

NEW THOUGHTS ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Workers' rights, a sustainable environment, food insecurity and the environmental and restorative justice movements are intersecting and connecting through agriculture and plants. "Brands and retailers should take notice — it is only a matter of time before socially conscious eaters in the U.S. begin demanding information about farmworker conditions," writes Danielle Gould on FoodandTechConnect.com. More than farmworker conditions are at stake — how we use our natural resources affects restaurant workers, cooks, farmers, those on food assistance and those who shop at Trader Joe's. It is the new face of environmental justice.

Food production, processing, distribution, retail and service industries account for over 13 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product, and employ one in five private sector workers. Food workers face higher levels of food insecurity, or hunger, than the rest of the U.S. workforce, according to a new report by PDF grantee, the **DataCenter**. In fact, food system workers use food stamps at double the rate of the rest of the U.S. workforce and only 13.6 percent of the food workers surveyed for this report, "The Hands That Feed Us," earn a livable wage.

Magda, a restaurant worker in Rhode Island who lost her job when she injured her shoulder, told PDF that she often worked overtime with no pay. "How we are humiliated, the injustice and threats became very clear to me when I joined **Fuerza Laboral**. We need to organize so we know what our rights are and then help people fight for what they should be getting."

The DataCenter, based in Oakland, CA, and their partner, the Food Chain Workers Alliance, link workers' rights to food safety. More than half of the workers they surveyed reported picking, processing, selling, cooking and serving food while sick. They note that unsustainable low wages (the median wage is \$9.65/hour) and little access to health benefits (79 percent did not have paid sick days) put our entire food supply at risk.

Gardens and plants also feed the restorative justice movement. The planned Restorative Justice garden at Washington Elementary School in Sacramento, CA is one example, thanks to PDF

grantee, the **Restorative Schools Vision Project (RSVP)**. RSVP focuses on promoting relationships in the school community rather than rules, and treats conflict as opportunities for growth and social learning. "Restorative practices result in fairness and healing without resorting to punishment," they say, and evidence-based research shows that restorative schools significantly contribute to ending the school-to-prison pipeline. "Our priority is keeping kids in school

when they make mistakes, so that they can learn how to correct themselves and make things right."

When the Sacramento City Unified School District secured a five million-dollar

grant to renovate schools and make them more energy efficient and "green," the district held a contest for plans to spend the funds. Fourteen schools entered, including the sixth grade class at Washington Elementary. One of the items on their plan was to build a restorative garden, based on the work done in New Orleans by Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools, which built their own garden in 2010. The garden is meant to be a quiet, peaceful place where kids can talk about conflicts and reconciliation. "Amazingly," reports Marty Solow, a RSVP volunteer at Washington Elementary, "they won first place, and will be getting \$550,000 to build the garden and put in place other energy efficient plans."

As the environmental justice movement has pointed out, low income communities are subject to a disproportionate impact from environmental hazards such as pollution from industrial facilities or resource extraction. In addition to being excluded from



Courtesy of Village Harvest and CISA

the decision-making process, residents experience disparate implementation of environmental regulations, requirements, practices and activities in their communities. Restricted access to safe, nutritious food, combined with targeting of poor communities with tobacco and alcohol advertisements, intensifies many of the environmental health issues already affecting residents. "Intense corporate conglomeration in every segment of the food chain has greatly diminished the quality and biodiversity of our food," the authors of "The Hands That Feed Us" add.

Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), a PDF grantee based in South Deerfield, MA reports that they continue to see "an incredible surge of interest in the importance of a local food supply and how it connects to regional and national farm issues." Americans spend just 13 percent of their household budgets on food, compared to twice that amount or more in countries outside of Europe, Australia, Japan or North America. Food prices are now slated to rise as a result of the worst drought in nearly 50 years in the Midwest. The weather has devastated the corn crop, a staple of processed foods and animal feed as well as the leading farm export. Besides affecting farmers, "It is one extra kick in the stomach" for low-income families, said

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TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING THE BASE INITIATIVE

“An initiative does not last forever” said Dr. Mildred McClain of Harambee House, as the BASE Elders Council decided to bring PDF’s BASE Initiative to a close after ten years. They directed PDF to conduct a review and evaluation process leading to a closing report, illuminating all that was learned and accomplished.

To read the entire report, go to peacedevelopmentfund.org

The BASE Initiative (Building Action for Sustainable Environments) was founded in September of 2002 during a gathering held outside of Atlanta, GA. Close to 50 participants came together representing over 20 organizations working on environmental justice and nuclear issues in their communities. Over the course of four intense days, participants developed the vision for what BASE would become: a true partnership between a foundation and grassroots communities for environmental justice.

After 10 years of organizing together across the country and across the world, the BASE Initiative taught us many important lessons, challenged us in many ways, and ultimately showed us what is possible when a small group of committed communities unite around common goals, unafraid to think outside the box. In looking back on that decade of work, here are a few reflections about working with diverse communities that we hope will continue to benefit all people working for justice.

From the beginning of the BASE Initiative, we recognized and tackled the traditional funder-grantee dynamic, and challenged ourselves to create a model that honors the voices, perspectives, wisdom and power that lies in each member of our community. One of our goals for this initiative was to create a new model of how funders and grassroots communities can work together in authentic partnership, building our movement’s capacity.

BASE meetings brought together Indigenous people, Latino farmworkers, African Americans from the rural south, funders with decades of experience in philanthropy, organizations that had never received a foundation grant, high-school aged youth and elders who were part of the beginning of the environmental justice movement in this country. Working with such a diverse group was part of our strength as well as

our biggest challenge. Cultural differences could lead to misunderstandings, and those misunderstandings could quickly escalate.

“In my community in rural South Carolina,” explained Rev. Brendolyn Jenkins from the **Imani Group**, “it is considered disrespectful to take more than two minutes to introduce yourself to a group. But I have learned through my involvement with BASE that in many indigenous cultures, if you *don’t* spend 15 minutes introducing yourself, *that’s* considered disrespectful.”

Each BASE meeting opened and closed with an interfaith prayer because ceremony is one way in which many of our cultures begin and close all important community activities. It allowed us to engage in a deeper level of conversation. Many of our meetings were held in a BASE member community, often coinciding with a cultural ceremony or festival. Whether it was participating in the spring salmon harvest festival in the Klickitat homeland of Washington, or homecoming weekend in Pine Bluff, AR, we made intentional efforts to immerse ourselves in celebrations of our different cultures.

“This was a way for us to honor all experiences and to recognize that all parties bring resources to the table,” explained former PDF Program Coordinator Kazu Haga. “Our work is about collective liberation, and no one party’s experience is more important than another if we are to achieve that goal.”

As we draw the BASE Initiative to a close, we anticipate that PDF will continue to work with grassroots communities on nuclear and other environmental justice issues, that we will apply all that we learned from BASE to our next cycle of work on these issues, keeping faith with the roots of PDF’s history and remaining true to our principles of elevating the voices of grassroots people and sharing our resources, skills and passions in authentic partnerships. ■



Top: BASE youth
Above: BASE in Mexico

Members of the BASE Initiative

Center for Environmental and Economic Justice, Biloxi, MS

- * Columbia River Education – Economic Development, The Dalles, OR
- * Harambee House: Citizens for Environmental Justice, Savannah, GA
www.theharambeehouse.blogspot.com
- * Defense Depot Memphis TN – Concerned Citizen Committee, Memphis, TN
www.ddmtccc.org
- * Diné Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment, Durango, CO
www.dinecare.org
- * Eastern Navajo Uranium Workers, Prewitt, NM
- Hyde and Aragon Park Improvement Committee, Augusta, GA
- * Imani Group, Aiken, SC
www.theimani.org
- Jesus People Against Pollution, Columbia, MS

Macedonia Baptist Church Environmental and Academic Tutorial Program, Blackville, SC

- * New Mexico Alliance, Chimayo, NM
- * Northwest Social and Environmental Justice Institute, Granger, WA
- * Pine Bluff for Safe Disposal, Pine Bluff, AR
- Proyecto Caribeño de Justicia y Paz – Caribbean Project for Justice and Peace, San Juan, PR
- Shundahai Network, Salt Lake City, UT
- * S.H.A.W.L. Society (Saving our Health, Air, Water and Land), Wellpinit, WA
www.shawlsociety.blogspot.com
- * Tribal Environmental Watch Alliance, (TEWA), Santa Fe, NM
- Tewa Women United, Santa Fe, NM

NOTE: Throughout the 10-year history of BASE, not all of the founding members remained with the initiative until the end. Some groups closed while others left due to a change in their focus, lack of capacity, etc. Groups who maintained an active presence until the end are noted with an asterisk.

In looking back on that decade of work, here are a few reflections about working with diverse communities that we hope will continue to benefit all people working for justice.



At the UN this year: Maehkikaysic Adnan El-Issa, Noeli Pocater, Myriam Sanchez, PDF Board Chair Teresa Juarez

New Thoughts about ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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Chris G. Christopher, senior principal economist at IHS, a consulting firm, to *The New York Times*. “A lot of people in this country live paycheck to paycheck. This is not a good thing for them.”

The DataCenter report points out that market consolidation favoring big business has worsened economic conditions for small and mid-sized food providers more than the Great Recession has done. Responding to the difficulties local farmers face, CISA has established an Emergency Farm Fund in Western Massachusetts. Although the federal government provides loans at low interest for many farms, its ability to provide cash assistance takes up to two years to receive. “There was no place for the community to come to the aid of farmers and no place for farmers to get emergency loans at no interest,” said CISA.

In the breadbasket of America and one of the most fertile areas of California, about one in ten people in Santa Clara County are receiving food assistance. Most are families with children and seniors. PDF grantee **Village Harvest** in San Jose, CA has responded to the problem by harvesting fruit from homes and small orchards for food banks and food agencies to feed people in need. Because a backyard fruit tree usually produces far more fruit than a household can use, there is more than enough to

provide for the community’s hungry — food that might otherwise go to waste. Over 1,000 Village Harvest volunteers now pick so much fruit in a morning, up to 3,000 pounds, that they have become a major source of food in many of the communities they serve. In a twist, they find themselves overloading most food agencies, and needing to manage their distribution partners more carefully. As a result they are shifting more deliveries to the largest food banks.

Village Harvest now helps similar groups get started and grow in communities throughout the country and in Canada. Executive Director Craig Diserens was recognized as a “Local Hero” for community service by the Midpeninsula Community Media Center of Palo Alto this year. “There is a close coupling between doing and seeing the intrinsic benefit,” says co-founder Diserens. “The biggest thing I tell people from other areas to do is just get started.”

The environmental justice movement believes that no one community should be more burdened by environmental hazards than another. That goes for food or the lack thereof. PDF grantees demonstrate that sometimes all it takes to alleviate the burden is redistribution provided by Village Harvest, a bridge loan for farmers from CISA, or teaching kids how to grow their own food and find peace in a garden. They show that justice requires community action. ■



MISSION STATEMENT

The PEACE DEVELOPMENT FUND works to build the capacity of community-based organizations through grants, training, and other resources as partners in the human rights and social justice movements. As a public foundation, we nourish, foster, and encourage the diverse, self-sustaining and economically viable communities that are essential to building a peaceful, just and equitable world.

FOR MANY YEARS, going back to the late 1990s, PDF has been engaged with indigenous peoples, human rights and environmental issues at the United Nations. In fact, individual members of PDF have been involved with these issues and the UN even longer.

Once the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) began in 2002, PDF partnered with other NGOs, mainly the **Flying Eagle Woman Fund**, New York’s American Indian Community House and the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation, in honoring Ingrid Washinawatok, the Menominee woman who, at the time of her death in 1999 at the hands of Colombia’s Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), was co-chair of the UN’s Decade of Indigenous Peoples. This event, where we recognize and honor indigenous leaders and heroines of the movement, has become a signature activity for all connected to the UNPFII.

Through relationships that in some cases go back decades, PDF was deeply involved in the adoption by the UN of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. PDF ensured participation at the UNPFII of many individuals and leaders from the indigenous movements, and has facilitated participation in other structures, such as the Human Rights Council, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

PDF board member Ali El-Issa, husband of Washinawatok, is the principal representative of Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú Tum. His presence on a regular basis at many UN functions continues the great work that Washinawatok accomplished over two decades of work at the UN. El-Issa has opened many doors for grassroots people. He has led PDF’s work at the UN for the last decade, and supported our efforts to exercise our belief that grassroots and community voices are necessary at the UN. ■

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Courtesy of San Francisco Living Wage Coalition

RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATES are looking for jobs — any job. But ones that promote “environmental sustainability,” career terminology that didn’t exist a decade ago, are at the top of their list. More than three million Americans are employed in the production of goods and services that benefit the environment, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. “The clean economy is a pretty small slice of the United States economy. But it’s now bigger than the dirtiest slice, related to production of fossil-fuel based energy,” notes Nancy Folbre, an economics professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

The definition of a “green collar” job is quite broad. They are jobs that help to protect ecosystems and biodiversity; reduce energy, material and water consumption through high efficiency strategies; de-carbonize the economy; and minimize or altogether avoid waste and pollution. For example, Veterans Green Jobs, based in Colorado, trains veterans for work in energy efficiency and other businesses. Rising numbers of veterans are entering the renewable energy business.

In 2012, the clean economy accounted for 2.4 percent of total U.S. employment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics also reported that California had the highest number of green jobs, 338,400, representing 2.3 percent of the state’s total employment. Vermont had the highest percentage of environmentally friendly jobs, at 4.4 percent.

Government lent its support to the clean economy with the Green Jobs Act of 2007. It authorized up to \$125 million in funding to establish national and state job training programs, administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment

Act includes provisions for new jobs in industries such as energy, utilities, construction and manufacturing with a focus toward energy efficiency and more environmentally-friendly practices. And President Obama promised to create five million new environmentally friendly jobs.

PDF grantee, the **San Francisco Living Wage Coalition** (SFLWC) educates, organizes and mobilizes workers to demand that tax dollars and use of public property do not go to businesses that pay poverty wages. The San Francisco Green Jobs Corps is their new on-the-job training program for the green economy. It was originally funded by the San Francisco Department of the Environ-

ment in collaboration with Environment Now to help workers prepare for jobs in the green industry. SFLWC focused on training parents in the welfare-to-work transition and immigrants who because of their status do not have access to government programs.

The San Francisco Green Jobs Corps supports skills development and workforce readiness in addition to ecoliteracy

and environmental stewardship. Program participants conduct environmental outreach activities throughout San Francisco, with an emphasis on neighborhoods in need. They perform green home assessments to help residents save money on their energy bills. Because many in the Green Jobs Corps come from underserved communities themselves, they are able to reach traditionally hard-to-reach audiences and boost community participation in the City’s environmental initiatives.

Despite early success, the San Francisco Department of the Environment stopped funding the program. SFLWC is now in discussion with the San Francisco Labor Council to use funding from a community benefits program to continue the Green Jobs Corps. “This program can serve as a model for transforming workfare into a genuine job training program,” says Campaign Co-Director Karl Kramer. Adds organizer Nora Calderon, “When we want something, we need to do it.”

Another grantee, the **Tennessee Alliance for Progress** (TAP), has become the leading grassroots organization in their state working on green jobs as “pathways to prosperity.” Their programs have four elements: a Green Collar Jobs Task Force, a conference, the Tennessee Green Jobs Network and the Middle Tennessee Women in Green Jobs Project.

As in San Francisco, TAP found that municipal weatherization programs have considerable potential for creating jobs for people with limited formal educations. It also improved the lives of low- to moderate-income residents through energy savings and more comfortable homes. The Mayor’s Office of Environ-

ment and Sustainability is now launching a home energy efficiency program called Nashville Energy Works (NEW) — a name that the Task Force created. “We will use this as a vehicle to promote equity through a High Road Workforce Agreement (hiring people from distressed communities, hiring more minority and women contractors, providing workers with a living wage, doing quality work) linked with community-based workforce development,” they say.

The Middle Tennessee Women in Green Jobs Project educates low-income women about green jobs careers and empowers them to become advocates for women in the clean economy. With a series of workshops and a buddy system that will support these women as they work to achieve their dreams, they learn technical skills as well as leadership. The project will also continue to do grassroots lobbying in support of public policies such as community college green training programs that can move women into green collar jobs, thus allowing them to do meaningful work and become more self-sufficient.

The Tennessee Green Jobs Network was formed after TAP’s first green jobs conference in 2009 and has developed substantial ties to the leading environmental organizations and business partners in Tennessee. The Tennessee Environmental Coalition made green jobs and green economic development its number one priority.

“The Great Recession has been a challenge,” TAP admits. “Our response has been to continue to build allies across sectors and work with the Mayor’s office on the NEW Project as a potential job creation engine.” ■