

**REF. 21****SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND HEALTH IMPACTS**

*"Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner."*

- James Bovard, Civil Libertarian (1994)

**Environmental Discrimination**

*Environmental discrimination* occurs when a certain sector of the population, especially vulnerable sectors, assumes a disproportionate burden of the effects of human induced environmental degradation. As a society we should be especially concerned when government or private sector practices cause unfair treatment on a group based on social or economic status.

Danford Lake could be defined as such a group. The community is somewhat isolated from the centre of the MRC Pontiac, and the employment opportunities are minimal. Many of the residents are so preoccupied with their daily struggles that they are simply unaware of the harm that will be caused to them by the imposition of a mega dump in their vicinity, especially when these harms are not immediately visible, such as air pollution, water contamination, increased traffic, etc.

Vulnerable groups, the financially challenged or excluded sectors, minorities and other marginalized groups are more likely to be affected by environmental degradation since they are usually the least likely, least driven, or least able to mobilize against such abuse. These sectors of the population generally live closer to areas targeted for large projects such as mega dumps. As a result, they are forced to live with dangerous environmental conditions, or to move. Projects such as mega dumps threaten communities and often displace people from their homes. (i.e. Cantley – many had to leave their homes temporarily – if you do not have the financial means, what do you do?)

Dump operators regularly use income factors when identifying facilities sites. Unfortunately, the negative impacts, innate to mega dumps, will cause a promoter to seek the road of least resistance, a road disproportionately inhabited by society's most vulnerable groups. These decisions have an impact on the environment, but also the population. This is *environmental discrimination*.

These locations tend to be **near to** urban centers but **far enough away** so as not to cause unpleasant odours or visual unsightliness to city dwellers, and close enough to justify transportation distances. Again, these groups populate these areas because the land is less costly, more accessible, yet close enough to commute to jobs in the city. Choosing Danford Lake as a location for a mega dump is a classic example.

Sometimes local governments, by lack of knowledge, omission, inaction or duplicity, will be an accomplice to the promoter, and ignore the negative affects a mega dump will have on the health and living conditions of their residents. Education is an essential tool to advert instances of environmental disasters. Unawareness sometimes occurs simply because we do not look closely at the medium and long-term consequences of our decisions.

In environmental issues, the defense of human rights rarely focuses on social, economic or cultural rights. The links between the environment and humans becomes obvious when environmental degradation results in health problems, birth defects or even death. By then it is too late. It is only then that we realize just how important what we do to the environment affects our lives. Where is the social justice in bringing garbage from an urban setting to a tiny community, in a pristine, wilderness area. Are the players, both public and private, unaware, ignoring, or they just don't care about the discriminatory consequences of their actions. Have they considered the price the community will pay through the loss of clean air, clean water, safety, quality of life and enjoyment of property and community. The players need to be aware, and society, you and I, needs to monitor and control activities that disproportionately affect the environment of certain sectors of the population.

Government needs to be *especially* sensitive to environmental living conditions of these groups. They need to look closely at how communities are affected by public and private development. Government must scrutinize projects such as mega dumps by linking them to the human cost. It is not enough to analyze a project for its environmental impact, but to look at the effects on the people. It must be noted that the Quebec Auditor General has recently criticized the government for not cleaning up dumps, enforcing environmental standards, or assisting communities that live near dumps.

Of particular concern are women, children, disabled persons, the elderly, and environmental refugees (those persons forced to leave their homes due to environmental degradation) as victims of environmental degradation, and stress the fact that these groups are entitled to effective protection. In Danford Lake many of the social networks involve the women, children, and the elderly, and they have been particularly impacted by the split in the community.

Despite the view that some communities are not organized or do not have operating communication networks, such communities often do have representatives that can act as intermediaries with government and private organizations. Such is the case with the Coalition of Citizens against the Danford Lake Mega Dump. This group was formed at the request of some of the residents of the Danford Lake Village. The coalition was able to quickly identify the environmental, social and economic problems that would be faced by the community and, in collaboration with local residents, were able to formulate

various action plans to fight the imposition of the landfill. Many in the community do not have the means or access to resources in order to investigate the environmental harm that will be brought upon them. The environmental impact of this project has the potential to destroy the livelihood, food chain, and cultural tradition of the community. Areas hosting mega dumps are known to be avoided by other industries, developers and entrepreneurs. Their very presence discourages “cleaner” industries. The potential for tourism, eco-tourism, and land development in this area is tremendous, but will be destroyed by the introduction of a mega dump, a socially unacceptable way of disposing waste in 2007. There is the danger that this village will eventually be entirely wiped out in the name of large profits to financial backers who live in communities 100’s of kilometers away in another province. Many young couples in the village have already indicated that they are planning to move away if this project goes forward. This will leave the elderly and disabled with no social or support network. They will not be able to sell their homes in order to relocate. Danford Lake will not be a renewable community. Living near a mega dump is not where young people want to locate to raise their families, and people seeking recreational properties will not choose an area near a mega dump.

The preservation of this community is important. All residents, whether permanent or seasonal deserve their fundamental rights of clean air, clean water, safe roads, and the right to the enjoyment of community, nature, home and property.