

**Committee:** United Nations Environment Commission

**Issue:** Conceiving methods to resolve the issue of environmental justice being exploited in contemporary society

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## Introduction

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Environmental justice issues revolve around the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens among different communities and social groups. These issues often arise due to systemic factors such as discrimination, socioeconomic disparities, and power imbalances. Environmental justice recognises that marginalised communities, including low-income neighbourhoods, indigenous populations, and communities of colour, have ecological hazards and pollution while limiting access to environmental resources and benefits.

One of the core environmental justice concerns is the unequal exposure to environmental hazards. Many disadvantaged communities are located near industrial facilities, waste disposal sites, and other sources of pollution. These communities often face higher levels of air and water pollution, toxic waste, and contamination, which can lead to serious health results like cancer and respiratory problems that threaten and pollute indigenous land.

Since then, the environmental justice movement has continued to grow and expand its scope in the United States and internationally. It has influenced policy debates, prompted legislative actions, and raised public awareness about the intersection of environmental issues and social justice. Today, environmental justice advocates continue to fight for equitable access to a healthy environment and the inclusion of marginalised communities in decision-making processes.

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## Definition of Key Terms

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### **Environmental justice**

Environmental justice refers to the fair and equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens among all individuals and communities, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or other demographic factors. It recognises that historically marginalised and disadvantaged groups often bear a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards and pollution while having limited access to environmental resources and benefits. Environmental justice seeks to address and rectify these disparities by advocating for the right to a healthy and sustainable environment for all

people. It emphasises the inclusion of marginalised communities in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard, and their concerns are considered in environmental policies and practices.

## Environmentalism

Environmentalism is an ideal philosophy and movement about protecting the environment. Environmentalists attempt to balance the connection between human and natural systems. Therefore, environmentalism also affects the education of natural resources and environmental protection. The main concern for the environment is focused on pollution, soil contamination, and waste.

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## History

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Date	Description of event
1987	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The report of the United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice: The Relationship between Race and the Location of hazardous waste sites was highlighted in the paper "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States". It demonstrated environmental racism and raised public awareness of the problem.</li> </ul>
1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The first National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit is being held in Washington, D.C., and brings together environmental justice organisations and activists.</li> <li>- As a result of the summit, the Principles of Environmental Justice are adopted, emphasising the importance of treating all communities fairly and involving them in environmental decision-making.</li> </ul>
1994	<p>Executive Order 12898</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations."</li> </ul>
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The order directs federal agencies to address environmental justice concerns and avoid disproportionately impacting marginalised communities.</li> </ul>
Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Paris Agreement: The Paris Agreement is a global climate accord adopted by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It aims</li> </ul>

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to mitigate climate change and strengthen the response to its impacts, with a focus on supporting vulnerable communities and promoting sustainable development.

- Growing recognition and activism
  - The exploitation of environmental justice is increasing.
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## Key Issues

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Individuals who tried to address the inequity of environmental protection in their communities started environmental justice. Environmental justice aims to achieve a society where everyone, regardless of their background, can enjoy a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment and where environmental decisions are made just and equitably.

Environmental justice is a concept that emerged in response to the recognition of disproportionate environmental burdens faced by marginalised communities. It evolved as a social movement advocating for fair treatment and equal protection from environmental hazards for all individuals and communities, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other demographic factors.

During the 1960s to 1970s, environmental issues improved their awareness through many activities like the book 'Silent Spring' by Rachel Carson. 'Silent Spring' indicated the seriousness of chemical pesticides and a specific experiment that proves the environmental impacts of chemical pesticides. In 1970, during ECOSOC conferences, peace activist John McConnell announced Earth Day to raise awareness of environmental issues and support environmental protection. Only a few years ago, the main task for environmentalists was raising the consciousness of environmental issues. But nowadays, it's time to solve the social issues caused by the environmental background which controls the health system. In 1982, the predominantly African-American community of Warren County, North Carolina's predominantly African-American community protested a landfill containing toxic waste in their neighbourhood. In Europe, environmental racism has been postulated through Trehan and Kocze that environmental hazards toward Romani communities. In addition, since South Korea explored rapid economic growth, the inequity of environmental problems has focused especially on regions. This event drew national attention to the unequal distribution of environmental burdens, and the term "environmental racism" began to be used to describe the disproportionate exposure of minority communities to pollution and hazardous waste. In 1987, the United Church of Christ (UCC) Commission on Racial Justice released the influential report "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States," which examined the correlation between race and the location of hazardous waste facilities.

The SDGs are a set of 17 global goals adopted by UN member states in 2015 aimed at achieving sustainable development by 2030. The goals include targets related to environmental sustainability, poverty eradication, and social inclusion. SDG 10 specifically focuses on reducing inequalities, including environmental inequalities, within and among countries. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) launched the Environmental Rights Initiative in 2019. This initiative aims to promote the recognition, protection, and enforcement of environmental rights, including the right to a clean and healthy environment. It supports efforts to strengthen legal frameworks, access to justice, and participation of marginalised communities in environmental decision-making. The movement continues to advocate for systemic changes, community empowerment, and the recognition of the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic issues. It strives for a more just and sustainable future where everyone can live in a healthy and thriving environment.

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## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

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### *USA*

The Environmental Justice Movement emerged in the early 1980s in North Carolina, USA, due to a local dispute over toxic waste dumping near a neighbourhood of African-American people. The movement emphasised from the beginning that environmental problems cannot be solved without unveiling the practices of maintaining social injustices. Many of the traditional environmental organisations were targeted by this critique. In the early 1980s in North Carolina, USA, the environmental justice movement emerged due to conflict over toxic waste near African-American people. Environmental injustice in the United States mostly reflects the delicate historical nature of the issue. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines environmental justice as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin or income, concerning the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.” According to the EPA, environmental justice can be accomplished when all societies have the same protection ability from environmental and public health hazards and go through equitable decision-making processes. The state legislature and the federal government in America have been going through the process of identifying impacted societies with health and making sure that all societies have equal access to a healthy environment.

### *Earthjustice*

Earthjustice is a nonprofit environmental law organisation that focuses on protecting the environment, advancing environmental justice, and advocating for the rights of communities and nature. The organisation provides legal representation to individuals, communities, and environmental organisations in cases where they believe the law is not adequately protecting the environment or public health. They work to reinforce and strengthen environmental laws and regulations, and they also engage in policy advocacy to promote sustainable and just environmental policies. In addition to their work in the United States, Earthjustice is also involved in international environmental issues, partnering with organisations and communities around the world to address global challenges.

### *Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice*

Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice is a grassroots organisation that works on environmental justice issues, with a particular focus on low-income communities and communities of colour. Greenaction's mission is to mobilise communities to achieve environmental justice and address environmental health hazards that disproportionately affect marginalised communities. They work in partnership with residents, community organisations, and other stakeholders to address a wide range of environmental issues, including pollution, industrial contamination, and pesticide exposure. The organisation engages in community organising, empowering affected communities to advocate for their rights and demand environmental justice. They provide resources, support, and technical assistance to communities facing environmental challenges, helping them to understand the issues, access information, and develop strategies for action.

### *Environmental Justice Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform (EJHA)*

The Environmental Justice Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform (EJHA) is a national coalition of grassroots organisations and community groups focusing on environmental justice and chemical policy reform in the United States. EJHA works to address the disproportionate impacts of toxic chemicals on low-income communities and communities of colour. EJHA was formed in 2010 and comprises organisations from across the country that are directly impacted by hazardous chemicals and pollution. The coalition aims to promote environmental justice by advocating for policies and practices that reduce toxic exposures and protect communities from the harmful effects of chemicals.

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## Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

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- **E/JECE/CEP/43** - Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (1998.4.21)

- Global environmental justice Mostafa. K.tolba
- **[E/ECE/CEP/WG.5/2001/5** - Workshop on Access to Justice in Environmental Matters under the Aarhus Convention (2001.10.3)
- Judicial handbook on environmental law / Dinah Shelton and Alexandre Kiss; introduction by Hon. Judge Christopher G. Weeramantry (2005)

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## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

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### I. *Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs):*

Environmental Impact Assessments were introduced in the 1970s as a regulatory measure to evaluate the potential environmental repercussions of major development projects prior to their approval. These assessments aim to identify and mitigate adverse environmental impacts. Still, they have been criticised for their limited consideration of the concerns and perspectives of marginalised communities, leading to inadequate resolution of environmental justice issues.

### II. *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act:*

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, enacted to eliminate racial discrimination, is relevant in the context of environmental justice. It prohibits any form of racial, colour, or national origin-based discrimination in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. Although Title VI can be invoked to challenge discriminatory policies and practices disproportionately affecting minority communities, its enforcement has encountered obstacles, such as strong opposing bills from the southern politicians, prompting calls for enhanced implementation measures.

### III. *Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898:*

In 1994, President Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 12898, which directed federal agencies to recognise and address the disproportionate and adverse environmental impacts on minority and low-income populations. Despite being a significant step towards addressing environmental justice concerns, the executive order has been criticised due to gaps in its implementation and enforcement mechanisms.

#### ***IV. Community Right-to-Know Act:***

The Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA), passed in 1986 in the United States, mandates facilities that handle hazardous substances to disclose information regarding chemical releases and waste management practices to the public, including local communities. By increasing public awareness and empowering communities to participate in decision-making processes, the act endeavours to address concerns related to hazardous materials within communities.

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### **Possible Solutions**

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#### ***I. Strengthening International Environmental Agreements:***

In order to address environmental justice on a global scale, nations should collaborate to strengthen existing international environmental agreements, such as the Paris Agreement. These agreements should include specific provisions that explicitly address environmental justice concerns. For instance, they could incorporate principles of equitable distribution of environmental resources, recognition of indigenous rights, and the meaningful involvement of marginalised communities in decision-making processes related to environmental issues. By integrating environmental justice into these agreements, the international community can emphasise the importance of addressing the disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation on marginalised populations and work towards achieving more equitable outcomes.

#### ***II. Integrating Environmental Justice into Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):***

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework for global action on various socio-economic and environmental issues. To effectively address environmental justice, it is important to integrate this concept into the SDGs. This integration would involve incorporating specific targets, indicators, and actions within the goals that specifically address the needs and rights of marginalised communities. For example, the goals could focus on reducing disparities in access to clean air, water, and other environmental resources among different social groups, ensuring the protection of marginalised communities from harmful pollution, and promoting sustainable development practices that prioritise environmental justice concerns.

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