

From the Director's Desk

A central challenge for the environmental justice movement, and for advocates of equitable development, is to move beyond the criticism into solutions. The toll of destruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast cries out for positive, pro-active transformation.

Earlier this year, the City of Richmond, California, in collaboration with Urban Habitat, crafted a resolution to formally establish Richmond's commitment to green economic development. The resolution states, that "economic opportunity, environmental integrity, and societal equity are the foundation upon which sustainable cities can build a better quality of life for its residents."

Unlike traditional forms of economic development, green economic development, if practiced equitably, is uniquely positioned to present solutions for some of the conditions that disproportionately impact low-income communities: environmental and human degradation, lack of quality jobs, and economic decline. In other words, equitable green economic development offers the potential for living-wage jobs in non-polluting industries that provide a clear career ladder for low-income residents.

If we can mobilize this "green wave" opportunity effectively, we can move toward a society where all people live in economically and environmentally healthy neighborhoods, and clean air, land, and water are recognized as fundamental human rights. We envision a world where leaders of the most impacted communities mobilize an inspired, well-informed, and politically engaged constituency to hold decision-makers accountable to the principles of economic, environmental, and social justice, because it is these communities that are best positioned to frame the terms of the green economic development debate so that its true potential is fully realized.

We realize that green economic development is not a guaranteed solution for Richmond or any city facing the multiple challenges of growing unemployment, diminishing affordable housing stock, and a high crime rate, nor should it be viewed as the only solution. But if done right, green economic development can be one piece of the solution. It is up to the cities to proactively and explicitly prioritize and encourage the leadership and participation of its low-income communities of color in its economic development plans, so that the outcomes are equitable for all classes of residents.

In Solidarity,

Juliet Ellis
Executive Director
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