

# Sankofa

## *A Model of Sustainable Development*

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A little more than two decades ago, a connection was made between climate change and low development. It is acknowledged that the impact of climate change on development has rendered vulnerable societies of the Global South not yet ready to achieve sustainability of their developmental goals. Yet, although the twentieth century has not provided much hope for sustainable development in Africa and many parts of its diaspora, twenty-first-century shifts in an understanding of the causes of climate change, as human-induced, suggest that there is scope for transformation in the Black diaspora from low development to potentially strong and sustainable achievements in that regard. Some of the reasons for hope stem from a recognition that knowledge sharing on the ecological, political, economic, and cultural impacts of development might contribute to more responsible and just human behavior and a greater will to work within communities to develop economies of scale that may be adaptable to the transformations Africa and its diaspora would need in order to envision sustainable levels of development.

As Singapore Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Masagos Zulkifli (2019) eloquently argued in his keynote address to the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), the world is witnessing geopolitical shifts, disruptive technological advancements and changing trade patterns that require the global community “to rethink traditional models and practices.” He added that despite awareness and concern about the rapid intensification of climate change, governments at either end of the geopolitical spectrum engage in destructive behavior in pursuit of their own national interests. Such destructive and self-interested behavior must give way to a multilateral cooperative framework for change if the existential challenge of climate change is to be adequately addressed

to meet the goals of the IPCC and, in the process, achieve sustainable development in vulnerable disaster zones of the Black diaspora.

A geopolitical shift away from national to global collaboration on climate recovery and sustainable development, while an urgent imperative, must first take stock of the range of adaptations needed across countries and the scale of adjustments possible in vulnerable localities such as Haiti, Louisiana, and Rwanda, whose natural and cultural exposure to disaster further complicates the challenge of climate change. To identify root causes of the problem of development in developing nations (largely inclusive of Africa and its diaspora), one has to look to the geographic, political, economic, and cultural history of its people. Looking back in time may confirm the challenges for development in a region where there has been high dependency on an ecosystem that yields a livelihood from agricultural growth, marine sustenance, cattle farming, and human resources. That dependency has taken advantage of the earth's lush resources without fully taking the time to minimize land degradation, treat disease, or reduce the social and political consequences that attend the challenge of survival as populations increase. Replenishing the ecosystem while benefiting from it is a lesson from the past that may have been forgotten in the human urgency to survive underdevelopment and realize growth. Yet, it is in humans' plunder of the ecosystem and inattentiveness to the role each human must play in maintaining it that future generations are tasked with recovery. Responding to climate stress has become a priority for those countries vulnerable to disaster and thus more negatively impacted by climate shifts.

### **Sankofa Modeling**

The *Sankofa* image in figure 6.1 symbolizes the Akan people's belief in a quest for knowledge. In African historiography, Ghanaian people of the Akan culture (see Agbo 1999) are encouraged to engage in critical examination and patient investigation in order to gain the wisdoms of the past and ensure a strong sustainable future built on understandings of what may have succeeded or failed before attempting to implement political, cultural, social, and/or economic change. The objective of this symbol was to empower Africans so that they may not neglect what "was at risk of being left behind" in the passage of time but to "look, seek and take it" into the future. Across the African diaspora, displaced people of Akan heritage and beyond are reminded, by way of the Sankofa symbol (figure 6.1), that the past serves as a guide for planning the future. For an examination as critical at this time as the sustainability of Africa and its diaspora, heeding the symbolism of this entreaty to diasporic communities is a timely re-



**Figure 6.1.** The Sankofa. Mythical African Bird. Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

minder that humans have degraded the ecosystem and without a return to the wisdoms of the past, they may not be able to restore a viable and sustainable future for generations to come.

This study will proceed then on the understanding that the impact of climate change on development in the diaspora has been devastating. As human behavior continues to impact and degrade the ecosystem, which has been primarily responsible for the sustenance of populations vulnerable to the ravages of climate disaster, it is imperative that action be taken by each society to contribute appropriately to mitigation efforts to create a climate-sustainable future. How may diasporic communities, challenged by limited financial institutions, weak institutional infrastructure, displaced human resources, and heavy dependence on the soil, overlook the political, economic, social, and cultural disasters spawned by climate change? Addressing lessons of history may allow researchers to:

1. begin to understand climate science and the obstacles to development that lie ahead as a result of the adverse climate forecast;
2. critically assess areas of vulnerability relevant to the diaspora's responsibility for upkeep of the ecosystem, as well as the role others have played in the past and must continue to play to adapt responsibly to the needs of the present;
3. identify priorities that may be set in relation to adaptations for sustainable goals to be achieved as recommended by the international community (see UN 2020);
4. develop strategic plans for the implementation of adaptation measures now urgently required to mitigate disaster as climate change heightens;

5. generate knowledge, education, and training, and make accessible to all citizens, critical information on the work of agronomists and climate scientists over time so that knowledge sharing can become the springboard from which recovery may emanate;
6. be cognizant of models and strategies that worked in the past to ensure cultural growth, which can be replicated to the scale currently needed and be mobile enough to reach deep into all communities of the diaspora;
7. be mindful of both the challenges and opportunities embedded in the implementation of new practices aimed at overcoming the harsh realities of climate change and the need for mitigating disaster in the interest of attaining sustainable development;
8. and, most importantly, be open to knowledge sharing in collaboration with all sectors of the community—public and private—working from bottom-up rather than top-down methods that are inclusive and primed for excellence in achievements.

This chapter will address critical issues for development and climate changes as laid out by the IPCC and guided by the UN Goals for Sustainable Development from a trans-diasporic lens and from a multidisciplinary perspective, reviewing the cultural wisdoms of the past while adapting to the requirements of the present. Black communities within the developed and developing world will be considered to highlight the necessity for equity in an approach to global climate change and sustainable development. The areas primarily targeted in this study are areas of underdevelopment that have been recognized globally as risk factors for developing nations and the Black diaspora. Gender inequality, environmental injustice, and economic insecurity, all included in the seventeen goals highlighted in the UN Goals for Sustainable Development, are the primary lenses through which this volume observes the potential impact of knowledge production for achieving sustainability in disadvantaged and disaster-prone areas of the African diaspora.

## **Sustainable Development Goals**

The impact of climate change is felt across the globe, varying among regions, generations, age, class, income groups, educational levels, and gender. Based on the adaptations recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), it is clear that people who are already very vulnerable and most marginalized are disproportionately impacted and need innovative strategies to prevail. The poor, primarily in develop-

ing societies, and further burdened by catastrophic weather, are more likely to be in the greatest need of new practices to adapt to climate variability and change. Communities in the diaspora, whether located in the Global North or Global South, many struggling with coastal erosion and infrastructural failure, experience the injustices of disaster management and recognize the physical, social, cultural, and political vulnerabilities that attend them.

The impact of disaster experiences on Black lives complicates the struggle for development. With the evolution of social movements and the realization that the Black experience is one of underdevelopment, subpar growth, and a record of low performance across the spaces inhabited by Black residents, there is no more pertinent time than now to comprehend the implications of injustice and the barriers to development as itself a global disaster rooted in the cultural history of the diaspora and requiring a Sankofa model for change.

The United Nations has laid out seventeen goals for sustainable development. Tackling these goals will help us imagine an ecosystem and a humanity that is equitably shared by those who inhabit the planet. Four of the seventeen goals espoused by the United Nations general body are a priority for study in the context of the Black diaspora. They are Goal 1: to end poverty in all its forms everywhere; Goal 5: to commit to the achievement of gender equality and to empower all women and girls; Goal 6: to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; and Goal 13: to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

### **Goal 1: End to Poverty**

Current economic data for the developing world are hard to come by and from the annals of history, including economic archival data, little has changed in that respect. When the UN's Sustainable Development Goals Report of 2020 entreated nations to do everything in their power to end poverty across the globe, there was an implicit objective of fairer distribution of the world's wealth. Although many scholars have debated the connection between global poverty and international distributive justice (see Fuller 2005; Nagel 2005; Olson 1983; Pogge 2001; Singer 1972; Wenar 2003), their scholarship has predominantly focused on the problems of inequality and avenues for addressing them. Little specific attention is focused on who is experiencing poverty versus who has the capacity to identify solutions to the problem and resources to implement actionable plans. Peter Singer (1972), for example, advances the argument that if it is in a nation's power to help without sacrificing anything of moral impor-

tance to do so, then that nation ought morally to help. Thomas Pogge (2001) was more targeted in his perspective of how the question of global poverty might be solved. He considered the question from a rationale of resource cost, highlighting the fact that everyone is responsible for the earth's resources, although the Global North contributes disproportionately to the degradation of the environment while perpetuating affluent lifestyles. He proposes that the wealthy West should be taxed on the natural resources they use and that the proceeds of this tax be used to ameliorate the condition of the poor. Providing improvement of the condition of the world's poor by utilizing the dividends of such a tax would not require any sacrifice from the world's wealthy and therefore would be more morally just as well as practically feasible.

The discourse on distributive justice has been extended over the decades beyond the question of morality and feasible practices to the more intractable nature of the problem: that is, how could global poverty be alleviated and what strategies might be put in place to ensure that equity for all sharing the planet might be realized. Global poverty has not decelerated while the world figures out best practices for alleviating the large gap in human suffering. Affluent nations have avoided taking responsibility for environmental degradation and have instead pointed fingers at governments in societies where the greatest disparity in wealth might be found. The latter are often identified as non-democratic, non-transparent, illegitimate, and so forth, and several challenge the leadership of "failing" states as the cause of poverty without addressing the extractive practices imposed on the natural resources of those states, which have led their publics to question the meaning of sovereignty and citizenship bestowed upon their relatively new politically independent state. Lacking the right to self-determination and basic recognition of human dignity and civil rights have left many of the world's poor merely to imagine a world where justice is at the heart of interactions with foreign governments, their own governments, and their interactions with each other. The challenge to end poverty in Haiti, an independent Republic, or Louisiana, where a Black diaspora is located on the southern coast of the wealthy United States, or Rwanda, a relic of European cultural malpractices that created division among the indigenous cultural groups of that land, still begs the question who will bell the cat—a tale in Caribbean folklore.

The Black diaspora has had a front-row seat to squabbles between the Global North and the Global South around the question of distributive justice. Post-colonial societies have debated the value of reparations as a settlement for the inequalities arising from slavery, the disparities observed in migration patterns, and the willingness of global actors and international institutions to acknowledge that inequalities across the globe

**Table 6.1.** Race-Gender Wage Comparisons in Louisiana. © Pamela Waldron-Moore.

State	Local Average	National Average	Race-Gender Comparison
Louisiana	19% in poverty	12%	All
	44% female-headed	33.8%	All
	\$0.47 to \$1.00	\$0.62	Black women/White men
	\$0.52 to \$1.00	\$0.54 to \$1.00	Latina women/White men

go beyond material resources to human capital as well. And, more significantly, it extends to consideration of who is on the bottom rung of the inequality chart. A quick glance at the wage gap in Louisiana, where approximately 33 percent of the population is Black, highlights this positionality (see Table 6.1).

It is for this reason that the diaspora needs to ponder the lessons of history, to learn how the resiliency of their ancestors was grounded not in gifts from honorable benefactors but in the ability of the poor to convert what little resources they could claim into what they needed to survive and to prevail. Being on the bottom rung of the economic, political, and social ladder forces knowledgeable people to recognize, as Kimberlé Crenshaw Williams (1995) advocates, that to get away from the margins of society, one must understand the “intersectionality” of social domination in order to disrupt such domination. Whether drawing on the songs of empowerment in the struggle for civil rights, for example, “We Shall Overcome,” or the narratives of griots, spinning the tales that hunted lions could not tell because the hunters had already glamorized what really happened in the forest to their unsuspecting prey, or the Caribbean fables of Anansi, the spider, who outwitted the cleverest impostors who would suborn the dignity and intelligence of the indigenous people, the power to transform the lives of peoples across the diaspora lies in the courage to identify ways to bell the cat.

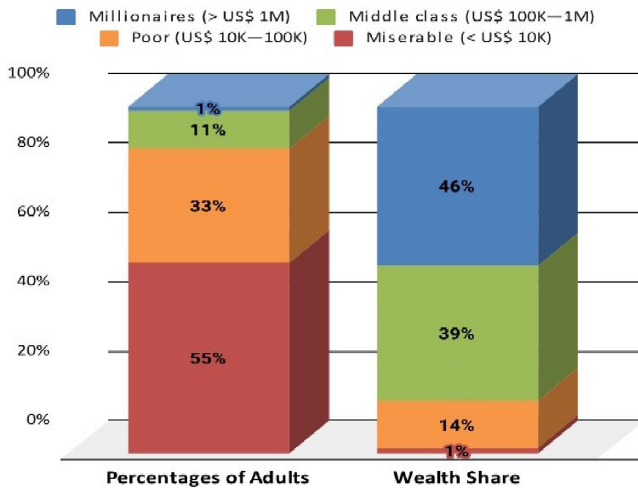
It may be useful here to put the moral of the story of the belling of the cat into present-day perspective. In a nutshell, it builds on the saying, “when the cat is away the mice will play.” Invariably, as the fable goes, mice are often surprised at play by the stealthy return of the old cat, who then had an easy time making a meal of the mice in their revelry. A plot hatched by the mice to stop this atrocity to their community envisioned putting a bell around the cat’s neck while it slept so that its movement

in the mice's direction would be hard to miss with the ringing of the bell around its neck. The plan seemed plausible to all the mice in the community until one mouse asked: Who will bell the cat? Of course, there were no volunteers. Despite the well-laid plan to disable the predator rather than eliminate the danger it posed, implementing that plan was as unrealistic as Lisa Fuller's (2005) proposal that NGOs deliver aid to poor countries in order to secure a transparent and accountable system, that is more likely to yield economic security than the tax dividend system proposed by Thomas Pogge (2001), as an opportunity to reduce the burden on poor countries caused by the wealthy countries' wanton degradation of the shared global environment.

A creation of knowledge economies may become the bell around an economy's neck. It could be a blueprint to jumpstart an end to the poverty disproportionately experienced across the African diaspora. The sooner states adopt collaborative tactics, across their geographical boundaries, to combat the predatory extractive nature of affluent states and their corporations, and engage in regenerative practices aimed at capacity building from the bottom up, while relying less on dependency tactics and external organizations such as NGOs to provide aid (often seen as charitable services), the more likely the diaspora is to experience the benefits of knowledge sharing and a reduction of poverty. Equality continues to be a basic presumption of human dignity (Moellendorf 2009; Sangiovanni 2007). The Black diaspora should recognize in the twenty-first century that dignity and human rights have been denied far too long for them to retain the expectation that they will be included in any form of moral justice that will allow them to share in equalizing opportunities provided by the world's affluent peoples. World data has mapped the trends in international versus global poverty and highlighted the differences seen when states are the focus versus people. Often these data exclude Africa and its diaspora from specific discussions on poverty and justice. There is also a shift in international discussion from data on specific states to general evidence of poverty across peoples. As shown in the chart below, an examination of property ownership pinpoints the disparities across class rather than regional inequities, recognizing that 55 percent of adults in the world are classified among the miserable poor, earning approximately less than \$10, 000 per annum, which is roughly a 1 percent share of global wealth. Compare this with the 1 percent of adults, who are classified as millionaires, sharing 46 percent of the global wealth. This economic disparity is enough to discourage any group, let alone members of the Black diaspora, from daring to imagine a world where equity and fairness would allow them to benefit from the earth's resources and therefore entitle them to share the environmental costs of sustainable development. Thus, the diaspora's only recourse



### Global Wealth Distribution 2020 (Property)



**Figure 6.2.** Global Wealth Distribution (Property) 2020 Data Source: Credit Suisse Research Institute, Global wealth report 2021, June 2021. Chart created by Leandro Salvador for public domain: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Global\\_Wealth\\_Distribution\\_2020\\_\(Property\).svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Global_Wealth_Distribution_2020_(Property).svg).

would be to forge alliances among themselves by identifying where their intellectual capacities lie, how they might be harnessed and produced through intercommunity efforts to achieve a level of sustainable development that prepares the way for future generations to survive. This cannot be done by replicating the strategies of the West but by pooling the wisdoms of the past and sharing current best practices through collaboration with educators, technologists, engineers, indigenous groups, and more to craft a future where trust and community reliance may yield openness and knowledge sharing for a better collective future, especially among disaster-prone communities, where the urgency of ending poverty and climate mitigation is palpable.

The connection between an end to poverty, on the one hand, and improvements in its correlates (low development, risky infrastructure, climate change, etc.) is inescapable. Developing green infrastructure is at least one method by which poverty may be reduced and disaster recovery from climate change addressed to sustain development in diasporic communities. As recent architectural practices by the nonprofit organization Model of Architecture Serving Society (MASS) demonstrated, its work designing the Butaro Hospital in Rwanda provides a viable opportunity for poverty reduction while providing local jobs and supporting climate

change has been a project example of how low development can be elevated in post-disaster recovery. Alan Ricks (2021), the principal architect of MASS, demonstrated how green infrastructure allows for better air flow in hospitals and public buildings to enhance development in poor communities. Rick's experience working in many countries, including some in Africa and the Caribbean, presents an opportunity to observe how collaborative work between nonprofit organizations, engineers, film-makers, health-care personnel, artists, designers, and landscape architects may not only help empower local activists, builders, and conservationists but also serve as a research tool where lessons learned in countries like Rwanda can be used to teach and educate developed and developing countries on models of architectural design that take into consideration who is involved, who contributes, who benefits, what impacts there are for the climate, and what the value of the design is. Using the cultural wisdoms of Rwanda, architects have developed new models of green infrastructure, thinking of how to build, who should build, where to build, and new innovative ways of building (Ricks 2021). Now it is Rwanda's turn not only to digest what their indigenous environment has taught foreign workers but also how best to share adaptive measures with their diaspora, so that a dent, however small, may be made in the check list of goals for sustainable development.

Embracing the UN's call for ending poverty has been challenging in many small countries, not only because of the difficulty in financing solutions to overcoming poverty but also because, it is often the very strategies to escape poverty that threaten the environment that has led states into poverty in the first place. The case of Guyana, a small developing nation, facing the existential threat of climate change provides the interesting dilemma of meeting UN goals for sustainable development and participating in a global effort to reduce risk while collaborating with the Exxon Corporation to realize a better life by extracting oil from its offshore repositories. In this dilemma, Guyana finds itself in the unenviable situation of losing its last resort at claiming wealth from its natural resources to embracing a fossil fuel crisis that the world needs to reduce to preserve a healthy planet for future generations (Arsenault 2021). It seems a cruel blow to be within grasp of billions of dollars of natural resources and an opportunity to elevate the tiny country from near abject poverty to a state of well-being that will/could arise from the billions of dollars Exxon has promised to share from the oil reservoirs it anticipates extracting at the same time that the IPCC is calling for a reduction of 2 percent of current greenhouse gas levels. How could this diasporic locale seek to end poverty and lower carbon emission levels at the same time? Such existential crises put the UN goals for sustainable development and

climate protections for global sustainability into stark relief, highlighting the challenges for the diaspora as insurmountable. These are issues that may not be judicially managed in an anarchic world where just transitions are well-nigh impossible to mandate. Identifying the knowledge capital of communities in the diaspora, rich in lessons from the past and intimate experience with capacities of the present may provide opportunities for sustainable futures.

### **Goal 5: Gender Equality**

The United Nations' espousal of a goal that will sustain development across countries is one that can be easily embraced by Black diasporic peoples. Perhaps, there is no idea more attainable to peoples of African descent as that of the role and power of women to lead and build communities that are sustainable. Feminist theories propagate the belief in full social, economic, and political equality for women. The United Nations has called on the international community to commit to the achievement of gender equality and to empower all women and girls to reclaim their humanity from the wanton abuse and violence young women experience via human trafficking and the slate of ills accompanying it. International Relations theories further propose that gender equity is a human right with critical consequences for global development (see Kegley 2009). Indeed, some scholars go so far as to find that "robust democracy is extremely rare in societies that marginalize women" (see Coleman 2005). In addition, as the philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) argued, a people's condition may be judged by the treatment women receive under it. This is a philosophy still cited in the twenty-first century (see Francis 2007).

At the United Nations fourth conference on women, there were cultural arguments for/against gender equity, with consensus emerging that gender empowerment should be based on the conviction that only the realization of the full potential of all human beings can contribute to true human development. Much scholarship has been invested in an attempt to sensitize the world to the neglect of gendered issues and the place of women in global society. This discourse aims at identifying a theoretical vision that empowers women, secures their basic human rights, and challenges realist theories that the power and development of a state lies in its ability to defend the state when borders and ideals are challenged (Hunt and Posa, 2001; Tickner 2003) rather than concern itself with the protection of those too weak to defend borders. Again, with the state being the dominant focus in global political discourse, it is not surprising that people are stratified in terms of their worth to the state.

In feminist political thought, gender does not stand alone. Race and gender often go hand in hand and need to be addressed in specificity. Critical race theory addresses this notion by arguing that societies and their laws often overlook the fact that race and gender are interpolated under the law and that women of the Black diaspora endure race-ing and gender-ing (Crenshaw Williams 1995) to their disadvantage within societies, such that laws become discriminatory and add an extra dimension to what might be sustainably achieved. In the context of development, then, one must consider development in the Black diaspora not just an equity issue but as social domination in an intersectional context that further places sustainability out of reach of diasporic peoples in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas. In a recent African Caribbean Pacific (EU-ACP) project in collaboration with the European Union, sub-indexes show that the region has closed 69 percent of its overall gender gap and is performing well on educational attainment and in the health and survival of its citizens (Cabrera 2000).

Theories of knowledge support the view that access to education, when widely available, prepares publics for self-discovery, leadership, and most importantly, self-fulfillment. What locations in the diaspora have done successfully, for example, Rwanda, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, in allocating space for women to thrive as parliamentarians and create policy avenues for other women to chart their own development, is precisely what the diaspora can share in order for each region to design a pathway through innovative exploration to sustainable development.

A commitment to Goal 5 of the United Nation's sustainable development goals has been both a global and national challenge that has made the search for solutions particularly difficult since each society needs to create idiosyncratic plans for its own self-determination based on its own cultural wisdoms and to its own political, social, and economic investment scale. Because states in Africa and its diaspora have been limited in their capacity to control their own political and economic affairs, being reliant upon external economies that hold them hostage to predatory market agreements and lending opportunities, they have tended to cling to the status quo and neglect taking time to consider their collective intellectual capital and how it might be harnessed in search of new methodologies for growth. Gender roles can be redirected to become political realignments, not with former colonial leaders but with regional innovators and collaborators. Pooling those resources and learning from the progress of sisterly nations can empower communities to resolve challenges to recovery in post-disaster environments.

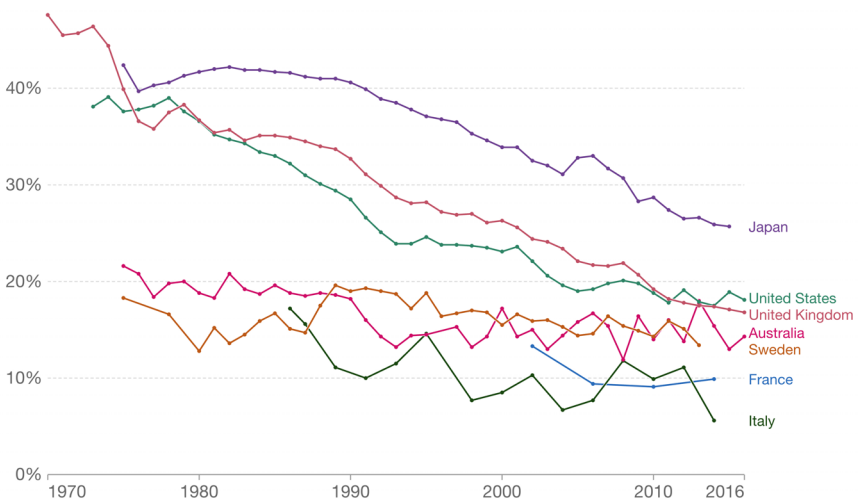
While smaller diasporic communities in the Caribbean and Americas have managed to forge some cultural unity, there are others that will continue to struggle even when embraced by supportive sister-nations.

Haiti finds itself caught in the crosshairs of Caribbean unity. For while Haiti has joined the Caribbean Economic Community (CARICOM) and is being supported via economic knowledge sharing, there are several identity features that isolate it from the English-speaking Caribbean. Language is one such characteristic, although communication is not an insurmountable obstacle. Francophone and Anglophone culture undergirds value conflicts, a product of enslavement that is still embedded in the Caribbean psyche. It is often difficult to navigate between a “divide and conquer” political value system and an “assimilationist” appropriation of values.

Caribbean countries have a record of strong participation of women in politics. This has given women access to decision-making forums. In the twenty-first century, several Caribbean states have succeeded in electing female heads of government, for example, Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados (elected in 2018), Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller of Jamaica (2012–2016), Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Trinidad and Tobago (2010–2015), and the late Prime Minister Eugenia Charles of Dominica, who served from 1980 to 1995. There has also been an increase in women’s representation in politics in countries such as Guyana and Grenada, where there is over 30 percent representation in the House of Representatives. In the Dominican Republic, the only country apart from Rwanda

### Unadjusted gender gap in median earnings, 1970 to 2016

The gender wage gap is unadjusted and is defined as the difference between median earnings of men and women relative to median earnings of men. Estimates refer to full-time employees and to self-employed workers.



Source: OECD, Gender Wage Gap (2017)

OurWorldInData.org/women-rights • CC BY

**Figure 6.3.** Global North Gender Gap, 1970-2016. Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/gender-wage-gap-oecd?country=AUS~FRA~ITA~JPN~SWE~GBR~USA>.

that adopted a quota law, women occupy 10 percent of the Senate seats and 21 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives, giving them some agency over policy decisions. A high level of educational attainment has been maintained in the Caribbean diaspora. Thus, women have been able to enjoy a large share of employment in the professional sectors of the region. Most of their engagement, however, has been restricted to the service sectors and to the nurturing occupations (teaching, nursing, social work, etc.), which keep their earning power fairly low. Although via CARICOM access, the African diaspora in the Caribbean has minimized the gender gap over the last three decades, not enough has been done at the grassroots level to promote advancement for poor communities.

While the Black diaspora shares some of the similarities found in explanations of the global gender gap (as illustrated in figure 6.3 above) and may get a thumbs-up for its record on participation in decision-making, there are still areas of performance that may aid those localities in achieving the sustainable goals set by the international community. For example, in recent analysis, it was observed that as younger women gain more access to decision-making, opportunities to intersect voice (in decision-making) and agency (in spending power) may translate into further closing the gender gap globally. This analysis further demonstrated that approximately 21 percent of the variance in household income is explained by younger women (aged fifteen to forty-nine) making decisions about the purchase of major household items. In South America, for example, about 80 percent of women making such decisions spend in the area of \$8,800 on household purchases. Comparatively, women in the North American region spend about twice as much and women in East, Central, and West Africa spend about \$35,500. There may, of course, be multiple explanations for this, one such being the gap in need as it relates to what items are easily available in the Global North versus the Global South. But, the budgeting decisions of women and potential expenditure on products in the global economy should not be disregarded in conversations on the role such spending may have on the economic well-being of a region. In fact, making financial choices that impact the global economy and utilize expenditure of foreign currency is a resource that merits collaborative attention primarily to ensure that such expenditure by households is geared to the common good and can be redirected toward the growth of innovative homegrown entrepreneurship rather than further importation of goods for which quality alternatives may be found within the native regions. This is a lesson that some women have already learned and implemented in the mitigation of economic disaster at the local level.

Across the United States and specifically in Louisiana, the leadership of women in spearheading innovative projects is astounding. At a presenta-

tion on disaster management on 15 July 2021, Dr. Aubrey Paris, policy advisor to the US State Department on global women's issues, moderated a forum entitled *Innovation Station of the Gulf Coast* featuring seven women invested in innovative programs in the Gulf of Mexico and as far afield as Hawaii and Argentina (S/GWI 2021–2023). The panels' conversations were informative, comprehensive, and abundant in their innovative resources. In Louisiana, the Water Collaborative highlighted a diverse arena of project foci, including urban conservancy, landscape architecture, art-centric culture aimed at enhancing the culture of Louisiana, while educating the populace on shoreline resilience, water management, and efforts to deepen the literacy of students and adults in the urban and rural communities of Louisiana. Similarly, challenges for shoreline resilience were tackled by Laura Bowie of the Mississippi Gulf Coast community project working on coastal resilience and green infrastructure in collaboration with communities in neighboring Louisiana. Knowledge sharing on such strategies with other disaster-prone areas of the African diaspora, such as Haiti, Puerto Rico, St. Maarten, and the Bahamas, whose collaboration at the community level with those knowledgeable in climate and infrastructure science, innovative technologies, education, and training in issues pertinent to development, will help communities to harness their capacities for sustainable development.

For the islands of the Caribbean, much benefit could be gained from studying the innovative strategies undertaken by Monterey Seafood Watch (Kemmerley 2015). Sadly lacking in Caribbean communities are neighborhood innovations pertaining to clean-up and financing of community projects for development and sustainability of their coastal areas. As was shared by Aleksandra Dragozet (Netherlands), Karina Campos (Argentina), Helena Williams (Louisiana), and Jeanette Gurung (Hawaii), panelists on the 2021 *Innovation Station* program, efforts to combat climate change, manage issues of food security, educate communities on how to conduct regenerative farming, and help women find their feet in the contemporary world of human resources and sustainable development are likely to rest on community leaders and their commitment to creating sustainable environments for their families, as the realities of climate change bring further devastation to poor societies with low opportunity for sustaining development.

Not only is the innovative work of women in vulnerable societies a powerful reminder of women's capacities, their gathering, leadership, and sharing within their communities ought to remind diasporic communities of their histories of exclusion and ways in which they renegotiated behaviors of the past and its legacies. In early post-colonial times, women in Africa were purposefully restricted from cities by local statutes under

the dynamics of systems like apartheid or, in the diaspora, where they experienced difficulty finding housing and employment (Mikell 1997). As Kenneth Little (1973) perhaps jokingly remarked, when explaining female urban migration in West Africa, “men followed the money, and women followed the men” (1973: 17), thereby recognizing the powerful, even if subordinate role, women played in creating progress. Regardless, data on women leading activist organizations, staging demonstrations, lobbying for marriage and other benefits, sharing knowledge and innovating change in cities of Africa as well as in the Caribbean and the Americas abound. In Kenya, for example, women have been establishing nonprofit organizations to provide easy access to safe public transportation, thus connecting mobility issues with climate risks. In Naomi Mwaura’s TED talk (2021) on Kenya’s successful program in gender sensitivity where women are not only given the opportunity to operate their own transportation services but also educated in the language of climate change and the importance of a just transition away from public transportation to personal ownership of mobility systems in the region. Innovative initiatives, such as these, give rise to the recognition that women are not sidelined or kept away from forums of education because they are perceived to be less intelligent or less able; they are suppressed because men reject or fear women’s capacity to lead, to budget, to think, to develop competently/efficiently and empower generations of younger women to seek access to the benches of power in order to better manage state affairs and maintain an active and equal voice in the decision-making process of their communities.

Looking back at examples of the past, Rwanda presents a classic tribute to women’s potential for nation-building following the genocide in 1994. That catastrophe left most of the Rwandan men slaughtered by each other in the massacre, allowing a strategic plan to be crafted to integrate women into the work of government. An oversample of women was designed to represent the country in the chambers of government. In 2003, 64 percent of seats in Rwanda’s lower house of the national legislature were occupied by women. As a comparison, only 19 percent in the US House of Representatives is held by women. Indeed, only Rwanda and Bolivia have a majority of women assisting in policy-making in their countries. But, does this fact hold any currency for Rwanda in the determination of “governance” or gender equity?

In a report filed by National Public Radio journalist Gregory Warner (2016) affording women space to represent Rwandan publics did not automatically mean for Rwandan women a closing of the gender gap. While in numerical assessment Rwanda ranks sixth among countries narrowing the gender gap in the early twenty-first century, this did not mean that wom-



en's roles were modified and that they had greater voice. It simply meant (and continues to mean) that although they would not think of themselves as feminists, in the American/European context, they are attending collectively to nationally ascribed gender roles but standing up, not just for the good of women in the country but for the country as a whole.

The fact remains, too, that most of the Rwandan women who were elected or appointed to serve were not elected on their formal attainment of education (baseline knowledge measure), as in the pre-genocide period but rather on their ability to serve and represent the needs of the public. Whereas prior to the genocide, women did not have the capacity to own their own homes, land, or work in professional occupations outside of the home, appointing women to positions of authority post-genocide, amplified their voices in decision-making and called attention to their natural, intellectual capital. Understanding how their ancestors sacrificed and worked communally to protect their communities, they were more than ready to assume roles they were denied in pre-genocide Rwanda, where external forces were able to generate hostility and dissension, resulting in group violence, rather than curate patterns of development where gender did not propagate exclusivity and divisiveness. The wisdom and resilience women demonstrated post-genocide not only illustrate how closing the gender gap could prove effective for developing the country but also clarify how empowering women to self-actualize, in the absence of a male workforce, for nation-building could open new innovative channels for development and allow women to step in and take their rightful place in building communities for growth. Unlike what happened in the United States and European territories, after men returned from World War I and claimed their traditional roles of running and developing the country and women were forced to return to their domestic duties or to the roles traditionally occupied by them, that is, teachers, nurses, secretaries, and so forth, the women of Rwanda were empowered to successfully produce creative strategies for nation-building, since there was no scope for waiting for the men in their communities to return to claim lost territory.

As the debate on gender equality policies becomes louder in the Black diaspora, scholars have teamed up to explore the meaning of gender equality initiatives in strong male-dominated states (Debuscher and Ansoms 2013). These scholars sought to evaluate deep-rooted societal norms and practices in order to determine factors that inform the level of commitment among Rwandan women to gender equality, the impact of women's commitment to development, and the trends that threaten the potential of Rwandan gender equality to transform gender equity policies. Thus, despite the political will to present target-driven policies and opportunities for promoting gender equality policies, the expected

transformative potential was undercut by the dominance of the economic rationale for development already in place; the continued neglect of the contribution of women's labor; the strong focus on quantitative rather than qualitative achievements of implemented policies; the inattentiveness to community voices on issues of policy; and the lack of grassroots participation in the process of policy-making. These and similar findings indicate that in regions where there is scope for gender equality to exist, especially following disasters, patterning leadership on male-dominated, authoritarian values does not allow for genuine gender equity to prevail.

In the contemporary era, Rwandan women have formed communities of developers. Learning from old cultural traditions, women have led the way in the development of textiles and crafts, such as papermaking from banana pulp, which has led to fabric development and paper products. And, building on old cultural wisdoms, women have begun to reclaim the sayings they grew up with, for example (in Kinyarwanda), "knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested." In the post-disaster era since 1994, Rwanda has developed communities of women, some teaching, some learning the entrepreneurial skills that would take them out of poverty and helplessness into leadership, and knowledge production for the development of their communities. The community approach to development has allowed for a remarkable turnaround of fortunes, with women now able to buy land and cultivate it for recovery and growth.

Because of the loss of so many male lives, most of the patriarchy has shifted to shared relationships where young men are being groomed to understand the value of partnerships between men and women and its importance in reforming the culture of resilience rather than hostility and competition as engendered by European occupation and exploitation. Communities have fostered entrepreneurial skills in dress-making, fabric production, and more. They are benefiting from micro-financing collaborations with private and public sector partners and the universities are producing bumper crops of mental health practitioners to provide support for recovery and train Rwandan women in how to be resilient and to make decisions not just for themselves, despite the inequities they have experienced, but for the whole country.

As younger Africans in the diaspora are often reminded by elders in their communities, "the strength of the crocodile is in the water": a reminder that people have their own niches and are strongest in that environment. This serves to discourage unnecessary competition between and among men and women. Thus, one recognizes the subtle ability to identify knowledge and the technologies to convert them into a product that is sustainable. The reiteration of what strategies achieve success and the

demonstration of the harmony it brings to think of and work in a space not divided by colonial exploitation but one cognizant of shared values and respect for the dignity and well-being of each member of the community is reinforced. Removing group symbols in Rwanda, for example, aimed at developing hatreds among groups while exploitative strategies to divide and conquer run amuck, was the first step toward Rwandan recovery but establishing equity among communities of males, females, old, young, punisher, punished, and others can today be attributed to Rwanda's successful embrace of the challenges for restoration and opportunities for sustainable development. Such outcomes need to be widely shared across Africa and its diaspora to introduce such community-building to the potential for achieving the goals of the international community to ensure the universe benefits collectively from a potentially sustainable future.

### **Goal 6: Public Health**

UN Goal 6 encapsulates what benefits life and provides a baseline for growth and the pursuit of happiness in a shared ecosystem. To ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all is to ensure humanity thrives and regenerates, building on shared experiences for the sustainability of life. Addressing human vulnerabilities across communities will not only allow humans to adapt their behavior to protect the environment from a changing climate but will allow them to apply creative wisdoms for sustainability. Sharing knowledge and expertise in traditional settings helps societies in the diaspora to meet the public health standards identified by the United Nations to claim citizenship in the global commons. Goal 6 is uniquely appropriate to measure innovative strategies in Louisiana, for example, where water and sanitation have featured in every strategic plan groups have developed to redeem patterns of loss, in Louisiana, from disaster as well as from a history of poverty and injustice.

Louisiana, with her large Afro-diasporic population, is easily identified as one of the most disaster-impacted regions of the Global North. Along with other areas of the Gulf South, Louisiana's exposure to hurricanes and ill weather has required, for the assurance of public health, that a safe drinking water program be set in place and that "boil water" advisories and water outages be added to available emergency reports to residents immediately after a storm. The safe drinking water program provides comprehensive mandates, with federal and state regulations, to ensure public health and safety from illness and death that ensures protection to all residents of Louisiana. It monitors public water systems to comply with protective measures against what may be caused by waterborne diseases or

contamination of water sources. In the immediate aftermath of a weather catastrophe, the Safe Drinking Water Program activates monitoring exercises aimed at testing for contamination levels and treating such contamination with immediate action. In addition, inspections are conducted and sanitation surveys distributed to determine the capability of the drinking water system to meet the needs of public safety so that, where desired, it can deliver satisfactory quantities and quality of safe drinking water to residential and business consumers. There is also an engineering review plan in place to determine if any new construction or modifications are needed for the system in place. This guarantees that water sources, its treatment, storage, and distribution facilities ensure the quality and protection of drinking water and sanitation necessary for healthy development. Much of this effort targets the urban areas where a majority of Black and brown populations reside.

Marked improvement in Louisiana's water management system has been observed since the Safe Drinking Water Fee (Act 605) was passed in 2016. The collaborative effort among local government officials, federal action committees, members of the private sector, and a variety of public health officials ensure that critical infrastructure, transparent communication, the involvement of technical operators, school boards, political operatives, and opinion leaders are all made accountable for righting the wrongs experienced in public health safety by vulnerable communities of the Black diaspora and indigenous groups resident in Louisiana.

The connection has already been made between climate change and development. Climate change is responsible for increases in disaster frequency that, in turn, lowers already low development, rendering sustainability a struggle for impacted communities. Global leaders assessing performance around the world of water resources reported an audit of said resources in Louisiana. They found, as reiterated at the COC (climate conference) in Glasgow in October 2021, that Louisiana leads the world in efforts to manage the water system. It is noted that public and private investments, supported and sponsored by "world class" science and technology identify Louisiana as a leader to be emulated in its realization of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations as outlined in Goal 6. It is precisely because of a history of loss in a state that is 6 feet below sea level with a large enough diasporic community that this leadership should be emulated by other residents of the Black diaspora. For example, Guyana, also a region below sea level with developmental issues stemming from decades of flooding as a result of overtopped sea walls and reliance on European partners to assist in meeting their developmental goals, could learn from Louisiana's success in managing its water resources.

Interestingly enough, one of the partners to Guyana and states in the Gulf of Mexico is the Netherlands. Dutch assistance in the area of water management has been reinforced by the collaboration of thousands of professionals engaged in the work of water management with a focus on preserving coastal habitats while protecting the millions of residents within/across the Gulf of Mexico. Although Louisiana leaders recognize the benefit of relying on their own cultural wisdoms in exploration of the relationship between water and the survival and sustainability of its people, local leaders are also aware of the Netherlands' efforts in finding solutions to the problems of low-lying areas of Europe and of the balance it has created in efforts to support the coastal challenge created by the confluence of the Rhine, the Meuse, and the Schelde Rivers in the delta. Engaging in a collaborative water management project allows Louisiana not only to learn from Dutch expertise but also to work alongside university professionals, scientists, and technologists across the globe, while hiring thousands of local employees to be part of the management sector of the project.

As research on water proceeds, research tools have been engaged to accurately forecast the flooding impact on neighborhood schools, hospitals, and other structures before a catastrophe strikes. This early warning attention is helpful. It alerts officials to the potential impact of a storm, to the potential damage to the shorelines, to the natural and man-made structures contributing to the devastation of marshes, barrier isles, and communities long held hostage by climatic events such as hurricanes and tropical storms. Findings stemming from such research are critical for other areas experiencing vulnerability from the weather and climate change. This is knowledge that can/should be shared with others in the diaspora. It is understandable that knowledge emanating from Black localities in the Global North can be extremely beneficial to communities in the Global South, who do not have the monetary resources to access such information. Black localities such as New Orleans where most of the services on a water management project are already publicized and shared with residents on the Great Lakes of the Upper Midwest or Vietnam's residents of the Mekong Delta should also be made available to others in the diaspora who can learn and benefit from the research (Ehrenwerth 2017). As Justin Ehrenwerth explained, using science to guide leadership has practical impact. Leading the Water Institute of the Gulf can put science into practice. He thus appreciates the need to take the best available science to develop realistic questions for good policy-making.

The Water Institute of the Gulf of Mexico, under the leadership of Ehrenwerth, serves as an important reminder of the role the past must play in decisions of the present and potential guidance for sustainability in

the future. Reflecting on the Sankofa model, introduced here to guide thinking on the role of cultural wisdoms in effecting new trajectories for development in the diaspora, one may recognize that the Dutch have not always been the best stewards of waterways throughout the history of diasporic spaces in states such as St. Maarten, Guyana, Suriname, and others where the Dutch exercised strong influence on water management by marketing their management strategies as solutions for others with similar vulnerabilities, regardless of the cultural disruptions that ensued in the other spaces. Recognizing that many mistakes were made in the building of sea walls and the reliance on structural man-made solutions as opposed to nature-based solutions cautions diasporic peoples against repeating the errors of the past. As disclosed by David Burdick (2021), in a presentation on innovative approaches to climate change and coastal resilience planning, nature-based solutions are found to be more durable for shoreline resistance than man-made structures. In Louisiana, Lake Pontchartrain, a massive man-made lake, is seen to contribute more to the problem than to the solution of past coastal erosion. A reflection on those failures has helped contribute to the work of the Water Institute as well as improved it. Ehrenwerth is the first to admit his understanding of the practical impact of using science to guide leadership of reforms to water management systems. Focusing on what policies should be put in place by collaborating with residents in vulnerable communities, technical experts with knowledge of the cultural wisdoms of the past in challenged communities, understanding the extent of flooding and increases in flooding in communities over the years, and analyzing alternatives to policy in addition to accessing available funds and regulatory parameters, all suggest that engineering skills alone cannot counteract the vulnerabilities of climate change to impacted communities. In the present, being part of a Water Institute, where all contributing parties (ecologists, emergency management officials, engineers, etc.) can engage in successful collaboration, is what would lead to effective practice and, ultimately, sustainable development for post-disaster communities under threat of future harm to the natural environment.

Haiti is ready to learn from the efforts of Louisiana and its emergence as a global leader in climate change in relation to managing water. Haiti has been ravaged not only by hurricanes but also by earthquakes. Its need for developing new green infrastructure to ensure public safety rests also in managing its water sources. Devastated by recent crises in political leadership, Haiti has to find ways to build the kind of collaboration that Louisiana has successfully instituted. Haiti had once been a beacon for economic development in Louisiana. From the introduction of sugar into Louisiana, Haiti demonstrated its ability to share and collaborate with others of the

African diaspora. Now that Louisiana has learned the importance of triangulating business (entrepreneurship), academia, and private and public sector engineering and consulting, this is an opportunity to help Haiti find its feet. And, not much is needed to do so. Access to information is what Haiti requires. The benefits of becoming a global leader in climate change and sustainable development where disaster experience is shared and solutions found is perhaps the simplest step that can be made in the direction of sustainability. Increasing information flow between the two diasporic localities augurs well for change and development. Bridging community leadership and science, both of which abound in this region must start by identifying the intellectual capacity shared within these groups and their potential to learn from each other. Of primary importance to Haiti, however, would be harnessing the political will in Haiti to put class differences aside and work, as Rwandan women do, to salvage development for the whole country in areas where they are most needed, namely, gender equality, environmental justice, and economic security. Getting local scientists back on board, both in areas of the physical and social sciences, will rest on innovative ideas and planning which will go a long way to realizing the UN's Goal 6 of sustainable development. Water and sanitation are the basic elements of a healthy environment. The incidence of hurricanes and earthquakes as well as traumatic political leadership has left only memories of past glory as an incentive for future growth in Haiti.

### ***Goal 13: Combating Climate Change***

Goal 13 serves as an umbrella for all to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Those impacts have been severely felt in the post-disaster diaspora. Louisiana has seen its coast erode and its interior degrade, affecting its livelihood from marine cultivation and its tourist appeal. Its disaster experience has been expanded by the latest catastrophe to impact its way of life. The COVID-19 pandemic has limited its social activities, crippled its nightlife and the hospitality services that attended it, and severely impacted the pocket books of all those relying on the culture of the state. The harm to its built environment has laid bare the poverty that exists behind the hustle and bustle of everyday life. A loss of life, employment, income in periods of weather disaster only expands the devastation that Louisiana communities experience. New perceived threat for the annual hurricane season, where the damage to already vulnerable communities increases displacement as communities repair and recover and exacerbates the urgency for innovative ideas to meet the challenges to development. Where does resilience come from, if not from

cultural wisdoms of the past and identifying the capacities to regenerate the present and build sustainable futures?

Similarly, the experiences of Haiti and Rwanda that address the crises of political leadership, challenges to legitimate governance, and the juggling of management criteria to ensure nations do not regress into complacency in the face of disasters past that have threatened employment, income, wellness, and community, all of which are required for sustainable recovery, serve as shareable knowledge capital that may be produced in the search for environmental sustainability.

Adaptation is at the heart of disaster mitigation in the three diasporic societies highlighted in this volume. Insights that contribute to a favorable outcome for the societies in this study may be applied to post-disaster societies seeking a trajectory of development. This emanates from the identification of intellectual capital resident in these societies and from the production of innovative methodologies for potential sustainability. As capital is produced, the achievement of goals will empower communities to generate conversations that will contribute to a feedback loop and regenerate even more innovative ideas for tackling economic insecurity, gender inequality and environmental injustice. To evaluate the impacts of climate change on an already vulnerable and far-flung diaspora, it is necessary to address the incidence of economic insecurities, gender inequity, and climate injustice on development in order to support a just transition for a sustainable future.

Previous chapters of this manuscript have outlined the need for building a resistant green infrastructure that allows adaptation to climate demands. The opportunity to succeed in the building of such infrastructure has costs and benefits. Among the costs is expenditure on education and training for skilled labor, information technology that is easily accessible to all communities within the given state, the identification, financing, and utilizing of local expertise, and the erection of political, economic, social, and cultural, institutional structures to implement innovative ideas and intellectual capacities of enlightened communities, willing to engage locally for the global good. The benefits are multiple also: guided self-reliance, new green jobs, institutional support, forging community partnerships and investment in low-carbon initiatives, and redress of environmental injustice, as illustrated in the table below.

While the above organization of costs and benefits adequately illustrates the impact climate change will have on the whole planet and potential solutions, it must be reiterated that its likely effect on the African diaspora with its wealth limitations, geographical drawbacks with many living on coasts and islands, its history of colonial exploitation, its strong dependence on natural resources for the livelihood of its people,



**Table 6.2.** Costs, Benefits, and Outcomes of Global Climate © Pamela Waldron-Moore.

Costs	Benefits	Expected Outcomes
Education and training on carbon reduction	Skilled labor force to mitigate risk	New Green Initiatives and monitoring policies: e.g. wind and solar energy
Information technology task forces	Knowledge access; information sharing	Application of models to scale: clean, cost-effective, energy access
New institutional structures	Framework for guided self-reliance	Political, economic, cultural, and social policy advocacy
Loss from predatory business investments	Community investment and cultural engagement	Advocacy for climate justice and empowerment of action for change

its mostly poor infrastructure and fast-growing populations are especially vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. So, there is no neat package of costs/benefits or solutions that will inspire confidence in a quick fix for the diaspora's lunge at sustainable development by the international community's designated 2030 deadline. A city like Lagos, Nigeria, for example, is one of the fastest growing cities in the world. Its population of 15 million people is forecast to double by 2050. This will not only place pressure on the infrastructure but will actually create more costs than benefits.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Guyana, with its three-quarters of a million population dependent on its own abundant natural resources, finds itself in the awkward position of optimizing its newly oil-generated resources at a time when the world needs to reduce its dependency on fossil fuels and adapt to new energy solutions in order to combat the effects of climate change. Sadly, because of brain drain over centuries, a lack of technological expertise, and underdeveloped access to information sharing, both Lagos and Georgetown, find themselves prey to the oil industry moguls of the Global North and have regressed into dependency on the industrialized core countries rather than engage in the policy advocacy and empowerment strategies that knowledge production for development entails. What is even sadder about this scenario is that Guyana and, to some extent, Nigeria both have a history of revolutionary economic leadership in collaboration with the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77, the ACP economic bloc and other international and regional alliances. Lacking, however, is the political will and policy innovations

necessary for these and other historically vulnerable nations to break totally free of the shackles with which neocolonialism has poor states bound and gagged.

### **Sankofa: Symbolism for the Diaspora**

Those who suffer the most from the effects of climate change remain the least responsible for its occurrence. Members of the Black diaspora located in the Global North fare better than those in the Global South, despite the fact that, overall, Blacks are rarely counted among the wealthy. There is an inverted relationship between groups in the North and South as it relates to global wealth distribution. Among the world's wealthiest and most developed countries, thirty-seven are members of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) group. There are, additionally, eighty-one high income countries that are very well developed. The poorest countries, low in development, are approximately seventy-seven in number and mainly located in the South. These are the countries where African-descended people are generally located. The reality that among these people, there is a history of resilience and survival confirms the view that their strength and grit lie in their cultural orientations and their continued survival depends on the will to survive. Many in the developed North claim that climate change is the world's problem and all countries "are in it together." But there are lessons to be learned from anthropologists that remind us to look to our histories for solutions, for learning from the past, lest we repeat its errors. Africa and its diaspora must learn that it is only through collaboration, knowledge sharing, and a resilient spirit that sustainable development is possible.

The quest for knowledge among the Akan is symbolized by the Sankofa emblem. Its implication that a quest for knowledge must be a critical examination, based on patient, intelligent investigation and analysis is a reminder to the diaspora that there is wisdom in learning from the past and that the only way to assure a strong future is to recall the past, understand what succeeded and what failed, before moving on to the introduction of policy that may be foolproof. Many leaders in the African diaspora have depended heavily on their colonial history for guidance at the expense of their African past. There is urgency now to retrieve that past and engage it to its best advantage. As the Akan believed, when one takes the best from the past and brings it into the present, it only augurs well for the future. Ghana's recovery from the depths of underdevelopment to the progress with which they are credited today is a good incentive for areas of the diaspora still struggling under the burden of

imperialistic acculturation. Rwanda has recognized that the hatefulness of “divide and conquer” under French/Belgian oppression has contributed to their failures and have taken those lessons to propel themselves into a positive present and a likely sustainable future. Black communities in Louisiana have taken a similar path and returned to the lessons of the past to devise new methods of managing water, the staff of their existence, for the betterment of their daily lives and communities dedicated to sustainability. A look at each of these communities in context amplifies the Sankofa model.

### **Haiti: Sustainable Goals**

The three post-disaster units (Haiti, Louisiana, Rwanda) referenced in this volume as having the potential to provide a blueprint for development in the future, all have powerful histories of loss and struggle, with equal present experiences of resilience and growth, and the courage and hope to press forward in search of a sustainable future. Haiti has had what may only be described as a turbulent political history. Yet, it was the first Black-led entity in the diaspora to reject French colonial rule to become an independent state. That history is marked by the bravery and resilience that the diaspora understands to be a part of its motivation to attain self-determination despite the cost. Although Haiti’s present has been plagued by political, natural, and man-made disaster, it still has the glory of its history to sustain it into a new and thriving tomorrow. So, what will it take for a post-disaster Haiti to break free from the interfering prescriptions of the North and neighborly ostracism in the South to reclaim its past glory, resilience, tenacity, grit? Would adopting a knowledge economy along the framework described earlier in this text be a sound recommendation for the achievement of environmental sustainability? Can a return to cultural wisdoms, where griots enlightened communities and generated advocacy of and empowerment for new innovative ideas, fed by strong communication and grassroots action to legitimize development in the interest of the people, while educating new cadres of risk-mitigators to find strategies for development and liberation akin to those conceived by Jean-Jacques Dessalines in 1804 be the catalyst for change in vulnerable Haiti? Beginning with legitimate people-centered governance and built around educational, sociocultural, geopolitical and economic institutions where easy access to information is available and knowledge sharing can revive and empower the Haitian spirit, a new day may dawn in Haiti’s ability to protect its environment, and envisage a sustainable carbon-reduced future.

To accomplish such a goal, it may be pertinent to introduce a better way of defining sustainability. As contemporary environmental scholarship (see Abrahams 2014; Goodland 1995; and WCED 1987) suggests, environmental sustainability incorporates in its definition the need for post-disaster activities but also a plan for resources that envisions a just social environment and provides resources to realize such an environment. Thus a modified definition of environmental sustainability created specifically for the post-disaster context must build on past knowledge and include a just representation of sustainability: “Sustainable post-disaster activities provide resources to affected citizens to ensure health and safety and to promote redevelopment, without causing further damage to land or existing structures, exacerbating the impacts of the disaster, or placing undue stress on the natural environment” (WCED 1987).

As Edwidge Danticat illustrates, in her far-reaching insights on Haiti’s political, socioeconomic, and cultural realities of life in Haiti, memory is key to Haiti’s survival. As Danticat writes (2003), “I know old people, they have great knowledge. I have been taught never to contradict our elders. I am the oldest child. My place is here.” The implication that it is the responsibility of generations to pass on knowledge and retain continuity of the histories of the past for the benefit of the future is not lost in Danticat’s writings. Indeed, as Maryse Condé’s novel (2001) narrates the life of her grandmother, both Haitian writers reveal the importance of historical narrative of elders’ lives as harvesting a “rich landscape of memory.” Caribbean scholars know only too well that what is missing from the archives on their African ancestors are only to be found in the memories of living, elderly family members, especially grandmothers and great-grandmothers, on/around whose lives their own futures are expected to be built. What Haiti may currently lack in expressions of climate innovativeness, they have excelled in creative expressions of resilience and the Haitian spirit. Whether in the success of books such as Danticat’s and other accomplished Haitian writers or in the theatrical productions of artistes such as Leyla McCalla (2021) in her performance of “Breaking the Thermometer to Hide the Fever,” the narrative of resilience is repeatedly told. Directed by Kiyoko McCrae in her exploration of the legacy of Radio Haiti-International, the multimedia experience featuring McCalla, Haitian American singer and songwriter, reminds us that the harsh political realities Haitians face and support for journalists who uplifted the voices of Haitian publics experiencing the trauma of their lived realities, express the creative energies of post-disaster Louisiana, Rwanda, and other diasporic spaces as they memorialize the past while expressing the potential for recovery from lived trauma as hope for a sustainable future.

## Louisiana: Sustainable Goals

At the 2021 climate change conference—COP26—in Glasgow, Scotland, former US president Barack Obama applauded the work of Louisiana communities fighting on the frontline of climate change. Selected for this study as one of the few northern territories with a significant track record of Black empowerment during relentless social injustice, it is easy to trace Louisiana's history of activism in the face of existential disaster/crisis to the resilience of grassroots community action. Though stories of political and sociocultural activism in the Black diaspora abound, few know the details of why areas like Louisiana, Jamaica, Guyana, and other diasporic spaces have carved out a niche for being the icons they really are. In Louisiana, stories of freedom-fighting women, like the Castle sisters, closely resemble that of Nanny and the maroons in Jamaica, or men like Kofi who led the rebellion of 1763 to overthrow colonial powers in Guyana. The agency that the Castle sisters and co-activists like Dooky Chase claimed in Louisiana (see Dottin-Haley 2020) still resides in historical memory and speaks to the power of a Sankofa model of development. As Blair Dottin-Haley, grandson of Oretha Castle Haley, recounts in his article in the local Louisiana magazine, *64 Parishes*, the Castles are remembered and honored in the naming of communities and creative centers. Their stories and the oral histories of other memorable women and activists of Louisiana, contribute to the legacies of the past, guiding the present and giving insight into the future, in both creative arts and narrative form.

Contemporary advocates of climate justice (e.g., Pichon-Battle 2019) continue the honoring of these icons by active engagement in legal and policy-oriented community projects, in recognition of the spirit of activism on which the memory of Louisiana's heroines, hinges. In their work on climate justice, the Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy (GCCLP) collaborates with a community of participants for a Green New Deal, linking with grassroots and other climate activists from the region and around the world to keep global temperatures from rising above the 1.5° level. The Gulf South Center for a Green New Deal (GS4GND) is the first regional-led movement for a Green New Deal and is inspiring change across the nation and world. The GS4GND is an interesting movement that builds on long-existing work in the southern region toward climate, racial, and economic justice. It is a useful blueprint for how other areas of the diaspora may build capacity and rely less on external organizations and more on community collaboration.

Other community development projects have fully embraced the adoption of a Sankofa perspective. Entitled the Sankofa Community Development Corporation, this nonprofit community organization in Louisiana

hosts a community garden and runs a farmer's market to promote access to healthy food at affordable prices. The effort to counteract food deserts, arising in the disastrous aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, models itself on food production methods of the past along with communal sharing of produce among neighborhood families. The Sankofa CDC is committed to providing "leadership to build, inspire, and serve" (Ferdinand 2022). Additionally, Louisiana boasts a variety of community collaborations whose purpose is primarily to mitigate the risks of disaster and adapt to green infrastructure that promotes the healthy lifestyle of communities while contributing to the sustainable development of the Gulf of Mexico. One such site, appropriately named the Sankofa Nature Trail and Wetland Park, highlights the role of wetlands in absorbing storm water and reducing land subsidence. Wetlands create a habitat for plants and support wildlife, while its trees cool the environment and absorb the rain. Moreover, the synchronized benefits of the wetland project serve to protect the city against the negative impact of hurricane. Working with the indigenous and Black and Brown communities of the region and drawing on the historical connection between humans and the earth has offered many lessons for the African diaspora in reaching back to the past for innovative entrepreneurial strategies that may potentially usher in a sustainable environmental future. Caribbean islands like St. Maarten, Antigua, and Barbuda and several of the smaller states in the Caribbean (Arrindell 2021), which need climate renovation and have encountered climate injustice in terms of what the colonial governments are willing to provide their citizens, could gain valuable traction from the community exchanges and collaborations from which they have historically benefited, though on a smaller scale.

It is also useful to observe that in Louisiana, knowledge sharing comes in all forms. Creative exercises, such as those hosted by the organization No Dream Deferred, have gathered a "cohort of Black and Black Indigenous artists, makers, and creatives who share an interest in building a coalition focusing on decolonizing their creative practices and crafting a shared vision for a more sustainable future" (Turner 2021).

The uniqueness of this creative expression, as directed by Lauren Turner (2021), memorializes the liberation practices of the ancestors' resistance and innovation. The goal is to continue to build and expand the diasporic archive for future generations. Not dissimilar from the productive activities of Rwandan communities in the wake of a catastrophic genocide that forced a wrenching return to roots as communities sought to heal and rebuild, Louisiana activists recognize that the practice of Sankofa is one of remembering and revering the memory of the past. Decolonization of the mind is practiced through ancestral veneration, out of which comes the wisdom for creating innovative and sustainable futures. As Turner (2021)

affirms, “liberatory practices for making are not new; we have countless examples within our current archives of our ancestors’ resistance and innovation. Our mission becomes to continue to build and expand the archive for future generations. The work we do now sets the tone.” Such are the blueprints of development that must be shared widely within the Black diaspora, if communities are to be developed sustainably. The time to learn from the past and organize creative and innovative community activism with recovery in mind is a viable pursuit for a sustainable future.

## **Rwanda: Sustainable Goals**

Rwanda’s catastrophe is etched from its colonial past. Its recovery strategies serve as an example for the survival of the diasporic spirit. In the previous chapter, much of Rwanda’s efforts to support recovery in the nation illustrated actions taken to honor the past and venerate those who died in the fray and whose corporal remains needed to be disposed of in respectful ways. Similarly, as climate change takes its toll on those seeking to reclaim the soil and replenish the earth, feasible strategies that yielded success in the past should be revised with land-based, plant-based solutions relevant to the topography, landscape, and values of the past. The memorial site in Kigali, not only affords citizens a place to recall the past but also a space where people may reflect on where they have been, where they are and, potentially, where they should be heading. Green infrastructure, relying on alternative sources of energy, clean air, guided water management, and providing wholesome food for healthy living, under the collaboration of a “woke” community and responsible government is a good formula for reducing carbon emissions in an attempt to decrease the warming of the earth and the sustainability of humankind. As is said in the vernacular of Guyanese and others in the English-speaking African diaspora, “one, one, dutty build dam,” which suggests that much can be accomplished even a little at a time.

## **Conclusion: Achieving a Sustainable Future**

One fact remains clear in addressing climate change and the diaspora’s need to avoid extinction in the face of critical disaster experiences: Waiting for the developed world to be accountable for the harm it has brought to a shared ecosystem and to provide services to the diaspora is not in the interest of a sustainable future. Especially for those threatened by immediate crisis situations, a viable plan must be devised post-haste to

divert the mud from hitting the fan. Building knowledge economies, replete with education and training institutions for learning/teaching about climate change and so much more, providing access to information to complement such institutions, identifying intellectual capacity and offering incentives for entrepreneurship and the use of uncovered knowledge capital, and encouraging collaborations with all community stakeholders where innovative approaches can be engaged in public service are fool-proof ways of saving communities as they save the planet.

Building alliances across the gender and generational divide is a first step to decolonizing the creative and innovative capitals of communities that have let the narratives of those who claim supremacy over Black thought and action reduce the diaspora to positions of subordination. Barbados's decision to shed the vestiges of colonization by becoming a republic in 2021 is an indication that the diaspora's hope for a sustainable future recognizably lies in renouncing the symbols of oppression of the past and reclaiming a history, fraught with lessons of resilience, innovation, creativity, dignity, and pride. Appointing a woman as the first president of the small island further signals Barbados's readiness to refrain from "loitering on colonial premises" (quoted in Coto 2021). In a passionate acceptance of her new role, Sandra Mason, the first president of Barbados, affirmed that it was time for Barbados to redefine its understanding of self, of state, and the Barbados brand, in a more complex, fractured, and turbulent world where Barbadians need to "dream big dreams and fight to realize them" (quoted in Coto 2021). Less than six months later, Jamaica quietly echoed the sentiment when its Foreign Minister notified the British Crown of its intention to seek Republic status and leave the Commonwealth in the near future.

Together with the Prime Minister of Barbados, the first woman to hold that title, and the new president of the Republic of Barbados, the Black diaspora must recognize that gender inequity, economic insecurity, and environmental injustice can be eliminated. Embracing their knowledge capital, producing said capital, and engaging in regenerative, creative, and innovative practices, is a plausible trajectory for sustainable development. Perhaps, the diaspora, as envisioned by Maya Angelou (1978), can still rise and collectively say:

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
 I rise  
 Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
 I rise  
 Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave  
 I am the dream and hope of the slave



I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

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