

## 5. Winter 2008: How Other Sectors Approach Environmental Issues

This installation discusses how the environmental justice, health, education or the grassroots sectors approach environmental issues.

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### Assessment, Winter 2008

Whether coming from the environmental justice, health, education or the grassroots sector everyone recommends a community assessment.

The assessments provide information on needs and assets as well as competing priorities. Below is an annotated list of assessments used by many other sectors interested in the environment and their community. Check out the guidelines and types of questions that are asked. One important tip is to gather all the previous community assessments done in your area so that you can take advantage of completed work and build on the knowledge base. A quick Internet search or call may lead to some interesting results. Your own assessment will help to create well-grounded relationships, programs and successes. If your local health, EJ and grassroots have yet to do an assessment, this would be a great collaborative project.

#### The Educational Field

Putting the Pieces Together: Comprehensive School-Linked Strategies for Children and Families is the result of a collaborative partnership among the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education, and the Regional Educational Laboratory Network. The guidebook includes numerous brief examples from programs in schools and communities throughout America where diverse stakeholders have come together to create a system that enables children to come to school ready to learn every day.

A community assessment is an exercise by which a collaborative partnership gathers information on the current strengths, concerns, and conditions of children, families, and the community. The information comes from many sources--especially parents and family members--and is elicited by many techniques, including interviews, focus groups, and scanning demographic data collected by local agencies. Because many types of partners participate in a community assessment--strategic planners, program staff, administrators, teachers, parents, and other community members--the resulting information is broad, accurate, and useful.

- In Putting the Pieces Together the following questions are addressed:
- What Does a Community Assessment Involve?

- How Does a Partnership Conduct a Community Scan?
- How Can a Community Assessment Engage Families and Community Members?
- What Factors Are Involved in Understanding Community Assets?
- How Should Assessment Information Be Used and By Whom?
- How Can a Partnership Use Assessment Results to Move from Planning to Action?
- Learning Opportunities

## The Environmental Health Field

Through a multi-year partnership with the National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), provides technical assistance to local health departments and their constituents in conducting community-based environmental health assessments. NACCHO developed the Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE EH), a methodology to guide local communities in identifying and addressing environmental health priorities.

The process is designed to improve decision-making by taking a collaborative community-based approach. The methodology takes the user through a series of steps to engage the public, collect necessary and relevant information pertaining to community environmental health concerns, rank issues, and set local priorities for action. At the heart are three core processes: developing new relationships with community stakeholders, expanding understanding about the relationship between human health and the state of the environment, and redefining a leadership role for public health officials in environmental health. A free download of this information is available in English and Spanish.

## Community Service Clubs

Rotary International is the world's first service club organization. Its more than 1.2 million members volunteer their time and talent to further the Rotary motto, Service Above Self. Rotary clubs make a difference locally and internationally through service. It recommends that clubs first learn about local issues to discover opportunities for service projects and avoid duplicating existing resources. Community assessments such as surveys, asset inventories, and focus groups are tools used in the process.

## Environmental Justice

The Environmental Justice Geographic Assessment Tool on EPA's website provides information relevant to assessing adverse health or environmental impacts, aggregate or cumulative impacts, unique exposure pathways, vulnerable or susceptible populations, or lack of capacity to participate in decision making processes among other conditions.

## Articles of Interest, Winter 2008

The New Environmentalists: How to Make the Green Movement Less White

By Van Jones, ColorLines

Posted on August 7, 2007, Printed on December 6, 2007

<http://www.alternet.org/story/58613/>

In response to mounting ecological crises, the United States is going through its most important economic transformation since the New Deal. Unfortunately, the vital process of change along more eco-friendly lines is moving ahead with practically zero participation from people of color.

Hundreds of mayors and several governors are bucking the Bush administration and committing themselves to the carbon-cutting principles of the Kyoto treaty on climate change. The U.S. Congress is debating an energy bill this year that could be a watershed for alternative energy sources.

What's more, regular people are way ahead of these leaders. U.S. polls show super-majorities want strong action on the climate crisis and other environmental perils. And consumers are reshaping markets by demanding hybrid cars, bio-fuels, solar panels, organic food and more. As a result, the "lifestyles of health and sustainability" sector of the U.S. economy has ballooned into a \$240 billion gold mine. And total sales are growing on a near-vertical axis.

The Economist magazine calls it "The Greening of America." Indeed, we are witnessing the slow death of the Earth-devouring, suicidal version of capitalism. We're even seeing the birth of some form of "eco-capitalism." To be sure, a more "ecologically sound" market system will not be a utopia. But at least it will buy our species a few extra decades or centuries on this planet.

That's the good news. Here is the bad news.

The celebrated "lifestyles" sector is probably the most racially segregated part of the U.S. economy; at present, it is almost exclusively the province of affluent white people. Few entrepreneurs of color are positioned to reap the benefits of the government's push to green the economy.

We are seeing a major debate about the direction of the U.S. economy -- in which communities of color apparently have nothing to say. Our near-silence on such key issues has no precedent, at least not since before the Civil War.

How can this be? Black, Latino, Asian and Native American communities suffer the most from the environmental ills of our industrial society. Our folks desperately need the new economic activity, investments and opportunities that this major transition is beginning to generate.

To put it bluntly, people of color have much more directly at stake in the greening of America than white college students do. Why are they marching for carbon caps, while most of us just yawn and change the channel?

When these new formations and networks emerge, all racial justice activists will become, in some sense, environmental justice activists.

More people of color have not yet grabbed the microphone for three reasons: our long-standing pattern of viewing environmental issues as luxury concerns; the mainstream media's "whites only" coverage of the green phenomenon; and serious structural impediments to action within the racial justice movement itself.

First of all, too often we have said: "We are overwhelmed with violence, bad housing, failing schools, excessive incarceration, poor healthcare and joblessness. We can't afford to worry about spotted owls, redwood trees and polar bears."

But Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath taught us that the coming ecological disasters will hit the poor first and worst. More of us are beginning to see that there can be no separation between our concern for vulnerable people and our concern for a vulnerable planet.

Secondly, any U.S. magazine's "Special Green Issue" typically will not show many people of color, despite the incredible achievements of numerous environmentalists of color across the country. Many racial justice activists see this kind of coverage, shrug our shoulders and understandably assume that green equals white.

But this is a mistake. When did we start trusting the corporate media to fairly calculate our interests in any major topic or development in U.S. society? When have our activists and advocates ever accepted their frame and parameters in determining what is important or what we should do? It should not surprise anyone that the mainstream media does not reflect our deep and profound interests in the greening of the economy. And it is high time for us to make our own assessment and create our own strategy for shaping the process in accordance with our interests.

Finally, at least among committed activists, there is a deeper reason that we have not mobilized at the appropriate scale. And that reason can be found within the structure of our racial justice movement itself. Our present deployment of resources simply does not let us meet the challenges and opportunities that the green revolution is generating, simply because it is nobody's job to take them on.

Because no racial justice organization can tackle every issue and champion every cause, our groups have evolved a fairly strict division of labor. A single organization will ordinarily focus on just one issue -- criminal justice, immigrant rights, economic justice, violence prevention, educational equity, school reform, reproductive justice, what have you. Out of deference to each other (and to stay within funders' guidelines), our organizations bend over backwards to keep within their chosen issue areas and to stay off each other's "turfs."

One important issue area is called "environmental justice." The environmental justice movement emerged in the 1980s to challenge toxic pollution in the neighborhoods of low-income people and people of color. Made up of hundreds of mostly small, tough and scrappy organizations, this movement has won many local and national victories over the past two decades. The "EJ" movement's (often pint-sized) dynamos have shut down scofflaw polluters, power plants and incinerators. They have cut toxic emissions and improved public health in innumerable communities. And their leaders have elevated the concept of "environmental racism" to mainstream prominence.

Because of this movement's success and visibility, most racial justice activists today presume that anything related to the environment falls under the purview of our existing environmental justice organizations. Therefore when we hear all this "green talk," we tend to either assume it doesn't have anything to do with our communities or that someone else already has the mandate and the capacity to deal with it. This assumption is another reason that other racial justice leaders tend to ignore "all of this green stuff."

Well, such an approach might have served us in years past, but not today.

Today's environmental justice movement was designed to protect our interests in a toxic, pollution-based economy. It was not designed to promote our interests in a mushrooming, \$250 billion green economy. Nor was any other racial justice movement or network. It is wildly unrealistic to assume that the already over-stretched and under-funded EJ groups can somehow meet this colossal, historic challenge on their own. It is unfair to expect them to do so.

So we stand now at the dawn of a new economy. But no part of the racial justice movement is charged with the task of ensuring that the new laws and new industries do right by low-income people and people of color.

We must change this. If we do not get involved, we will end up with eco-apartheid -- a society with ecological haves and have-nots. Imagine a world in which wealthy people have clean air, fresh water, healthy food and no-cost energy, thanks to solar panels, organic agriculture and green technology. Meanwhile, poor neighborhoods continue to choke in the fumes of the last century's pollution-based industries.

To put it bluntly, people of color have much more directly at stake in the greening of America than white college students do.

We must say no to a future in which our peoples get hit "first and worst" by the coming ecological catastrophes and benefit "last and least" from the emerging ecological advances.

This next environmental revolution -- call it the "Green for All" revolution -- will require especially sophisticated and skilled leadership.

We will have to continue to fight corporate polluters. And we would also be wise to consider and explore partnerships with eco-capitalists, who are willing to grow their businesses in a cleaner and greener way. We will continue saying no to the economic oppression of the dying economy. But we must also learn how to say "yes" to economic opportunity of the emerging economy. As a part of a new economic strategy, we should help interested communities and workers to create their own green collectives and co-ops (as did the Green Workers' Cooperative in the South Bronx).

We will continue fighting for equal protection from the worst of the pollution-based economy. And we will also add demands for equal access and equal opportunity in the clean and green economy.

We will also need tighter formations -- united fronts that can work explicitly for racial justice and inclusion. These networks and coalitions will advance independent slogans, such as Majora Carter's demand to "green the ghetto" or the Ella Baker Center's call for "green-collar jobs, not jails" for urban youth. And they will be more comfortable for many people of color than many of the present "green wave" spaces.

When these new formations and networks emerge, all racial justice activists will become, in some sense, environmental justice activists. But by that point, the environmental justice movement itself will be transformed into a massive movement, focused on a new paradigm of economic development, fighting to birth a green economy that is strong enough to lift people out of poverty.

View this story online at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/58613/>

Permission to reprint provided by the author, Van Jones, and AlterNet, the Internet publisher of the article. Van Jones is the president of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, in Oakland, California and a National Apollo Alliance steering committee member. AlterNet is an Internet news service providing award-winning coverage on global warming, healthy food clean water, population control, and nature protection.

## **Vignette, Winter 2008**

### Education and Current Events

You are an environmental educator working for an organization that provides classroom programs on various environmental, ecological, and action taking themes. There has been an on-going controversy about creating a landfill in a low socio economic part of your community. Teachers from this part of the community that you have actually been trying to target have called and wondered if you can cover this topic in their classroom. What do you do?

How is your response influenced by:

- ... your definition or philosophy of EE?
- ... the educational approaches you use in the classroom?
- ...your understanding of the issue?
- ...your comfort in discussing environmental justice issues?

How will this decision influence...

- ...Your relationship with staff in this school?
- ...Your reputation in various sectors in the community?
- ...Your ability to be more inclusive?

## **Mini-Lesson, Winter 2008**

### Overcoming Obstacles

In many of the EE & Diversity workshops we have offered participants often share obstacles to becoming more inclusive. If you have begun a plan to become more inclusive but need a push into turning your challenges into strategies try using an activity called Force Fields. You can find instructions for it on the Internet. One great website is [www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com). Mindtools.com offers many useful techniques for problem solving, planning and decision-making. The Force Field Analysis is a useful tool for looking at all the forces for and against a plan. According to Mindtools.com "When you have decided to carry out a plan, Force Field Analysis helps you identify changes that you could make to improve it.

To check out the specifics of how to apply this tool to your next plan, go to:  
[http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED\\_06.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_06.htm)

## **Success Stories, Winter 2008**

Green for All

Green For All, an important new campaign working to bring “green collar” jobs to urban areas, launched at the Clinton Global Initiative in New York on September 26, 2007. The group, created by Van Jones, co-founder of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, seeks to capitalize on the exploding green economy while ensuring that the coming green economic wave lifts all boats. To find out more visit <http://www.greenforall.org/>

## Links, Winter 2008

Other sectors working on environmental issues

### Government Links

[EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance Federal Activities'](#) website on the draft "Guidance for Incorporating Environmental Justice Issues in EPA's NEPA Compliance Analysis." This guidance is designed to assist EPA staff responsible for developing EPA compliance documentation as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), including Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) and Environmental Assessments (EA), in addressing a specific concern -- environmental justice (EJ). It defines common EJ terms, illustrates the relevance of EJ issues in environmental analyses, heightens awareness of EPA staff in addressing EJ issues within NEPA analyses, presents methods for communication with the affected population throughout the NEPA process, and introduces EJ as a primary consideration to the NEPA process.

[The National Environmental Justice Advisory Council \(NEJAC\)](#) is a federal advisory committee that was established by charter on September 30, 1993, to provide independent advice, consultation, and recommendations to the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on matters related to environmental justice. The NEJAC is made up of 25 members, and one Designated Federal Official (DFO), who serve on a parent council that has seven subcommittees. Along with the NEJAC members who fill subcommittee posts, an additional 39 individuals serve on the various subcommittees.

### Non-Governmental Links

[African American Environmentalist Association](#) is an environmental organization dedicated to protecting the environment, enhancing the human ecology, promoting the efficient use of nature resources and increasing African American participation in the environmental movement.

[Center for Neighborhood Technology \(CNT\)](#) develops resources to promote healthy, sustainable communities.

[EarthJustice Legal Defense Fund](#) is an environmental advocacy group.

[Environmental Defense \(EDF\)](#) is a national advocacy organization. Their Living Cities program promotes clean air, water and lands in the nation's population centers.

[Natural Resources Defense Council \(NRDC\)](#) is an environmentalist organization dedicated to public education and preservation of the environment.

[Noise Issues, The Noise Pollution Clearinghouse](#) is a national nonprofit organization with extensive online noise related resources. The Noise Pollution Clearinghouse seeks to: 1) Raise awareness about noise pollution; 2) Create, collect, and distribute information and resources regarding noise pollution; 3) Strengthen laws and governmental efforts to control noise pollution; 4) Establish networks among environmental, professional, medical, governmental, and activist groups working on noise pollution issues.

#### Academic Links

[Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change](#) at Case Western Reserve University seeks to address the problems of persistent and concentrated urban poverty and is dedicated to understanding how social and economic changes affect low-income communities, and how living in these communities affects the well-being of their residents. Activities of the Center also reflect an interest in how social and economic conditions can be improved through community generated strategies for change, as well as reforms in the ways institutions and service organizations respond to community needs. The Center's primary function is to produce comprehensive poverty-related information in local and regional contexts.

Environmental Justice Clinic is a public interest, environmental project to lend the expertise of the Civil Rights and Environmental Movement to disenfranchised minority and low-income communities in Texas and neighboring states.

[Environmental Justice Resource Center \(EJRC\)](#) at Clark Atlanta University serves as a research, policy, and information clearinghouse on issues related to environmental justice, race and the environment, civil rights, facility siting, land use planning, brownfields, transportation equity, suburban sprawl, and Smart Growth.

[The Institute on Race and Poverty \(IRP\)](#) is a strategic research center located at the University of Minnesota Law School. It is a national organization that directly addresses the underlying causes of the problems created at the intersection of racial injustice and poverty.