INTERSECTIONS

Environmental and Climate Justice & the NAACP Game Changers
Environmental and Climate Justice and the NAACP Game Changers

Our environment, including climate change, is affected by how societies, communities and individuals function, on many levels. Our environment, including climate change, also increasingly has multiple impacts on our lives. With NAACP’s multi-issue advocacy agenda, climate change is a common thread that runs through all of the sectors in which we are engaged. Thus, there are many opportunities for cross-programmatic collaboration to address these intersections.

I. Voting Rights and Political Representation

GAME CHANGER GOAL: Protect and enhance voting rights and fair representation. Every American will have free, open, equal, and protected access to the vote and fair representation at all levels of the political process. By protecting democracy, enhancing equity, and increasing democratic participation and civic engagement, African Americans will be proportionally elected to political office.

a. Voter Disenfranchisement, Underrepresentation, and Environmental Justice: Whether it’s zoning boards that hold the reins for permitting of toxic facilities that too often land in low income communities and communities of color, or the public utilities/service commissioners who are bestowed with the responsibility of regulating electricity rates, or city council which approves everything from development projects to municipal ordinances on clean air, there are multiple offices that are instrumental in upholding communities’ rights to clean air to breathe, water to drink, and land on which to live. If communities aren’t represented in these offices and if these offices don’t see themselves as beholden to the interests of communities we have the circumstances that exist nationwide and particularly in the South, with cancer clusters, asthma pockets, and areas of concentrated birth defects. In addition to voting for President, Congress, Mayors, and Governors, these smaller, less recognized offices are critical to the survival and wellbeing of communities. Analysis and messaging around representation in these offices and voter engagement over these critical spaces should be an area of collaboration between the Civic Engagement/Voting Rights Department and the ECJP.

b. Disaster, Displacement, Redistricting and Voter Disenfranchisement: Climate change driven disasters, which can result in massive displacement which, as proven by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, results in voter disenfranchisement. Also, with the redistricting that sometimes occurs, due to resulting shifts in living patterns and population distribution, it further complicates matters. Given the heightened social vulnerability of people of color, the likelihood of experiencing displacement and subsequent voter disenfranchisement is elevated. Collaboration between Civic Engagement and the Environmental and Climate Justice departments could result in examining regulations around voting post-disaster and making recommendations to officials regarding how to preserve voters’ rights post disaster contexts.
II. Criminal Justice

a. **Criminalization of Disaster Survivors:** Climate change results in the increase of severe weather events or “natural disasters.” As the most recent examples of hurricanes Katrina and Rita showed us, handling of the chaos following disasters often results in criminalization of the very victims of the disaster, particularly when those survivors are people of color. The shooting of survivors on the bridge in New Orleans is the most stark example. Even more recent tornados in Alabama saw issues arising around profiling of people of color when police have heightened vigilant around “looting.” Another issue which becomes prominent in times of disaster is displacement of prisoners, loss of prisoner records, and impact of disaster on due process for incarcerated persons and others engaged in the criminal justice system. The ECJP and the Criminal Justice Program should develop draft guidance to be incorporated into disaster planning at national and state levels to guard against the criminalization of survivors of disaster and protect the rights of incarcerated persons.

b. **Prisons and Land Contamination:** In New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere, there are documented cases of prisons built on contaminated land, resulting in incarcerated persons and staff drinking toxic water and potentially being exposed to airborne toxins. Too often in these situations, the level of advocacy for prisoner’s rights isn’t on par with the still inadequate advocacy for such violations in communities, or schools.

GAME CHANGER GOAL:
**Equitable dispensation of justice for all**
Everyone will live in safe communities and incarceration will be greatly reduced. Racially motivated policing strategies, disproportionate incarceration, and racially biased, discriminatory, and mandatory minimum sentencing will end.
Criminal Justice cont’d.

c. **Green Enterprise:** This sector spells opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and anti-recidivism programming. Whether it’s through apprenticeships in weatherization/retrofitting, or in post disaster contracting, formerly incarcerated persons can be trained and offered opportunities to engage in these emerging sectors. The ECJP and Criminal Justice Teams can work together to develop demonstration projects, as well as making sure that prison branches of NAACP and other programs know of other programs. The ECJP and Criminal Justice Programs must work to ensure that formerly incarcerated persons aren’t taken advantage of and that they are afforded the same high standard of workers’ rights that are afforded to all. The programs must also ensure that when incarcerated persons’ labor is utilized during post disaster clean up, as transpired after the BP Oil Drilling Disaster, workers’ rights are also upheld.

d. **Pollution and the School to Prison Pipeline**

*See Education Section under Toxic Exposure.*

---

**Economic Justice**

**GAME CHANGER GOAL:** A chance to live the American Dream for all

Every person will have equal opportunity to achieve economic success, sustainability, and financial security.

a. **Economic Vulnerability and Disaster:** Hurricanes Katrina and Rita as well as the tornadoes and flooding of 2011 (and to some extent the recent BP Oil Drilling Disaster) demonstrated how substandard housing stock, reliance on public transportation, under-insurance (home, business, and health) are all economically based vulnerabilities that make African American communities more vulnerable and less resilient in the face of increasing disasters/severe weather events resulting from climate change. The Environmental and Climate Justice Program and the Economic Department can collaborate on examining disaster related legislation, liability limits on corporations, and regulatory measures and how well they ensure protections and support communities in recovering from disaster.
Economic Justice cont’d

a. **Impact of Changing Agriculture Market on Black Farmers:** The impact of climate change on weather patterns has increased droughts, which significantly jeopardizes already vulnerable black farmers. Together, the Economic Program and the Environmental and Climate Justice Program can examine the Farm Bill and other relevant legislation for implications for the plight of black farmers and advocate accordingly.

b. **The Green Economy and Green Jobs:** Given that communities of color have the most to lose with the disproportionate impact of climate change, correspondingly those communities should have the most to gain from the green economy to balance the effect, decrease economically based vulnerability, and increase resilience. The Economic Program and the Environmental and Climate Justice Program can work together on advancing and improving legislation related to green jobs and availability of contracts and also on implementation by facilitating access to programs that ensure that African Americans are getting green contracts and green jobs. We can also work together to establish our own definition of green jobs including setting standards of equity and safety.
i. **Just Transition to Clean Energy:** As we advocate for clean energy alternatives there is great opportunity, as per the above, and significant risk to some as we push for the closure of coal based industry which employs tens of thousands of people nationwide. For those workers, the Economic Program and the EJCP can collaborate on how to ensure a just transition.

ii. **Post-Disaster Employment** is both an opportunity and a risk for communities of color. There is a plethora of avenues for revenue through the numerous contracting options around clean-up, construction, providing equipment and supplies, catering, etc. Working together, the Economic Development Department and the ECJP can ensure that communities of color have equal access to contracting and job opportunities. At the same time, as experienced throughout the BP Oil Drilling Disaster, many of the jobs in post disaster settings are hazardous and involve risk. The ECJ and Economic Programs must ensure that workers’ rights are upheld throughout.

c. **Budget Tracking:** With the growing amount of resources being dedicated to the expansion of the green economy, as with so many other areas, it is critical that communities understand budgets and how to track expenditures and ensure that priorities in spending match community needs and support effective strategies to address community concerns. This is a critical area where the ECJP and the Economic Program can partner in building the capacity of communities to engage in budget tracking.

IV. **Education**

GAME CHANGER GOAL: **A free, high-quality, public education for all**

Every child will receive a free, high quality, equitably-funded, public pre-K and K-12 education followed by diverse opportunities for accessible, affordable vocational or university education.

a. **Environmental Education:** All students should emerge from school with an understanding of the environment. For students of color in particular, it is critical that there is curriculum content on environment and climate change given the disproportionate impact of environmental exposures and the effects of climate change in our communities. As we advocate for equity and quality education, our agenda must include recommendations regarding a robust environmental education component.

b. **Environmental Sciences Pipeline:** As we anticipate the way climate change will increasingly impact the earth and our communities and as we seek to play a leadership role in climate change mitigation and adaptation, we must ensure that there is a cadre of youth of color in the environmental
sciences pipeline who are prepared to don the mantle of leadership. Thus, advocating with foundations for support for scholarships in environmental sciences for students of color and advocating with HBCUs and others to offer course content and study tracks in this area is critical. Additionally, facilitating Youth and College Member participation in environmental and climate justice internships is a key to ensuring that students gain knowledge and experience in this area.

c. **Toxic Exposure and School Performance/Educational Outcomes:**
Multiple toxins (such as lead, mercury, etc.) emitted from coal fired power plants and incinerators, both of which are disproportionately located in communities of color, have been tied to learning challenging conditions such as attention deficit disorder. Also, there are scores of schools across the country that are located on non-remediated brownfields, putting student and staff at risk. School performance is linked to subsequent likelihood of incarceration as well as impacting employment opportunities. When school performance challenges are pervasive in a school for any of these reasons, it can impact resource allocation at that school which affects the entire community. Furthermore, property values are an average 15% lower for properties near toxic facilities and it is the property values that finance our schools. The Education and Environmental and Climate Justice Programs can work together on joint advocacy to reduce harmful toxins, as well as around school finance reforms as funding allocation should not be yet another punishing affect for communities beset by pollution and/or disaster.

d. **Disasters and Schools:** In times of disaster, school attendance, performance, and attrition can be impacted by family stress and disruption. Also schools are often closed in the aftermath of disaster because of damage to the schools as well as the fact that schools are often used as shelters so significant disruption occurs. Furthermore, in disaster prone areas property values are lower and when properties are damaged or destroyed, it impacts property values which again, links back to financing for schools. The Education and Environmental and Climate Justice Departments can work together on joint advocacy around school finance reforms as well as mental health interventions for disaster-impacted students, and minimizing schooling disruptions in the aftermath of disasters.
V. Health

GAME CHANGER GOAL: **Health equality for all Americans including a healthy life and high-quality health care.** Everyone will have equal access to affordable, high-quality health care and racially disparate health outcomes will end.

a. **Nutrition/Childhood Obesity/Food Deserts:** Given the direct effect climate change has on food supply due to its impact on agricultural yields, as well as the indirect influence via the shifting of the financial market as well as the alteration in farming patterns as folks change to mono-cropping for agro-fuel, there are multiple mechanisms for the effects of climate change and methods employed for curbing it on access to affordable and healthy food. Joint advocacy and messaging around the Farm Bill, Climate Legislation, No Child Left Inside, are a few examples, in addition to place based work on EcoDistricts, Sustainable Communities, equity based adaptation planning, etc..

b. **Cancer Clusters & Asthma and Respiratory Illnesses:** The same toxins that are driving climate change, such as those emitted from coal fired power plants, are impacting the health of African Americans. Emissions from various industrial facilities have been tied to disproportionately high rates of asthma in African American communities, as well as cancer clusters. Joint advocacy initiatives can target EPA regulatory provisions, the Clean Air Act, Climate Legislation, legislation and programs around health disparities as well as potentially working with universities on strengthening the evidence base around the linkage between toxic facilities and community health.

c. **Reproductive Health, Family Planning, and Population Control:** Many organizations are emphasizing a linkage between climate change and population. Instead of focusing on consumption and the fact that there are few who are disproportionately gorging on energy resources, they focus on the birth rates of people in communities of color and the global south. Big environmental groups and family planning organizations use images of black and brown people and call for increased resources for family planning as part of climate change mitigation. Counter-messaging is important, by emphasizing reduced consumption/energy conservation versus this troubling trend of differential focus on controlling reproduction in communities of color.

d. **Violence Against Women:** In times of disaster there is a proven link to spikes in violence against women. This is one of many ways that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by climate change. Ensuring that there are mechanisms in place to better protect women and girls from experiencing violence in times of disaster as well as ensuring that justice is served if women and girls are victimized by violence is essential.
e. **Mental Health:** Post disaster incidence of mental health problems significantly spikes as people deal with displacement, death, illness, destitution, etc. As such, special provisions should be in place to ensure access to mental health services. It’s important to encourage integration of mental health provisions in disaster plans, such as through the All Healers Mental Health Alliance and the International Transformational Resilience Initiative, and advocate for accompanying funding for this mandate in disaster related legislation and/or health related legislation.

f. **HIV&AIDS:** With poverty identified as one of the drivers of HIV&AIDS, and given the relationship between increased poverty and climate change, addressing a possible increase in HIV&AIDS in the face of climate change is an important consideration. Work on increasing the body of research linking poverty and HIV&AIDS, particularly among African Americans, can pave the pathway to ensuring that policies designed to alleviate HIV&AIDS address root causes in addition to providing much needed care, support, and treatment.

g. **Health Insurance and Health Care Access:** As demonstrated, African Americans are most exposed to toxins and severe weather events, but have the least access to quality health care. Access to health insurance and care ensures that the disproportionate disease and morbidity is tempered by access to life preserving care.

VI. **Youth Organizing**

a. **Today’s youth are not only the inheritors of the condition in which today’s society leaves the earth, but they are also active contributors/leaders in what we do now.** The Youth and College Division and ACT SO as the youth led nodes of the Association, have active programming in academia and activism! Through the ECJ Environmental and Climate Justice Youth Leadership Initiative, we will engage youth leadership in policy change, entrepreneurship, etc.
International Affairs

Afro-Descendant communities in the US and Afro-Descendant nations in the Global South share several common circumstances as it relates to environmental and climate justice. Exposure to unfettered pollution; Bearing least responsibility for climate change yet experiencing the greatest impact; Elevated vulnerability to the effects of climate change due to myriad other social issues including housing, economic status, health conditions and outcomes; and Relative lack of political power over the systems that govern their lives. There are three critical policy reforms that communities of color in the US and Afro-Descendant communities and nations worldwide share equal stake in advancing: 1) Emissions Reduction; 2) Advancement of Justice Based Clean/Renewable Energy; and 3) Equitable Climate Finance: Polluter Pays Principle. The Environmental and Climate Justice Subcommittee could work with the International Affairs Committee to host events that highlight the common cause between Afro-Descendant Communities in the US and Afro-Descendant nations in the Global South. The ECJP is working with the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance to facilitate the development of the Afro-Descendant Global Climate Justice Initiative with central aims of joint advocacy on emissions reduction, advancing energy efficiency and clean energy, and establishing equitable global climate finance.