

# What's Holding Us Back From the Global Efficiency Opportunity?

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What if you were told that the United Nations, scientists, and economists had already identified the biggest opportunity for greenhouse gas emission reductions? That the key strategies for pursuing that opportunity were also the least costly to society?

And finally—what if these greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies worked in tandem with successful economic development of emerging economies, and to the long-term resiliency of communities?

Are you on the edge of your seat yet? Maybe you know where we're going with this. The opportunity that the U.N., the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the International Energy Agency (IEA), the World Economic Forum, and countless other climate and economic experts are talking about is none other than the world's building stock.

Experts have identified the building sector as having the single greatest potential for greenhouse gas emission reductions worldwide, with efficiency holding the key to [slash emissions from homes and office buildings by nearly 30% by 2020](#), at no net cost. They have also determined that this strategy can be highly profitable, with economic benefits for whole societies.

Despite this golden nugget of knowledge we have about the impact of the building sector, the international community has a long way to go before we begin to capture the opportunity before us. That's why USGBC, together with over 40 other environmental organizations, businesses, and green building councils around the world are calling for Global Leadership in Our Built Environment (GLOBE). The recently launched [GLOBE Alliance](#) is a group of like-minded organizations from 18 countries that will advocate for policies, technologies, and financial instruments for sustainable buildings and transportation infrastructure.

An immediate attention to buildings and infrastructure is particularly important in the developing world, for both the planet and for the economies of growing nations. The IPCC estimates building-related greenhouse gas emissions will nearly double by the year 2030 under a high-growth development scenario, with this increase concentrated largely in poor regions of the world. But while the U.S. and other industrialized states must work with poor countries to develop strategies for sustainable new construction, we must at the same time [lead the way in retrofitting](#) our own energy-sucking, water-gobbling, money-burning existing building stock. The financial benefits of doing so aren't chump change – the efficiency gurus at [McKinsey & Company](#) estimate that the U.S. could save \$1.2 trillion in the next decade by investing in building efficiency measures.

The question of how we pair economic growth with sustainability—both here at home and around the world—is intricately tied to the concept of the 'green economy.' This conversation is already underway at the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), which will be discussing buildings and sustainable production and consumption at its [next meeting this May](#), and again in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 (known as the [Earth Summit or Rio +20](#)). In the meantime, Congress and the Obama Administration can do their part to make headway on [energy efficiency policies](#) here in Washington, and assist other countries in doing the same. A combination of U.S. leadership and international political will can go a long way in unlocking the energy savings, economic savings, and emission savings that buildings present.

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- [From Cancún Compromises to Concrete Action: We Don't Need a Binding Deal to Act Now on Efficiency](#)  
(Huffington Post)
- [The 'Green Economy' and Earth Summit 2012: Why fast-growing mega-cities with challenges of poverty and hunger may hold the key to a sustainable future](#)  
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