

THE CHALLENGE AND THE NEED

- Hurricanes Katrina and Gustav highlighted the vulnerability of the African American community to the types of extreme weather events that the scientific community believes will be exacerbated by global climate change.
- This vulnerability stems not only from the initial calamities themselves, but also from a lack of economic, health, and institutional resources to avoid and mitigate global warming's worst effects.
- By affecting the price and availability of energy supplies, global warming mitigation policies could also have a disproportionate impact on African Americans, who on average spend a greater share of their household income on energy.
- There is an urgent need to sharply and quickly increase African Americans' understanding of climate change and its potential impact on their communities, and to ensure they have a seat at the table when climate change solutions and energy policy initiatives are discussed.

FUNDERS

- The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (through the Bipartisan Policy Center)
- Environmental Defense Fund
- Walmart, Inc.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

- Alliance for Climate Protection
- American Association of Blacks in Energy
- Center for Budget and Policy Priorities
- Climate Equity Alliance
- Clinton Global Initiative
- Green for All
- Hip Hop Caucus
- NAACP
- NAFEO
- NCLR
- National Latino Coalition on Climate Change
- National Urban League
- NOAA
- *Science Weekly*
- US Climate Action Network
- U.S. Department of Energy
- U.S. Department of State
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- White House Council for Environmental Quality
- White House Office of Science and Technology

African Americans are less responsible for climate change than other Americans. On average, African American households emit 20% less greenhouse gases than white households.

Because of something known as the "heat island effect," temperature increases from global climate change are expected to be more extreme in urban areas, where blacks are more than twice as likely to live than whites. During the 1995 Chicago heat wave, the African American death rate was 1.5 times the rate for non-Hispanic whites.

Hurricane Katrina displaced more than 700,000 Americans, and poor African Americans represent a disproportionate percentage of the displaced. New Orleans' African American population has fallen to less than 60% of its pre-hurricane levels.

Because African Americans spend a 25% greater than average share of their income on energy, they are more likely to be affected by changes in the price of energy.

According to a Joint Center survey, a large majority of African Americans (72%) support legislative action that would mandate the U.S. to begin achieving the goals of the Kyoto treaty on climate change.

FOCUS AND GOALS

The Joint Center's Commission to Engage African Americans on Climate Change will work with African Americans and others to understand the impacts that climate change will have on their communities, and work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ensure that energy policies are fair to all Americans. Among the Commission's key objectives are:

- *Build* a broad and geographically diverse coalition of scientists, activists, policy makers, labor, entrepreneurs, educators, religious leaders and business people committed to engaging the African American community on the issue of climate change.
- *Participate* in activities to educate and engage black youth and students, the media, voters, civil rights groups, black churches, and black elected officials at the federal, state and local levels to be more involved with the political debate over climate change.
- *Provide* support for research, policy, partnerships and outreach activities.
- *Develop and implement* strategies to involve the black community, specifically business and entrepreneurs, in the economic opportunities unleashed by the "green economy."
- *Reframe* the debate on climate change in terms that both resonate with the African American community and express the concerns and needs of the community.

RESEARCH AGENDA

- Ascertain black public opinion and knowledge of global warming.
- Health impacts - the relationship between global warming and the following variables: asthma, air pollution, infectious diseases and heat stress.
- Economic impacts - conduct a green finance assessment that will elaborate on the possibilities for African Americans to lead, participate and shape the emerging green economy across multiple scales: from wage work to finance and capital investments.
- Determine how global warming will impact black communities in the U.S. and people of color around the world.
- Assess efforts that can be undertaken to engage black communities in the climate change debate, and empower black elected officials who seek to ameliorate the problems associated with global warming in the U.S. and worldwide.
- Engage black youth and students to become part of the coalition of people who are fighting global warming.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

- Established principles to promote equitable climate change legislation that achieve the following goals: reduce emissions to avoid dangerous climate change, thus improving overall air quality and public health; shift America away from an over-reliance on fossil fuels to a clean energy economy; and recognize and minimize any adverse and disproportionate economic impacts on vulnerable communities resulting from both climate change and policies to address it – while seeking to fulfill international emissions reduction commitments.
- Convened a series of regional meetings to raise awareness of climate change issues among African Americans, with a focus on students and faculty at HBCUs. Participants have included EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson.
- Advising members of Congress and the Obama Administration regarding climate change and its specific impact on African Americans and communities of color.
- Collaborating with *Science Weekly* magazine, a periodical targeted at grade-school children, to produce a special climate change issue featuring age-appropriate scientific information.
- Planning a *Targeted Cities* initiative to focus on climate-impacted cities with substantial African American populations. Through this initiative, the Commission will interact with local officials and community leaders to facilitate research on climate change impacts and policies; to educate communities about the effects of climate change; to determine how local communities are addressing climate change; and to identify and promote successful sustainability models.
- Adopted a local elementary school and engaged in community clean up and will continue to partner with and highlight climate change projects involving students.
- Completed a second national opinion survey of African American responses to climate change as it relates to policy implications, environmental concerns, health issues, and economic opportunities such as green jobs and political impacts.
- Received UN NGO Observer Status and sponsored a delegation to participate in the COP15 meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark.