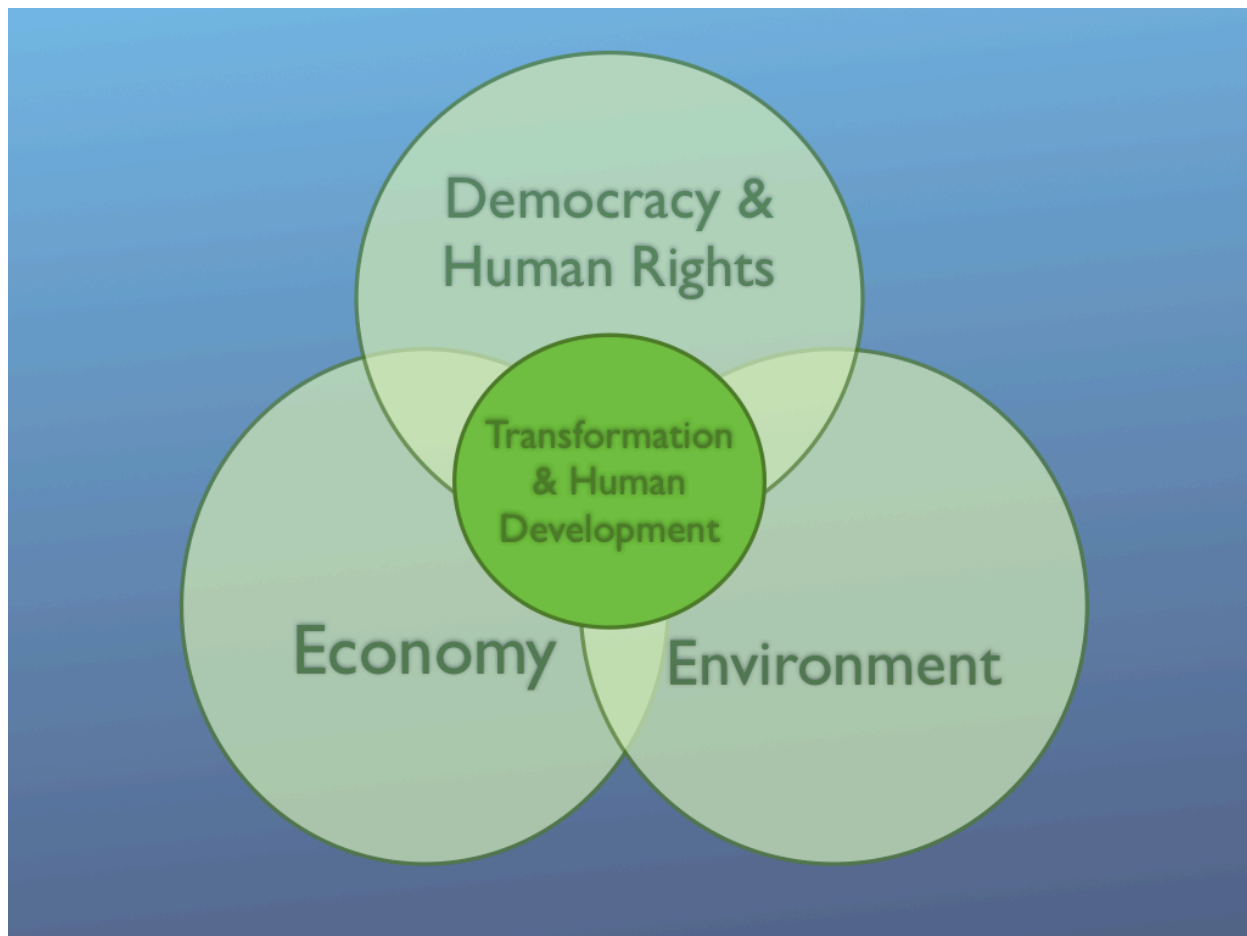


The Wheel and the Web:

Shifting and Sequencing Investment and Impact to Balance Human and Ecological Systems (2.0)



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The Problem: Our Current Crises

Undeniably, we are living in an era at the intersection of the worst economic depression the world has ever experienced and an insurmountable ecological crisis that threatens our very existence. The mechanisms that create racial, religious, extreme inequality on the one hand are the same mechanisms that create the degradation of the planet on the other. And, as the mechanisms that create inequality grow more powerful, inequality itself is rapidly accelerating. We know that a strong public sector and State are needed to counterbalance these mechanisms and the elites that dominate it in order to create a regenerative economy and environment, securing, at the very least, our basic means to survive. However, we do not foresee an "Enlightenment Era" in which corporations will, of their own accord, come to the conclusion that they are part of the problem and that they could, in fact, serve the interests of the "all" over the interests of just a few. In our current system, there is no plausible way for actors outside the current economic model to really challenge or shape our economy and its impact on ecology; current efforts to address our crises and attempts to rework the economy and our environment are only dancing around the edges in a localized context.

In order to urgently address these complex and compounding disasters that threaten our long-term survival, we must bridge the gap between mitigation and adaptation strategies, and advance an integrated, holistic resilience frame to the ecological crisis¹. While it seems obvious to some, what is most crucial at this moment is recognizing and including the social dimensions of resilience, integrating the needs of communities most impacted by societal inequities, the communities bearing the brunt of the confluence of the ecological and economic crises: low-income and people of color communities.

The Problem with the Problem

Despite the extreme gravity of the current state of affairs, this problem is not new. For many years, activists, scholars, researchers and other actors have been discussing and attempting to address these issues. So, then as John Powell has framed it, why has it been so difficult to disrupt the engine of inequality? What different articulation do we have to offer?

If we take the perspective of three sectors attempting to address inequity and inequality-- the economy, the environment and our democracy²—they are viewed in silos, with each of the three "camps" tending to focus on their own set of issues:

- Individuals and groups looking at **economic transformation** are rightly focusing on job creation, living wages and factors involved in our current economic disaster such as the Global Financial Crisis, the Subprime Mortgage Crisis, growing economic inequality (especially in the U.S.), and the need for campaign finance reform. Environmental issues, however, while considered

¹ Movement Generation is one organization working to address the intersection of economic and ecological crises from a resilience framework. They define adaptation as responding to climate impact as they are happening or as they are approaching. Mitigation is defined as preventing future detrimental climate impact.

² In the broadest sense, we understand the sphere of **democracy and human rights** to be the area in which human identity and community is structured and defined, the realm of **economy** to be the forms of community and ways of life that have been developed and **ecology** to be the ecological systems (biosphere and bioregions) upon which human communities depend. For the whole systems to be in balance requires creating balance and equity within and between human communities, and generating or protecting forms of economy that are in balance with the ecosystems upon which they depend.

important, are considered as more of a “side issue” rather than as central to transforming the economy.

- Those working on **environmental issues** and the climate crisis often do not consider that the transformation of the economy is central and critical to the success of their environmental work
- In the **Democracy** “camp,” focusing on important issues related to expanding democracy such as voter suppression and immigration reform do not necessarily see how fighting for an expanded democracy is the ultimate fuel and solution to our economic and environmental problems.

We have experienced some progress; there are groups and people taking on an intersectional approach, attempting to break silos, working toward a new, more democratic economy, providing an analysis at a larger, structural level joining forces with actors bringing an ecological lens. However, what is not at the center of these conversations is the concept of structural marginalization and social exclusion³. We understand today, more than ever that structural marginalization is built into the core of our political economy. As John Powell articulates, it was once thought to be a consensus among political scientists that the breakdown of the State and the “anxiety of the Other” were driven by bad economic conditions. In fact the converse is true: the polarization of the Other, the extreme structural marginalization that is experienced by poor, communities of color not only precedes the breakdown of the economy-- it is the cause of our economic slowdown all together. Undoubtedly, structural marginalization and social exclusion are systematic, intentional by-products of our current economy, as well as key drivers of its dysfunction as the majority of people experience it.

In addition to these key missing pieces is a critical sequencing that first involves radically engaging and expanding our democracy in relationship to transforming our economy to create ecological resilience for all. Without addressing structural marginalization and social exclusion and without the sequencing of a new strategy we will continue to dance around the edges and not achieve solutions at scale.

The Moment: A Cognitive Opening

We believe that the moment we are in, allows for a cognitive opening. In the past, various actors have brought to light the degradation of our ecology and while frontline communities have felt the waves of environmental devastation and the diminishing returns of our economy, a wide swath of people were blissfully protected. The ways in which the economic crisis is colliding with the ecological crisis makes the compounding impact an inescapable tsunami for everyone. These are no longer issues that effect just a few; they are felt by one and all. As everyone is touched by this and we have more power to seek what is causing the problems we are experiencing, the cognitive opening allows for us to turn to the root of the problem and what has been talked about for decades can now be more fully absorbed and better understood than ever before: social inequality, structural marginalization and human exploitation are the driving force breaking down ecological and economic systems.

Sequencing the Solution

A functional State—one that confronts social exclusion and structural marginalization—is needed to actually transform the economy in order to address our ecological crisis. We look at this in the following formula:

³ These concepts are deeply informed by the work of John Powell around structural marginalization and Maya Wiley around social exclusion



Let us understand this by looking at the end, or the subject, of the formula first. To truly create solutions to our ecological crisis, we need a transformed economy that does not deplete the environment and is in the hands of an expanded democracy, as opposed to an elite few.

Looking at the second variable of the formula, climate disruption is being generated by the ways our economy is consuming resources and energy. Current economic policies and practices reward financial profit over all else, driving unsustainable growth and an extractive approach that undermines community resilience. Therefore, a meaningful and material action on climate will require a significant shift in the economic paradigm such that our economy is transformed by and for the people.

In order to transform our economy however, we must first expand democracy, requiring broad community participation so that everyone, including and especially those historically excluded and marginalized, will have a real voice in what happens in our communities and in the country. By entrusting democracy to all people, we will be able to advance the financial, legal and policy environments that we need, currently dominated by corporations and those with concentrated wealth who continue to have an outsized influence on policy and our democracy, making it impossible to build resilient communities.

A + B = C

A (or Expanding Democracy), is what makes B (or Transforming the Economy) possible. And the combination of an expanded democracy and a transformed economy, will serve as the critical foundation for creating climate resilience in our communities (or C).

To build power in order to Expand Democracy, some key “calls to action” include:

- Challenge structural racialization and social exclusion through advancing targeted universalism in social policy and practice
- Resource the engines of participation and democracy;
- Change the rules to increase community participation (money and politics);
- Re-design Public Systems: where we train and re-train public servants to maximize community engagement;
- Re-imagine/re-invent vehicles for participation and democracy.

Blending the themes of expanding democracy and transforming the economy are strategies that emphasize economic decentralization and localization, which shift economic power to local communities. Some specific calls to action around remaking the economy include:

1. **Cost/Disincentives:** It becomes progressively more costly and unprofitable to engage in economic activity that advances climate change.
2. **Incentives:** It becomes increasingly more attractive (via incentives) to shift energy production to renewable resources.
3. **Localization of Economic Activity:** The policy environment creates **incentives to generate new and sustainable forms of economic activity** at the local community level.
4. **Local Access to Capital:** Local communities and enterprises have **access to new forms of capital** that incentivizes decentralized access to basic needs, food, energy, etc.
5. **Local Capacity Building:** Capacity is built at the local/community level that supports distributed and decentralized economic activity.

Conclusion

We need to look at climate resilience holistically. A purely environmental focus is insufficient. Only by remaking our democracy and economy, will we achieve any long-lasting impact in our environmental work of building climate resilient communities. Whether one comes from the "environmental camp" or the "economic camp," it is important that we all understand that this sequence is now imperative. Creating social cohesion is iterative in this process and it becomes paramount; it is not just something we do afterwards and it is not just something that those in the Civil Rights and Racial Justice movement should care about. Furthermore, if we want to address any of these problems, tackling them in a primary way that addresses them at their intersections is important; interrelationship and interdependency are necessary over approaches that are taken in silos.

Often frontline communities, communities most impacted and most marginalized receive the least amount of resources. In this cognitive moment, as we all recognize how we are inescapably impacted by the interactions of these systems, a shift is to resource the critical work happening at these intersections.

About the *What Were Learning Series*

The Wheel and the Web: Shifting and Sequencing Investment and Impact to Balance Human and Ecological System (2014) is the fifth in a series of MSC mini publications called *What We're Learning*. Through these papers – each produced in conjunction with a specific movement gathering or action – MSC seeks to name and explore questions and challenges that we are hearing and observing throughout the social justice world. As the title implies, these papers represent "what we're learning," offering our words and thoughts to on-going dialogue among partners, allies, and friends we have not yet met. *What Were Learning* is a place we share significant updates and shifts in our learning over time with updated versions of previous frameworks and approaches.

You can find many longer introductions to the tools and approaches described here on the resource section of MSC's website, from an overview of the Pivots framework to our frameworks for alliance building.



About Movement Strategy Center

MSC is dedicated to transformative movement building: helping individuals, organizations, and alliances build their capacity to be strategic, collaborative, and sustainable. MSC works with over 300 partner grassroots organizations, alliances, and networks that operate at local, regional, and national levels. MSC works across sectors and within sectors. MSC supports local alliances that bring people in one place together across issues and constituencies, and supports national alliances that unite groups working on common issues. © 2013, Movement Strategy Center, 436 14th Street, 5th Floor, Oakland, CA 94612 www.movementstrategy.org

