



CCIC 2026 SYMPOSIUM

Strengthening Global Citizenship Through Collective Action

April 9–10, 2026 | Toronto



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OCIC Symposium 2026

Strengthening Global Citizenship Through Collective Action

Symposium at a Glance

The OCIC Symposium is an annual gathering that brings together members, partners, practitioners, researchers, students, youth leaders, community organizers, funders, public servants, and others committed to advancing global citizenship and international cooperation.

Held over two days in April 2026, the Symposium created space for learning, dialogue, reflection, and relationship-building across sectors and experiences. Through plenaries, dialogue sessions, small-group discussions, creative reflection, and informal networking, participants engaged with a central question: *What does it mean to be a global citizen today?*

Across the two days, conversations returned to several shared themes: local leadership, trust in meaningful partnership, learning across differences, and the responsibility we each hold in contributing to collective change.



Dates: April 9–10, 2026



Location: Schwartz Reisman Innovation Campus, University of Toronto



Theme: Strengthening Global Citizenship Through Collective Action



Participants: 91, including approximately 40 speakers and contributors including sector leaders, practitioners, researchers, artists, youth leaders, and public servants.



Key Areas of Exploration:

- Locally led development
- Youth leadership and representation
- Community-led approaches to change
- Advocacy and policy influence
- Storytelling and participatory research
- Funding and sustainability
- Wellbeing and resilience
- Global citizenship in practice



Opening in a Good Way

The Symposium opened with a welcome, grounding, and land acknowledgement that invited participants to arrive fully into the space and connect with the purpose of the gathering. Shehara Athukorala and Kimberly Gibbons of OCIC, along with Paul Galipeau of Global Affairs Canada, acknowledged the Indigenous peoples and nations whose lands continue to sustain the work being done today and situated the Symposium within broader commitments to reconciliation, justice, and solidarity.

As part of the opening reflection, Melissa Hammell of Bridge Building Group introduced participants to the **metaphor of a stone and a feather** and invited them to carry it throughout the Symposium. The stone represented the weight of the challenges facing our communities and world, as well as the sources of strength and support that help sustain us. The feather invited reflection on resilience, connection, and the lightness that can emerge when people come together in community. Participants were encouraged to consider what it means to “meet the moment” while holding both realities at once.

Through the Symposium Code of Conduct, participants were invited into a space guided by respect, curiosity, inclusion, and care. Attendees were encouraged to listen generously, engage thoughtfully with different perspectives, and contribute to a learning environment where all voices could be heard.



Day One

Locally-Led Development in Action

Shifting Power in Practice

The first day focused on questions of power, participation, and local leadership. The opening plenary, *Shifting Power in Practice: Locally-Led Development in Action*, introduced six principles of locally-led development:

- **Shared Future**
- **Ever-Learning**
- **All Voices**
- **All Minds**
- **All Insights**
- **Collective Commitment**



Jakub Nemec of Salanga reflected on how these principles emerged from gaps in traditional development approaches, emphasizing that communities should have influence not only over resources, but also over the data, evidence, and decisions that shape change.

Participants then heard examples from organizations working in different contexts but grappling with similar questions. Sopheap Sreng of ADRA Canada shared lessons from work addressing gender-based violence and child marriage, highlighting the importance of centring local realities and leadership. Dr. Felagot Taddese described CPAR Ethiopia's Remote Ultrasound Access initiative, illustrating how community-informed adaptations—such as offering services on Saturdays—can improve access and trust. Marie Meloche of the Jane Goodall Institute of Canada explored the Tacare model of community-led conservation, emphasizing the connections between environmental stewardship, community wellbeing, and local ownership.

Together, these examples highlighted locally led development as an ongoing practice of shared decision-making, accountability, and community leadership.



Reflection Through Participation

Following the plenary, participants took part in an interactive gallery walk, led by Christina Masching of Salanga, exploring the six principles of locally led development.

Moving around the room, attendees reflected on each principle and considered how it connected to their own work and experiences. Participants then gathered around the principle that resonated most strongly with them, creating opportunities for conversation and shared reflection.

The activity helped bring the discussion into practice, allowing participants to exchange perspectives across organizations and sectors. It also highlighted both the diversity of experiences in the room and the common values that connected them.

Shared Responsibility and Global Citizenship

Day One concluded with reflections from Leslie E. Norton, Assistant Deputy Minister, International Assistance Partnerships and Programming at Global Affairs Canada.

The discussion addressed questions about public engagement, Official Development Assistance, funding uncertainty, civil society partnerships, and Canada's evolving development priorities. A key message was the importance of partnership and collaboration in responding to increasingly interconnected challenges, and the continued role of a strong civil society in advancing equitable and sustainable development.





Day Two

Locally-Led Development in Action

The second day expanded the conversation, exploring global citizenship through the lenses of youth leadership, community voice, advocacy, policy influence, storytelling, wellbeing, and collective action. Through plenaries, dialogue sessions, and informal conversations, participants examined how individuals and organizations can contribute to meaningful change in increasingly interconnected communities and systems.

Youth Leadership and Representation

The morning plenary, *Framing Global Citizenship: Representation, Youth Leadership & Models of Engagement*, challenged the idea that young people are simply future leaders. Moderator Anjum Sultana of Plan Canada, along with Loïc de Fabritus of Fairtrade Canada, Alison Horton and Zeina Shabaan of Partners in Health Canada, and Negin Kamvizi of Plan International Canada, highlighted the many ways youth are already influencing policy, mobilizing communities, and strengthening democratic participation through campus organizing, advocacy campaigns, fellowships, and advisory roles.

A central theme was that meaningful youth engagement requires more than participation. It requires agency, resources, institutional support, and opportunities for young people to help shape decisions from the outset. As one participant reflected, the goal is not to engage youth for the sake of engagement, but to work alongside them as partners and allies.



Digging Deeper with Parallel Dialogues

Scaling Community-Led Models for Transformative Global Citizenship and Girls' Education



Hyang Cho of Good Neighbours Canada, Kohima Daring of World Renew, Nyaluma Elise of Good Neighbors Cameroon, Catherine Rina Guda of SATHEE, Rano Mansurova of Acted Canada, and Nasima Nazrieva of Acted, examined how community-led development models shift power, strengthen local leadership, and anchor programming in locally driven decision-making.

Beyond Traditional Funding: Adapting to a Changing Landscape

Tariq Bhanjee of Facilichange, Sarah Bird and Kim Umbach of Alongside Hope, Tanya Cothran of Spirit in Action, and Tiffany Nyklickova of Services in Action, shared perspectives and best practices on adapting to a challenging and shifting funding landscape.

From Story to Solidarity: Trans MENA Photovoice as Global Citizenship in Action

Yousef Alhammadi, Cléo, Dr. Roula Kteily-Hawa, and Khalil I. Rantissi of the YSMENA, presented their community-based participatory project centring transgender and gender-diverse Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) newcomer young adults in Ontario, exploring how arts-based research can advance global citizenship and advocacy.



Implementation to Policy Influence: Translating Evidence into Government Decision-Making



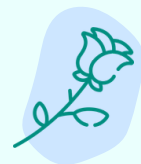
Mark Loewenberger and Dr. Felagot Taddese of CPAR, presented a case study on a tele-ultrasound program in rural Ethiopia that served as a vehicle for locally-led, feminist, and equitable systems strengthening. The session highlighted how governance, operational control, and power were intentionally transitioned to local institutions.

Activating Global Citizenship: Advocacy for Systems Change

Taryn Russell and Lindsay Sheridan of Results Canada led an interactive workshop on how advocacy can advance sustainable, transformational change, with a focus on applying practical advocacy tools to mobilize communities, build relationships with decision-makers, and strengthen collective impact.

Guided Wellness Session: Sustainable Wellbeing for Global Professionals

Samina Jamshed of Community World Service Asia led a guided mental health and wellness session, offering participants space for reflection, respite, and creative engagement.



Lunch & Learn

As a more informal opportunity to connect, Tariq Bhanjee, author Marian Dodds, and Molly Grove of Salanga, hosted small group conversations for participants to explore ideas, ask questions, and connect more deeply.



Shared Themes Across the Dialogues

Several common themes emerged across the parallel sessions and lunch and learn conversations, reflecting shared questions about how individuals and organizations can contribute to meaningful and lasting change.



Community Leadership and Participation

Speakers emphasized the importance of grounding initiatives in community priorities, lived experience, and local leadership. Examples from education, health, conservation, and community development highlighted approaches that strengthen participation, ownership, and long-term sustainability by building on existing community strengths.



Trust and Partnership

Trust emerged repeatedly as a foundation for effective collaboration. Whether discussing funding, research, advocacy, or community engagement, participants highlighted the importance of consistency, humility, and mutual accountability. As one contributor noted, **“Partnership is never just about funding, it’s about trust.”**



Learning and Adaptation

Contributors shared lessons from practice rather than presenting fixed solutions. Across sectors, participants emphasized the value of listening, reflection, and continuous learning, recognizing that meaningful change often requires adapting to evolving circumstances and community needs.



Storytelling, Advocacy, and Systems Change

Several sessions explored how stories, evidence, and advocacy can influence public understanding and decision-making. Discussions highlighted the role of lived experience, research, coalition-building, and strategic communication in advancing social change. One memorable line captured the spirit of these conversations: **“Advocacy is the antidote to apathy.”**



Funding and Sustainability

Participants reflected on the challenges facing civil society organizations and international cooperation efforts in a changing funding environment. Discussions examined approaches such as trust-based philanthropy, participatory grantmaking, and community-based fundraising while also emphasizing the importance of values, partnerships, and long-term purpose.

Diving into the Fishbowl

The Fishbowl Dialogue Circle created space for participants to reflect on the themes, tensions, and questions that had surfaced throughout the Symposium. Facilitated by Melissa Hammell, the conversation invited participants to move between speaking and listening roles, creating a shared space for reflection, challenge, and connection.

Returning to the Symposium's central question—**What does global citizenship mean now?**—participants explored a range of perspectives and experiences. Several key themes emerged:

Global citizenship is complex

- Participants reflected on global citizenship as an evolving and sometimes contested concept.
- Conversations connected global citizenship to empathy, collective action, advocacy, civil rights, responsibility, and care.
- Participants explored questions related to borders, identity, nationalism, polarization, and belonging.
- Some noted concerns that a "borderless" vision of global citizenship could unintentionally overlook cultural identity and local context.

Empathy needs hope

- Participants spoke about the emotional weight of engaging with conflict, displacement, climate change, and global injustice.
- Concerns were raised about empathy fatigue, particularly among young people.
- One reflection captured this clearly: **"Empathy is heavy. If we don't put hope in the hearts of young people, they won't engage in empathy."**
- Participants emphasized that awareness alone is not enough; sustainable engagement also requires hope, imagination, community, and opportunities for action.

The work begins close to home

- The conversation challenged the assumption that global citizenship requires international travel or work abroad.
- Participants reflected on how global engagement can happen locally through community involvement, advocacy, relationship-building, and responding to injustice where we live.
- Many spoke about the interconnectedness of local and global issues and the importance of seeing both together.





Storytelling creates connection

- Stories from Afghanistan, Colombia, Kenya, Palestine, and immigrant communities highlighted the human realities behind global issues.
- Participants reflected on storytelling as a way to build empathy, challenge assumptions, and strengthen solidarity.
- One of the most moving reflections shared was: **"I hope the world does not forget me."**
- The quote served as a reminder that global citizenship is ultimately about people, relationships, and the choices we make in response to one another's experiences.

Critique and hope can coexist

- Participants named concerns about inequality, broken trust in institutions, and power imbalances within global systems.
- At the same time, the conversation made space for hope, imagination, and collective action.
- One participant reflected: **"We can write a new narrative, together."**
- Another shared the proverb: **"When spiderwebs unite, they can tie up a lion."**

Together, these reflections captured the spirit of the Symposium: a willingness to engage honestly with complexity while remaining committed to connection, solidarity, and the possibility of meaningful change. The Symposium concluded by returning to these themes through music and storytelling. In a performance and conversation with Sara Kae, an Ojibwe and Cree artist, writer, and performer, participants reflected on identity, community, belonging, and shared responsibility, bringing the gathering to a thoughtful and memorable close.



Closing Reflections and Shared Learning



The OCIC Symposium 2026 brought together people from across the international cooperation sector and beyond to explore questions of leadership, partnership, advocacy, wellbeing, storytelling, and collective action.

Throughout the two days, participants engaged with important questions about power, representation, trust, community leadership, and hope. While perspectives differed, a common thread emerged: meaningful change requires curiosity, courage, and a willingness to learn and act together.

As participants returned to their organizations, communities, and networks, they carried forward new ideas, strengthened connections, and renewed energy for the work ahead. Like the stone and feather introduced at the opening of the Symposium, they left holding both the weight of today's challenges and the hope, resilience, and possibility needed to meet them.

*One reflection from
the Fishbowl offered:*

*"We can write a
new narrative,
together."*



One Month Later

Reflections from Zeina Shaaban of Partners in Health Canada

The best part of the OCIC Symposium... **didn't happen on the main stage.** It happened in the conversations we kept having after.

One month ago, the international cooperation sector gathered to rethink global citizenship. As panel speakers, we left feeling inspired and energised. But the real test comes after the applause fades: What do we actually change in how we work?

So here are **5 reflections** we're carrying into our work:



Takeaway 01 BOTTOM-UP ARCHITECTURE

Decolonizing global citizenship is a significant structural shift. Models like YSMENA remind us that we need to stop forcing local communities into rigid, pre-made boxes. The most refreshing solutions happen when youth and local leaders design their own self-determined spaces from the ground up.

Takeaway 02 POLICY POWER OVER TOKENISM

Youth aren't a decorative focus group. During our plenary session on framing global citizenship, we kept coming back to the fact that our job isn't to "give youth a voice"—they already have one. Our job is to dismantle the barriers keeping them from being genuine policy shapers and decision-makers and provide scaffoldings of support.

Takeaway 03 FUNDING THE SHIFT

True solidarity requires shifting how capital flows. You cannot champion locally-led development without committing to multi-year, unrestricted funding. If we trust partners on the ground to implement solutions, we must trust them with the financial flexibility to lead.

Takeaway 04 THE POWER OF THE FISHBOWL

Systems change requires democratic dialogue. One of the most impactful spaces was the Fishbowl discussion. Breaking away from traditional, rigid panel formats allowed for collective wisdom, honest friction, and the kind of open debate our sector desperately needs.

Takeaway 05 EVIDENCE TO INFLUENCE

Turning grassroots data into systemic impact. As highlighted in the Results Canada session, moving from implementation to influence means bridging local realities with national policy. We must use robust evidence and lived experiences together to advocate for government-level accountability.

One month later, we are still asking ourselves:
What are we doing differently today to shift power tomorrow?

What questions are you asking?

Thank You

This report was produced by OCIC and our wonderful Symposium host - Melissa Hammell of the Bridge Building Group. Thank you to the student volunteers who took detailed notes during the sessions: Alissa Blommestyn, Aashritha Boddolla, Yağız Boran, Justasia Equality, Lubna Ismail, Tasmia Nahreen Jahangir, Diya Prashantham, Sofia Rafati, Maya Sarawan, Mehak Warring. Thank you to Ken Wong for photographing the event.

Thank you as well to Acted, Acted Canada, ADRA Canada, Alongside Hope, Bridge Building Group, CPAR, Community World Service Asia, Connected North, CPAR Ethiopia, FaciliChange, Fairtrade Canada, Good Neighbours Canada, Good Neighbors Cameroon, Jane Goodall Institute of Canada, Partners in Health Canada, Plan International Canada, Presbyterian World Service & Development, Results Canada, Salanga, SATHEE, Services in Action, Spirit in Action, World Renew Canada, World Renew Bangladesh, YSMENA Program at the Western University, the independent experts and contributors, OCIC Board Directors and consultants, members, youth participants, volunteers, staff, and our broader community for your contributions and active participation.

Global citizenship matters.





This initiative was undertaken with financial support from the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada, and in partnership with the Department of Global Development Studies, University of Toronto Scarborough. In addition Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief (CPAR) and TakingITGlobal supported their international and national partners in joining us in person. Thank you for your unique contributions.

