

# Environmental Justice



*This is a resources to support the understanding of what is environmental justice.*

## What is environmental justice?

There is no single definition for environmental justice. In fact, in the past decade this concept has been adopted in different circles to achieve different goals, but in general, it relies on an equity-based model to access the natural environment. Here are some other definitions:

*"Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples [...].recognize[s] a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government...calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color...opposes military occupation..." (The Principles of Environmental Justice 1991).*

The EPA Office of Environmental Justice defines environmental as:

*"The goal of environmental justice is to ensure that all people, regardless of race, national origin or income, are protected from disproportionate impacts of environmental hazards. To be classified as an environmental justice community, residents must be a minority and/or low income group; excluded from the environmental policy setting and/or decision-making process; subject to a disproportionate impact from one or more environmental hazards; and experience a disparate implementation of environmental regulations, requirements, practices and activities in their communities" (EPA 2000).*

On the other hand, the European Environmental Bureau defines environmental justice as:

*"Environmental justice means that environmental benefits and burdens have to be shared fairly. Environmental injustice occurs when those with political or economic power exploit the planet's resources to the detriment of poorer communities or the average citizen" (EEB 2018).*

It is important to recognize that the environmental justice movement has its roots in the recognition of discriminatory policies and practices described as environmental racism (Pena 2005). In 1982, Benjamin Chavis, former head of the United Church of Christ's Commission on Racial Justice, defined environmental racism as the:

*"Racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the presence of life threatening poisons and pollutants for communities of color, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the environmental movement" (Chavis 1994).*

Robert Bullard, considered father of the environmental justice movement in the United States, defined environmental racism as:

*"Environmental racism refers to any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color" (Bullard 2001: 160).*

Finally, in recent years and at a global scale, environmental justice has been referred as climate justice, due the unequal impact that climate change has on certain groups due to sociopolitical structures: "Communities of color, people with lower incomes, and indigenous people are on the frontlines of climate and environmental change. We are hit first by extraction, pollution, and damage to the climate, which

makes existing health and economic disparities worse. Yet frontline communities are often left out or are the last to be included in the transition to a healthy, resilient and sustainable future. These principles are our collective approach to equity — reducing uneven barriers to participation and wellbeing — so that all communities thrive” (Front and Centered 2018).

Video: [What Is Environmental Justice?](#)

## Moving forward

- ✓ There is an urgent and imminent need to integrate the principles of environmental justice to current environmental efforts, in and outside of academia. This is, we need to decolonize our methods and practices by recognizing each one's positionality and embracing the principles of fairness and equity.
- ✓ Embrace diversity through the ideals of justice and respect, both on an individual and on an institutional level.
- ✓ Get involved with local communities through community-based approaches that respect the self-determination of these communities. Allow them to speak for themselves.
- ✓ Develop relationships with local communities based on trust, rather than just intellectual interest.
- ✓ Ensure full disclosure of the information and results obtained through any form of collaboration with the members in a community you collaborated with
- ✓ Acknowledge the structural barriers that play into decision-making processes and partner with vulnerable communities as an ally.
- ✓ Create more professional development opportunities for underserved and underrepresented students.
- ✓ Be open to learn from local communities and collaborate with them putting your privilege in service.
- ✓ Get involved in initiatives and actions that use environmental/climate justice as a framework

## Additional resources

- UW Libraries, in collaboration with the Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in this College created an [Environmental Justice Research Guide](#) where you can find books, articles and other media.
- [Principle of Environmental Justice](#) (First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 1991)
- [Principles of Working Together](#) (Second People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 2002)
- [Principles of Climate Justice](#) (2009)
- [Principles for Climate Justice](#) (Front & Centered)

### Environmental Justice Mapping Tools

- [EJSCREEN: Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool](#)
- [Energy Democracy for All](#)
- [Energy Justice Network](#)
- [Environmental Justice Atlas](#)
- [Flood Hazard Maps](#)
- [Justice Map](#)
- [Spatial Justice Test for Race and Income](#)
- [U.S. Scorecard](#)
- [Washington Air Monitoring Network](#)
- [Washington Swimming Beach Closures](#)
- [Washington Tracking Network](#)
- [What's in my Neighborhood?](#)

### Environmental Justice and Policy

- [EPA Environmental Justice Program](#)
  - [Factsheet on the EPA's Office of Environmental Justice](#)
  - [National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\)](#)
  - [EJ 2020 Action Agenda](#)
  - [EJ in Your Community](#)
  - [EJ Collaborative Problem-Solving Model](#)
  - [EJ Collaborative Model: Framework to Ensure Local Problem-Solving](#)
  - [National Environmental Justice Advisory Council \(NEJAC\)](#)
  - [Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice](#)

- [Region 10 Strategic Plan](#) – FY15 - FY18
- [Executive Order 12898](#)- Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations
- [Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities](#) - 2016 Update
- [King County Social Justice Goals](#)
- [Seattle Equity and Environment Agenda](#)
- [Washington Environmental Council](#)

For any suggestions or observations please contact Isabel Carrera Zamanillo at [micz@uw.edu](mailto:micz@uw.edu).

#### **Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

The College of the Environment actively welcomes and engages students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds. If you are interested to learn more about Diversity resources in the College and at UW please contact:

Terryl Ross, Assistant Dean, at [tjross@uw.edu](mailto:tjross@uw.edu) or at **206-221-5038**.

Isabel Carrera Zamanillo, Program Specialist at [micz@uw.edu](mailto:micz@uw.edu) or at **206-221-9316**.