



A Trust Fund for California's Poor Communities

By Evelyn Marcelina Rangel-Medina

The Green-Collar Jobs Campaign housed at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights—a strategy action center for justice, peace, and opportunity—is working to transform the current unsustainable economy into a green economy founded upon eco-equity. The Center focuses its statewide policy efforts on generating green collar jobs, ameliorating poverty, combating climate change, and ensuring the equitable implementation of AB32, the 2006 Global Warming Solutions Act.

Under our current system, low-income people and communities of color disproportionately suffer from loss of land and food security, economic and cultural displacement, and health impacts. (Five of the smoggiest cities in California have the highest densities of low-income people and communities of color.¹) With AB 32, the state government made a commitment to combat climate change and protect California's most impacted communities in the efforts to regulate and reduce greenhouse gases. This is a great opportunity to place low-income people and communities of color at the

core of the emerging green economy. Nidia Bautista, policy director of Coalition for Clean Air, says we "must invest in a climate solution that combats unhealthy air quality and greenhouse gases simultaneously... though climate change is a global phenomenon, our solutions should be geared to provide benefits locally."²

Bautista is leading the legislative effort to create a Community Benefits Fund through the passage of AB1405, which will direct a minimum of 30 percent of the revenues generated from the implementation of AB32 to the most impacted and disadvantaged communities in California—that is, neighborhoods identified as most affected by air pollution, hence most vulnerable to climate change.

The Ella Baker Center, along with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and Environmental Entrepreneurs (E2) is sponsoring SB31—introduced by Senator Fran Pavley—to create a Carbon Trust Fund for revenues collected from AB32. The fund will be directed toward investing in (a) renewable energy and energy efficiency programs, particularly those focusing on low-income consumers; (b) technologies that provide pollution reduction benefits; and (c) creating green jobs development and training.³

SB31 and AB1405 represent a groundbreaking opportunity to restructure the purpose of monies raised through market-mechanisms to reduce greenhouse gases. The carbon funds that currently exist in Europe and Asia focus on financial gain and energy efficiency investments, but no attention is given to returning resources to communities that need green pathways out of poverty. Through the Carbon Trust Fund and the Community Benefits Fund, we will enact proactive policies that can create systemic change by getting our communities back to work today, while at the same time safeguarding their tomorrows.

Both bills are currently parked at the California State Legislature and will be voted upon during the next legislative cycle in 2010. We hope you can join us in becoming a partner and advocate for these policies. ■

Endnotes

1. Morello-Frosch, R., Pastor, M, Sadd, J., and Shonkoff, S. B. "The Climate Gap: Inequalities in How Climate Change Hurts Americans & How to Close the Gap." June 2009. <http://college.usc.edu/geography>.
2. Bautista, Nidia. "Climate benefits, community safeguards can come together." *Capitol Weekly*, August 20, 2009. www.capitolweekly.net.
3. Ella Baker Center for Human Rights. October 2009. http://ellabakercenter.org/index.php?p=gjcc_ca_policies.

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Photo:

Detail from an Oakland Climate Action Coalition flyer for a Climate Justice event.

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