Sustainable Development, Racial Equity, and Public Health in the City of Detroit:
A Report on Detroit’s *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* Workshop

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“Bridging the Global-Local Divide in Academia: Best Practices & Models”
University of Maryland Baltimore
Purpose

- Explore the creative application of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relating public health to the social challenges facing the City of Detroit
Why GHI/Henry Ford?

• Interest in low-cost, “frugal” innovations

• Commitment to CBPR, healthcare research in Detroit

• Detroit’s Sociohistorical Context
  – Post-industrial
  – Structural racism & inequities
  – Privatization (public health, water)
Methods

• One-day Workshop
• 55 attendees
• 4 Breakout Workgroups
  – Hunger and Food Security (SDG 2)
  – Health and Wellbeing for All (SDG 3)
  – Sustainable Water and Sanitation (SDG 6)
  – Urban Development and Safety (SDG 11)
Hunger & Food Security
• Selected Quotes
  – “Although government may be able to inform change, the ultimate transformation must come down to the community.”
  – “Engaging individuals within communities in addition to producers would ultimately create a more sustainable practice.”
  – “Accountability should span from the government-level down to the household because only by holding people accountable on all levels can sustainable change be achieved.”
  – “We must build a greater sense of political power and build relationships with the city government, since they are the property owners of the land.”

• Goal: By Oct 2017, establish a Council or Office of Sustainability in the City of Detroit
Health & Wellbeing for All
• Selected Quotes:
  – “Rates of both infant and maternal mortality are extremely high in Detroit, predominantly affecting African American women and children.”
  
  – “Detroit’s maternal death rate of 58.7 per 100,000 babies is triple the national average and even higher than the average in Libya.”
  
  – “We need to focus on giving women the right to manage their reproduction, which would allow them to participate more actively in the community, making them gatekeepers for healthcare.”

• Goal: By October 2016, convene an inclusive Public Health Roundtable to (re)establish a comprehensive, holistic, public health infrastructure
Sustainable Water & Sanitation
• Selected Quotes:
  – “Those who are most able to pay the necessary cost for clean water should be held accountable and do so.”

  – Although the Great Lakes Water Authority hosts public meetings, one participant worried that “all action, discussion, and decision-making has already been done ahead of time, so in actuality, there is no open discussion.”

  – “We have a great deal of the country’s fresh water in the Great Lakes, and there is a real need for the stewardship and preservation of this resource.”

• Goal: Residents of Detroit should immediately be provided safe and affordable water.
Urban Development & Safety
• Selected Quotes:
  – “Our neighborhoods need to be made safer and more affordable, we need a better transportation system, we need to make sure that Detroiters know what to do in local disasters, and the environmental impact of Detroit itself needs to be addressed more thoroughly.”

  – “Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard Detroit’s majority population to thrive and survive by the elimination of structural racism.”

  – “Detroit needs to ensure access to adequate, safe and affordable housing for its long-term residents.”

• Goal: By October 2017, implement inclusive urban planning and development processes that educate and empower residents of Detroit’s neighborhoods
Takeaways

• Weak, un-prioritized existing infrastructure
  – *Detroit must (re)build and reclaim a robust public health infrastructure*

• Detroit too often portrayed as vulnerable, powerless
  – *Take pride in resilience and history of organizing*

• Stressed by racialized post-industrialization
  – *Translocalism: Detroit can learn lessons from other cities around the world and vice versa*
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