
Guest Column: Make our charitable donations do the most good

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As we set resolutions to achieve personal goals and give back, the end of the year is a time to envision the positive changes we can bring to the world in the next 12 months. It is time for us to consider extending our influence to do the best we can by shining a light on the power of doing good.

Globally, all countries have promised to fix all the world's big issues by 2030 through the so-called Sustainable Development Goals. The world's governments came together in 2015 to promise to end hunger, poverty and disease; to fix corruption, climate change and war; and to ensure jobs, growth and education along with a bewildering array of major and minor promises like developing more urban gardens. Unfortunately, this year, the United Nations acknowledged we are failing badly. Promising everything means nothing is a priority.

We must insist that our politicians get real in 2024 and focus first on the most efficient policies. And in our own end-of-year donations, we should similarly look to achieve the best we can for every dollar spent.

With my think tank, the Copenhagen Consensus, I have worked with more than a hundred of the world's top economists and several Nobel laureates to discover where each of us can help the most first.

Our free, peer-reviewed findings, which can also be read in the book "Best Things First," offer a roadmap for the 12 most innovative initiatives for politicians worldwide. They highlight proven solutions to persistent problems that deliver immense benefits at low cost. These are policies like delivering more mosquito nets to tackle malaria, nutritional supplements for pregnant women to boost the baby's opportunities even before birth, or better legal protection to ensure poor farmers' rights over their land, increasing productivity.

Politicians could set aside \$35 billion a year — a rounding error in most global negotiations — to deliver immense benefits: implementing these 12 policies would save 4.2 million lives annually and make the poorer half of the world more than \$1 trillion better off every year. On average, a dollar invested would deliver an astounding \$52 of social benefits.

But just as these overarching goals should inspire and guide politicians, they can also guide us as we make our end-of-year donations to help make a better 2024.

We need to focus more on the tuberculosis epidemic. TB has been treatable for more than 50 years, yet it kills more than 1.4 million people annually. The solution is straightforward: Make sure more people get

diagnosed and make it easier for patients to stay on their medication, which is needed for a grueling six months.

Many organizations push for these simple solutions, and you can help. Governments should similarly increase their funding. Just \$6.2 billion annually can save a million lives each year over the coming decades. Each dollar delivers a fantastic \$46 of social benefits.

We also need to pay attention to cheap and efficient ways to increase learning for kids in schools. Shared tablets with educational software used just one hour a day cost only \$31 per student over a year, resulting in learning that usually would take three years. Semi-structured teaching plans can make teachers teach more efficiently, doubling learning outcomes each year for just \$9 per student.

As individuals, we can donate to organizations doing amazing work in these areas across Africa and beyond. Governments could dramatically improve education for almost half a billion primary school students in the world's poorer half for less than \$10 billion annually — to generate long-term productivity increases worth \$65 for each dollar spent.

And we can help much more with maternal and child health. The research shows a simple package of policies that improve basic care and family planning access is incredibly powerful — and many organizations are working hard in these areas.

If we persuade politicians to commit less than \$5 billion annually, we could save the lives of 166,000 mothers and 1.2 million newborns yearly.

Across all the 12 policies we identified, there are inspiring organizations doing incredible work. These are the areas where our donations — and any additional government spending — can have the biggest effect.

As the year winds down, we are presented with an occasion to break free from the never-ending cycle of negativity. The holiday season, with its moments of reflection and celebration, encourages us to pause and take stock of the positive aspects of our lives and the world at large. For 2024, let us resolve not only to help more but to help better. In the 12 months ahead, let's focus on making the most effective and impactful contributions to create a brighter world.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Bjorn Lomborg is the author of "Best Things First," which The Economist named one of the best books of 2023. He wrote this for InsideSources.com.