

Trinational workshop for the creation of a Communities for Environmental Justice Network



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Executive Summary

Climate change is contributing to an increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events across North America, including floods, hail, hurricanes, extreme heat, drought, and wildfires. Each community faces unique threats and within each community, diverse people face a range of barriers based on intersectional factors, such as race, color, income level, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and/or disability. Many communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental burdens, ranging from pollution to climate change related impacts. Efforts to adapt to climate change must act to advance climate justice and more broadly environmental justice. This includes addressing and minimizing social, gender, racial, and intergenerational inequities, which requires diverse perspectives at the table—including youth and persons with disabilities. It also includes prioritizing populations and communities at greater risk of climate change impacts—e.g., due to historical and ongoing practices (including environmental injustice) and policies that shape lived experiences, capacity, and access to resources. The disproportionate harmful social, economic, and public health impacts on specific populations, are felt most by those who have the fewest resources to cope effectively when damage and disruption occurs (IPCC, 2022). Despite a wide variety of challenges, local community members are joining forces to strengthen their collective resilience in an uncertain future.

In September 2021, the [Commission for Environmental Cooperation](#) (CEC) launched the [Communities for Environmental Justice Network](#) (CEJN) project. The project aims to strengthen the capacity of North American Indigenous, local, disproportionately impacted, marginalized, and/or underserved communities to address environmental justice concerns in the context of climate change. The project supports the creation of a trilateral network to facilitate the exchange of community-based expertise, lessons learned, and practical guidance between network participants. Project development is guided by the CEJN Steering Committee, consisting of representatives and experts appointed by the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States.





The CEJN hosted a trinational workshop from November 16th to 18th 2023, in Oaxaca, Mexico, to examine opportunities for creating a knowledge exchange network linking like-minded groups. The event was attended by representatives from 13 environmental justice (EJ) organizations across North America, including two from the United States, six from Mexico, and five from Canada. Collaborative games, knowledge sharing, and brainstorming activities helped build trust between participants as they traded community-based success stories, strategies, and lessons learned. Trinational Workshop participant Omar Muhammad from the Lowcountry Alliance, South Carolina, US, observed that the values of his organization were shared by the larger collective: “As an organization, we believe in collaborative work, and we achieve a lot more together than we would apart.”

After comparing resource strengths and gaps, participants identified practical opportunities to accelerate resilience in their communities by pooling their collective resources. For example, the Canadian and American groups had a wealth of experience with government advocacy, college and university research partnerships, and educational programming, that could help address knowledge gaps faced by their Mexican counterparts. The Mexican groups, on the other hand, had notable expertise rebuilding Indigenous cultural heritage, language, and land-based knowledge. They also excelled at supporting community-based leadership opportunities for Elders, youth, and women, all of whom could directly benefit their American and Canadian colleagues. All participants noted that limited access to funding presented barriers to the continuity of core operations, community-based project implementation, or both. Workshop participants unanimously agreed that creating a Trinational Network to connect members with needed resources, advice for overcoming project barriers, and the support and encouragement from others, was vital in helping environmental justice initiatives to advance across North America.

As the Trinational Workshop ended, participants committed to working together in 2024 to create an online story map, featuring participant profiles and resources, and hosting knowledge-sharing webinars with the public. The Communities for Environmental Justice Network strives to help all community members work together to adapt and thrive in a changing climate. The Network aims to formalize its structure and expand its membership base in 2025 and by scaling up efforts to strengthen community-based environmental justice initiatives across North America.



Communities for Environmental Justice Network

Results

During the workshop, participants spoke of the threats they face due to climate change and environmental injustices, shared the strategies they have developed, and detailed their needs for meeting these challenges. What can be retained from the stories they shared is that although the participating environmental justice groups face diverse climate change-influenced challenges and each possesses unique resource strengths and gaps, this diversity of knowledge and experience represents the core strength of the trinational network. Throughout North America, participants noted that drought, wildfires, floods, changing weather patterns, and changing habitats are negatively impacting their communities. Groups from Canada and Mexico noted disproportionate impacts on Indigenous Peoples, particularly Elders / seniors, and youth. In all three countries, intersecting challenges for low-income residents included food insecurity and barriers to accessing affordable housing, education and employment. Mexican participants highlighted disproportionate social, political, economic, and environmental impacts faced by women. Analyzing resource strengths and gaps by country highlighted the critical role the network could play in fostering knowledge exchange between nations and building on the wealth or experience and expertise that are distinct yet complementary. Ultimately, workshop participants agreed that by participating in the Trinational Network in a group setting, they can be stronger together.

References

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022). *Climate change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryVolume.pdf>



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