

# Environmental Racism and the Fight for Equality

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by Naume Guveya

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Environmental hazards are a problem. But what happens when they don't affect everyone equally? What happens when the hazards only impact those already struggling with other hardships and inequalities? Such occurrences have a name – environmental racism.

## What Is Environmental Racism?

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Environmental racism is a term used to describe the unequal burden of environmental hazards that is placed on people of colour and those belonging to low socioeconomic groups. This disproportionate burden is often a result of practices and policies that affect minority groups that live close to areas with heavy pollution.

Put simply, the minority groups lack access to basic environmental resources and a clean environment based on their race and income level. Compared to people not affected by the racism, these people specifically have:

- a high chance of breathing in polluted air
- a higher chance of living near toxic sites and places containing many pollutants such as coal mines, power stations, methane pipelines, major highways and plastic plants.

These people are often exposed to all manner of harmful pollutants that often lead to serious health problems such as cancer, asthma, and high blood pressure. What's worse, climate change is accelerating the devastating impact of environmental racism on these people.

Environmental racism exists all over the world, but why does it even exist?

## Unequal Social Dynamics, Unequal Impact

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Wealth plays a significant role in the prevalence of environmental racism. In most cases, the people of colour and those from low-income groups don't have much say when it comes to determining environmental policies and enforcing environmental regulations.

The result is that the burdens of toxic waste and pollution are not distributed equally among all communities. The minority groups live in areas that are often seen as less valuable and don't get any robust environmental policies. This leaves the minority groups exposed to pollution and toxins compared to their peers in the affluent areas.

## A Different Kind of Unified Movement for Equality

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People all over the world are demanding environmental justice. Activists are calling for change. This is all good, but it's important to adopt the right approach.

Yes, we want change, but there should be a systematic way of doing things if we are to get the most change. Moving at a local scale can have a more significant impact compared to tackling the problem using a universal approach. Different communities have different backgrounds and a one-size-fits-all approach to creating equality just won't work.

The different initiatives to create equality and curb environmental racism can be created on an international scale, but true change will come from adopting these initiatives at the local level. From reducing the toxins, waste and pollution to empowering minority communities and ensuring that local governments give everyone equal protection from environmental hazards and the worst impacts of the climate crisis, working from a local level can be the answer.

For a long time, socioeconomic imbalances have made it hard for minority groups to respond to environmental racism. Speaking up about this challenge and taking the conversation about local change seriously can help ensure that all people, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, are protected.