Lessons Learned: Conclusions

We need a new story. We need a story that is going to tell us about what is possible, a story that includes not only the rich people and the white people but also the people of color, and the poor people and the working people, and the working families. We need to acknowledge where we are and some of the difficulties we have had, but we also need to step up to the plate and say "Here is what's possible in the 21st century." We have shared with you some parts of the new story. This new story is informed by an old story, a story that goes back to the beginning of time: the struggle of humanity to make a place for itself in the world. This story began in Africa, where we strove and struggled for over 200,000 years before coming to a critical low point in our history, the slave trade. Our ancestors went through a huge humiliation, and our communities are not the only ones that have been humiliated. There were witch burnings and one-half of the people in Europe died during the Plague. There were huge hunger traumas in the Irish community. Many communities have experienced trauma. The Native American community was almost completely demolished. We need to be able to accept those tragic parts of our story as part of our shared history. But now we are in the 21st century, we have a chance to undo one of the worst episodes in urban development--the creation of parasitic urbanism, white and affluent flight to the suburbs abandoning the people in the cities as they were suffering from enormous poverty. Now, given the fact of rising prices of gasoline, the costs of living are going up. People are coming back from the suburbs to the cities, and we are happy to have them come back, but we want to be able to share the wealth and the prosperity with them, not be displaced. So this is a new story. It is a story about what people in those suburban, urban, and rural communities are doing together about adapting to climate change in the 21st century.

This is the story of how we came to really understand the need to reshape our metropolitan regions, including not only a response to climate, but also a response to social and racial injustice. We have been at this for approximately 25 years, since I started the Urban Habitat program, then met Dr. Paloma Pavel before I went to the Ford Foundation. We collaborated at the Ford Foundation and produced a book called Breakthrough Communities (MIT Press) and subsequently established an organization with that same name which builds multiracial, multicultural environmental leadership for sustainable communities in the Bay Area, in California, across the nation, and around the world.

Climate change is probably the most important issue facing our communities all over the world today. Human activity, the human economy has been so effective in heating up the atmosphere that we are now facing the threat of extinction of many, many species and even the possibility of life as we know it. We are facing the opportunity to rein in that trend, and make our economy respond to the discipline of an organized community saying no, we refuse to go extinct. We are at a remarkable moment in history, and California is at the forefront. California was the first state in the nation to adopt what was essentially the Kyoto protocol while the Federal government was unable to adopt a methodology for reducing CO2 emissions. We as a state of 40 million people stepped up to the challenge and passed AB32, pledging to bring our CO2 emissions back down to 1990 levels.

California SB 375 followed and was legislated to shape our metropolitan policy for dealing with transportation and land use together in order to reduce the CO2 emissions in the state. It turns out that 40 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions in the state actually come from cars and light trucks, so we saw we could make a difference by finding a way to change our behavior around cars and light trucks. There are eighteen metropolitan planning organizations in the state of California that are making plans for public investment in transportation. We have been lucky to be participating in that effort, both in the Bay Area, where there is a very high level of en-
gagement, but also in several metropolitan districts throughout the state.

The idea behind SB 375 was for the state to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from some thirteen tons per person throughout the state annually down to two tons by 2050. It is a remarkable decision to make a commitment to that, and it has actually been tested by ballot. Some of the oil companies did not like this idea and financed a campaign to roll back AB32, but the voters of California said “no, we really need to go forward with this legislation.” AB32 supports change in our land use and our transportation policies and all the other policies in the state, providing leadership for the United States and around the world, showing what is possible.

If you have any idea of how dependent we are on these fossil fuels with their accompanying CO2 emissions, you can imagine that going from thirteen tons per person, per capita, down to two tons annually is a pretty remarkable transformation. The scale is hard to imagine, but for example, Plan Bay Area governs investments of about 270 billion dollars over 20 years, a very substantial investment. This means that not only will we have to revise our transportation policies, but we will also have to revise our housing patterns to get our housing closer to the transportation networks so people can walk and take public transportation, and use bicycles. It is really changing the pattern from an autocentric society to one which is based on a much more balanced set of transportation choices.

There is a major role for community organizations and social justice groups in this process. Breakthrough Communities is part of a national conversation that has been going on, linking the whole idea of social justice and sustainability. Sustainability includes the three E’s: the Environment, the Economy, and social Equity, and very often people forget about social equity. The viewpoint that we have been putting forward is that we need a plan that not only reduces the greenhouse gas emissions, but we also have to face issues that our communities are very concerned with that are not that much linked in the public discussion. For example, we need to begin thinking about dismantling racism in our criminal justice system. We need to think about how we are going to respond to the challenges of suburbanization of poverty. We continue with high levels of unemployment and some places do not have tax revenues to support the social services. All these things need to be addressed at the same time that we are reducing CO2 emissions, and we say that it is possible to do these things together.

When forty five social justice organizations in the Bay Area--the Six Wins--put forward a plan called the Equity, Environment, and Jobs Scenario, we demonstrated that not only could we reduce the CO2 emis-
sions, but we also showed that we could meet our criteria for making life more equitable in the Bay Area. We demonstrated that you actually achieve better outcomes for climate change and better outcomes for reducing CO2 emissions and reducing displacement and increasing public health if you lead with social equity. This new story is about how we were able to advance an idea about planning for the seven million people in the Bay Area to meet these quite extensive goals of reducing CO2 emissions while at the same time advancing ideas about social and racial equity throughout the region, in ways that lifted up communities that have been very oppressed. We are very proud of those findings and we are very proud of the people we have been working with over the last three years.

What is really exciting is that we can in fact continue to meet our goals in terms of the technical requirements, but we can also do it in a much fuller sense of appreciation of the diverse people who are in the communities, who are also wanting to change their ways of living and what kinds of communities they live in. First of all, it is a story of people, diverse people. One of the things we feel very blessed to be doing in this project is presenting it not only as a planning episode or a set of technical interventions, but also as a story of the people who advanced those interventions. We were able to tap into a deep set of currents that have been working in the communities for the last 20, 30, 40 years, and find a way to connect them to the big challenge of adapting our behavior to a different set of assumptions about climate. We started the Six Wins coalition and many of us have been working actively on it for three years. We started it when this process was kicked off in April of 2010, and then we had a series of community meetings that followed that. We said to these coalition communities, “look at what you are already doing. Look at what you’ve been trying to do for the last four or five years, and see if this is not the best opportunity that is available to achieve some of those goals.” The Six Wins adopted a framework for doing that and we were very pleased to be a part of it with a number of other groups.

Lessons Learned

A number of innovations were made in order to accomplish the outcomes of the Six Big Wins. I think the most important thing is that we were able to dig deep into the organized community. We have had a number of organized communities that have been working on major issues for a long time. For example, the environmental justice community came into being toward the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, and has been working on toxic pollution. We were able to make the link between their goals and transportation policy, environmental justice, gentrification and displacement. As it turns out, if we are going to try to get people into a new housing pattern that is close to transportation, communities are at risk of being displaced. The question is how can we get investment and development in these communities without displacing the people. And who knows about this the best? People who have been struggling with anti-displacement and economic conversion in our communities since the dotcom boom. These were the groups that were the best resources for figuring out how to do that.

The same thing is true for our concern with public transportation, and we really had to try to find a new pattern for financing public transportation. We have been so reliant on all these automobiles. Automobile companies bought up the public transportation system to force our purchase of private vehicles. People get very excited about the return of light rail, but it needs to address the issue of how working people, working families get to work. People rely on their automobiles but with the price of gasoline going up the question becomes “how can we finance a public transit system that meets the needs of the poorest people, and then of all the people in the region?” So one goal was to get operating funds for public transit so that it really met the needs of everybody, and we were successful to some extent in getting that done. We also had important goals in terms of creating economic opportunities for the low income and the marginalized populations in the Bay Area, and that is in the process of being implemented.

One of the goals, of course, was developing economic opportunity. How could we actually create more jobs and more economic opportunity for people in this process? And then we had a goal to pro-
vide housing in high opportunity neighborhoods, particularly in the suburbs where there is a strong tax base and schools are good. We think it would be crucial to have affordable housing in those locations, particularly since many of those locations are also where the jobs are. We advocated for that, and we also advocated building community power in this process.

One of the main contributions that I think this process has made is that we showed the knowledge base of the communities is actually quite strong. We showed that if we approach these communities and say, “build on what you know, participate in this process, which is a very complicated process with lots and lots of actors, but participate from the point of view of what you know,” it turns out that each of these communities were able to draw on its own network. We had people who were quite knowledgeable in each field. They built on what they knew. They moved it up from a neighborhood scale to a regional scale. They were able to get out of their silos and work with one another, and they were able to begin this process with the end in mind, for example, they had an idea that we wanted to have investment without displacement, and they stuck with it for three years, all those public hearings, to speak coherently and conclusively about the goals they had for each of the Six Big Wins.

One of the things happening now is an initiative that has been operating statewide to allocate a huge amount of money coming out of the cap and trade process. The state has established a cap on the amount of CO2 emissions that will be allowable. A price penalty as emissions increase provides more revenues in the state while incentivizing the reduction of CO2 emissions. The cap and trade initiative has been established and SB 535 was just signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown, saying that twenty five percent of the money raised by cap and trade has to go to improve the lives of low income communities. Ten percent of the whole is to be spent directly in communities that are on a map showing they are under siege from pollution, or people who have low educational backgrounds, or people who are suffering from high rents, basically, low income communities. Going forward, we will try to understand how we can get those investments into those communities and participate with those communities in deciding how that money will be spent. This will create a pool of funds, about 3 billion dollars a year starting this year, and that will increase over the next five or ten years.

The important thing is, we actually created a plan for the whole Bay Area that demonstrated that we could organize ourselves and get the support of many, many communities in endorsing the Equity, Environment, and Jobs scenario. Not only did we achieve some impact on the last planning process, but the process will be continuing and they will ramp up again to make the next three years of planning for the metropolitan area. This will be a starting point...
for a new round of commitments to public transportation.

We also got a fairly substantial commitment for investment using OBAG, One Bay Area funds for communities that are trying to fight displacement, and that is a really important accomplishment. We also had a set-aside of the cap and trade funds for operating expenses for public transit. These are our victories.

Going forward, there are some areas where we need to focus more. We should be focusing more on the suburban neighborhoods that have high opportunities and make sure that those opportunities are available not only for the people there, but also for some of the communities that need jobs and economic opportunities located in the suburban communities. We also need to make sure there is additional money in the till for public transit. There has been a new trend developing over the last decade called the suburbanization of poverty. We really need
to be thinking about how we can address the needs of people who moved out of the ghetto and into the suburbs only to find themselves trapped in places that basically have no tax base and no jobs and no schools and no public transportation, so in some ways they are worse off than before they moved. The suburbanization of poverty is something we need to focus on. We also need to focus on the young people who have been caught in the drift nets of the criminal justice system. We really have to dismantle that, and I think there is a real connection between having healthy metropolitan regions and eliminating this system that has trapped people.

I would also add that people need to become much more self-reliant. Fourteen percent of the people around the world live in cities that grow their own food. We need to think about what kind of urban agriculture we can develop so that our fruits and vegetables are not traveling from thousands of miles away. We are paying for petroleum rather than actually paying for food. These are some of the innovations we are looking to see, that can happen in the Bay Area.

We need to build new campaigns for how we should be using the cap and trade money, how to implement the anti-displacement efforts, and also to get new resources and money into supporting operating expenses for our public transportation system. One of the really important aspects of this is to increase our communication throughout the region so that people will understand what has been succeeding in the past and can use that as a starting point. The interviews and reports in this book will be put up on the web and where people can see that there are African American and Asian and Pacific Islander and Latino and European American people who are passionate about climate change, and sharing positive solutions they have been able to contribute. California is a remarkable state and it is a remarkably diverse state, and most of the people in the state now are people of color. So we are very interested in being able to communicate well what our success has been and where we need to put our focus.

Now we have a model that can provide direction and support for many communities throughout California, including the next round in the Bay Area, but especially for the next generation of environmental justice leaders throughout the country and the world. We really look forward to being able to get this document out, to show what we can do in the face of a terrible threat of climate change, to help improve people’s opportunity for surviving, prospering, and being able to function in a way that’s really much healthier and much more energy efficient. We feel this demonstration should be shared with other people and we are excited to be able to offer these case studies in this particular form.

The answers are not yet complete, but we have a new body of material in hand, from which we can draw out new implications for transportation and land use policy. The next phase is discovery of the implications for special populations: silenced minorities (now in the majority), immigrants, foreign language speaking, youth, people of color. What forces contribute to the suburbanization of poverty? What special needs get included in policy? What decisions made in planning silos, focused on solutions based on technology, create greater problems for the groups affected? How can we
overcome marginalization and silencing so that the voices of the people are justly heard? When evidence from the life experiences of silenced groups is heard, new conclusions can be drawn. Civic engagement is not MTC allowing you to fill out a blue card for permission to speak for three minutes. It is a culmination of community groups, whose voices were suppressed, having come forward with additional knowledge to inform the whole.

We can bring the unique lenses of various professionals including psychologists, anthropologists, urban architects and social historians to create new knowledge. For example, through the lens of Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History, record-keeping tends to privilege voices and artifacts from the more powerful while the most marginalized are silenced in history-making processes. Learning from Trouillot, we seek to use our media-making capacity to lift up voices from marginalized communities and make history in a way that can undergird the kind of equitable and sustainable society we want to create. Inclusive recreation of our history can reshape society’s understanding of itself. A second example is the Breakthrough Compass lens, the learning-action theory outlined in this book that has the flexibility and robustness to be applied to many diverse further projects.

Next is dissemination of this community-generated knowledge, strategy, and wisdom. The next generation will need to solve our major climate problems. Their voice is currently barely heard, and requires careful listening. We need to create contexts for the unheard to practice their voices being heard in civic engagement. We need to provide them with the best tools we have developed so far. An example is our creation and filming of a youth-to-youth salon on Climate Justice for the Summer Externship program of The Rose Foundation’s New Voices Arising project. We also co-sponsored a teacher training for Alameda County integrating a hands-on mapping tool and our Compass for Transformative Leadership model incorporating multi-media based learning on SB 375 for classroom use. Breakthrough Communities and two other of our Six Big Wins network leaders have completed a communications framing workshop with Alan Jenkins of Opportunity Agenda. Alan has enthusiastically agreed to collaborate with us on a three-part strategic communications training using our new campaign focused on SB 375 implementation as well as SB 535 Cap and Trade for all Six Wins network members this year.

Further Research

We need to explore the links between SB 375 and the suburbanization of poverty, the immigrant rights agenda and workers rights. This ties to the newly revitalized Quality Jobs network of Six Win, and Cap and Trade (SB 535) with its commitment of specified funding to aid at-risk communities. More research is needed to clarify rural transportation and infrastructure issues.

It has been a great joy and privilege to gather the cutting edge social innovation and community-based knowledge that is being generated by these community leaders and their networks. Now we are preparing for the next phase of our strategic communications work. The material we have gathered has great potential to provide guidance and inspiration for a range of audiences throughout California and beyond.
Proposed Activities

We need to get the word out. Activists in regions throughout California can see that the gains achieved in the Bay Area are common to their own struggles. There needs to be an investment of time, energy and support for all the regions in California to stimulate a flowering of this commitment. This effort should include: completion, publication, dissemination of this report, website development, other communication, and workshops. There are many potential audiences for this material. With the right support, the valuable assets generated by this work can be tailored for a wider range of audiences.

1 Edit, refine, and disseminate the material in this essay for publication in many forms: as a book, as free-standing essays, as youtube segments, as a curriculum guide, and as blogs on a website.

2 Provide strategic communication support for three of the Six Big Wins Campaigns cap and trade, community benefits for priority development areas in Oakland, and operating funds for public transit.

3 Promote community resilience in at-risk communities in the Bay Area and elsewhere in California to prepare low income communities and communities of color for the impacts of climate change.

4 Further develop the statewide Community/University Network throughout California to provide research, technical assistance, and students to support social justice policies and practices for community regional equity with organizing in transportation, as well as in land use planning to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.