

# Best Buys for the MDGs

**Esther Duflo**

Abdul Latif Jameel Professor of Poverty  
Alleviation and Development Economics  
MIT

# Evidence in the fight against poverty

- Meeting the MDGs is a major challenge.
- Focus resources on anti-poverty strategies that are:
  - Practical and cost effective.
  - Based on rigorous evidence.
- Scientific rigor of randomized trials - test anti-poverty strategies.
- Today's focus is on seven highly effective anti-poverty programs, or "best buys"

# In-School Deworming

- Many reasons for children not to be in schools but addressing their health can be a cheap, effective and easy way to improve attendance.
- 400 million children infected with intestinal worms, causing them to be anemic and tired.
- Sick children skip school more often.
- School-based mass deworming costs 50 cents per child per year and increases attendance by 1/6 of a school year (about 30 days annually).
- Kenya launched national deworming program to treat 3.6 million children.

## 1: EXTREME POVERTY & HUNGER

- Halve proportion whose income is less than \$1 a day.
- Halve proportion who suffer from hunger.

## 2: UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

- Ensure boys and girls complete a full course of primary education.

## 3: GENDER EQUALITY

- Eliminate gender disparity.

## 4: CHILD MORTALITY

- Reduce under-five mortality.

## 6: HIV, MALARIA

- Halt spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Halt spread of malaria.

## 7: SUSTAINABILITY

- Halve proportion without safe drinking water.

# Basic Learning

- Primary school enrollment is rising but learning remains a challenge.
- Poor children often lack school preparedness and quickly fall behind. Unable to read and write in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade they gain little from school attendance.
- Simple remedial education focusing on basic skills is very effective:
  - Everyone could recognize letters.
  - 98% could read short story.
- Costs at most \$2.25 per child per year.
- More than 20 million children in India have benefitted from program already.

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Banerjee et al., 2004 “Remedying education”  
Banerjee, et al., 2009 “Pitfalls of participatory Programs.” Location: India

# Free Bednets

- Large social benefits from use of insecticide treated bednets. WHO advocates free bednets.
- Proponents of user fees suggest charging helps ensure bednets get to those who need them and will use them.
- Evidence shows it simply excludes the poor and does not promote usage.
  - Coverage drop by 75% with small user fees.
  - 90% of free or bought bednets are used.
  - \$200-300 per child life saved.
- ITN cost \$5.

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# Quotas for Women

- Women are highly under-represented in political structures.
- Reserving positions for them costs practically nothing. Yet, it boosts female political participation and spending on women's priorities, such as clean water.
- Voters systematically underrate successes of women politicians.
- Exposure to women politicians eliminates bias against them.

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# “Sugar Daddies” Talks

- 4 million people are newly infected with HIV yearly (UNAIDS).
- Youth are “window of hope” in fight against HIV/AIDS but many programs targeted at youth have had disappointing results.
- Unprotected sex with men in their 20s (or older) is a key driver of HIV pandemic amongst young girls.
- Information on relative risk of HIV transmission from older men vs. younger men:
  - Reduce teen pregnancies with older men by 65%.
  - Cost \$1 per student.

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# Incentives to Immunize

- Vaccines are highly cost effective and provided for free in many countries.
- Yet there are still areas with very low coverage.
- Small incentives (e.g. a bag of lentils for each shot) can dramatically increase uptake.
- By encouraging many more families to attend immunization clinics or camps, incentives can reduce the cost per child immunized.

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# Smart Subsidies

- Simple agriculture technologies have potential to dramatically increase income.
- Surprisingly low use even when farmers know the benefits.
- Smart subsidies can trigger big changes at low cost.
- Limited-time offers at harvest time can be more effective than big subsidies at planting time.

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# From Evidence to Action

- “Best buys” are effective, simple, and scalable programs. Potential for large effects if integrated into national policy and development programs.
- To meet the MDGs we need to focus resources on strategies that are backed by rigorous evidence and cost effective.

**Learn more about the best buys:**

**[www.povertyactionlab.org/MDG](http://www.povertyactionlab.org/MDG)**