



When to count the damage?

Economic tools for evaluating liabilities in environmental justice struggles

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The health and environmental implications of fossil fuel exploitation, nuclear waste or mining-related pollution are some of the more well-known effects of the increasing energy and material use of the global economy. One way to confront environmental injustice is to use economic evaluation tools. **Environmental Justice Organisations (EJOs) are conducting cost-benefit analyses (CBAs) and multi-criteria analyses (MCA) with the support of academics, in order to explore and reveal the un-sustainability of environmentally controversial projects.** In some cases, that strategy has made the difference. The experience with CBA against **sugarcane plantations in the Tana Delta, Kenya** shows that this has been an important and **powerful advocacy tool.** In others it would have backfired. In the case of the **opposition to the mining project in Mount Ida, Turkey,** **monetary reductionism** would have **harmed** the **social legitimacy** of other values articulated, such as territorial rights and access to resources. Christos Zografos from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and author of the report said: *"Possibly helpful in some cases, evaluation tools are by no means a panacea: they are best used when employed strategically, when they do not alter or obstruct the priorities or forms of expression of those experiencing environmental injustice, and if they can help level power asymmetries."*

An international team of academics and activists collaborated to find out what works where, based on the wide variety of experiences with economic valuation in the EJOLT¹ project. The outcomes suggest that they help when they support existing debates on local futures and visions and when there are complementarities with regulatory and institutional developments. Oppositely, evaluation methods disable local mobilization when they force communities to bring their concerns into assessment schemes that do not fit their own languages and concerns, when they reproduce uneven power relations, or where public decisions have little to do with formulating and advancing 'reasoned arguments'. Beatriz Rodriguez from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and author of the report said: *"Evaluation tools can be used to 'deconstruct alibis' for perpetrating environmental injustice, specifically the alibi of 'sound economic sense' that is regularly put forth by promoters of projects harmful to the environment and communities"*

Insights on the benefits from an activist-academic collaboration and recommendations on the use of evaluation tools are all outlined [in the report](#). In the short [briefing](#) associated with the report we focus on when Environmental Justice Organisations could use evaluation tools and how. We list 10 issues for EJOs to consider before, during and after using an economic valuation tool.

For more information, please contact

Author Beatriz Rodriguez-Labajos (ICTA-UAB) beatriz.rodriiguez@uab.cat Tel. +34 93586 8643

Author Christos Zografos (ICTA-UAB) christos.zografos@uab.cat Tel +34 93586 8640

1 EJOLT is a large, EU sponsored, collaborative project bringing science and society together to catalogue ecological distribution conflicts and work towards confronting environmental injustice. EJOLT produces reports, briefings, articles and much [more](#)