Exploring the Nexus: Bringing Together Sustainability, Environmental Justice and Equity

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Abstract. In recent years it has become increasingly apparent that the issue of environmental quality is inextricably linked to that of human equality at all scales. This article examines the differing traditions and approaches of environmental justice and sustainability, and explores some of their theoretical bases. It also briefly reviews human rights and environmental security issues in order to discern the potential for common ground between the two main traditions. The authors argue that there are indications of convergence between these traditions and that this convergence is happening primarily through the activities of progressive NGOs, academics and local community organisations world-wide. What is now needed is for governments at local, regional, national and international levels to learn from these organisations and to seek to embed the central principles and practical approaches of environmental justice within emerging sustainable development policy.

Introduction

In recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that the issue of environmental quality is inextricably linked to that of human equality (Agyeman, 1989). Wherever in the world environmental despoilation and degradation are happening, they are almost always linked to questions of social justice, equity, rights and people's quality of life in its widest sense. There are three related dimensions to this.

First, it has been shown by Torras and Boyce (1998) that, globally, countries with a more equal income distribution, greater civil liberties and political rights and higher literacy levels tend to have higher environmental quality (measured in lower concentrations of air and water pollutants, access to clean water and sanitation) than those with less equal income distributions, fewer rights and civil liberties and lower levels of literacy. Similarly, in a survey of the 50 US states,

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Boyce *et al.* (1999) found that states with greater inequalities in power distribution (measured by voter participation, tax fairness, Medicaid access and educational attainment levels) had less stringent environmental policies, greater levels of environmental stress and higher rates of infant mortality and premature deaths. At an even more local level, a study by Morello-Frosch (1997) of counties in California showed that highly segregated counties in terms of income, class and race, had higher levels of hazardous air pollutants. From global to local, human inequality is bad for environmental quality.

The second, related, dimension is that environmental problems bear down disproportionately upon the poor. Whilst the rich can ensure that their children breathe clean(er) air, that they are warm and well housed, and that they do not suffer from polluted water supplies, those at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder are less able to avoid the consequences of motor vehicle exhausts, polluting industry and power generation, or the poor distribution of essential facilities. This unequal distribution of environmental 'bads' is, of course, compounded by the fact that, globally and nationally, the poor are not the major polluters. Most environmental pollution and degradation are caused by the actions of those in the rich high-consumption nations; especially by the more affluent groups within those societies. The emergence of the environmental justice movement in the US over the past two decades was in large part a response to these inequities, as are the growing international calls for environmental justice (Adeola, 2000; Bullard, 2000).

The third dimension is that of sustainable development. The 'new policy agenda' of sustainability emerged after the publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development's Report in 1987, but more fully after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Our interpretation of it places great emphasis upon the need to ensure a better quality of life for all, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems. Sustainability, we argue, cannot be simply a 'green' or 'environmental' concern, important though 'environmental' aspects of sustainability are. A truly sustainable society is one where wider questions of social needs and welfare, and economic opportunity, are integrally related to environmental limits imposed by supporting ecosystems. This emphasis upon greater equity as a desirable and just social goal, is intimately linked to a recognition that, unless society strives for a greater level of social and economic equity, both within and between nations, the long-term objective of a more sustainable world is unlikely to be secured. The basis for this view is that sustainability implies a more careful use of scarce resources and, in all probability, a change to the high-consumption lifestyles experienced by the affluent and aspired to by others. It will not be easy to achieve these changes in behaviour, not least because this demands acting against short-term self-interest in favour of as yet unborn generations and 'unseen others' who may live on the other side of the globe. The altruism demanded here will be difficult to secure, and will probably be impossible if there is not some measure of perceived equality in terms of sharing common futures and fates.

In this paper, we make no claims to being comprehensive in our treatment of this vast, interdisciplinary area. In effect, we are exploring the nexus between the ideas of sustainability and environmental justice. Our interpretation of sustainability is that its focus should be to ensure a better quality of life for all and that this should be done in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems. Moreover, by 'development' we mean both

physical and human development. In addition, we fully endorse Middleton and O'Keefe's point that

> unless analyses of development begin not with the symptoms, environmental or economic instability, but with the cause, social injustice, then no development can be sustainable (Middleton and O'Keefe, 2001, p. 16).

Despite the very real obstacles facing greater linkages, and the arguments of those such as Dobson (1999) who believe the two ideas to be politically incompatible—although Dobson is talking principally about 'environmental' sustainability, rather than our broader conception of 'sustainability'—it is felt by many that justice and sustainability are intimately linked and mutually interdependent. Goldman (1993, p. 27) goes so far as to suggest that "sustainable development may well be seen as the next phase of the environmental justice movement". We agree with this assessment. Indeed, there is evidence that this linkage of ideas and practical action is already happening at the local level in organisations such as Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE) in Boston, the Center for Neighborhood Technologies (CNT) in Chicago and the Urban Habitat Program (UHP) in San Francisco, who are operating within an environmental justice framework (Bullard, 1994) but who are also exploring the emerging terrain of sustainable development and the development of sustainable communities. For instance, the mission of UHP is "building multicultural, urban environmental leadership for socially just and sustainable communities in the San Francisco Bay Area" (ECO and UHP, 1998, p. 21). Organisations outside the US, such as Friends of the Earth Scotland and the South African Exchange Programme on Environmental Justice (SAPEJ) are also noteworthy in this respect.

But the varied discussions that are taking place—from local issues to global ones, from theoretical debates to policy implementation, from neo-liberalism to New Zealand—come at a critical time when the first tangible successes of sustainability policies, and movements for social and environmental justice, are being eroded by both the processes and products of globalisation. Due to the increasingly competitive nature of the global economy, multinational corporations (MNCs) are maintaining profits by relying on unsustainable forms of production. The enormous financial gains that are being made by those fortunate enough to benefit from neo-liberal economic policies come with large social and ecological costs in terms of higher pollution levels, greater resource exploitation, less protection for workers and massive social and cultural dislocation.

However, not all peoples bear these costs equally. As has traditionally been the case, companies usually locate their dirtiest businesses in areas that offer the path of least political resistance. Thus, in the US, Europe and around the world, it is the least politically powerful and most marginalised sectors of the population who are being selectively victimised to the greatest extent by environmental crises. The causes and effects of environmental injustice and unsustainable production are becoming increasingly related in places as far apart as the Mississippi Chemical Corridor in Louisiana, Papua New Guinea, Irian Jaya in Indonesia, the Niger delta in Nigeria, the Brazilian Amazon and Durban's South Basin in South Africa, spurring coalitions between advocates of sustainable development on the one hand, and environmental justice and human rights on the other.

In the remainder of this article, we want to lay the foundations of this debate by briefly tracing the emergence and development of ideas about sustainability and environmental justice, and the nexus, or common ground in between them. Both these ideas have moved to the fore in public policy circles in many countries in recent years.

However, while the sustainability agenda has been advanced in the more formal policy-making arenas of government at all scales and levels from the local (for example, UK local government), through state (for example, Vermont), and national governments (e.g. The Netherlands and Sweden) to the international arena (for example, the Earth Summit in 1992 and the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg) as well as in a growing number of businesses, environmental justice agendas have achieved prominence primarily as a result of grassroots organising, advocacy and action. Whilst one could argue that environmental justice agendas are primarily local, and thus different from the multiscalar sustainability agenda(s), this is changing rapidly, especially since the recent United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) 'Racism and Public Policy Conference' in Durban which adopted a position paper on international environmental racism (Bullard, 2001).

Similarly, it could be argued that, while sustainability advocates have concentrated on 'futures'—on developing new policy and strategic directions—environmental justice advocates have tended, because of a variety of constraints, to focus on countering the effects of currently inadequate policies and strategies, together with the power asymetries that undermine the quality of life of disproportionately burdened groups.

An examination of the development of the two agendas will prove useful in determining the potential for, benefits of and obstacles to more broadly based ideological and practical linkages.

Sustainability

The surge in material in recent years dealing with the concept of sustainability and its action-oriented variant sustainable development, has led to competing and conflicting views over what the terms actually mean, and what is the most desirable means of achieving the goal. According to Redclift (1987), sustainability as an idea can be traced back to the 'limits to growth' debates of the 1970s, and the 1972 UN Stockholm Conference. The single most frequently quoted definition of sustainable development comes from the World Commission on Environment and Development who argued that

> sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987, p. 43).

This definition implied an important shift away from the traditional, conservation-based usage of the concept as developed by the 1980 World Conservation Strategy (IUCN, 1980), to a framework that emphasised the social, economic and political context of 'development'. By 1991, the IUCN had modified its definition. Along with that of the WCED, it is the most used definition:

> to improve the quality of life while living within the carrying capacity of ecosystems (IUCN, 1991).

However, unlike our working 'definition' mentioned earlier ("the need to ensure a better quality of life for all, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems"), neither the WCED nor the IUCN definition specifically mentions justice and equity, which we hold to be of fundamental importance.

McNaghten and Urry argue that

> since Rio, working definitions of sustainability have been broadly accepted by governments, NGOs and business. These tend to be cast in terms of living within the finite limits of the planet, of meeting needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs and of integrating environment and development (McNaghten and Urry, 1998, p. 215).

More recent thinking, according to Jacobs (1999) and McNaghten and Urry, is the

> growing impetus within the policy making community to move away from questions of principle and definition. Rather they have developed tools and approaches which can translate the goals of sustainability into specific actions, and assess whether real progress is in fact being made towards achieving them (McNaghten and Urry, 1998, p. 215).

Prominent among these tools, they argue, are sustainability indicators. Within the sustainability discourse itself there have also emerged two divergent trends—that of strong/hard sustainability versus weak/soft sustainability (Jacobs, 1992). Hard or strong sustainability implies that renewable resources must not be drawn down faster than they can be renewed—i.e. that (critical) natural capital must not be spent: we must live off the income produced by the capital. Soft or weak sustainability accepts that certain resources can be depleted as long as they can be substituted by others over time. Natural capital can be used up as long as it is converted into manufactured capital of equal value. The problem with weak sustainability is that it can be very difficult to assign a monetary value to natural materials and services, and it does not take into account the fact that some of these cannot be replaced by manufactured goods and services. Strong sustainability thus maintains that there are certain functions or ecosystem services that the environment provides that cannot be replaced by techno-fixes.

Environmental Justice

The roots of the US environmental justice movement can be traced to citizen revolts against the siting of toxic waste or hazardous and polluting industries in areas inhabited predominantly by people of colour. A 1983 Government Accounting Office Report (GAO, 1983) indicating that African-Americans compromised the majority population in three of the four communities of the south-eastern US where hazardous waste landfills were located and the landmark report *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* (United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, 1987) contributed significantly to the development of a public awareness of 'environmental racism' (Bullard, 1993,1994, 1999). Thus arose the traditional definition of environmental injustice—that people of colour are forced, through their lack of access to decision-making and policy-

making processes, to live with a disproportionate share of environmental 'bads'—and thus to suffer the related public health problems and quality-of-life burdens. Environmental justice activists claim that the 'path-of-least-resistance' nature of locational choices within our economy functions to the detriment of people of colour, and, moreover, this disproportionate burden is an intentional result (Portney, 1994).

In addition, studies have shown that not only are people of colour more likely to live in environmentally degraded and dangerous places, but the amount of environmental and public health protection afforded these groups by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is substantially less than that generated for whites and more wealthy people (Lavelle and Coyle, 1992). Furthermore, claims of environmental racism point to the limited participation of non-whites in environmental affairs and the lack of public advocates who represent minority and low income communities (Pulido, 1996; Camacho, 1998). Advocates of environmental justice argue that the victims of environmental inequities will only be afforded the same protection as others when they have access to the decision-making and policy-making processes that govern the siting of hazardous materials and polluting industries (Faber, 1998). Environmental justice advocates go beyond so-called 'fair-share principles', which maintain that every municipality should have an equal share of environmental 'goods' and 'bads', regardless of the race or class of its population (distributional justice). Instead, they argue that environmental bads should be eliminated at the source (procedural or process justice) (Faber, 1998).

The environmental justice movement has benefitted from several successes in recent years. Although traditionally a movement built upon the grassroots organising and activism characteristic of other social action movements, environmental justice advocates have of late been able to secure official government responses to their demands. The establishment of an EPA Office of Environmental Justice, the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC), and the issuance of Executive Order 12898 by President Clinton's administration, directing federal agencies to ensure that minority communities are not disproportionately affected by environmental burdens, all signal the recognition of the movement (Sandweiss, 1998). The development of environmental justice policy federally, and at the state level, is reflective of a growing coalition between mainstream environmental movements, traditionally concerned about wilderness preservation and conservation, and minority groups with concerns for basic civil rights such as employment security and public health. The inherent organisational and ideological conflicts between the élitist, preservationist goals of mainstream environmental movements and the greater social equity concerns of the environmental justice movement have meant, however, that this linkage has been slow to develop (Camacho, 1998).

One explanation for the success of the environmental justice movement can be seen in the mutual benefits of a coalition between environmental and social concerns. As the mainstream conservationist ideologies of wilderness preservationists received criticism for being élitist, the benefits of adopting more of a social justice perspective on environmental issues, and the broadened base of support that this perspective would enable, became recognised (Ringquist, 1998). Similarly, advocates of a social justice perspective on environmental issues realised the increased credibility, resources and support in which a coalition with the mainstream organisations would result. Perhaps the key reason for the

success of the environmental justice movement, however, can be attributed to its ability to tap into the discourse and rhetoric of the civil rights movement (Camacho, 1998; Sandweiss, 1998; Taylor, 2000). Sandweiss shows how the collective action frame of the civil rights movement—which emphasised such values as individual rights, equal opportunities, social justice, human dignity and self-determination—provided a master frame through which victims of disproportionate exposure could articulate their concerns (Sandweiss, 1998). The success of the environmental justice movement in linking environment, labour and social justice into a master frame through which to communicate claims and clarify goals and grievances to others, and to create a powerful 'environmental justice paradigm', has been extensively analysed by Taylor (2000). This, she argues

> is the first paradigm to link environment and race, class, gender, and social justice concerns in an explicit framework (Taylor, 2000, p. 42).

Emerging Voices for Justice

The environmental justice movement developed in the US in response to concerns about the uneven distribution of environmental risks among certain groups of people, especially those of colour. Agyeman, talking about environmental justice in the UK, notes that

> it was, in its most specific sense, aimed at people of colour (Bullard, 1994) and is the term used by activists. However, because of its increasingly broad usage, especially outside the US, it will be used ... to include poor and disadvantaged groups as well. As Cutter (1995, p. 113) notes "environmental justice ... moves beyond racism to include others (regardless of race or ethnicity) who are deprived of their environmental rights, such as women, children and the poor" (Agyeman, 2000, p. 7).

In many other European countries, such as Scotland (Scandrett *et al.*, 2000), class issues and issues of exclusion, not race, are to the fore in environmental justice debates.

The international dominance of the US experience within the environmental justice discourse is unsurprising given the history and experience of its grass-roots communities, and its linkages with the civil rights movement. Nevertheless, it is clear from the cases around the world that other countries have recognised the links between environmental exclusion and social exclusion, and between environmental degradation and economic exploitation. In some instances, such as in the UK, there have been initiatives that have sought explicitly to link race and racism to environmental issues.

The Black Environmental Network (BEN), for example, created in the late 1980s, was an early UK initiative bringing together black and ethnic minority organisations to address environmental concerns. Its major campaign at the time was about black access to the British countryside, which was, and still is, seen as an exclusive, ecological or white space (Agyeman and Spooner, 1997) which restricts black recreational access because of fears of racism. Many would argue that this is an access issue, not strictly an 'environmental justice issue', but according to one definition of environmental justice, it includes "the equal distribution of environmental benefits" which includes "the provision of access

to open space" (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2000, p. 2). In addition, a case could be made for access being an 'environmental right' (Cutter, 1995). Increasingly, therefore, environmental justice is being seen not only as being about stopping 'bads', but about promoting 'goods' and being able to experience quality environments and environmental quality.

Although there are examples of explicit environmental justice actions in other parts of the world outside the US—the UK, the Indian sub-continent, Nigeria, South Africa and Australia are clear examples—few if any places have developed an 'environmental justice paradigm' (Taylor, 2000) including the environmental justice vocabulary and range of organisations which exist in the US. This does not mean, of course, that there is no experience of, or understanding of, US-style environmental justice issues, or that political activity is somehow non-existent: far from it. There are political struggles around the world which are clearly evident both in traditional siting issues and in areas such as housing, work or opposition to new developments. In this sense, the discourse of environmental justice may be seen as a unifying process, bringing together diverse situations and sharing understandings and experiences. In some countries, an environmental justice discourse is emerging. In the UK context, Agyeman argues that

> What is clearly happening under New Labour, as it was in the US when Clinton took office, is that environmental and sustainability policy discourses and claims are beginning to be re-framed and this is being driven by NGO activists and policy entrepreneurs. Instead of being framed within a 'green', or predominantly 'environmental' agenda, these discourses are being refocused around quality of life, using the notions of *justice, rights* and *equity* (Agyeman, 2000, p. 8).

Sustainability *and* Environmental Justice

As we have said, it is the intent of this paper to map the nexus—the common ground between both the concepts of sustainability and environmental justice, and their practical actions. This means, as Haughton has argued

> acknowledging the interdependency of social justice, economic well-being and environmental stewardship. The social dimension is critical since the unjust society is unlikely to be sustainable in environmental or economic terms in the long run (Haughton, 1999, p. 64).

Despite this criticality, justice and equity aspects of sustainability are only now beginning to be better understood (Boardman *et al., 1999*, Agyeman, 2000) in terms of 'environmental space' (McLaren *et al., 1998;* Carley and Spapens, 1997), 'footprinting' (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996) and 'asset-based' approaches (Boyce and Pastor, 2001). Essentially, therefore, our question is: 'How can sustainability theory and initiatives benefit from environmental justice's focus on equity and justice issues?'

One set of questions worth asking here relates to reference points, terminologies and discourse convergence and divergence. To a certain extent, both environmental justice and sustainability advocates cover similar issues (see Taylor, 2000, for a thorough comparison of the issues covered by the 'new environmental paradigm' and the 'environmental justice paradigm'), but their

discourses are structurally and syntactically different. This can, in large part, be attributed to the fact that the environmental justice movement—built, as it is, on the model of the civil rights movement—has (re)framed the discourse of environmentalism, using what Taylor (2000, p. 515) has characterised as "elaborated master frames ... which are ... more inclusive: they are more accessible to aggrieved groups that can use them to express their complaints". The framing of environmental justice has thus created a very accessible discourse that those in disproportionately affected groups can identify with. The same is not so true within the sustainability movement, where the discourse, being more futures-oriented, is much less tangible for many. However, where convergence or co-operation has happened, the results have been excellent.

Schlosberg (1999, p. 194) argues that there are a growing number of "examples of cooperative endeavours between environmental justice groups and the major organisations". This co-activism on sustainability and environmental justice issues can be found in local fights for just transport (see, for instance, Heart and Burrington, 1998; Bullard and Johnson, 1997), community food security (Gottlieb and Fisher, 1996; Perfecto, 1995), sustainable communities and cities (Roseland, 1998; Rees, 1995; Haughton, 1999) and in Friends of the Earth Scotland's environmental justice campaign (slogan: "No less than our right to a decent environment; no more than our fair share of the Earth's resources") (Friends of the Earth Scotland, 2000).

Some have argued that sustainability and environmental justice will come into conflict because of the environmental justice movement's primary focus on the issue of social equity and the focus of 'environmental sustainability' on green issues. (Dobson, 1999). While the rhetoric of sustainability (as opposed to 'environmental' sustainability) has traditionally encompassed a wider set of policy goals and social groups, the environmental justice concept has addressed a more focused constituency marginalised by both race and class. Some, such as Faber (1998), would argue that these putative conflicts might be avoided if emerging linkages between the environmental justice movement and broader movements devoted to human rights that have arisen in response to unsustainable modes of production and outright exploitation of the environment and working classes by MNCs were concretised.

With the transformation of the global economic system and the declining importance of national and state boundaries with regard to trade and pollution, the justice–sustainability coalition is also now being addressed at the broader level of transnational activism through the skirmishes in Seattle, London, Washington, Vienna and, most recently, Quebec, and in the policy debates of international environmental regimes.

Rights

International calls for justice considerations to be incorporated into sustainability policies usually focus on intergenerational equity and on *intra*generational equity between what have been traditionally referred to as the core, industrialised nations in the North, and the peripheral, developing nations in the South. The notion of justice can be seen in reactions against the social costs of unsustainable natural resource extraction such as the case of the destruction of mangrove swamps by shrimp exporters (Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1999), the environmentally degrading practices of oil companies in West Africa (Adeola,

2000,), and the bio-prospecting of agricultural biotechnology companies (Smith, 1999). Activists claim that the injustices caused by MNCs represent a major human rights violation against the local people who are caught in the path of globalisation, and describe these violations as 'ecological imperialism' (Adeola, 2000). They argue that the right to a clean and safe environment is an important and essential human right that should not be denied on the basis of race, class, ethnicity or position in the global economic system (Adeola, 2000; Sachs, 1995; Hartley, 1995; Johnston, 1995). This argument is reflective of greater concerns for social justice issues in the environmental movement, which is often blamed for paying too much attention to issues of environmental quality, such as nature and biodiversity (important though these are) while other basic human rights, equity issues and needs remain unprotected (Agyeman, 2001).

Following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948, the Council of Europe passed the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in Rome on 4 November 1950. Of especial relevance in environmental justice and sustainability terms is Article 14 on 'The Prohibition of Discrimination' which states that

> the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status (Council of Europe, 1950, Article 14).

Liepetz (1996, p. 223) has argued that we need "new rights and obligations to be incorporated within social norms" involving "the recognition at first moral, of new rights, new bearers of rights and new objects of rights". Adeola (2000, p. 687) talks of the "need to frame environmental rights as a significant component of human rights". The recognition of 'human environmental rights' has led to an overlap of international environmental and human rights law, as can be seen especially in the 1999 Aarhus Convention on 'Access to Information, Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters', which recalls Principle 1 of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment and Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. The Convention is therefore unique in being the first to ensure citizens' rights in the field of the environment. It implies *substantive rights* (right to a cleaner environment) and guarantees *procedural rights* (right to participate) to European citizens. It states, as the objective of Article 1, that

> in order to contribute to the protection of the right of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being, each party shall guarantee the rights of access to information, public participation in decision making, and access to justice in environmental matters in accordance with the provisions of this Convention (UNECE, 1999, Article 1).

Environmentalists are also increasingly questioning the justice and equity implications of other international agreements, especially those related to trade or economic development. There is great (and underresearched) potential for the notions of environmental justice, human rights and sustainability to permeate

environmental regimes and international policy and agreements. Indeed, it is being increasingly recognised that one of the best ways to protect environmental rights is to uphold the basic civil and political rights of the individual (Sachs, 1995). Furthermore, once these ideas become enshrined in policy, they have the capability to enable legal challenges to existing practices upon which they could not make a previous impact. An example of this confluence of activism, policy and law can be seen in recent developments surrounding the use of Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to prove discriminatory intent in environmental injustice cases in the US.

The ideas of sustainability and justice are also being used to influence policy change at the global level. The recent Earth Charter (2000) represents an initiative to form a global partnership that hopes to recognise the common destiny of all cultures and life-forms on earth and to foster a sense of universal responsibility for the present and future well-being of the living world. The Earth Charter Initiative was launched in 1994 by the Earth Council and Green Cross International, and is now overseen by the Earth Charter Commission in Costa Rica. The current draft of the Charter was produced at the Earth Charter meeting at UNESCO headquarters in Paris in March 2000, after revisions by over 40 national Earth Charter committees. The Charter stresses the need for a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community (Earth Charter, 2000).

The set of principles that are outlined in the document reflect the necessary and inherent linkages between the ideas of sustainability and justice that will enable the development of this shared vision. The four principles that constitute the basis of the document are: respect and care for the community of life; ecological integrity; social and economic justice; and democracy, non-violence and peace. It is hoped by the members of the Commission that the Earth Charter principles find expression in individual lifestyles, professional and organisational work ethics, educational curricula, religious teachings, public policy and government practices, and that the principles will be endorsed by the United Nations by the year 2002 (Earth Charter, 2000).

Security

One final consideration is the relationship of the environmental security agenda to sustainability and justice concepts. In recent years, a huge literature on the subject of conflicts arising from environmentally degraded communities or scarcity of natural resources has permitted the environmental security paradigm to enter into post-Cold War mainstream policy discussions. In the absence of a Cold War enemy, military strategists have identified 'the environment' as a flashpoint; a potential source of conflict. Authors writing on the subject have documented the conflicts that can emerge as a result of ecological degradation and scarcity, particularly in developing countries where there is great competition for land and resources (Tuchman-Mathews, 1989; Homer-Dixon, 1994; Kaplan, 1994). Deudney and Matthew (1999), however, argue that much of the empirical evidence for scarcity-induced conflict upon which the environmental security literature is based rests on 'contested grounds' while Hartmann (1998) notes the lack of attention paid in the environmental security literature to the role of MNC interests in environmental degradation.

Conclusion

Hitherto, the two discourses and traditions of environmental justice and sustainability have developed in parallel and, although they have touched, there has been insufficient interpenetration of values, framings, ideas and understandings. The US environmental justice movement has always clearly understood that the vocabulary of environmental justice should be underpinned by ecological principles. The 1991 Principles of Environmental Justice provide this theoretical underpinning (People of Color Environmental Summit, 1991). Nevertheless, it has to be recognised that much of the practice of environmental justice has been reactive: an inevitable response to external threats to already disadvantaged communities. In this sense, environmental justice and Taylor's 'environmental justice paradigm' may be understood as a new, inclusive vocabulary for long-established struggles.

In contrast, sustainability has different origins. Whereas the environmental justice movement can be understood as a grassroots or 'bottom–up' political response, the sustainability agenda emerged in large part from international processes and committees, governmental structures, think-tanks and international NGO networks. In this sense, sustainability as a policy approach can understood as a more exclusive, 'top–down' phenomenon. Paradoxically, however, the implementation of sustainability is generally seen as being through local action. Perhaps the most important and successful outcome of the 1992 Earth Summit was the commitment to Agenda 21 and the Local Agenda 21 process world-wide. Despite the undoubted yet patchy success of this initiative (Southey, 2001), it is clear that, whilst there has been increasing recognition of justice and equity issues, these have yet to be translated into action.

There are encouraging signs that this constructive dialogue is emerging, and it is our contention that this is both essential and overdue. In the main, this dialogue is restricted to progressive NGOs, academics and local community organisations world-wide. What is now needed is for governments at local, regional, national and international levels to learn from these organisations and to seek to embed the central principles and practical approaches of environmental justice into sustainable development policy. Whilst many if not most governments at all levels have adopted some kind of commitment to sustainable development, few—if any—recognise the importance of placing this within a context of social justice, equity and human rights. The need to ensure that public policy—environmental or otherwise—does not disproportionately disadvantage any particular social group must be a precondition for a just and sustainable society.

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