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**AB 617: Successes, Challenges & Opportunities for Legislative Action**

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**OVERVIEW**

Assembly Bill 617 (C. Garcia 2017) created a new approach to addressing air quality in disadvantaged communities through community participation, local air monitoring, and emissions reduction plans. After six years of implementation across 19 communities, this research examines the policy's impact and provides recommendations for improvement.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- **Process:** How well is AB 617 meeting goals of community leadership and decision-making?
- **Outcomes:** How effectively is implementation improving air quality in selected communities?
- **Explanatory Factors:** What conditions enable or hinder successful implementation?
- **Applications:** What lessons can improve AB 617 and inform similar policies?

**METHODS**

Research across seven communities (Richmond/ North Richmond/ San Pablo; South Stockton; South Central Fresno, Shafter, Arvin./ Lamont; Wilmington/ Carson/ West Long Beach and Portside Environmental Justice Communities/ San Diego) included observations of 264 public meetings, 110 stakeholder interviews, document analysis of Community Emissions Reduction Plans (CERPs), and a statewide survey with 244 responses.

**KEY FINDINGS****Community Power Has Increased But Remains Uneven**

- Community influence in decision-making has significantly improved since 2020 in all studied communities but there is a need to build upon and sustain this.
- There is increased transparency and accountability from air districts to local communities.
- Innovative governance models such as community co-lead teams and participatory budgeting processes are enabling meaningful resident participation.

**Implementation Challenges Persist**

- Complex "implementation ecosystems" involve multiple agencies whose participation is neither mandated nor funded.

### Environmental Justice Integration is Improving

- Air districts have increasingly embraced environmental justice (EJ) principles.
- New offices/positions focused on equity and EJ now exist at most air districts and CARB.
- Language access has improved but remains inconsistent for non-English speakers.

### Industry Engagement is Difficult

- Tension exists between using incentives versus mandating industry compliance.
- Relationships between industry, regulators, and communities remain challenging.
- Several successful industry-community collaborations have emerged.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION

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| <b>Increase and Sustain Funding</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain baseline funding for existing communities while increasing resources for program expansion.</li> <li>• Allocate specific funding for cities, counties, and other state agencies to participate in CERP implementation</li> </ul> |
| <b>Strengthen Inter-Agency Coordination</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentivize participation from cities, counties, and state agencies in implementing CERP measures.</li> <li>• Align AB 617 with SB 1000 (Environmental Justice in General Plans) implementation.</li> </ul>                               |
| <b>Enhance Land Use Authority</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create requirements for cities/counties to ensure compatibility with CERPs in land use and other relevant permitting decisions.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Expand Program Reach</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create pathways to extend benefits to more communities through Local CERPs (L-CERPs)</li> <li>• Consider a statewide approach to implementing key successful strategies from existing CERPs.</li> </ul>                                   |
| <b>Balance Incentives and Regulations</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish clearer legislative guidance on the appropriate balance between incentives and regulation.</li> <li>• Ensure industries bear appropriate financial responsibility for emissions reduction.</li> </ul>                           |