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ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES: IDENTIFYING EMERGENCIES, CREATING DYNAMICS

Whilst significant progress has been made in the field of research and information on social inequalities over recent years, only recently has any work been undertaken in France on the issue of environmental inequalities. In 2002, the French Committee for the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development defined them as «a difference in situation between individuals and social groups that is visible not only in 'ecological' terms in the strictest sense (pollution, public hygiene, natural environments, etc.) but also in terms of living space, accessible renewable resources, the quality of human settlements, living conditions, landscape, etc. and that is considered to be in breach of human rights and furthermore likely to result in imbalances that are detrimental to the smooth running of the community».

Not all countries and populations are in the same position when it comes to climate change, access to energy, drinking water, pollution, and the destruction of ecosystems.

How can we now achieve a form of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs, as the Brundtland Report defined sustainable development in 1987?

There are many factors that contribute to the need for a different economic approach. The Council wishes to see real changes made to our developmental model that are compatible with a new ecological approach that ensures that natural systems are safeguarded, basic rights are respected and basic needs are met.

The proposals outlined in the ESEC's opinion and report explore the national dimension of environmental and social inequalities both in mainland France and in the overseas departments and territories and endeavours to reconcile environmental, social and economic priorities. Continuing on from the proposals already put forward by the Council in its opinions, a number of avenues of action aimed at both public authorities and other players have been identified with a view to bringing about a change of paradigm.

The complexity of the issues raised and the ambition that the invention of a new developmental model implies have given rise to different approaches and priorities, calling for the expansion of shared knowledge and encouraging further reflection.

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The recommendations put forward focus on certain aspects of the links between environmental and social inequalities, without claiming to be exhaustive, and are intended to promote a preventive approach in all fields. They are also centred around the following four major avenues of action:

IDENTIFYING AND REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL INEQUALITIES RELATING TO EXPOSURE AND ACCESS TO AMENITIES

- 👉 **Targeting decisive socio-economic and environmental factors relating to health as a matter of priority and adopting the following measures in order to do so:**
 - resolutely supporting a change of paradigm
 - generating appropriate data
 - reducing exposure and sources of exposure
 - promoting health and fighting inequalities in environmental health by means of cross-sectional and anticipatory approaches
 - involving society
 - acquiring the means to inflect health-related public policies
- 👉 **Reducing inequalities in rural areas by improving quality of life**
- 👉 **Improving access to environmental amenities in urban areas**
- 👉 **Fighting inequalities in environmental exposure and access in the overseas territories and departments by means of the following:**
 - adapting to climate risk in the overseas territories and departments in order to prevent the emergence of new inequalities
 - continuing and extending the initiatives involved in the Chlordecone plans in the Antilles
 - the effectiveness of the right to water
 - reducing inequalities in exposure to the risks and problems associated with household waste
- 👉 **Reducing or preventing too much inconsistency in the application of standards within the European Union**

ANTICIPATING THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

- 👉 **Clearly identifying the various sources of funding for environmental policies in terms of objectives**
- 👉 **Anticipating the social aspects of environmental measures in the energy sector**
- 👉 **Preventing any risk of aggravating the energy poverty situation**

ENCOURAGING INVOLVEMENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

- 👉 **Structuring the way in which whistle-blowers operate and the way in which reports are followed up**
- 👉 **Making new Agenda 21s truly regional projects with strong local roots**
- 👉 **Making the 'right to the city' a reality by increasing involvement and fighting inequalities in the ability to take action where environmental matters are concerned**
- 👉 **Increasing the democracy of the healthcare system at all levels of society**
- 👉 **Educating individuals in democratic participation from as young an age as possible**

DEVELOPING RESPONSIBILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL REPAIR

- 👉 **Ensuring that the 'polluter pays' principle is applied**
- 👉 **Continuing the expert assessment on consolidating the principle of repairing ecological damage**
- 👉 **Upholding the principle of precaution as a guideline for sustainable human development**
- 👉 **Better understanding the environmental and social issues encountered in an international context**