

RATIONAL MIDDLE.
NET ZERO 

THINK GLOBAL. ACT LOCAL.

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

Sarah Golden:

Climate change is such this big challenge. There is a desire to have a big idea that can just solve it all. In reality, there's so many different situations, so many different contexts throughout the world that there isn't going to be just one big idea.

Dr. Kenneth Medlock, III:

There are a lot of dimensions to how a low carbon future will ultimately unfold, and it's going to be different everywhere because there's different comparative advantages everywhere.

Dr. Richard Newell:

We're going to need a mix of solutions, and it's not going to be one size fits all. Different regions need the ability to make decisions about how they want to produce energy and use energy that kind of works for them, given their own history and geography.

Dr. Arun Majumdar:

I think it's very important to recognize that people have made the commitments, countries have made the commitments, but the pathway they take, the policy framework that they adopt, the technologies they adopt are going to be different, and we need to give room for that to happen.

Sarah Golden:

Clean energy transitions can look very different depending on where it is, and they should look different because every place is different. We're at an exciting moment because policy is beginning to align, and increasingly, we have these finance mechanisms that make clean energy technologies more accessible. But one thing that I think is being left out is what it actually takes to deploy clean energy technologies at specific local levels. Some of the considerations in deploying clean energy at technologies include what's just physically feasible in a place. What natural resources do they get? Is it a sunny location? Is it a windy location? Are there geothermal resources? Is there the potential for hydropower?

Dr. Arun Majumdar:

In the United States, you're talking about the regional, it's very different, right? If you're in Arizona or California and all that, you get more sun. Whereas if you're in Minnesota, and all the places you don't get as much.

Dr. Kenneth Medlock, III:

It really is about the resource that's in place. That's the first box to check, and then you can start worrying about other dimensions.

Sarah Golden:

We tend to focus so much on the big story and the metrics, and where we need to go, which is incredibly important, but sometimes that ignores what the local context is.

Dr. Suzanne Tegen:

You can't just put a wind farm in on a marsh, for example, because that will not be good for wildlife. So, we have to consider ecosystems. We have to consider wildlife. We have to consider what that community values.

Dr. Kenneth Medlock, III:

So when you kind of traverse the country, you realize very quickly that you can't just throw a blanket over the United States and say, "Everybody shall do X," because it's not going to work.

Dr. Arun Majumdar:

Some of the debates that are happening are perhaps reflective of the public sentiment on this. There are ideas that are at the ends of the spectrum, and there are ideas on the middle.

Dr. Kenneth Medlock, III:

We're very much shaped by the collection of our own experiences. Every day when we wake up, we have a set of things that we do on a day-to-day basis, and a set of things that we see on a day-to-day basis, and that very much shapes our view of the world. What we sometimes fail to realize is there are people all over the world that are doing the exact same thing and they see different things, and they're influenced by different things, and so their reality in a lot of ways is very different than the reality we think exists. It's important to understand that if we want to argue for a particular solution in the United States, it's not necessarily going to be the same as a solution that might be effective in India, or in China, or an Indonesia.

Dr. Arun Majumdar:

In Switzerland, hydropower is already there. It's like 60% of the electricity. For them to become zero carbon is much easier than in the United States. Whereas in India, for example, in a 60-plus percent of the electricity is produced by coal today, and to transition to zero carbon, the pathway India takes is going to be different from the United States, or Japan, or Switzerland, for that matter.

Dr. Todd Moss:

If we put it crudely, there's a part of the world that's already wealthy, and already using a lot of energy, and already emitting a lot. So for the rich world, the challenge is to decarbonize their energy systems. Then you've got another part of the world, about half of humanity, that doesn't have enough energy. Now the challenge in those countries is different. They don't need to decarbonize. What they need to do is build energy systems. While there's an interest and a need to do that as green as possible, the priority is not decarbonization. The challenge globally right now is how do we balance this need for development and higher incomes and higher

energy use with a greener world, and what kind of carbon space do we have for developing regions between now, and say, 2050?

Eric Drummond:

Will need to help these developing countries by providing additional financing, additional support, additional technology and resources so that they are also on the path. That together, there's a combined initiative, a collaboration between industrialized and lesser industrialized countries to all track toward a lower carbon future.

Sarah Golden:

So right now, what it takes is aligning the people that are super smart with finance and figuring out what kind of mechanisms we need joining together with those technology providers and getting the clear market signals we need from policy, whether that be local policy in different countries that can get on board, or that be policy within countries to create the markets in order to have the technologies we need that can be disseminated throughout the world.

Dr. Kenneth Medlock, III:

One of the things that also comes into play when we think about dealing with concerns related to climate, and too often this is left out of the discussion, we have to think about things like urban planning and infrastructure resilience. These are vital.

Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks:

We're at a moment at which we can re-envision the way our cities and other built environment spaces are built, but everything from infrastructure, environmental restoration, we can improve local food systems, addressing these hyper-local impacts to climate change and really working to ensure that the communities who are most impacted are able to develop and to implement the solutions.

Sarah Golden:

I truly believe you need local champions. Sometimes just an individual person that sees the potential of something like needing new infrastructure and working with the local government. Most often, I think that it works well with community organizations or organizations that work on the local levels, that are on the ground, that know how the community operates.

Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks:

If we're going to get to a place of greater climate resilience and get to a point at which all communities are thriving and not just surviving, this has to be a household conversation.

Dr. Kenneth Medlock, III:

There's an old saying that's, "think globally, act locally." That's kind of the point, really. If you are addressing policy at a local level with global objectives in mind, there is, I would argue, a higher likelihood of being successful and affecting change. It's important that we put our heads around the scale and scope of the problem, and begin to address things at a local level so that we can actually achieve global outcomes.

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