

Environmental Justice and Equity: A call for a Just and Equitable Future

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ABSTRACT

Environmental justice and equity are fundamental principles that demand the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, colour, nationality or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. This paper examines the historical aspects of environmental injustice, analyses the disproportionate communities, and examines the critical role of community engagement and advocacy in achieving a just and equitable future.

Keywords- Environmental justice, Environmental equity, Low- income community, redlining, hazardous waste.

I. INTRODUCTION

The environmental law is the collection of laws, regulations, agreements and includes common law that governs the relationship between humans and environment. The concept of environmental justice emerged from the recognition that environmental problems are not distributed equally across society. Environmental equity describes a country, or world, in which no single group or community faces disadvantages in dealing with environmental hazards, disasters or pollution. Historically marginalized communities, particularly racial and ethnic minorities and low income communities have borne a disproportionate share of environmental burdens, including exposure to pollution, hazardous waste sites and other environmental threats. This inequitable distribution of environmental harms has significant social, economic and health consequences. According to the Environmental Protection Act, environmental equity can be broken down into two categories one is fair treatment and meaningful involvement. Fair treatment means that no single section of the population should be disproportionately affected by environmental crises as a result of laws or policies, and meaningful environment

means that groups can offer input regarding decisions that affect their health or their environment.

The roots of environmental injustice can be traced back to historical patterns of discrimination and systematic racism. The siting of polluting industries and hazardous waste facilities in or near marginalized communities is often a result of discriminatory practices, such as redlining and urban renewal policies. These policies have historically marginalized and segregated communities, leaving them vulnerable to environmental hazards. If environmental equity is a basic human right, environmental justice is the act of protecting that right. Environmental justice involves the action and activism necessary to highlight inequities and level the playing field. This means proper oversight and review of federal agencies, proper permitting and licensing for companies, buildings and warehouse that emit pollution, setting clean standards, regulations and laws that protect at-risk communities and awarding grants to organisation that act on behalf of these communities. This discriminatory practice involved denying loan or insurance to residents in certain neighbourhoods, often based on race or ethnicity. This practice contributed to the concentration of poverty and environmental hazards in specific areas. Urban renewal projects often displaced low-income

communities of color, forcing them to relocate to areas with higher level of environmental Environmental justice, environmental equity and environmental racism are different phrases that describes and explain central features of the environmental features of the environmental justice movement, focusing on the disparate impact of hazardous waste sites and other polluting facilities located in or near distressed neighbourhoods with high concentrations of ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged populations, because the concepts and contexts associated with each of these labels are complex and multi dimensional, the meaning of environmental justice and injustice has changed overtime and can differ considerably. Disproportionate exposure to air pollutants, such as particulate matter and ozone, can lead to respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular problems and other health issues. Studies have shown that communities are often located near major highways and industrial facilities, resulting in higher levels of air pollution exposure. Contamination of drinking water sources with pollutants like heavy metals and industrial chemicals can have severe health consequences. Access to clean and safe drinking water is often inequitably distributed, with marginalized communities disproportionately affected by water pollution.

Despite the abundance of environmental equity research, class actions brought against US civil authorities on the grounds of unjust planning decisions have proved largely unsuccessful, in part due to poor empirical analyses that failed to provide convincing evidence of environmental inequality. However, even where environmental inequality clearly does occur, this must not automatically be considered unjust, as the fairness of the observed patterns may depend on how they occurred and on the justice theory that is applied. Race, class and power dynamics play a significant role in shaping environmental justice outcomes. Systematic racism has historically disadvantaged communities of color, making them more vulnerable to environmental hazards. Low- income communities often have limited resources and political power to advocate for themselves and protect their environment. The unequal distribution of power between marginalized communities and powerful industries and government agencies can exacerbate environmental Empowering communities to participate in environmental decision-making processes is crucial. This can be achieved through community-based participatory planning, public outreach and education programs. Strengthening environmental regulations and ensuring their equitable enforcement is essential. This includes addressing discriminatory siting practices and promoting environmental justice considerations in all environmental policies.

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environmental policies. Promoting sustainable development practices that prioritize environmental protection and social equity can help mitigate the impacts of environmental injustice. Tackling the root cause of environmental injustice requires addressing systematic racism and other forms of discrimination. Numerous cases studies are there which illustrate the complexities of environmental justice issues, some of them are- warren county, North Carolina, in this case the 1982 protests against the dumping of toxic waste in Warren County, North Carolina, marked a turning point in the environmental justice movement. The predominantly Black community's resistance to the dumping highlighted the disproportionate environmental burdens faced by marginalized communities. Another case is that of Love Canal, New York, in this case the Love Canal disaster, where residents were exposed to toxic chemicals from a buried waste dump, brought national attention to the dangers of hazardous waste sites and the need for stricter environmental regulations. Flint water crisis , where residents were exposed to lead-contaminated water due to government negligence, highlighted the intersection of environmental injustice and public health. Environmental injustice issues are not confined to national borders. Many developing countries face significant environmental challenges, including pollution, deforestation and climate change. These challenges disproportionately affect marginalized communities within these countries. The international community has a responsibility to address these global environmental justice issues through international cooperation and assistance. The technology plays a crucial role in both exacerbating and mitigating environmental injustices. Technological advancements can lead to the development of new and more potent pollutants, and can also contribute to the displacement of communities, technology can also be used to monitor pollution, develop renewable energy sources, and improve environmental monitoring and enforcement.

Environmental justice and equity are not just moral imperatives, but also essential for achieving a healthy and sustainable future for all. By recognising the historical and contemporary roots of environmental injustice, empowering communities, and implementing equitable policies, we can work towards a future where everyone has the right to a healthy and safe environment. The increasing impact of climate change are raising new challenges for environmental justice. Addressing climate change in a just and equitable manner requires considering the differential vulnerabilities of marginalized communities. Indigenous people s have a deep connection to the land and face unique environmental justice challenges, including the loss of traditional lands and resources. Further research is needed to understand the potential impacts of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and biotechnology on environmental justice.

Achieving environmental justice requires continued advocacy, activism and policy change. Individuals and communities can play a crucial role by raising awareness, educating themselves and others about environmental justice issues, supporting community-based organizations like local organisations working to address environmental justice concerns, by advocating policy change, making sustainable choices by adopting sustainable lifestyles and reducing their environmental impact.

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