

## Environmental Justice



Tamara Steger, Ph.D.  
Central European University, Dept. of Environmental Sciences and Policy  
Center for Environmental Policy and Law  
Budapest, Hungary

### “Environment For Europe”: What do we need to build bridges to the future?

- We need:
  - Institutional development including policy integration, coordination, and commitment
  - Information gathering and dissemination
  - Implementation capacity
  - Diverse and inclusive participation & collaboration
  - Common frameworks for understanding and action
  - Financing
  - Political will
  - Education

### How do we meet these challenges? How do we build those bridges?

- With a foundation made of:
  - Justice
  - Equality

### A healthy environment: Not just for some, but for everyone.

- It has been repeatedly shown that certain groups disproportionately suffer environmental harms and/or are disproportionately denied environmental benefits due to discrimination:
  - Certain minority ethnic groups
  - Poor people
  - Least educated segments of society

### International Context for Environmental Justice

- Stockholm Conference (1972) lead to Stockholm Declaration. Principle 1: right to a healthy environment
- UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (1992). Link between human rights and environmental protection. Principle 1. “Human beings .....are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.”
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1963)
- International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979.
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.
- And, more!

### Environmental Justice: What is it?

A condition of environmental justice exists when environmental risks, hazards, investments and benefits are equally distributed **without direct or indirect discrimination** at all jurisdictional levels and when access to environmental investments, benefits, and natural resources are equally distributed; and when access to information, participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environment-related matters are enjoyed by all.

Coalition for Environmental Justice

## Environmental Injustice in Sofia, Bulgaria

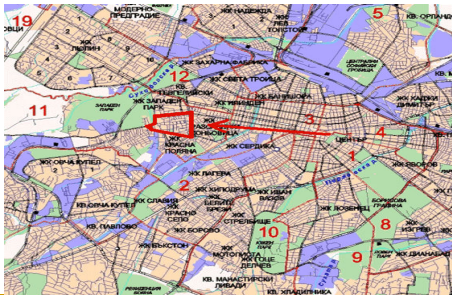
- Poor minority settlement of Fakulteta:
  - Lack of roads; insufficient electricity supply; very old and poorly maintained water supply system; primitive sewerage system.
  - Child died as a result of poor road access by emergency health care workers; water borne diseases, allergies, etc.
  - While the surrounding part of the city has improved infrastructure, this section of the city was left out.

## Sofia, Bulgaria: Fakulteta Settlement



Photo by Keti Medarova

## Fakulteta Settlement, Sofia, Bulgaria



## Women and Children

- While poor and minority populations suffer disproportionate exposure to environmental harms and access to environmental benefits, *women and children within those groups tend to suffer the most.*

## Women and Children: Specific Circumstances

- All over the world, women are more likely to be:
  - More likely to be classified as "in poverty."
  - Be exposed to environmental health problems and issues.
- Gender discrimination exacerbates environmental injustice for women.
- Poor women in traditional societies tend more to home and family life which exposes them and their children to pollution (indoor pollution, scavenging risks, etc.).
- Children are especially vulnerable to poor environmental conditions.
- 40% of the global burden of disease attributed to environmental risk factors falls on children under 5 years of age, who account for only 10% of the world population.

## Building environmental justice in Europe:

- EU Framework for promoting environmental justice
- Recognising the important role of women in the promotion of environmental justice

### Basis for Asserting Environmental Justice in the European Union

- European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) and its Eleven Protocols (1952-1994)
- European Social Charter
- EU Strategy for Sustainable Development
- Anti-Discrimination Directives emphasizing **equal treatment** (adopted pursuant to the revised Article 13 of the Treaty Establishing the EC after its Treaty of Amsterdam amendments)

### A Framework for Promoting Environmental Justice



- Amend 6<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Programme to include EJ
- Incorporate EJ into EU Strategy for Sustainable Development
- Link Aarhus related directives to EU anti-discrimination law
- Strengthen the reference to equity in the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan (CEHAPE)

### Recognising the important role of women in promoting environmental justice



### Improving women's lives improves life for everyone

- Equality, for example, makes "economies grow faster, the poor move more quickly out of poverty and the well-being of men, women, and children is enhanced" (World Bank, 2002)
- Better circumstances for women increases the effectiveness of environmental policies (S. Buckingham et al. 2005)
- There can be serious health consequences if you don't respect and pay attention to human rights. (Mann J., Gostin L., Lazzarini, Z., and Fineberg HV, "Health and Human Rights," Health and Human Rights: An International Journal. Vol. 1, No 1, 1994.)

### Women in their family life are a source for improved policymaking.

- Women's focus on environmental issues tend to "grow out of their concrete, immediate experiences" related to their frequent roles as mothers, domestic workers, caretakers, and members of communities. (Krauss, 1989, 1993; Shiva, 1989; Taylor, 1992).
- Linking on-the-ground environmental experiences in the home and in communities to policymaking (Krauss, 1993).
- Women are often at the forefront of grassroots environmental initiatives to protect or improve the health and well-being of their community (eg. Toxic waste disposal issues).

### How do we build bridges to a better future?

- Improving EU laws and policies to reflect environmental justice
- Improving the lives of women