and are outside the scope of formal governmental agreements. Positive examples of international relationships and collaboration include references to connections with Norway, the United Kingdom, United States, and Guyana, as well as discussion of the fishery as a key sector that is embedded in provincial-international relationships.

## Section B: Sustainable Development Goals

The next set of questions discusses the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the Newfoundland and Labrador context.

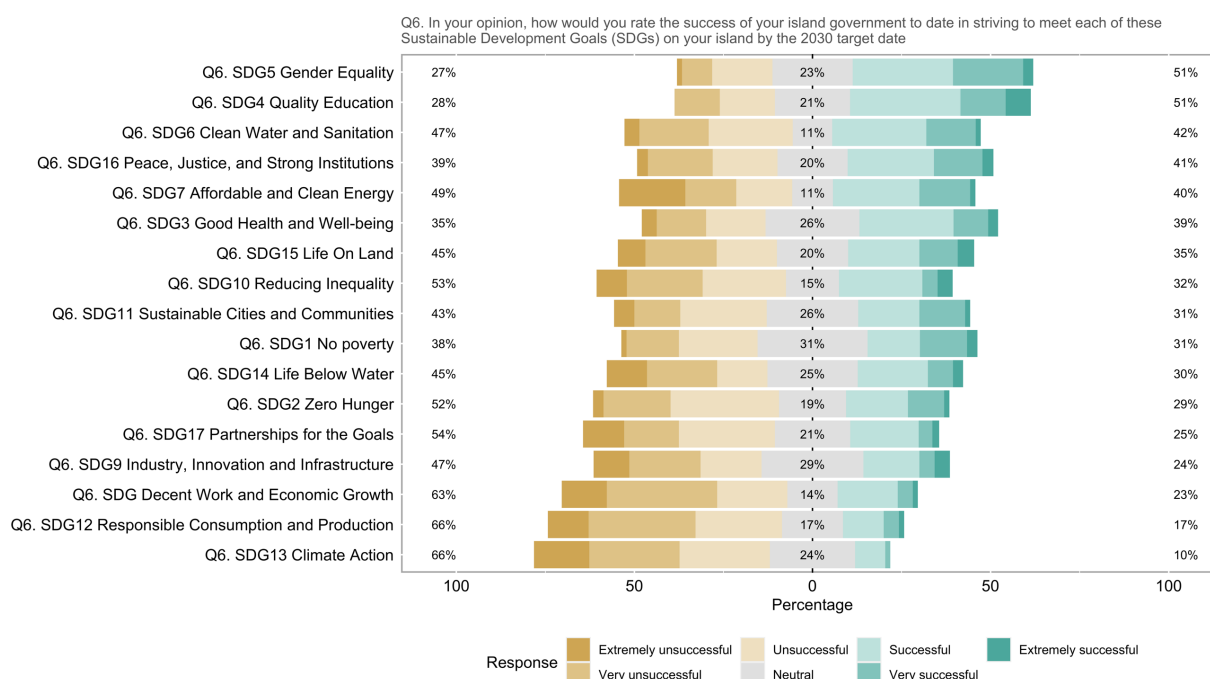
We asked survey participants to assess how important they think each of the Sustainable Development Goals is to the province (Figure 6-a). **All the 17 SDGs receive predominately positive evaluations. The five most highly valued, in terms of importance to the province are: *SDG14 life below water* (rated by 95% participants as very important, critical, or absolutely critical); *SDG8 decent work with economic growth* (94%); *SDG5 gender equality* (91%); *SDG 9 industry, innovation and infrastructure* (90%); and *SDG4 quality education* (90%).** It is worth noting that three of these five goals relate — directly or indirectly — to the provincial economy. This is consistent with our participants' overarching concerns with economic sustainability as the most important facet of sustainable development for Newfoundland and Labrador. While the majority of participants view all the SDGs as important or critical to the province, **the two goals that are relatively assessed as least important are: *SDG10 reducing inequality within and among countries* (73%) and *SDG 17 global partnerships for the goals* (76%).**



**Figure 6-a.** Participants' assessment of the importance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals to Newfoundland and Labrador.

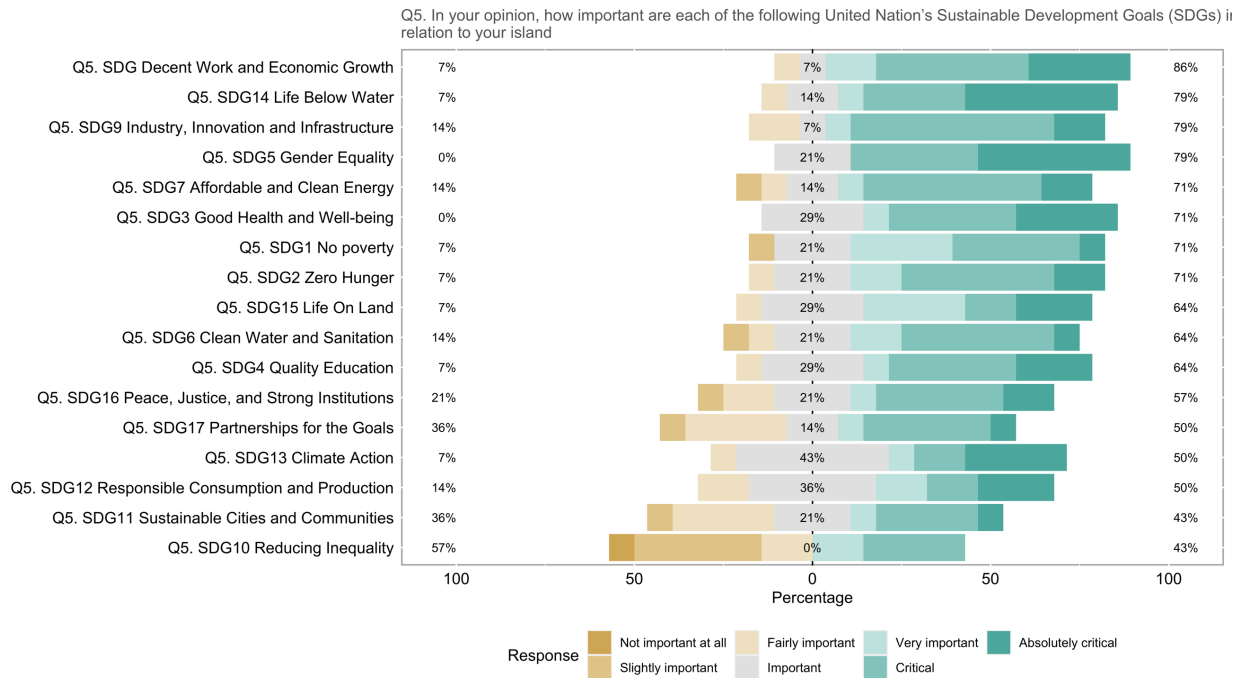
We then asked participants to assess the performance of the Newfoundland and Labrador government in striving to meet SDGs by the 2030 target date (Figure 6-b). **The provincial government's performance towards the SDGs is generally viewed as insufficient.** Performance towards only two SDGs — *SDG5 gender equality* and *SDG4 quality education* — is seen as successful by a small majority of participants (both with 51% positive ratings). By contrast,

**progress towards *SDG13 climate action* is viewed as the least successful** in terms of government performance, with only 10% of participants rating the provincial government's climate action as successful.

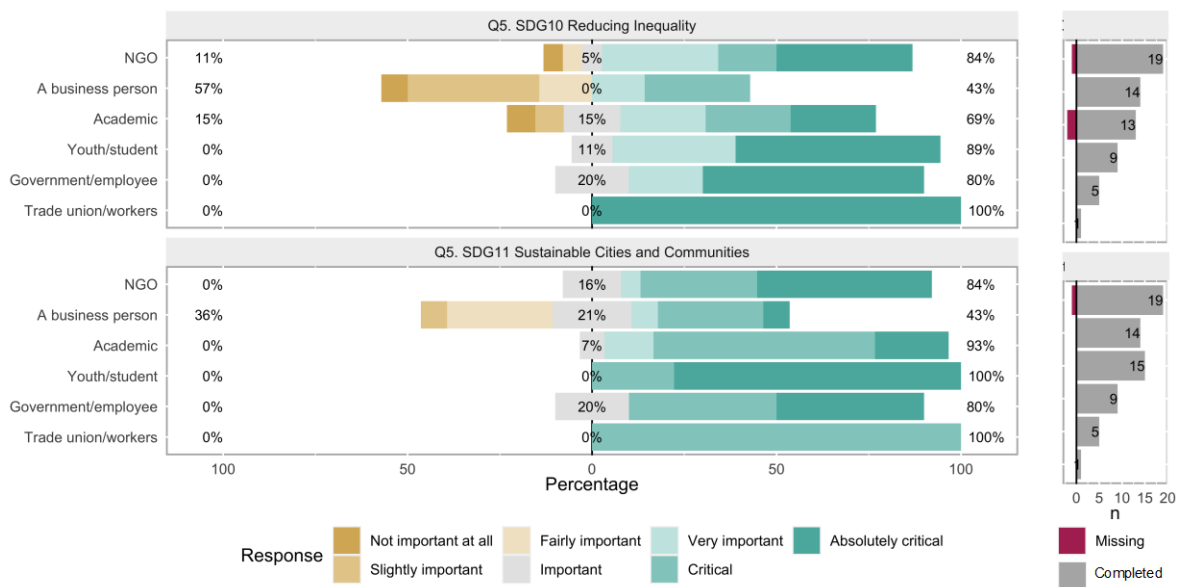


**Figure 6-b.** Participants' assessment of the Newfoundland and Labrador government's performance to date in striving to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals by the 2030 target date.

**Business-affiliated participants show significantly different views about the Sustainable Development Goals.** Overall, business-affiliated participants assess the SDGs as less important than did participants from the other five stakeholder groups (see Figure 7a for business-affiliated participants' responses, Figure 6-a for all six stakeholder groups' responses). **Particularly, they give significantly lower assessments to the importance of *SDG10 reduce inequality within and among countries* and *SDG11 make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable*** (Figures 7b). While the majority of youth, academic, government, NGO, and trade union participants highly value these two SDGs, a large group of business participants think these goals are only slightly important, or not important at all (57% and 36% respectively). Furthermore, as shown in Figure 7-a, **the SDG that is most highly valued by business-affiliated participants is the economic sustainability focused *SDG8 promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all*** (with 86% positive ratings). Business participants also give high assessments of the importance of SDGs that are related to fisheries, gender equality, and industrialization, which are: *SDG14 conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development* (79%), *SDG9 build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation* (79%), and *SDG5 achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* (79%).



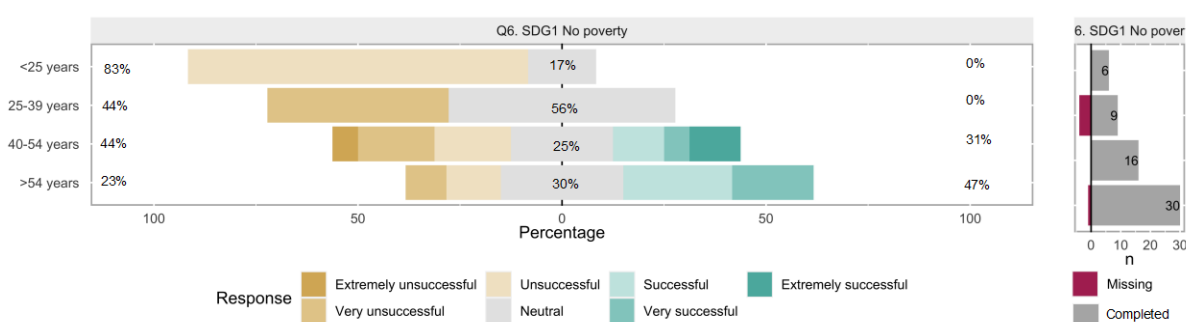
**Figure7-a.** Business-affiliated participants' assessment of the importance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals to Newfoundland and Labrador.



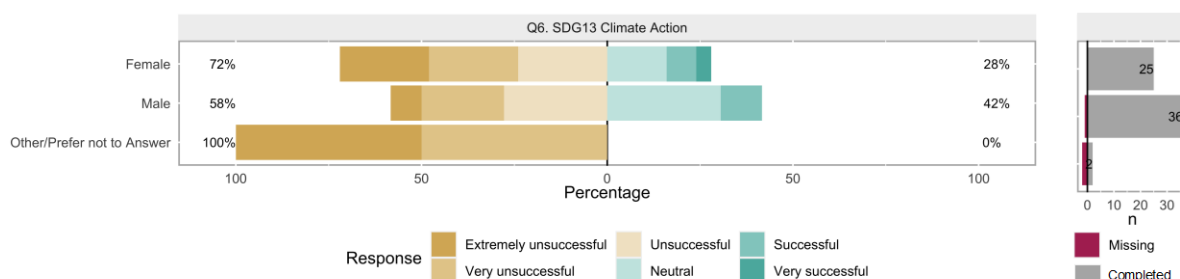
**Figure 7-b.** Opinion variation across stakeholder groups regarding the importance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals to Newfoundland and Labrador.

There are also variations across age groups and by gender in terms of evaluations of how successful the Newfoundland and Labrador government is in meeting the SDGs. Generally, **the younger participant is, the less satisfied he or she would be with the provincial government's**

**performance towards *SDG1 end extreme poverty in all forms*** (Figure 8-a). No participants from the 39 years older and younger age groups considers the provincial government’s performance on SDG1 to be successful. By contrast, 31% of participants in the 40–54 age group and 47% of participants in the above 54 years old group positively rate the provincial government’s performance towards SDG1. There are also significant gender differences in participants’ evaluation to the provincial government’s performance on *SDG13 take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts* (Figure8-b). **Although provincial climate action is generally viewed as unsuccessful across participant categories, male participants tend to be slightly more optimistic than others about the provincial government’s progress on climate change** (42% male participants gave netural or positive ratings).



**Figure 8-a.** Opinion variation across age groups regarding Newfoundland and Labrador government’s performance on *SDG1 End extreme poverty in all forms*.



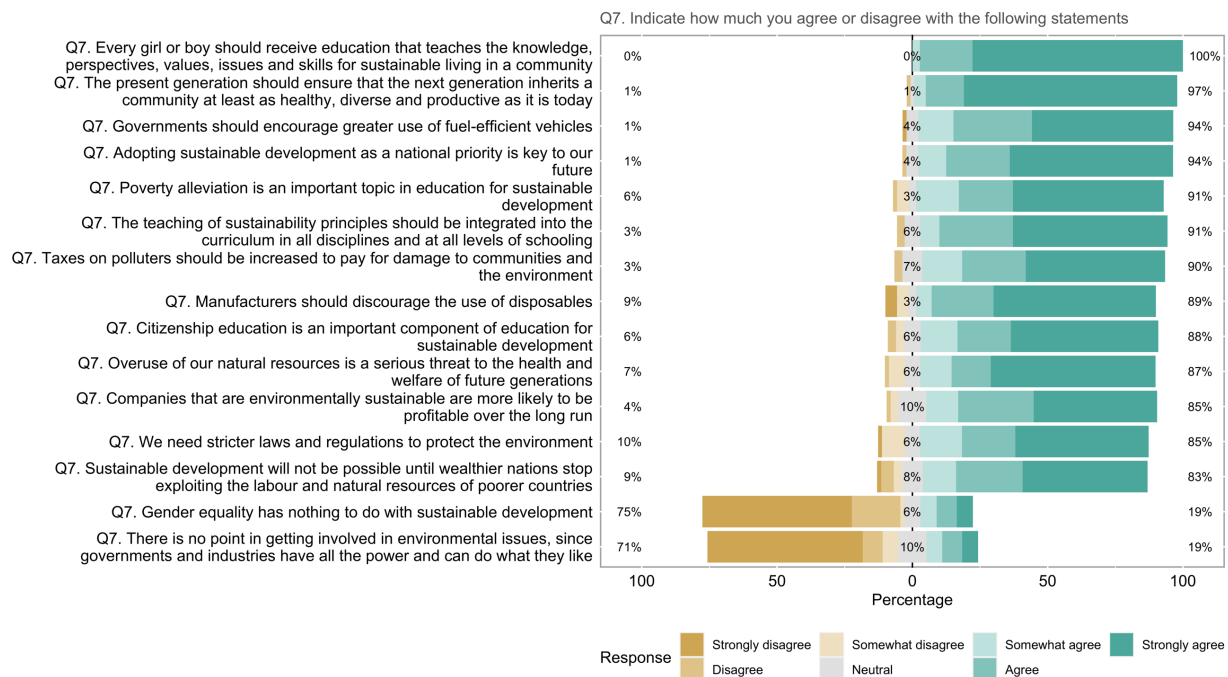
**Figure 8-b.** Opinion variation across gender groups regarding Newfoundland and Labrador government’s performance on *SDG13 take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*.

We then investigated participants’ personal views towards a series of SDG-related statements regarding gender equality, intergenerational justice, sustainable production, environmental protection, education, international justice and so on. As shown in Figure 9, **most participants agree or strongly agree with most of these sustainability belief statements** (or disagree with reversely coded statements<sup>1</sup>). However, despite this consensus, a few sustainability statements receive disagreement from notable minority of participants. Among participants, 10% disagree

<sup>1</sup> There are 19% participants who selected “agree” with the two reversely coded statements, which we believe is largely a result of mistakes in answering online survey. These responses are not included in the following analysis.



with the notion that “we need stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment”; 9% disagree or strongly disagreed with the statement that “manufacturers should discourage the use of disposables”; and 9% disagree with the statement that “sustainable development will not be possible until wealthier nations stop exploiting the labour and natural resources of poorer countries.”



## Focus Groups

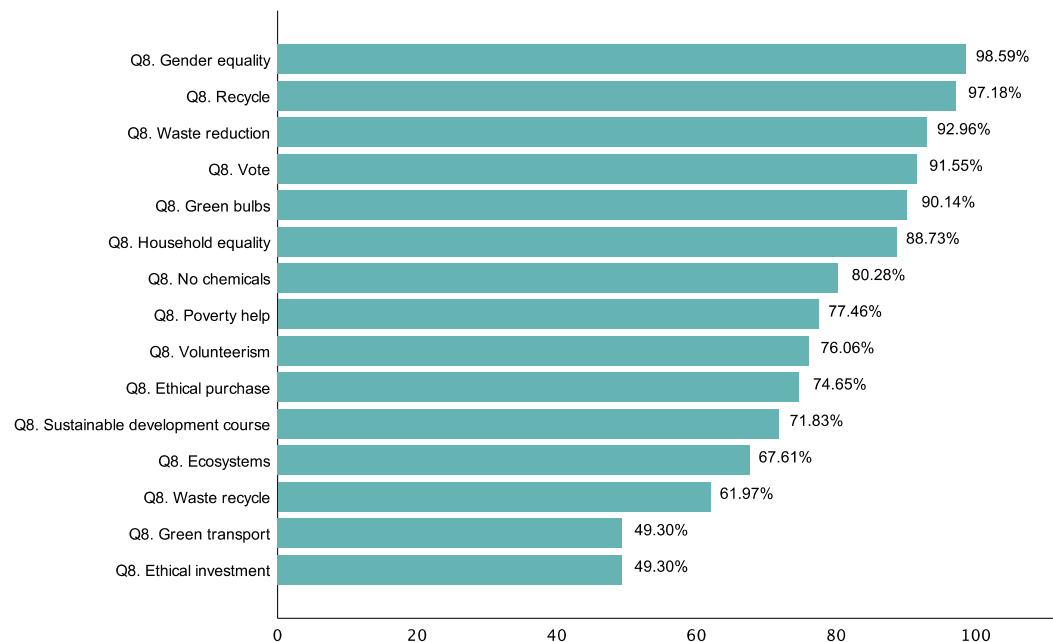
Focus group participants were asked: What do you know about the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals and what is your assessment of how NL has done in trying to meet these Sustainable Development Goals?

The dominant recurring theme is the provincial government is disengaged from the SDGs and that any positive movement towards the SDGs is largely coincidental, not purposefully guided by the SDG framework. Other recurring comments are that the province is doing poorly on achieving the SDGs, with access to clean drinking water and boil water advisories noted as an issue for many communities in the province. By contrast, a less frequent theme is that NL is doing well in achieving the SDGs in comparison to many global regions.

## Section C: Sustainability Practices and Community Sustainability

This section discusses participants' responses to questions about promoting community sustainability through everyday practices and beliefs, as well as their perceptions of NL as a sustainable community.

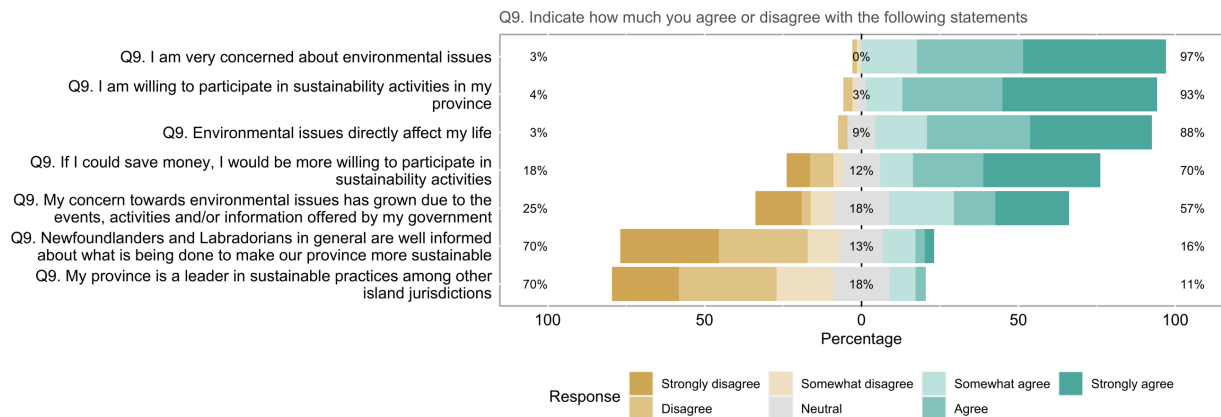
We asked survey participants about their personal experiences with 15 kinds of sustainability activities, covering environmental protection, sustainable education, public participation, gender equality, and sustainable consumerism (Figure 10). Most participants report involvement with 11 to 13 practices in their daily lives. As shown in Figure 10, **almost all participants report they try to ensure that there is gender equity in their home, their work, and their volunteer environments (98%), try to recycle as much as they can (97%), and have changed their personal lifestyle to reduce waste (93%).** Other most reported sustainability practices include voting in municipal elections (92%), using environmentally friendly light bulbs (90%), and equally sharing household tasks among family members regardless of gender (89%). **Among the 15 sustainability activities, the least reported are: invest savings in funds or enterprises that are ethically responsible (49%) and walk or bike to places instead of going by car (49%).**



**Figure 10.** Participants' involvement with sustainability practices in their daily lives.

**Participants also show a high level of personal commitment to sustainability activities** (Figure 11). Almost all participants agree or strongly agree that they are very concerned about environmental issues (97%), that they are willing to participate in sustainability activities in their province (93%), that environmental issues directly affect their lives (88%), and that they would be more willing to participate in sustainable activities if they could save money (70%). Over half of participants agree their concern towards environmental issues has grown due to

events, activities and/or information offered by government (57%). **However, despite high levels of individual interest in improving sustainability, participants view provincial sustainability actions as insufficient.** A large majority of participants disagree or strongly disagree that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are well informed about what is being done to make the region more sustainable (70%). Similarly, most participants disagree or strongly disagree that the province is a sustainability leader among other island jurisdictions (70%).



**Figure 11.** Participants' views about sustainability practices in Newfoundland and Labrador.

### Focus Groups

Focus group participants were asked: Is the physical environment of NL being preserved in a responsible and sustainable manner? How so or not so?

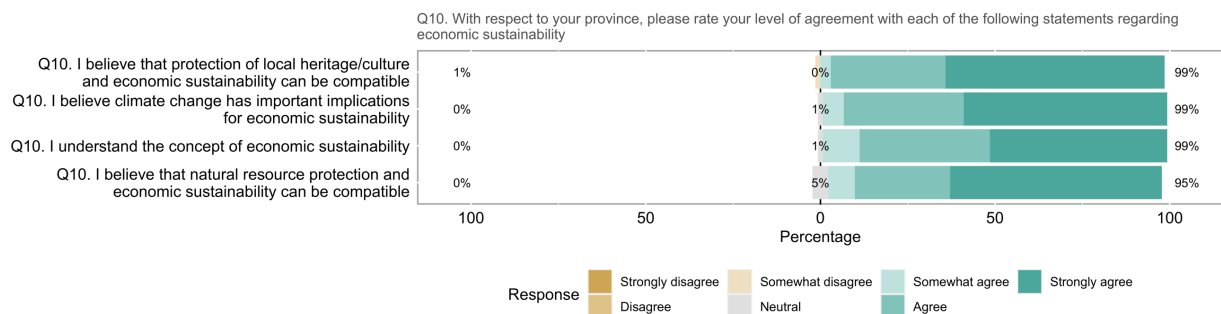
The predominant theme is that the province is falling short on environmental sustainability and has significant room for improvement. This is linked to critical comments about waste management, forestry practices, lack of implementation of a protected areas plan, and failing to protect environmental infrastructure (such as the East Coast Trail, which has co-benefits as a tourism attractor).

Conversely, though less prevalent, other participants note that the government is doing a good job on environmental sustainability, with specific reference to the regulation of the oil sector as rigorous and adequate.

## Section D: Economic Sustainability

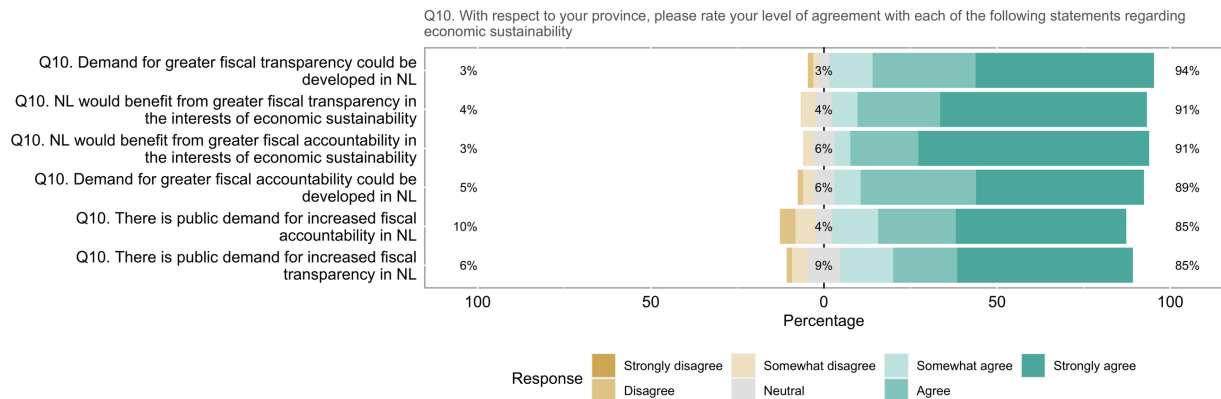
As noted above, most participants identify economic dimensions of sustainability as their top concern in relation to ensuring the sustainability of Newfoundland and Labrador. This section looks at economic sustainability in greater detail (Figures 12-a – Figure 12-c).

We first asked about survey participants' perceptions about economic sustainability (Figure 12-a). We find **participants overwhelmingly agree that ensuring economic sustainability is compatible with protecting the environment and local culture**. Nearly all participants said they understand the concept of economic sustainability (99%), they believe that economic sustainability is compatible with protecting local heritage and culture (99%), and they believe climate change has important implications for provincial economic sustainability (99%). Most participants agree that natural resource protection and economic sustainability can be compatible (95%), despite of a small portion of participants (5%) who hold a neutral view on this statement.

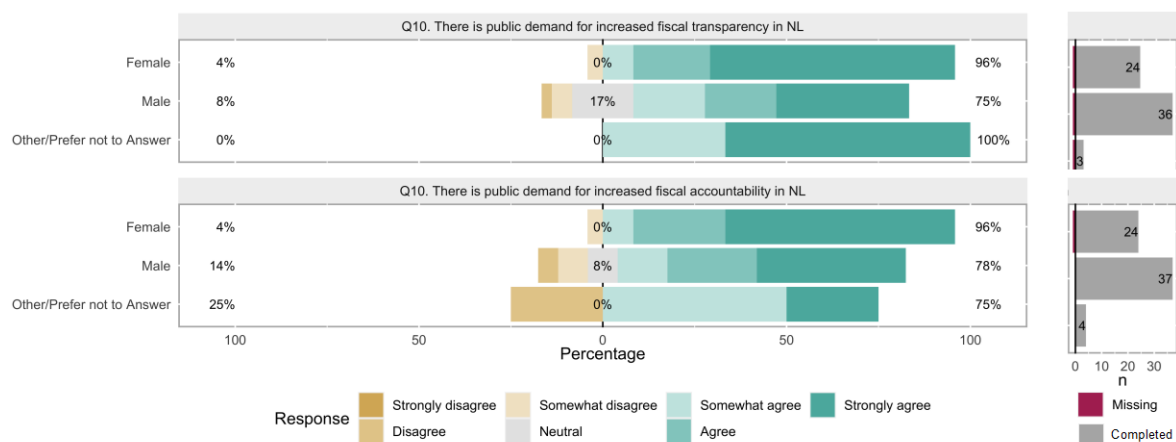


**Figure 12-a.** Participants' views about the concept of economic sustainability.

We then asked about participants' views on issues of fiscal transparency and accountability in relation to economic sustainability (Figure 12-b). **A substantial majority of participants agree or strongly agree that NL's economic sustainability would benefit from greater fiscal transparency (91%) and greater fiscal accountability (91%). A somewhat smaller majority believe there is public demand for increased fiscal transparency (85%) or increased fiscal accountability (85%).** However, there is a significant — through moderate — gender difference in response to these latter questions. Female participants are more likely to agree or strongly agree that there is public demand for fiscal transparency and accountability, while male participants are more likely to disagree or strongly disagree on these items (Figure 12-c). However, **most participants agree that a demand for greater fiscal transparency and accountability could be developed among the public (94% and 89% respectively).**

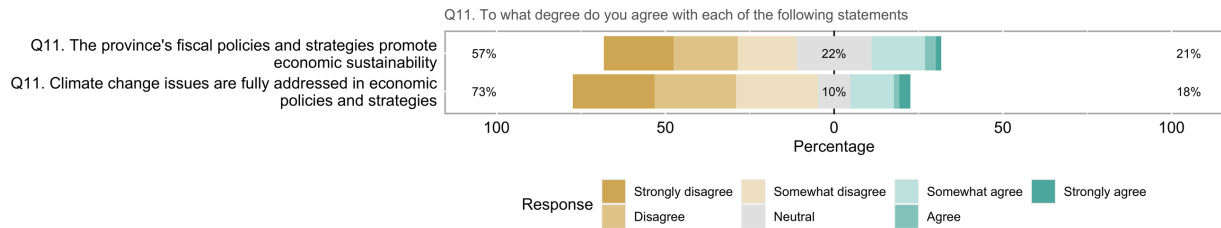


**Figure 12-b.** Participants' assessment of the fiscal transparency and accountability in Newfoundland and Labrador.



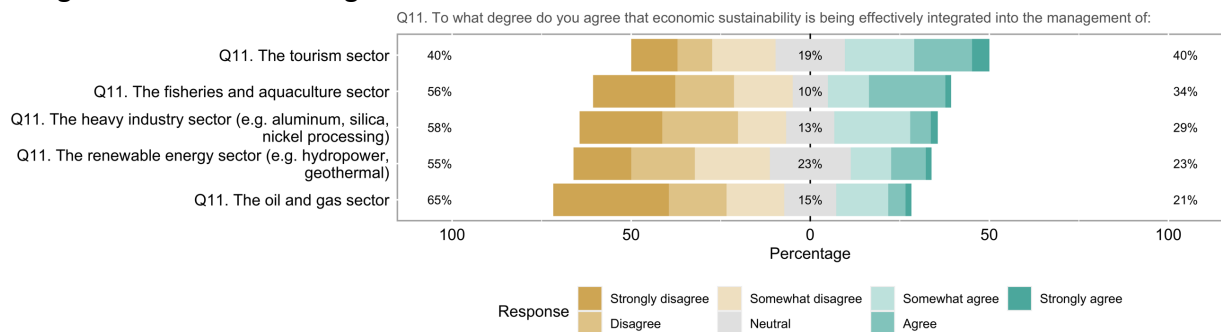
**Figure 12-c.** Opinion variation across gender groups regarding the public demand for increased fiscal accountability in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Questions about **the integration of economic sustainability into government policy and management across several sectors elicit generally negative response** among participants (Figures 13-a – Figure 13-d). As shown in Figure 13-a, **a minority of participants (21%) agree that the province's fiscal policies and strategies promote economic sustainability** (while 57% disagree and 22% hold a neutral view). Similarly, **a large majority of participants do not believe that climate change issues are fully addressed in provincial economic policies and strategies (73%)**.

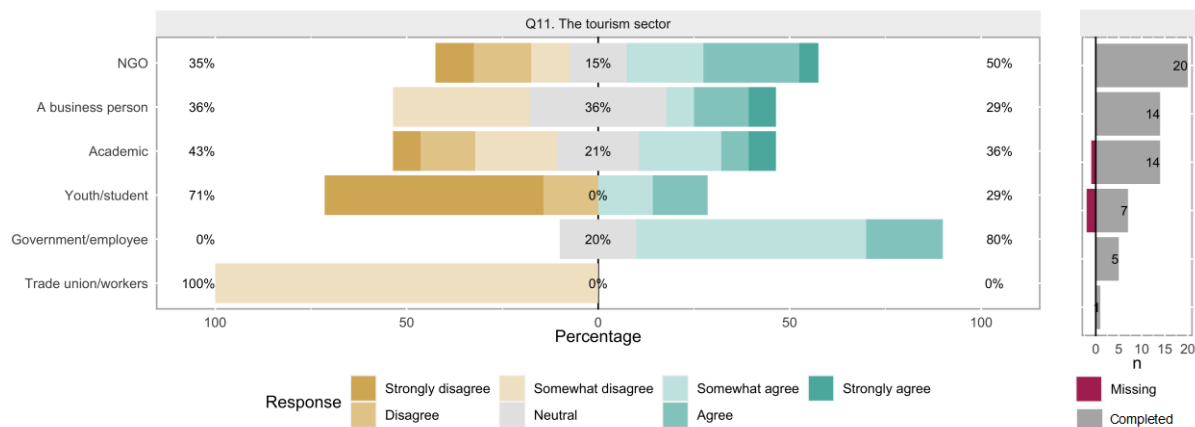


**Figure 13-a.** Participants' views on the economic sustainability situations in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We also asked to what degree economic sustainability is effectively integrated into the management of five sectors: tourism; fisheries and aquaculture; heavy industry; renewable energy; and oil and gas (Figure 13-b). **The management of the tourism sector is viewed as having the most effective integration of economic sustainability** (with 40% positive ratings), though many participants also disagree with this statement (40% negative and 19% neutral ratings). However, there are significant opinion differences between youth and government employee stakeholder participants (Figure 13-c). While a large majority of government employee participants agree that economic sustainability is being effectively integrated into the management of the tourism sector (80%), many youth or student participants strongly disagree with this statement (with 71% negative ratings). **The majority of participants hold pessimistic views of the integration of economic sustainability into the other four sectors, with the oil and gas sector receiving the most negative assessment.** 65% participants disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that economic sustainability is effectively integrated into the management of the oil and gas sector.

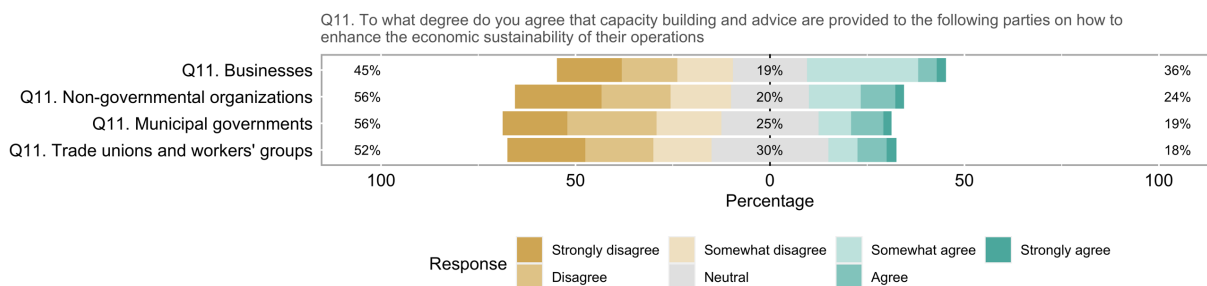


**Figure 13-b.** Participants' views about economic sustainability in five sectors in Newfoundland and Labrador.



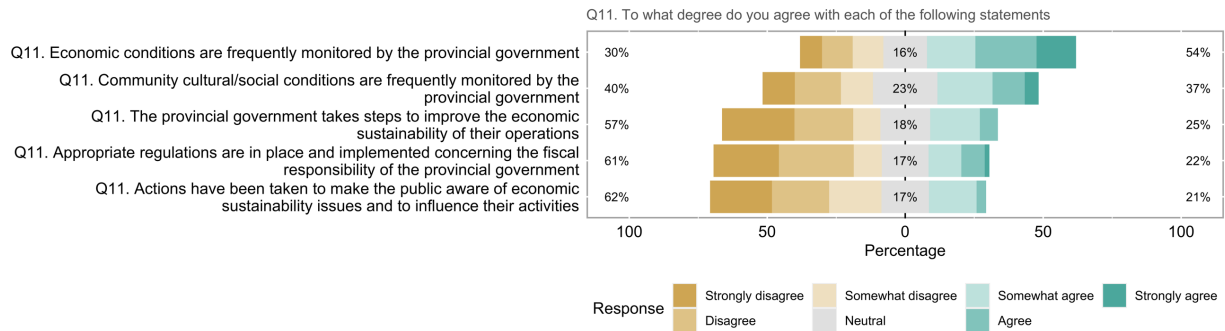
**Figure 13-c.** Opinion variation across stakeholder groups regarding economic sustainability in Newfoundland and Labrador’s tourism sector.

**Participants report similarly pessimistic assessments of the provincial government’s assistance to ensure economic sustainability** (Figure 13-d). Very few participants agree that the government provides capacity building and advice to trade unions and workers’ groups (18%), municipal governments (19%), or NGOs (24%) to help enhance the economic sustainability of their operations. The business sector received slightly higher assessment, with 36% participants agreeing that government provides support for capacity building and advice for businesses.



**Figure 13-d.** Participants’ views about the provincial government’s role in enhancing economic sustainability in the operations of several parties.

Lastly, participants show **generally negative to neutral views regarding other provincial government roles for enhancing economic sustainability**. The majority of participants do not think actions have been taken to make the public aware of economic sustainability issues and to influence their activities (62%), nor do they think appropriate regulations have been implemented concerning fiscal responsibility (61%). Over half of participants disagree that the provincial government takes steps to improve the economic sustainability of their operations (57%). However, participants have relatively more positive views about the provincial government’s performance in monitoring economic conditions (54% positive ratings) and community cultural/social conditions in NL (37% positive ratings).



**Figure 13-e.** Participants’ views about the provincial government’s role in enhancing economic sustainability in Newfoundland and Labrador.

### Focus Groups

Focus group participants were also asked multiple questions about economic sustainability, including: What does economic sustainability mean to you and do you believe that economic sustainability is being achieved in NL? Why or why not? We followed this up by asking whether participants have specific suggestions on strategies to ensure the future economic sustainability of the province?

The dominant theme is that the province is not currently economically sustainable. Related comments highlight the Muskrat Falls mega-project as a prime example of poor planning for economic sustainability (a recurring theme across focus groups). Other related themes include: the province has lots of natural resources that are not as well used as they could be, and the provincial government has a track record of poor decision-making regarding support and investment to the private sector. There are also observations about the lack of a legacy fund from oil development as a missed opportunity. Another recurrent comment is that there are many examples of personal/individual wealth and economic success in the province, but this is not necessarily translating into economic sustainability for the province as a whole.

Focus group participants also offered a range of comments about pathways forward and suggestions for moving towards greater economic sustainability. Recurring themes include: the need for more long-term planning; the need for more immigration to support economic sustainability (with one participant noting the necessity of improved social structures and a cultural shift to support new immigrants to the region); the need for greater accountability for decision-makers; the need for more public education for entrepreneurship and financial literacy to support economic sustainability; the need to pursue the regionalization of municipalities; the need to better foster local economies; and the need to better identify assets that make the province competitive in international markets.



## Conclusion

Our first research question was: How do participants assess the role of various institutions in relation to the sustainability of Newfoundland and Labrador? While participants tend to view the provincial government as the most important institution for ensuring the sustainability of the province, they also tend to have mid- to low levels of satisfaction with the performance of the provincial government, especially concerning the management of the economy.

Our second research question was: How do participants view the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in relation to provincial sustainability and their own lives? All 17 SDGs are highly valued by participants. Three goals that are related to the province's economy (i.e., *SDG8 decent work with economic growth*; *SDG9 industry, innovation, and infrastructure*; and *SDG14 life below water*) are rated among the most critical goals in terms of ensuring the sustainability of Newfoundland and Labrador. However, when it comes to the provincial government's performance in striving to meet SDGs, participants generally give moderate to low assessments. *SDG13 climate action* is seen as the least successful in terms of government performance. The provincial government's achievement on *SDG5 gender equality* and *SDG4 quality education* receive relatively more positive evaluations than other goals. Moreover, we found significant sectoral differences in perceptions of the SDGs. Business-affiliated participants tended to have lower evaluations of most SDGs than participants from other stakeholder groups. At the same time, business-affiliated participants place greater value on the economic-oriented SDGs.

Our third research question asks about governmental and individual roles in building a sustainable community in Newfoundland and Labrador. Most survey participants have highly positive attitudes towards — and personal involvement in — everyday sustainability practices. However, while most participants report a high level of personal participation in sustainability activities, they generally do not consider Newfoundland and Labrador to be a sustainability leader.

Our last research question focuses in more depth on economic sustainability. Almost all participants report that they understand the concept of economic sustainability and believe economic sustainability is compatible with protecting local heritage and culture, as well as protecting natural resources. Similarly, almost all participants believe climate change has important implications for economic sustainability. Greater fiscal transparency and greater fiscal accountability are overwhelmingly seen as important to ensuring economic sustainability in Newfoundland and Labrador. Conversely, a majority of participants disagree that the province's fiscal policies and strategies work to ensure economic sustainability in the region. In terms of effectively integrating economic sustainability into the management of the province's key sectors, the oil and gas industry is rated the worst, while the tourism sector is relatively seen as the sector where economic sustainability is best integrated. We also find a largely pessimistic view on the ability of the provincial government to assist with capacity-building and providing advice to promote economic sustainability in the operations of municipal governments, trade unions and workers' groups, or NGOs. By contrast, government's ability to

promote economic sustainability among businesses is more positively assessed by our participants.

Overall, our results show that economic sustainability is considered the most critical, yet poorly managed, dimension of “full-spectrum sustainability” (Foley et al. 2020) in terms of building a sustainable future for Newfoundland and Labrador. At the same time, it is important to note that most participants see economic sustainability as compatible with protecting culture and heritage and protecting natural resources. Similarly, participants generally see climate change and climate action as linked to issues of economic sustainability, but note the province is falling behind other regions on climate action and energy transitions.

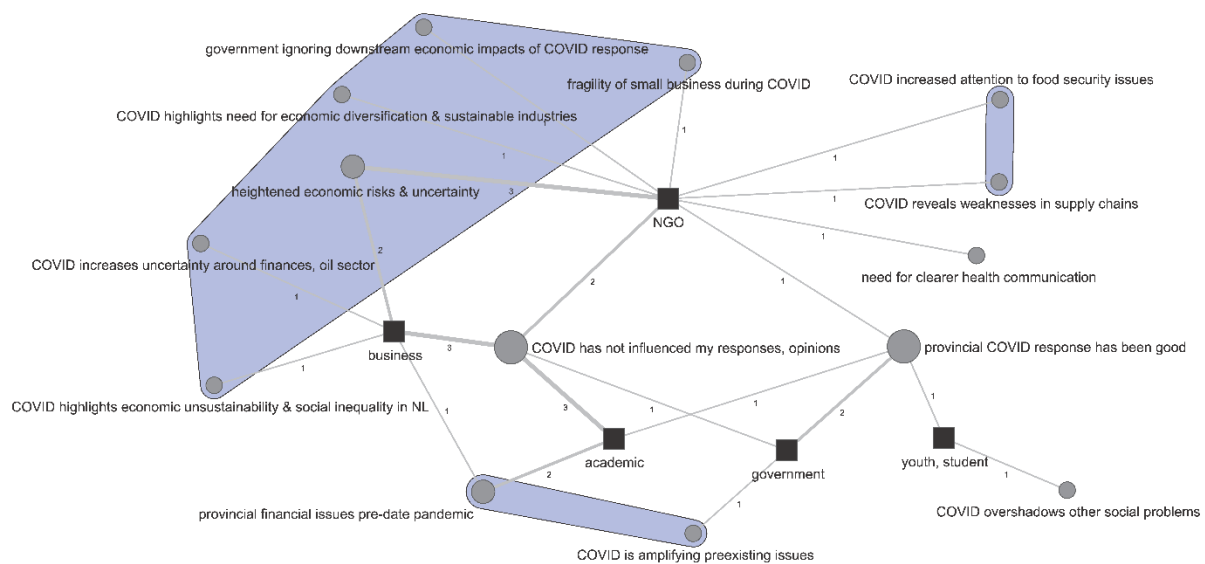
There appears to be an appetite for the gap between the high salience of economic sustainability and poor performance on economic sustainability to be addressed by the provincial government. While the provincial government is often viewed critically, it is also seen as the most important public institution for ensuring the sustainability of the province. This can be done through policy measures that help increase fiscal transparency and accountability in the province, as well as measures that further improve capacity-building and advice for economic sustainability among the business sector, but also across municipalities, labour unions and workers groups, and NGOs and civil society.

## References

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## Appendix 1: COVID-19 Impacts

In the survey, we invited participants to provide open-ended comments about whether they thought their responses had been influenced by the current COVID-19 pandemic. Among our participants, 26 provided open-ended comments. These are visualized using Discourse Network Analysis (Leifeld, 2017) in Figure A1. Circular grey nodes represent themes from the open-ended data. Black square nodes represent participants' sectoral affiliation. Node size is adjusted to reflect centrality (i.e., themes with larger node size are better connected). Tie thickness is adjusted to reflect the number of coding co-occurrences (the number of coding references is provided next to the ties). Thematically similar nodes are grouped together.



**Figure A1.** Discourse network of participants' views about COVID-19 influences.

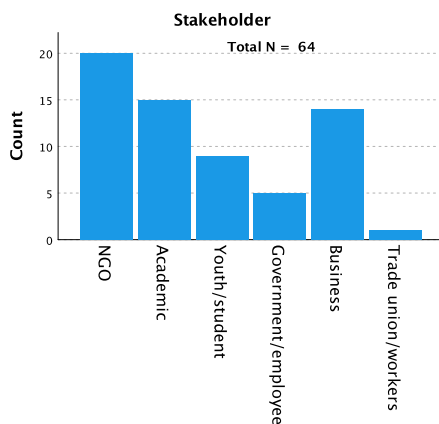
There is not a great deal of thematic coherence or consensus, as such we have not include these results in the main body of the report. Rather, the discourse network reflects a diversity of interpretations and experiences related to the COVID pandemic. The most prevalent theme (8 participants) is that the COVID-19 did not shape their responses. Another recurrent theme (5 participants) is that the provincial COVID-19 response has been good. The latter theme also comes up among focus group participants, who point to the COVID-19 response as a positive example of government action.

Five participants (from business and NGOs) note a range of concerns that can be grouped together under the broader label of “heightened economic risks and uncertainty.” From NGO participants, these include the following: fragility of small businesses during COVID; government is ignoring the downstream economic impacts of its COVID response; and that COVID highlights the need for greater economic diversification and investment in sustainable industries. From business sector participants, this includes: COVID increases uncertainty around provincial finances and the oil sector; and COVID highlights economic unsustainability and social inequality in the province. While several participants note how issues of economic sustainability have been amplified by COVID, two other participants (both academic) note that the provincial financial issues pre-date the pandemic. A couple other themes also group together, both noted by NGO participants: COVID increased attention to food security issues; and COVID reveals weaknesses in supply chains to the island.

## Appendix 2: Methodology

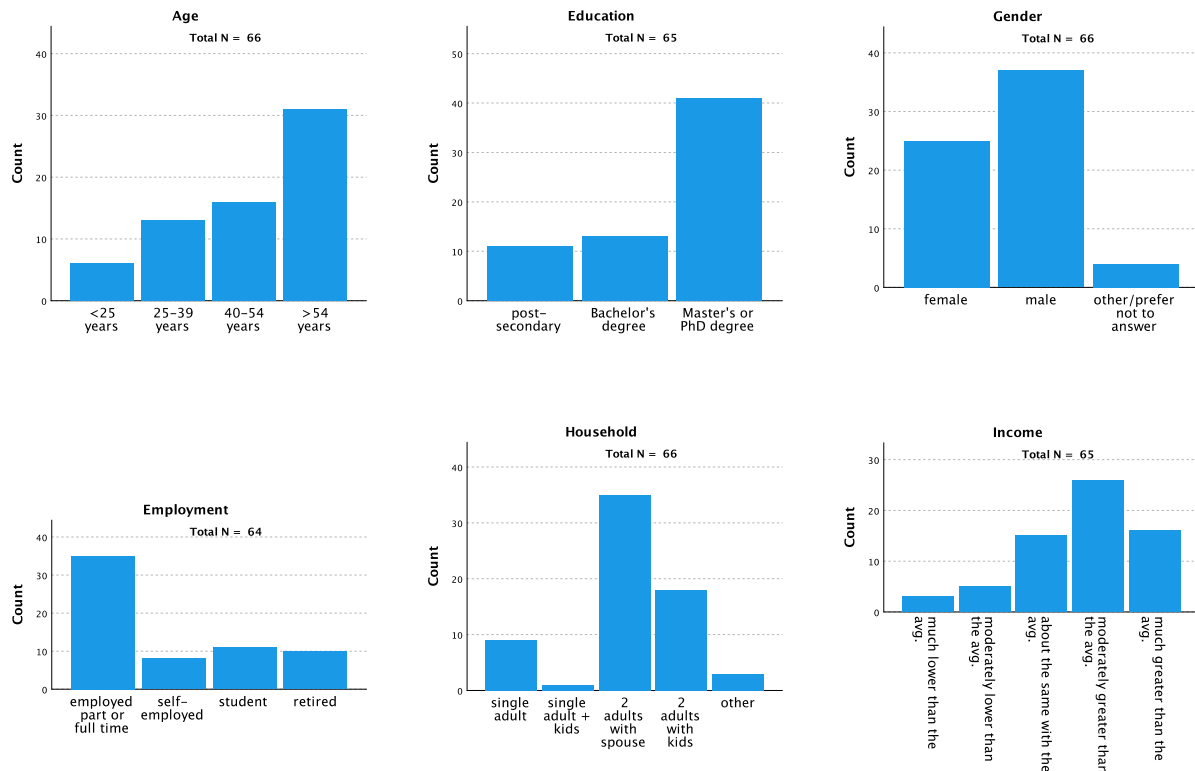
### Survey Participants

This survey was conducted online between April and November 2020. Based on six purposely selected stakeholder groups (academic, business, government, NGO, trade union, and youth/student), we received 109 survey responses. Among survey participants who answered the stakeholder identity question (Figure A2), 31% of them are NGO-affiliated, 23% are academic-affiliated, and 21% are affiliated with business and industry. In addition to these largest groups of participants, participants also include 9 youth or students (14%), 5 governmental employees (8%), and 1 trade union member (1%).



**Figure A2.** Number of participants in the six stakeholder groups.

Overall, participants reflect a middle-class, well-educated, and middle-aged sample (Figure A3). The majority of participants are over 40 years old (71%), while individuals over 54 years old account for almost half of our participants (47%). There are slightly more male (56%) participants than female (37%) and other (6%) gender groups. Over half of the participants (53%) live with a spouse and 27% of them live with a spouse and children. All our participants have received post-secondary or higher education, with a large majority having completed a Master's or PhD degree (63%). Most of our participants reported their income is about the same with or higher than the average in their community (88%).



**Figure A3.** Participants demographic statistics.

## Statistical Methods and Visualization Tools

Survey data analysis was led by Yixi Yang. We used Kruskal-Wallis H Test (Kruskal & Wallis, 1952) to examine if there are statistically significant differences across different stakeholder and demographic groups. Kruskal-Wallis H test is a rank-based nonparametric test that is often used to tackle ordinal data and compare the mean rank for each group. This method fits well with our ordinal Likert-type survey data. Unlike one-way ANOVA, Kruskal-Wallis Test is a nonparametric method, and therefore, does not assume a normal distribution of the residuals. This makes it a good statistical tool to test group variances in our ordinal-level small-n survey data. For every survey question that shows statistically significant group differences, we further conduct a Dunn-Bonferroni post hoc test (Dunn, 1964) on each pair of groups to identify the specific groups that differ significantly. The Kruskal-Wallis and Dunn-Bonferroni tests were conducted using SPSS version 27.

We then used the R *Likert* package (Bryer & Speerschneider, 2016) to visualize the distributions of participant responses to the Likert-type survey questions. This diverging stacked bar visualization (Heiberger & Robbins, 2014) helps us to present the survey results effectively, with

positive and negative responses grouped and centred around neutral responses. When showing group variation, we panel the data distribution by levels of participant group variables.

### Focus groups

The survey asked respondents to indicate whether they would be willing to participate in follow-up focus groups, which allowed us to collect qualitative data to expand on our survey findings. Of the 109 survey participants, 34 agreed to be contacted for the focus groups. We held three focus groups in May-June 2021 with 15 participants. The first focus group included participants affiliated with government, private sector, and unions. The second and third focus groups included civil society participants, including those affiliated with academia, NGOs, and youth/students. Focus groups were held on Zoom and were co-moderated by Mark Stoddart, Bojan Fürst, and Rob Greenwood and lasted 90 minutes each. The focus groups were transcribed by a research assistant at University of Prince Edward Island and analysed by Mark Stoddart.

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