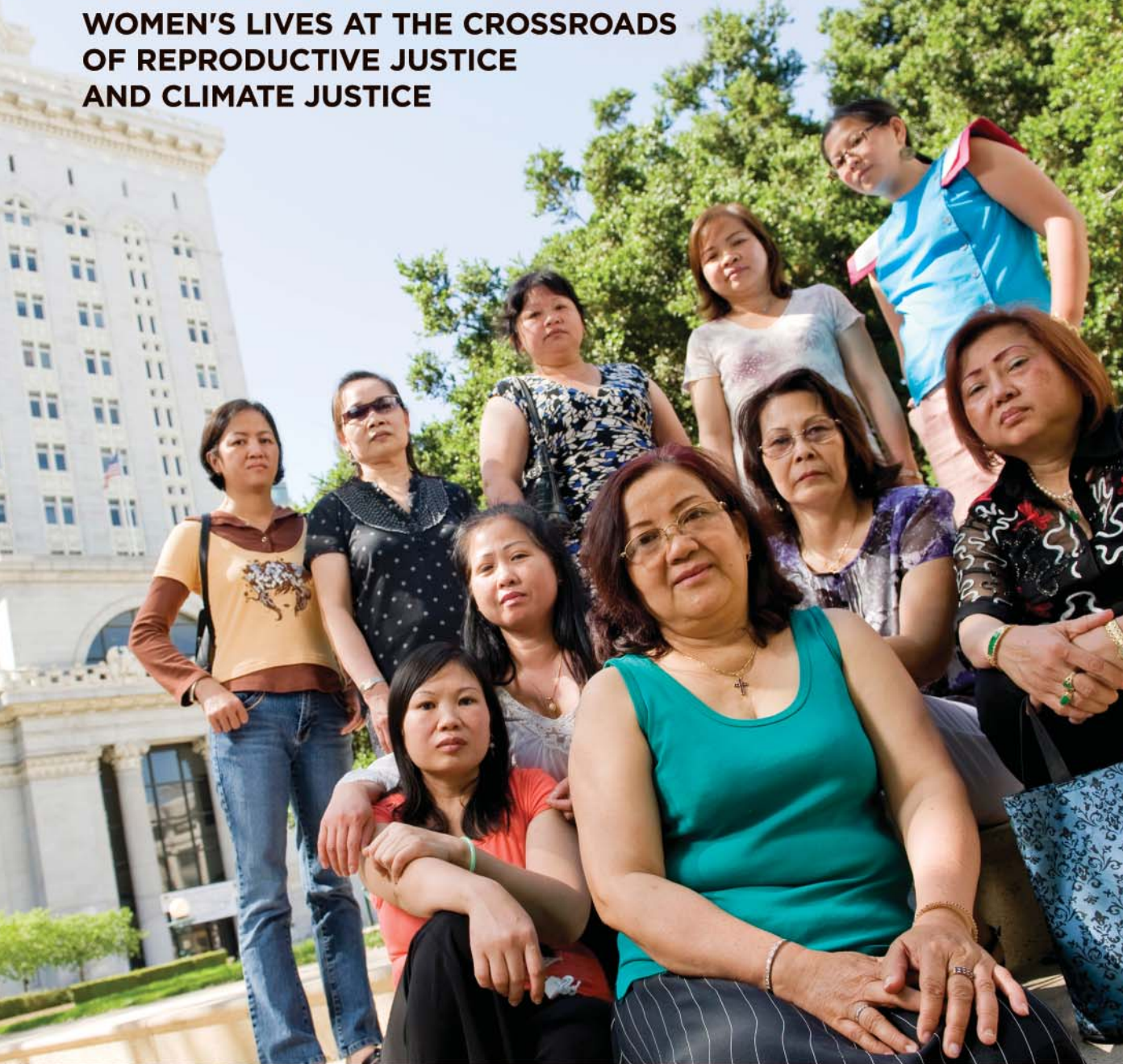


# LOOKING BOTH WAYS

**WOMEN'S LIVES AT THE CROSSROADS  
OF REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE  
AND CLIMATE JUSTICE**



## **THE MOMENTUM SERIES**

A project of EMERJ: Expanding the Movement  
for Empowerment and Reproductive Justice

## **Volume 5**

EMERJ is a national movement-building initiative  
of Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice



**ACRJ**  
ASIAN COMMUNITIES FOR  
REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE



## LOOKING BOTH WAYS

Women's Lives at the Crossroads of  
Reproductive Justice and Climate Justice

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### **Volume V. Looking Both Ways:**

Women's Lives at the Crossroads of Reproductive Justice and Climate Justice

**The Momentum Series** shares tools, models and resources that highlight emerging reproductive justice issues, successes and challenges of organizing, and the contributions that reproductive justice organizations are making to social change. This series is a project of Expanding the Movement for Empowerment and Reproductive Justice (EMERJ), the national movement building initiative of Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice.

The analysis, research and development of Looking Both Ways was led by ACRJ's organizing department in collaboration with the New Orleans Women's Health & Justice Initiative. Our analysis of the intersection of reproductive justice and climate justice reflects the importance of developing new understandings of issues rooted in the lived experiences of our communities.

The Momentum Series is one of many ways in which EMERJ and other groups are making a contribution to reproductive justice movement building. Together we will continue to strengthen our collective capacity to build the social, political, and economic power required to make lasting change and ensure the wellbeing of all our communities.

Momentum Series reports are available online at [www.reproductivejustice.org](http://www.reproductivejustice.org).



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PHOTO: SHANA GRIFFIN, NEW ORLEANS WOMEN'S HEALTH AND JUSTICE INITIATIVE



# INTRODUCTION: THE CRITICAL INTERSECTION OF REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

Effectively solving the climate crisis demands that the mitigation and adaptation measures we employ align with a justice agenda that improves the circumstances of poor people, people of color, women, and children. If we fail to make synergistic efforts to protect the planet and lift up the most vulnerable among us, we are doomed to recreate an unsustainable system that demands little of those with the most to give and the most of those with little to spare. Our mission is to construct a new economic and political system that is both sustainable and just.

Women, who have and will continue to bear an increasingly disproportionate share of the climate change burden in coming decades, are central to the success of this mission. The current working paradigm regarding women and climate change focuses on the fact that women, specifically women of color, are disproportionately impacted by disasters and environmental degradation caused by global warming. Women make up approximately 70% of those living in poverty, and low-income women, women of color, and immigrants will be most impacted by the severe weather events, heat waves, and increases in disease rates that will characterize Earth's changing climate. Hurricane Katrina, which hit African American, immigrant, and Indigenous women in Southeast Louisiana the hardest, cruelly exemplified this increasingly accepted gender analysis of climate change.

But while Katrina brought shape to the emerging understanding of women and climate change in the United States, the scope of the climate crisis demands much more: that we not only address how women will be impacted — and how to protect their rights — but also how women's lives are wrapped up in both the causes of, and potential solutions to, the climate crisis.

Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice (ACRJ), an organization with significant experience working at the intersections of women's health with economic and environmental justice, has begun to explore the ways that empowering women in their homes, workplaces, and communities can contribute to climate justice. We hope to further deepen the current

gender and climate change paradigm by understanding the disproportionate impact of hardships on women in the U.S. due to climate change and bringing a greater understanding of how to apply a reproductive justice lens to climate justice in order to further both.



Over the past decade, an increasing number of grassroots organizations have cultivated a more comprehensive analysis of reproductive rights. This analysis acknowledges that the reproductive options and self-determination of women of color, low-income women, and others are limited in many complex ways even beyond restrictions on the right to choose: by poverty, inadequate health care, toxic workplaces, unhealthy neighborhoods, and laws that demean them because of where they come from or whom they love. This reproductive justice movement organizes on a host of interconnected social justice, human rights, and environmental health issues that affect women’s gender, bodies, and sexuality; advances the participation and leadership of people from traditionally marginalized communities; and advocates for a progressive policy agenda capable of fundamentally changing the economic, social and political conditions that disempower women, girls, and their communities. ACRJ has been a leading and active voice in building this movement.

In this report, we argue that in order to create the sustainable and just society necessary to effectively confront climate change, we should look for ways to both confront the causes of climate change and protect the health and well-being of historically marginalized communities. We describe how “looking both ways” — not only through the lens of climate change mitigation but also at the reproductive justice needs of women and girls — fosters new and innovative strategies, partnerships, and leaders to emerge. We explore how “looking both ways” at reproductive justice and climate justice will protect the reproductive justice of women of color, low-income, and immigrant women during climate change crises. As well, we discuss workplace changes to improve reproductive justice and at the same time mitigate climate change. Finally, we examine how a reproductive justice lens can be applied to climate change policy at the city, regional, state, and national levels.

# CLIMATE CHANGE BASICS

Reducing global warming is critical to the survival of the planet and life as we know it. Billions of tons of greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere through fossil fuel burning, industrial agriculture, deforestation, and chemical production and use. These greenhouse gas emissions are causing the climate to change drastically. Scientists predict that unless humans significantly reduce carbon emissions, sea levels will rise and weather patterns will shift violently. The changes to the climate could be irreversible, countless species will become extinct, and our economic and cultural way of life will irrevocably be altered.<sup>1</sup> We have already experienced increases in disease, warmer weather, more hurricanes, polar ice cap melting, and increased frequency and intensity of droughts and heat waves.

The U.S. faces the possibility of much more rapid climate change by the end of the century than previous studies have suggested, according to a 2008 report led by the U.S. Geological Survey. The survey expands on the 2007 findings of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.<sup>2</sup> Looking at factors such as rapid sea ice loss in the Arctic and prolonged drought in the Southwest, the new assessment suggests that earlier projections may have underestimated the climatic shifts that could take place by 2100.<sup>3</sup> The scientific bottom line is that to prevent catastrophic climate disruption, carbon emissions need to be cut at least 80% (to below levels in 1990) by 2050, and at least 25% by 2020.<sup>4</sup>



PHOTO: LILLIAN ORTIZ



# CLIMATE CHANGE DISASTER AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Unfortunately, climate change disasters frequently result in increased attacks on women's bodies that take advantage of the social, political, and economic instability created by the disaster to further degrade women. Escalated threats to women's safety and vulnerability to sexual abuse regularly accompany natural disasters. According to Oxfam International, disasters that cause mass displacement, such as those caused by climate change, are characterized by increased incidences of rape.<sup>5</sup> While incidents of gender-based violence are often not reported due to chaos and stigma, an online database for sexual assaults reports 47 cases of rape during and after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, with 93% of victims being women and girls.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, rape crisis centers reported more than 100 calls regarding sexual assaults from Katrina evacuees from Texas to Mississippi to Louisiana.<sup>7</sup>

Further exacerbating conditions following a disaster, women of color, particularly African American women, low-income women, and immigrant women, are routinely targeted as burdens of the state and the cause of over population, environmental degradation, poverty, crime, and economic instability. The story of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath is a shifting narrative between the visibility and invisibility of people most impacted by these disasters, and the dangers and opportunities inherent in both.

In the early morning of August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the New Orleans area with storm surges breaching the city's levees at 53 different points, submerging 80% of the city of New Orleans in floodwater, and leaving tens of thousands of people stranded for days without food, water, or basic provisions for health and public safety services before assistance arrived five days later. Three weeks later, Hurricane Rita re-flooded much of the area. The storm surges caused substantial beach erosion, and completely devastated many coastal areas. Over 1800 people lost their lives during the hurricanes and subsequent floods.

After investigating the cause of the destruction, a June 2007 report by the American Society of Civil Engineers indicated that two-thirds of the flooding was caused by the multiple failures of the federally built levees in New Orleans.<sup>8</sup> The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who by federal mandate is responsible for the conception, design and construction of the region's flood-control system, failed to pay sufficient attention to public safety. The U.S. Geological Survey has estimated 217 square miles of wetlands were lost, equivalent to over 100,000 football fields. The storm surge also wreaked havoc on the coasts of Mississippi and Alabama, making Katrina the most destructive and costly natural disaster in the history of the U.S. and the second deadliest hurricane on record.

For women in vulnerable communities, gender inequality fueled by racial injustice and reproductive oppression often exacerbate the already oppressive conditions existing before a disaster takes place. For example:

- According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, during the first year after the storm, New Orleans families headed by single mothers fell from 51,000 to 17,000 and low-income families headed by single mothers fell from 18,000 to 3,000 – reflecting an 83% population drop and mass displacement of low-income single mothers.<sup>9</sup>
- The first year after Hurricane Katrina, only 10 federally subsidized childcare facilities reopened in New Orleans. Today, less than half the total number of pre-Katrina childcare centers are open.<sup>10</sup>
- Louisiana lost 180,000 workers in 2005 as a result of Hurricane Katrina, of which 103,000 were women. Female-dominated industries – health, education, and hospitality – were hit especially hard.<sup>11</sup>
- Pre-Katrina, Louisiana ranked lowest in the nation for women living in poverty. Nonetheless, in New Orleans after the storm, men's median annual income rose to \$43,055, while women's median annual income fell to \$28,032.<sup>12</sup>

Women of color, low-income women, and immigrant women in the region live in a context of poverty, social neglect, environmental degradation, and false perceptions of economic burdens and over population – thus creating the “perfect storm” for inaction, regulation and control with regard to health and welfare, housing, and reproductive health policies.

### Health and Welfare

Women who experience multiple oppressions based on race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, age, ability, and geography often have the greatest need for comprehensive and safe reproductive and sexual health services and resources to address post-disaster needs. Yet their vulnerabilities and experiences have largely remained invisible,<sup>13</sup> and their priorities and voices are often underrepresented in decision-making arenas where health policies are set. Nearly four years since Hurricane Katrina, thousands of African American and low-income women from New Orleans face severely limited access to affordable and safe health care services.

The destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina took a terrible toll on New Orleans' health care system. Prior to the storm, New Orleans ranked highest in the nation for the number of uninsured residents who relied on the public health care system, and 75% of African American residents with incomes of \$20,000 or less were dependent on this system of care.<sup>14</sup> The Medical Center of Louisiana, commonly known as Charity Hospital where over 80% of those without insurance received health care in New Orleans, was closed after the storm,<sup>15</sup> leaving low-income and uninsured residents with no place to access care. Pre-Katrina, only adults with dependent children and incomes of approximately \$3,000 per year qualified for Medicaid.<sup>16</sup> Though the storm dramatically increased financial and unemployment burdens

on many families and individuals, Medicaid eligibility standards in the state did not expand to include those who became newly uninsured.<sup>17</sup> Currently, over half of uninsured adults in post-Katrina New Orleans report having no usual source of care other than the emergency room.

To date, there have been no recovery plans and policies specifically designed to address the health and wellness needs of women and girls who are the most vulnerable to poverty, discrimination, displacement, and limited health care access. Women of color, low-income and immigrant women continue to be left out of critical decisions and underrepresented in defining health priorities and improving the system of health care and delivery.

### Housing and Shelter

While the lack of access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing impacts many, women bear the brunt of housing related poverty, discrimination, and displacement as a result of climate change disasters. The lack of affordable housing, and obstacles to renting, buying, and rebuilding a home post-Katrina, has denied thousands of low-income women of color the right to take care of their children and families in safe and healthy environments. While tremendous resources for hurricane relief in the Gulf Coast went to rebuild casinos and other big businesses, women were left displaced without the resources they needed to rebuild and support their families.



The Institute for Southern Studies, Justice for New Orleans, and Policy Link have extensively reported on the affordable housing crisis in New Orleans. Nearly four years after Hurricane Katrina, the city's lack of affordable housing remains one of the most pressing problems facing the recovery effort. For low-income women, the ability to return to or stay in the city depends on affordable housing.<sup>18</sup> However, 80% of subsidized affordable housing suffered major or severe damage from Katrina<sup>19</sup> and remaining rental units have increased almost 50% in rent.<sup>20</sup> Federal programs project recovery of only 43% of total rental losses,<sup>21</sup> and recently over 4200 public housing units were demolished by HUD. Moreover, the housing crisis continues to contribute to New Orleans' growing homeless population, one that has doubled to an estimated 12,000 since the 2005 disaster.<sup>22</sup> The impact of this climate disaster speaks volumes to the intersection of housing, climate change, and reproductive justice.

Furthermore, disabled women were left without assistance in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina based on their bodily status. Marie Roth of the National Spinal Cord Injury



Association quoted an employee from American Red Cross headquarters as saying, "Our shelters are not for them. There are places for them, run by local health departments, but still busloads of them kept being dropped off at our American Red Cross shelters. We can hardly serve the intact people." Later inquiries confirmed that the American Red Cross implemented a policy to refuse shelter access for people with obvious disabilities.<sup>23</sup>

### Coercive Reproductive Health Policies

During the Hurricane Katrina crisis and in its aftermath, some politicians and their supporters targeted the most vulnerable people, including low-income families and women of color. In September 2008, three years after the devastation wrought by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Representative John LaBruzzo struggled to meet the State of Louisiana's responsibility of evacuating, sheltering, and caring for tens of thousands of people stranded without transportation or alternative shelter during Hurricane Gustav. Fearing Louisiana was headed toward an economic crisis if it didn't decrease the number of people "having babies they could not take care of" and dependent on the government, he proposed a solution to sterilize low-income people to stop them from having children.

LaBruzzo's office researched a plan to pay low-income women \$1,000 to have their fallopian tubes tied<sup>24</sup> and specifically referenced women on welfare. LaBruzzo stated, "What I am really studying is any and all possibilities that we can reduce the number of people that are going from generational welfare to generational welfare." Claiming that "Mainstream strategies for attacking poverty, such as education reform and family planning programs have failed to solve the problem," LaBruzzo nonetheless suggested creating tax incentives for college-educated, higher income people to have more children.



Instead of addressing the environmental destruction caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the environmental crisis plaguing coastal Louisiana and destruction of wetlands by chemical industries, or regulating the petrochemical plants and refineries along the corridor stretching from New Orleans to Baton Rouge, commonly dubbed "Cancer Alley," LaBruzzo's solution targeted African American and poor women's bodies, sexuality, fertility, and motherhood. As a result of leadership from the New Orleans Women's Health and Justice Initiative and the New Orleans Women's Health Clinic in responding to LaBruzzo's legislative plans,<sup>25</sup> he was removed from his position as Vice Chairman of the House Health and Welfare Committee.

Climate change disasters have and will continue to increase the poverty of women, increase violence against women, destabilize food and water supplies on which women and their families depend, and increase displacement of women from their homes and communities. The story of Hurricane Katrina demonstrates that rather than further ignoring, displacing or blaming vulnerable and marginalized communities, we must fully examine the complex structural causes of inequality as well as climate crises and their aftermath in developing comprehensive and inclusive solutions.



# EMISSIONS OF KEY GASES CONTRIBUTING TO THE RISE IN EARTH'S TEMPERATURE

U.S. industry is responsible for approximately 25% of these emissions

Synthetic gasses

CO<sub>2</sub> from burning fossil fuels

Nitrous Oxide

Other CO<sub>2</sub>

Methane

## CLIMATE CHANGE

Disasters (floods, droughts, hurricanes, etc.), disease, sea level rise, extinctions



IN THE U.S.

Women coerced into sterilization

Housing, health care & human rights of most vulnerable women threatened

Women of color blamed for consequences of disasters



By working at the intersection of reproductive justice and climate justice (RJ/CJ) to protect reproductive justice, women will be more able to maintain their economic, social, political, and human rights during times of climate change crises. Reproductive justice guarantees women the ability to exercise control over their bodies and secures a full range of reproductive, family, work, and educational choices, all of which are more threatened during climate change crises. Since women and girls play central roles in families and communities, this will in turn advance the health and well-being of all communities.



# HEALTHY WORKPLACES: HEALTHY WOMEN, HEALTHY EARTH

When “looking both ways” at reproductive justice and climate change in the U.S., it is clear that several of the same corporations that most contribute to global warming also greatly impede on women’s reproductive justice. On the other hand, some corporations can be commended for making changes to decrease their use of hazardous chemicals that contribute to global warming, though not required to do so by law. California companies at the forefront of this effort include Kaiser Permanente, Catholic Healthcare West, Intel, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Bentley Prince Street, and Apple.<sup>26</sup>

Other industries have not only continued to spew greenhouse gases and other chemical pollutants at escalating rates, they have also created working conditions that harm the reproductive health of the women who work for them. Some of these industries have exploited the hard work that women have done in manufacturing their products; women have literally been sacrificing their lives. Women across the globe work unreasonably long hours without a living wage. It is a pivotal time for such industries to “look both ways” and make changes that will decrease their global warming emissions as well as improve the working conditions, reproductive health, and reproductive justice of the women who work for them.

In addition, there are many specific, local situations in which action to improve reproductive justice can also contribute to climate justice if we “look both ways.” Understanding the intersection of RJ/CJ for women of color and their workplaces is one way to identify and implement effective strategies for advancing both issues at a local level. Because women of color, low-income, and immigrant women tend to work in mid-market industries (determined by their direct global warming emissions), we must focus on “mid” industries in order to identify strategic opportunities for working at the RJ/CJ intersection.



### “Mid” Industries

Most efforts to mitigate climate change have focused on energy producing industries and the transportation industry, which have the largest direct carbon dioxide (CO<sup>2</sup>) emissions. CO<sup>2</sup> accounts for approximately 80% of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>27</sup> Oil refineries, coal burning plants and transportation and cement producing industries are now required to report on, and in some cases reduce, their emissions. It is critical, however, to investigate secondary industries that depend on fossil fuel energy production and the transportation industry. These industries that have more indirect or “secondary” global warming emissions, and collectively are as dirty as the top emitters, are called mid-market companies by the report “Design to Win, Philanthropy’s Role in the Fight Against Global Warming.”<sup>28</sup> This report emphasizes improving the emissions profile of mid-market companies as one of the top five most important strategies to reduce global warming.<sup>29</sup>

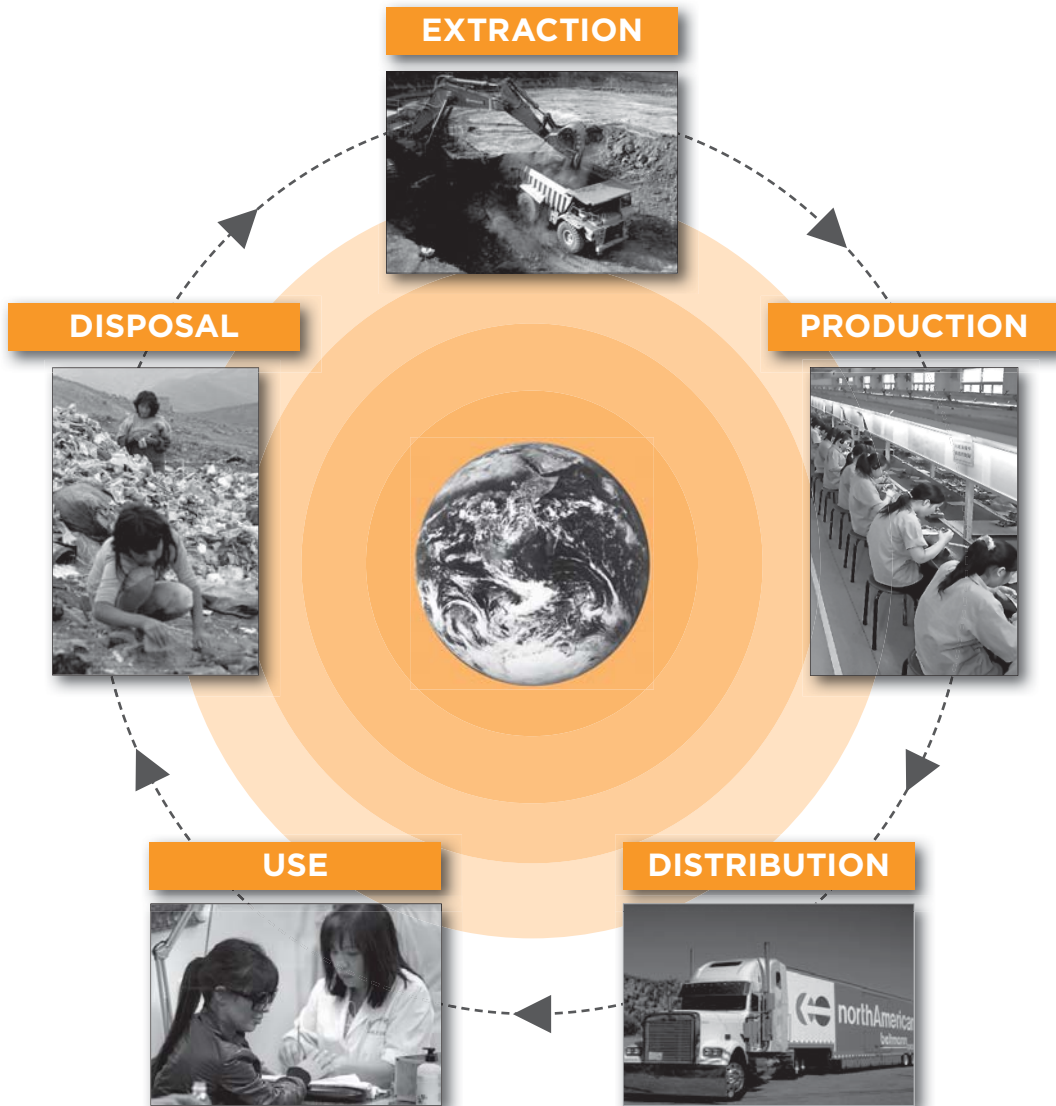
These mid-market industries use energy obtained from oil refineries and coal burning in primary and secondary production of the chemicals and materials that are “ingredients” for their final products. In the U.S., CO<sup>2</sup> emissions from industrial sources accounted for 28% of all CO<sup>2</sup> emissions in 2006<sup>30</sup> and industrial use of electricity is greater than residential and commercial use.<sup>31</sup> If industries don’t alter their demand for energy, oil refineries and coal plants, which are major sources of CO<sup>2</sup> emissions, will continue to produce the same supply.

## UNDERSTANDING THE LIFE CYCLE PERSPECTIVE OF CHEMICALS

Though mid industries do not directly emit significant amounts of greenhouse gases, they have a greater than expected impact on global warming through emissions released in the extraction, production, distribution, use, and disposal of the primary chemicals and materials used to make their products.

Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) can provide an understanding of the impact of the entire life cycle of a chemical or material on the environment or a particular aspect of the environment - such as energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, or water contamination. LCAs can include examining a chemical’s impact on the environment from the point of extraction from the earth through production, distribution, use, and disposal. In contrast to an analysis that solely considers a chemical’s emission from use, an LCA analyzing the impact of a chemical on global warming almost always produces increased estimates of greenhouse gas emissions.

# LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT



The electronics manufacturing and nail salon industries provide opportunities to examine the potential benefits of strategies that utilize a reproductive justice approach to addressing climate change. The electronics industry demonstrates the opportunity to take action to improve reproductive justice for women through workplace change and at the same time reduce emissions that directly impact global warming. The nail salon industry is a good example of a mid-market industry for which an LCA is helpful in understanding and taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

# THE ELECTRONICS INDUSTRY

The electronics or semiconductor manufacturing industry emits high Global Warming Potential (GWP) gases, and for this reason is classified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as one of the top six industrial processes that contribute to global warming.<sup>32</sup> Current semiconductor manufacturing processes require the use of high GWP fluorinated compounds including perfluorocarbons, trifluoromethane, nitrogen trifluoride, and sulfur hexafluoride, collectively termed perfluorocompounds (PFCs).<sup>33</sup> PFCs have been identified as some of the most potent greenhouse gases measured.

While processes used in the electronics industry significantly contribute to global warming, the sector also provides fertile ground for organizing to improve reproductive health and justice for women workers. Women in the electronics industry suffer from high rates of miscarriage, fertility problems, children with birth defects, vision impairments, and cancer. Initial research has shown that these health effects may be associated with the workers' exposure to chemicals, including PFCs, used to manufacture microchips.

The electronics industry demonstrates the importance of "looking both ways." If we solely focus on women's reproductive justice we come up with different solutions than when we also consider the industry's contribution to global warming. If we were to only look at reproductive justice we might decide that a better ventilation system is needed to decrease workers' exposure to chemicals. By "looking both ways" and taking into account the electronics industry's contribution to global warming, a more comprehensive solution that eliminates or reduces the hazardous chemicals that are harmful to women workers and contribute to global warming emerges.

# THE NAIL SALON INDUSTRY

Nail care is the fastest growing sector in the beauty industry, generating more than \$6 billion in sales annually.<sup>34</sup> These salons provide a critical source of employment for women of color and immigrant women. In California alone, there are approximately 8,300 nail salons and more than 300,000 people licensed to work in them. Approximately 80% of the nail salons in California are owned and staffed by Vietnamese women.<sup>35</sup>

## **Nail Salons and Global Warming**

Nail salons use a large range of unregulated chemicals in the products used for nails as well as products mandated for use in cleaning the salons. While nail salons aren't coal plants, the chemicals they use as solvents, hardeners, fragrances, glues, polishes, and dry/curing agents - in addition to the chemicals in the cleaning products they are required to use - are no more healthy for the environment than they are for nail salon owners and workers. Among the climate change contributors in use in nail salons are acetone, aluminum, ammonia, petrochemicals, magnesium, and phenols. And if an LCA of all the chemicals used in nail products and products used to clean salons is done, the industry's contribution to global warming increases substantially.

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are chemicals used in nail salon products that contribute to global warming through their role in the formation of smog. Acetone, a solvent in nail polish remover, is an example of one of the VOCs emitted directly from the use of remover in the salon.

Many nail polishes contain the chemical aluminum calcium sodium silicate which requires aluminum to produce (aluminum is used in nail polish to produce a "mirror-like finish").<sup>36</sup> The production of aluminum is one of six industrial processes classified as having high GWP by the EPA<sup>37</sup> because during primary aluminum production, PFCs are emitted as by-products of the smelting process. Therefore, the production of nail polish is dependent upon one of the top six industrial processes rated for high GWP gas emissions.

The production of ammonia, used to clean nail salons, is the 14th largest source of CO<sub>2</sub> in the U.S.<sup>38</sup> Petrochemicals are used in nail polish in the form of polyvinyl chloride; their



production is the 18th largest source of CO<sup>2</sup> in the U.S.<sup>39</sup> Magnesium is also found in nail polish, and magnesium production and processing is the second largest source of sulfur hexafluoride in the U.S. Sulfur hexafluoride has one of the largest GWP of all greenhouse gases.<sup>40</sup>

Nail salons are required to use hospital grade cleaners and disinfectants. Chemicals known as phenols are used in nail salons as disinfectants, degreasers, and slimicides to clean the equipment and the salons themselves. In order to produce phenols, large amounts of the greenhouse gas nitrous oxide are used. Manufactured sources of nitrous oxide account for approximately 6% of all greenhouse gas emissions.

The impact of the use and disposal of nail salon products also creates greenhouse gas emissions. For example, at the ex-Revlon site in New Jersey, which was used to manufacture nail salon products, tetrachloroethene (PCE) and other volatile organic compounds have been found to be “serious contaminant[s] among pollution at this site.”<sup>41</sup> The main effects of PCE in humans are neurological, liver, and kidney problems following short-term and long-term inhalation. PCE evaporates readily from soil and surface water and undergoes degradation in air to produce direct and indirect greenhouses gases that contribute to climate change including phosgene, trichloroacetyl chloride, hydrogen chloride, carbon monoxide, and CO<sup>2</sup>.



### **POLISH: Nail Salon Workers Looking Both Ways**

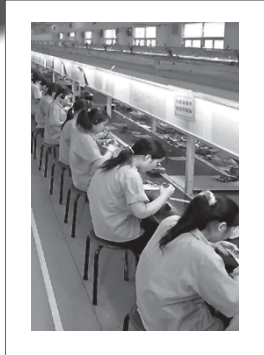
Reproductive justice is only possible when women are physically healthy and when their economic, political, and social rights are assured. Although more longitudinal research is needed in order to fully understand the long-term health impacts of working in a nail salon, the research to date points to possible serious health effects. Studies have shown that manicurists and cosmetologists may experience disproportionate rates of multiple myeloma,<sup>42</sup> stomach cancer, mixed lymphomas, cirrhosis of the liver, spontaneous abortion,<sup>43</sup> birth defects, reproductive problems, and asthma.<sup>44</sup> Workers' reproductive justice is not only compromised by the harmful chemicals they work with, but also by their working conditions. A reproductive justice analysis of working conditions in nail salons directs improvements not only to making the nail salon environment one that is conducive to good health, but also to increasing wages, improving benefits, reducing working hours, reducing harassment and discrimination, and creating more educational opportunities for workers.

ACRJ has applied the RJ/CJ framework to the nail salon industry, focusing specifically on nail salon workers in Oakland, California through our worker organizing project POLISH (Participatory research and Organizing Leadership Initiative for Safety and Health). The majority of these workers are Vietnamese women. POLISH is currently "looking both ways" at the impact of the nail salon industry on reproductive justice and on climate change; these women's bodies literally lie at the intersection of reproductive justice and climate change. POLISH is a leading member of the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative, an alliance of community, advocacy, policy and research organizations dedicated to progressive change on behalf of the nail salon community. Over the past two years, this project has made gains in a successful campaign to prioritize education and access to health and safety information for workers and salon owners. Key accomplishments include a commitment from government agencies to collaboratively revamp their health and safety programs to better serve the nail salon community and an increase of language access to health and safety education, materials, and regulations about salon inspections. Currently POLISH is designing a local organizing campaign at the intersection of RJ/CJ to take action in Oakland that will improve the reproductive justice of nail salon workers and reduce the greenhouse gases emitted by products used in this industry.

In both electronics manufacturing and nail salons, among many other examples, ACRJ sees a natural alignment between the objectives of reproductive justice and climate justice. Both these industries employ significant numbers of immigrant women; both have been found to have possible negative reproductive health consequences for these workers; and both are, in their own way, complicit in the widespread chemical production and consumption that significantly contribute to climate change. These sectors represent mid-market industries that experts agree must be addressed in a comprehensive solution to the climate crisis. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons – geographic, economic, and cultural – these advocates have not collaborated at the level demanded in this new era. We believe that by studying, encouraging, facilitating, and publicizing such collaboration, we can break open new, local, and forward-looking solutions to the climate crisis – solutions that ensure both sustainability and justice.

## ELECTRONICS INDUSTRY

Workplace change in large industry



## NAIL SALON INDUSTRY

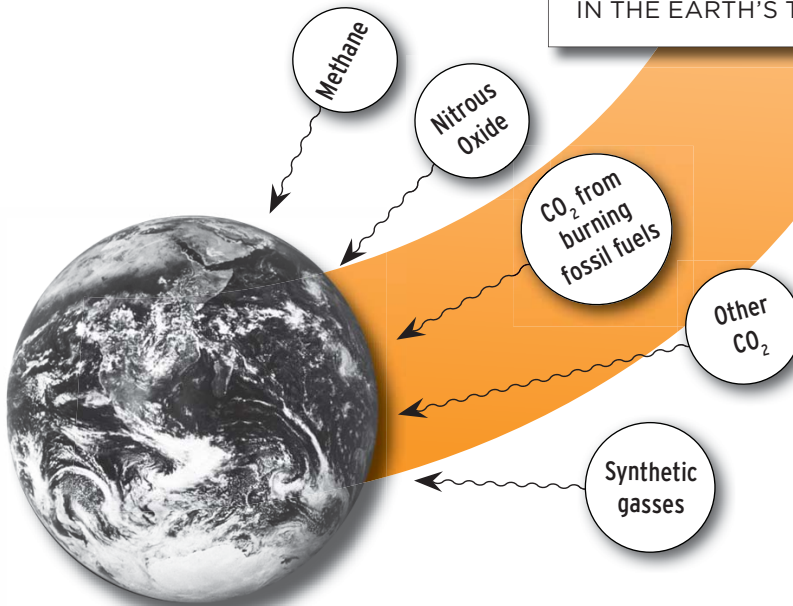
Workplace change in mid-size industry



## CAMPAIGN OF WORKPLACE CHANGE

to reduce/eliminate chemicals and processes that significantly impact reproductive justice and contribute to global warming.

DECREASE EMISSIONS OF KEY GASES CONTRIBUTING TO THE RISE IN THE EARTH'S TEMPERATURE



# GLOBAL CHANGE REQUIRES LOCAL ACTION AND THE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN

As the impact of climate change falls disproportionately on the most vulnerable communities, local communities led by women must take leadership roles to ensure effective strategies and solutions to address climate change and reproductive justice. The industries and politicians who have a propensity to exploit and vilify women will not willingly make the changes necessary to further reproductive justice and reduce global warming. But it is clear that the preservation of the planet remains intimately connected to protecting the reproductive capacities and self-determination of marginalized communities.

## **Local Communities**

An important lesson about the importance of local community involvement from the Reproductive Justice Movement can be applied to climate justice and reproductive justice. Communities with the most pressing needs for policies that protect and promote their health and well-being are often most transformed when they are actively involved in the crafting and implementation of those policies. The case of comprehensive sex education in Fremont, California is an example. While California law mandates comprehensive sex education (CSE) in all school districts that offer sex education, there is no enforcement of the law. As a result, many schools do not provide CSE. Recently, a parents group in Fremont mobilized fellow parents, students and other community members to advocate for implementing a CSE curriculum at the city's middle schools. After a year of pressuring school board members to adopt CSE and comply with state law, the school board voted in favor of CSE. When local communities take action to hold school districts and other institutions accountable to the law, state policy and local action work hand in hand to manifest the benefit intended by lawmakers.

It is critical to support work on climate justice at the local as well as the national levels. Local groups must hold industries accountable to regional, state, and national emissions standards as well as design and take action to mitigate climate change. Ensuring that local groups have the resources to work directly with low-income communities will guarantee



that climate change work “looks both ways” at reproductive justice and climate change. If local communities understand and are prepared to work on climate change solutions that take into account the needs of low-income and marginalized communities, we will cultivate climate change solutions that advance social justice.

Numerous laws intended to protect our environment are not enforced adequately by the government. When these laws are upheld it is often due to the work of local community groups. In the 2008 Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) report “An Uneven Shield,”<sup>45</sup> there are many examples of how the work of local groups ensured that communities were protected as they should be under the law. A national environmental action group, the NRDC is made up of 1.2 million members and more than 350 lawyers, scientists, and other professionals. The report contains examples of how the most comprehensive air quality laws, water quality laws, pesticide safety laws, and groundwater protection laws are rendered futile without local community groups to demand enforcement. One of the NRDC’s recommendations for tightening enforcement of environmental laws is to “Allow the people most directly harmed by pollution and health and safety violations to protect themselves and their communities by enforcing the law where government bureaucracies do not take firm and effective enforcement action.”<sup>46</sup>

One example from “An Uneven Shield” of the failure of the assigned regulatory body to enforce the Clean Air Act is that of Falcon Foam. Located in Los Angeles County, which is



known to have very poor air quality, Falcon Foam's surrounding neighborhood is 98% people of color and has 11 schools within a one mile radius. Day after day, Falcon Foam released volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that mix with other chemicals and sunlight to make smog, which is known to contribute to respiratory diseases, increase asthma, decrease lung function, and cause premature death. The facility also released chemicals that have been associated with cancer such as benzene, formaldehyde, and polyaromatic hydrocarbons.<sup>47</sup> Local residents complained that the facility produced clouds of smoke and strong odors and reported finding a white chemical film on their cars, in their backyards, and even inside their homes. Some reported finding pieces of raw and finished foam in their yards. Residents and schoolchildren complained of difficulty breathing and other respiratory problems, nausea, eye irritation, and unexplained illnesses.

In October 2003 and again in January 2004, the South Coast Air Quality Management District notified the facility that it was breaking the law by releasing unacceptable amounts of VOC pollution into the air. In March 2004, the EPA also found the facility to be in violation for failing to install the correct equipment to reduce the amount of VOC emissions. Yet the pollution continued without penalty. Instead, the facility was issued a variance — permission to exceed otherwise applicable pollution limits — which was repeatedly renewed for several years. After the government failed to enforce these persistent air quality violations, the neighborhood group Community Coalition for Change sued Falcon Foam with help from the NRDC. In the end, the company negotiated with the EPA to pay \$369,000 for pollution violations and was shut down.

Local efforts will ensure that work at the intersection of RJ/CJ continues to stake new territory and define the cutting edge. California is a national leader in efforts to reduce climate change and in the last five years has surpassed the nation with its climate change work. Most recently in February 2009, the State of California adopted regulations to control,



and in some cases phase out, some of the chemicals used in the electronics industry that contribute to global warming at significantly greater rates than carbon dioxide. The semiconductor regulation sets new maximum allowable greenhouse gas emission limits for the use of a variety of greenhouse gases from computer chip manufacturing and related operations.<sup>48</sup> Using a reproductive justice framework on this policy change brings to the surface questions of how to consider the health and safety of the workers in the electronics industry in choosing substitute chemicals, gases, and processes for the ones being controlled and/or phased out.

President Obama has identified California as one of five states he will support that have gone beyond the federal government in efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In November 2008, he declared that his national goal would be that already established by California.<sup>49</sup> Local communities within California will continue to pave the way to maintain California's leadership in climate change. Nonetheless, we cannot depend on federal support for reducing greenhouse gas emissions beyond the next four or eight years. The fight for climate change is longer than any federal administration, and compels states and regions to develop a strong foundation for the long term.

While it is imperative for local organizations to secure resources to work on climate change mitigation, it is also vital to work on adaptations to climate change, which are the adjustments in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climate change events, including disaster preparedness. After Hurricane Katrina, according to a Congressional Report, "It is not widely known that the most effective, immediate responses to Katrina were by local people, local organizations, and locally based Coast Guardsmen, not from disaster industry giants or the US military."<sup>50</sup> We must better leverage local expertise, networks, and small-scale technological interventions when we invest in disaster planning services.<sup>51</sup>







# MOVING FORWARD: OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK AT THE INTERSECTION OF REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

- 1. Identify opportunities in the workplaces of women of color to increase reproductive justice and decrease greenhouse gas emissions.** Greenhouse gas emissions in some industries are direct, while other industries require a life cycle assessment of the chemicals and materials used to attain a complete picture. In order to further reproductive justice for workers in a particular workplace it is important to analyze health and safety needs as well as the economic, social, and political barriers to women workers leading healthy lives.

Many global and national corporations have a long history of establishing unsafe and unhealthy work conditions that harm women's health, pay low wages, and provide inadequate benefits - all of which collectively impinge upon women's reproductive justice. These conditions provide an opportunity to hold corporations accountable to the reproductive justice of the women whom their success depends on and reduce or eliminate greenhouse gas emissions. The cumulative effect of local organizing campaigns builds momentum for shifts at the global level with regard to corporate responsibility for the reproductive justice of women workers as well as the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions affecting the planet.

- 1. Engage in movement building to build strategic cross-sector alliances.** There are numerous strategic opportunities for low-wage workers to organize across industries for reproductive justice and climate justice at a local or regional level.

Oakland, California is a good example of a city with tremendous opportunity to organize low-wage women of color across sectors at the intersection of RJ/CJ. Oakland has a significant number of low-wage workers whose reproductive justice can be fortified, and municipal officials have lately prioritized "greening the city." Nearly 20% of Oakland's Metropolitan Statistical Area's workforce (more than 204,000 workers)



earns less than \$11 an hour. These workers are exposed to toxic chemicals, ergonomic risks, noise, air contaminants, and other hazards on a daily basis. Up to 80% of low-wage workers in some occupations do not receive health insurance, sick leave, or other benefits from their jobs.<sup>52</sup> This is a prime opportunity for these workers to come together to “look both ways” at their respective industries and ensure that the plans to “green the city” do as well.

The Los Angeles Port is a case in which low-wage workers’ involvement at a local level in greening an industry was successful in decreasing its contribution to overall environmental degradation and global warming while improving working conditions. Workers organized to have the city, along with trucking corporations, pay to install engines that have much lower pollution emissions.<sup>53</sup> The truck engines that were previously used in the Los Angeles Port had significant greenhouse gas emissions that also negatively impacted the health of the drivers. This example shows that it is possible for corporations and cities to expend resources to reduce industries’ emissions thereby protecting the health and safety of workers.

- 3. Move local/regional policy at the intersection of reproductive justice and climate justice that advances the definition of “green policies.”** Recent changes in public policy at the state and local levels have begun to address worker health and climate change, though often in isolation from each other. Cities can be held accountable to “looking both ways” at RJ/CJ by including analyses and solutions in green city plans and climate action plans that address the intersection of RJ/CJ.

For instance, the city of Pasadena, California created a green city plan in 2006 which includes reduction of waste from businesses and other institutions. The plan aims to “Ensure development and construction of new structures have onsite recycling areas; request a plan from franchises outlining strategies to increase commercial recycling as a condition of license renewal; implement a Food Waste Recycling Program for restaurants within the City.”<sup>54</sup> While reducing waste is important for greening a city and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, Pasadena’s plan does not consider protecting workers from possibly dangerous materials and waste. The plan focuses on reducing emissions while missing the opportunity to improve reproductive justice for workers. The most effective way for cities to include the interests of low-wage women of color workers is for the women themselves to be actively involved in city planning processes.

Another example of local policy related to the intersection of RJ/CJ is the creation of “green standards” for businesses. In a landmark initiative, the city of Santa Cruz adopted Green Business rules that set standards for green-labeled nail salons.<sup>55</sup> These standards attempt to regulate the types of nail products used in salons but do not include any assurances of reproductive justice for nail salon workers. There is no mention of the health and safety of nail salon workers, no minimum standards for nail salon working conditions, and no policies that protect nail salon workers from discrimination (e.g. requiring workers to receive health and safety information in their native language or requiring pay for overtime work). No city, region, or state has investigated the possibility

of setting standards at the intersection of RJ/CJ for products used to clean the salons, for example, setting standards that would ensure the cleanliness of the salons through the use of cleaning products that have a minimal contribution to global warming (in their production, use, and disposal) and do not negatively impact workers' health. Over the next few years, cities and regions will be increasingly focused on strengthening their climate actions plans, and we must insist that reproductive justice is protected and promoted in these processes.

- 3. Ensure that low-income women, women of color, elderly women, LGBTQ women, disabled women, and youth are protected and not targeted for discrimination and oppression during times of climate change disaster.** We must remain vigilant of the blaming and controlling of women during times of climate change crises. As we have already seen in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, attempts at coerced sterilization and other forms of population control and decreased resources for housing, healthcare, education, and work for those who most need it are often made in efforts to place the climate change responsibility on the backs of vulnerable women instead of the industries and institutions that have caused the climate change disaster.

It is indeed possible to reduce climate change and its devastating results without marginalizing any community in the process. An intersectional framework directs action to minimize the damage that can impact vulnerable communities and communities of color during times of crisis. It is essential for solutions to proactively impact climate change by "looking both ways" to reduce oppression and improve the social, political, and economic needs of all communities.

The intersection of reproductive justice and climate justice highlights key points of leverage for lasting global change. Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice has extensive experience doing community and worker organizing at the local level and believes that work to bring climate justice to the U.S. will be strengthened and amplified by understanding and integrating reproductive justice. In the coming two years, we hope to bring together diverse communities – led by women of color – to study and address these intersections. Our initial focus will be on women's workplaces – specifically how women's reproductive health is impacted by the same industries that exist at the heart of the climate crisis and how women can play creative and cutting edge roles in leading the workplace changes needed to address the crisis.

In this unprecedented moment of political, environmental and economic transition, the climate justice movement is gaining momentum exponentially. From climate change being named a top priority for the Obama administration as well as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, to the tremendous amount of local organizing, advocacy and resources being invested, the time is now to develop effective solutions to the climate crisis that ensure both sustainability and justice. By embracing the complex interactions between women's well-being and climate change mitigation, we can take bold action to activate and mobilize larger constituencies for both goals and to keep our movements strong, relevant, and forward looking.

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