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**Topic: Environmental Justice in South Africa**

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Abstract

Environmental justice (EJ) is sought by the poor, or working class, often of ethnic/marginal communities who have been disproportionately affected by the negative consequences of environmental degradation. Originating in American activism against 'environmental racism' in the 1970s and 1980s, academics (especially political ecologists, ecological economists, and environmental sociologists) have long focused analysis on the topic of EJ in the West. More recently, however, scholars have begun to document the evolution of a global environmental justice movement, comprised of both activists and researchers engaged in the work of linking protest with theory. Indeed, in the South African (SA) context, evidence points to a burgeoning of EJ activism, as local communities engage in urgent, high stakes struggles to defend their access to non-market environmental resources and services upon which livelihoods depend, against contamination and/or encroachment by market and state forces. This paper examines a range of South African EJ struggles, drawing from a recently developed interactive map of environmental conflicts known as the EJAtlas. Focusing on activism against waste production, water (mis)management and mining operations, this paper argues that the analysis of such conflicts by academics and activists engaged in transdisciplinary research promises to produce a wealth of policy-relevant knowledge, especially valuable to the South African context and its persistent and growing levels of inequality. At the same time, cooperative research offers activist organisations vital opportunities, enabling them to work in collaboration across global networks to increase the visibility and credibility of their work in the eyes of decision makers.

**Keywords:** Environmental justice; South Africa; Sappi Saiccor Pulp Mill; Xolobeni mining; Water in Western Cape; transdisciplinary research