

## Environmental Justice

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### Introduction

Can there truly be a healthy, sustainable environment without justice? [ref. 1] Across the United States, poor communities and communities of color bear a disproportionate burden of environmental pollution. A national, multi-cultural environmental justice movement has emerged over the last decade to tackle the problem. Environmental problems are woven into the fabric of people's lives and communities are recognizing the need for broader social solutions beyond the mitigation of a particular risk or environmental hazard. Individual environmental hazards are seen as part of a larger context of problems that a single community faces, including inadequate access to quality health care and education, poor job opportunities, lack of affordable housing, and being left out of the process of identifying problems, communicating risks, developing responses to problems, and developing mitigation strategies. Rarely are the needs of low-income communities and communities of color taken into account in the identification of environmental health problems, studies of health outcomes, and/or designing appropriate interventions. Using a "holistic" approach and bringing together civil rights and environmental activists, the environmental justice movement integrates a broad range of issues, including environmental pollution, public health, worker safety, land use, transportation, housing, economic development and community empowerment. [ref. 2] "Sustainability" means different things to different people. The term is most common among policy- and decision-makers who are far removed from the day-to-day struggles of poor and working-class communities. A "sustainable community" seems to refer to an idealized, utopian place or condition. However, many people and cultures do not use "sustainability" in their language, and this term is not universally shared. From the perspective of environmental justice activists, sustainability must include a process of collective decision-making and address issues of social inequality and racism as well as ecological degradation. A sustainable community provides:

- A means of livelihood for all people,
- Resources to participate in civic life, and
- Respect for all members of the community. [ref. 3]

Although most environmental justice activists do not use the term "sustainability" to describe their efforts, for many the survival and environmental health of communities has been a central theme. The Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, a network of numerous environmental grassroots community organizations throughout California and the Southwest, describes sustainability as encompassing the political and personal, the tangible and intangible, the past and the future, and includes such ideas as "accountability, self-determination, justice, youth, nature, creation, collectivity, knowledge, culture, spirituality, and livelihood." To build a multi-cultural, socially just, sustainable community, it is necessary to work together to develop a shared language and vision for San Francisco. Several local examples illustrate the need to look at environmental issues from an environmental justice standpoint.

- Despite being collectively charged more than \$5,000 per month to support the City's curbside recycling program, until 1994 Chinatown residents did not receive the same level of recycling services provided to most other neighborhoods in San Francisco. Community advocacy from a base in Chinatown changed this situation.
- Bayview-Hunters Point is an area of San Francisco documented to have a disproportionately high ambient pollution compared with the rest of the city. It is also an underserved community, with a large proportion of residents of color. Community advocates successfully fought a power plant proposed for the area and are working with the City's Department of Public Health on a community-wide environmental and health assessment project, in an effort to address the effects of toxic pollution and other environmental illnesses suffered by community residents.
- In the Mission, where 80% of the population lives in rental units, the low-income and primarily Latino residents have a serious problem with exposure to lead paint, which can lead to childhood lead poisoning. Local activists have supported a lead-paint poisoning prevention ordinance and help educate residents about the issue.
- San Francisco is also the home of several cutting-edge community-based programs that embody the goals and implementation actions of environmental justice. These include an innovative greening and gardening job-training program through the Sheriff's Department for correctional inmates, and a series of community gardens and greening projects that are designed from a community perspective and that provide local jobs and job training.

One of the most important aspects of environmental justice is the question of participation. In this context, it is appropriate to examine whether the sustainability plan drafting process itself has been inclusive of people from the entire community. Generally, volunteer drafters have been recruited from three sectors: environmental activists, City departments, and the business community. While the sustainability draft is regarded as a "starting point" for public participation and was not intended to be a final document, the drafting process has been insufficiently inclusive with respect to public participation. It did not ensure the contribution of community residents, particularly those living in the City's lower-income communities of color who are bearing the brunt of the City's environmental industrial pollution. Any plan for the City's sustainability should reflect the views and perspectives of San Francisco's multi-racial, multi-ethnic communities and not only just those of people with the time to attend drafting meetings. For the Sustainable San Francisco project to serve as an effective planning tool, community outreach efforts must be undertaken and public hearings and planning sessions conducted beyond those conducted during the summer of 1996.

### Sustainability Strategy

GOALS	LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES TO REACH SUSTAINABILITY	OBJECTIVES FOR THE YEAR 2001 (5-year plan)	ACTIONS
1. To establish meaningful participation in the decision-making processes that affect historically disadvantaged communities of San Francisco.	1-A. Both the marginalized and the powerful communities in San Francisco share in the responsibility for preserving San Francisco's ecological and social environment.	1-1. Information about decision-making processes is made accessible in culturally and linguistically appropriate formats.	1-1-a. Broadly publicize meetings; 1-1-b. Direct outreach into all communities; 1-1-c. Have a pool of translators and interpreters available at all times; 1-1-d. Translate documents and agendas; and 1-1-e. Hold meetings in affected communities on a wide range of sustainability issues

		<p>1-2. Community education about issues that affect historically disadvantaged communities and about the decision-making process is supported.</p>	<p>1-2-a. Create an environmental resource center where residents can gain access to information about environmental hazards in their communities; also create a community-initiated system for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information about environmental hazards in various communities.</p> <p>1-2-b. Ensure that information regarding present and future public policies reaches all residents of San Francisco; including disseminating information via non-traditional forums such as religious institutions, schools and community-based organizations.</p> <p>1-2-c. Recognize and financially support urban, community-based environmental education programs.</p>
		<p>1-3. Decision-making bodies and processes have adequate and direct representation of affected communities.</p>	<p>1-3-a. Include proportional representation from historically disadvantaged groups in all decision-making bodies. (Candidates for these positions should be chosen by and reside in the communities they wish to represent.)</p>
		<p>1-4. All residents of San Francisco participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making processes, including planning, implementation, enforcement and</p>	

		<p>evaluation.</p> <p>1-5. Community awareness of policies and plans affecting the communities of San Francisco has increased.</p>	
<p>2. To create a vibrant community-based economy with jobs and career opportunities that allow all people economic self-determination and environmental health.</p>	<p>2-A. Adequate, non-polluting means of livelihood have been provided so people are not forced to choose between jobs and environmental health.</p> <p>2-B. Extensive public awareness of the advantages of community-based enterprise (money going back into the community rather than out of it) has been created.</p> <p>2-C. Sustainable businesses have been created throughout San Francisco that generate jobs and capital for poor communities.</p> <p>2-D. A skilled work force in poor communities has been created that is ready to work in new and existing sustainable businesses and industries.</p> <p>2-E. Existing toxic, radioactive, hazardous, or otherwise polluting industries and businesses in poor neighborhoods have been replaced with safe and sustainable ones.</p> <p>2-F. City standards of workers' occupational health and safety have been bolstered to minimize workplace illness and injury.</p>	<p>2-1. Residents of poor communities are trained in the basic and technical job skills required by new and existing sustainable businesses and industries.</p> <p>2-2. An economic strategic plan has been developed that will appropriately place (according to resource supplies, resource needs, cultural fit, etc.) just and sustainable businesses and industries into communities within San Francisco.</p> <p>2-3. Local, state, and national sources of economic and technical business and industrial assistance have been identified and are in use.</p> <p>2-4. The volume of community-based economic activity in poor communities of color has been increased from 20% to 80%.</p> <p>2-5. The economic and environmental well-being of historically disadvantaged communities has increased to reach parity with all other communities in San Francisco, according to traditional economic and environmental indicators.</p>	<p>2-a. Create and fund locally staffed neighborhood economic development corporations to research and develop appropriate non-polluting businesses in poor neighborhoods.</p> <p>2-b. Provide economic and technical assistance to those businesses, such as loan programs for home-based and small businesses especially in poor neighborhoods with the concept of sustainability as a criteria for such loans.</p> <p>2-c. Link economic development corporations with federal programs (such as Climate Wise) that sponsor environmental assessments of existing local industries to make them more economically sound and less polluting and to cut energy and waste costs.</p> <p>2-d. Create an incentive program for small and large businesses and industries to meet environmental and environmental justice sustainability criteria, recognizing that sustainability is an ongoing process rather than an end goal.</p>

	<p>illness and injury.</p> <p>2-G. Residents of lower-income communities of color have access to technology and resources to participate in sustainability programs.</p>	<p>2-6. 25% of existing and new businesses and industries are enrolled in environmental/ environmental justice incentive programs.</p>	<p>2-e. Create an incentive program for landlords and homeowners to extend accessibility to low-flow toilets, weatherization, etc.</p>
<p>3. To eliminate disproportionate environmental burdens and pollution imposed on historically disadvantaged communities and communities of color.</p>	<p>3-A. Pollution prevention strategies to reduce environmental pollution throughout the City of San Francisco have been implemented, with special focus on reducing the amount of pollution and toxic waste having an impact on historically disadvantaged communities.</p> <p>3-B. The amount of pollution and toxic waste having an impact on historically disadvantaged communities is dramatically reduced.</p>	<p>3-1. The amount of environmental pollution affecting historically disadvantaged communities of color has been reduced by 25%;</p> <p>3-2. The approvals process for proposed projects that have the potential to cause significant adverse environmental impact take into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The demographics surrounding the site and</li> <li>• The fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of such projects among the City's communities.</li> </ul> <p>3-3. The percentage and amount of environmental pollution in communities in San Francisco that have been disproportionately burdened with environmental pollution ("EJ communities"); has been reduced.</p>	<p>3-a. Identify communities in San Francisco that have been disproportionately burdened with environmental pollution ("EJ communities");</p> <p>3-b. Through detailed and comprehensive environmental assessments, identify sources of environmental pollution affecting EJ communities and identify a quantifiable "baseline" for pollution (this "baseline" may serve as a supplement to the 1994 Environmental State of the City Report);</p> <p>3-c. In partnership with local residents, establish an inter-agency task force to develop a comprehensive plan and implement pollution prevention strategies to reduce pollution in EJ communities (these could include promoting new technologies, using alternative manufacturing materials, promoting economic incentives and/or increasing enforcement and regulatory compliance).</p>
<p>4. To create a community with capacity and resources for self-representation and indigenous leadership.</p>	<p>4-A. The relations of power have been altered so that historically disadvantaged communities are able to participate as equal partners with business, government,</p>	<p>4-1. Resources have been provided and support has been given to organizations that develop indigenous leadership and community capacity in historically disadvantaged</p>	<p>4-a. Fund community-based organizations for leadership development activities and community organizing within historically disadvantaged communities.</p> <p>4-b. Hire staff with first-</p>

	environmental and other sectors.	communities. 4-2. The contributions of people from diverse sectors of historically disadvantaged communities, with an emphasis on those who suffer the greatest environmental risk, are solicited and considered.	hand understanding of historically disadvantaged communities. 4-c. Consult with diverse sectors of historically disadvantaged communities, especially those who suffer the greatest environmental risk.
5. To ensure that social and economic justice are established as an integral aspect of environmental well-being and sustainability.	5-A. Long-term strategies that integrate activities of business, city government, and community groups with the goals of social, economic and environmental sustainability have been established.	5-1. The environmental program and project resources of all city departments shall be divided equally between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The local social and community aspects, and</li> <li>• The environmental conservation aspects</li> </ul> of environmental problems.	5-a. Audit current city government expenditures for environmental programs and projects based on social justice criteria such as geographic distribution within the City, emphasis on social equity goals, amount of community-based participation, and emphasis on neighborhood leadership development. 5-b. Create partnerships among local businesses, residents and city officials to reorganize city government to balance departmental activities on environmental issues equally between community activities and conservation activities. 5-c. Create partnerships among local business, residents and city officials to establish ongoing neighborhood community planning processes. 5-d. Prepare neighborhood plans for all areas of San Francisco based on social, economic and environmental goals and on the participation of local business, residents, and city officials.

**References**

1. A similar question was asked by Charles Lee, Director of Research, United Church of Christ, Commission for Racial Justice, in an article, "Evidence of Environmental Racism" (1990).

2. Bullard, Robert D., "Environmental Justice: A New Framework for Action," *Environmental Law News*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 3-9 (Spring 1996).
3. EDGE, "Beyond Fear: Addressing Population and Sustainability Concerns in California" (1995). "Sustainability" has also been defined as having at least three broad components: access for all to safe livelihoods that pay livable wages, protection of environmental health, and the equal participation of all communities in decisions that affect their lives. Urban Habitat Program, "Sustainability & Justice" (1995).