

Getting to 350: Building Strategies for 21st Century Aspirations

Description

Over the last several years, Middlebury students and I – alongside many colleagues – have been engaged in thinking about solutions. In particular, we have studied the emergence of large-scale solutions that the global community will require to address the three great challenges of our age: the acceleration of greenhouse gas emissions, the persistence of poverty, and the struggle for human rights. One number – 350 – captures these related challenges. Climatologist James Hansen and colleagues have [recently suggested](#) that the world must rapidly stabilize atmospheric carbon dioxide, then bring its concentration down to 350 parts per million.

This is not just a problem of greenhouse emissions. “Getting to 350” must entail reinvigorated economic and political systems that improve well-being for the world’s poorest and assure the most basic freedoms for all. Put another way, this daunting challenge transcends climate science. It will require the best possible economics, unprecedented technological innovation, visionary development policies, and a global commitment to abandoning old ways for a more sustainable, more desirable future. This is the call of our age.

As we answer this call, there is good news. In the private, public and civil-society sectors, decentralized, “open-source” approaches are changing the very nature of problem solving and innovation. Indeed, we may well be at the dawn of the “open-source century,” in which information technology, networking, public-private partnerships, and transparent feedback loops enable new frameworks for solution building.

What do I mean? As I see it, open-source approaches reject hierarchical, linear thinking, and closed, expert-based problem-solving; they embrace networks, systems thinking, and open, group-based problem-solving. Three examples:

- [The Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#)
- [Kiva](#)
- [America Forward](#)

Over the last few years, the climate movement – the global groundswell being led by many workshop participants – has embraced open-source approaches. Leading climate groups – including [Step It Up](#) and [350.org](#), [Energy Action](#), [Green for All](#), [1Sky](#), [Focus the Nation](#) – have used both the web and face-to-face organizing to mobilize groups in the name of a clean-energy future. These strategies have been

purposefully open-source, and they have succeeded: in less than two years, many national and global leaders have embraced four main messages of the climate movement:

- 80% by 2050
- Green jobs
- Breakthrough technologies
- 350 ppm

As we gather at Middlebury in the wake of billion-dollar green investments in the 2009 stimulus package, the recent EPA decision on regulating CO₂, and the Waxman-Markey hearings, we have good reason to celebrate.

Now, what next for the climate movement - and the broader, global push for poverty alleviation and the strengthening of human rights? Let's first remind ourselves: *in their entirety, the universe of known strategies is still not enough*. The challenges ahead will require global action of unprecedented scale and scope. For starters, how can we build clean-energy paths out of poverty for hundreds of millions in China, India and much of the developing world? To do so will require not just breakthrough technologies; it will require breakthroughs in economics, politics and our very conception of roles as citizens on a planet with finite resources and a growing global population with modern aspirations.

Our workshop will consider challenges of this magnitude, building on the successes to date of open-source and other innovative approaches. After a Friday-evening keynote talk by Dr. Hansen, the workshop is designed so that participants can actively engage each other over the course of the weekend, sharing updates on strategies that are working and building new ideas for effecting change.

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