

Blogs and Briefs by Human Development Research Staff (2008 – present)

- ❶ Blogs and briefs by researchers in the [Human Development Research Program](#) of [Development Research Group](#) at the World Bank.

2020

David Evans, Fei Yuan and Deon Filmer. [Teacher Pay in Africa](#)

August 2020 - In the coming years, Africa will need a lot more teachers. UNESCO estimates that to achieve universal primary education in the next decade, Africa will need to recruit more than 6 million new teachers. The number for secondary education is 50 percent higher. A reasonable level of teacher pay is part of being able to recruit new teachers.

Adam Wagstaff. [Coronometrics 101](#)

April 2020 - Over the last month or so, we've all seen a lot of coronavirus charts, such as the Financial Times' tracking of cases (and now deaths) across multiple countries, the New York Times' map of the virus in the United States, and the Guardian's map of the global spread of the virus.

Sergio Schmukler, Michael Toman & Adam Wagstaff. [Returns to early interventions at sufficient scale are high](#)

What key insights have emerged from development economics in the past decade, and how should they impact the work of the World Bank? A new working paper Toward Successful Development Policies: Insights from Research in Development Economics from the Bank's research department captures 13 of the most significant insights in the world of development economics.

Here's insight #10 – on how early policy interventions at large enough scale can be highly cost-effective. See all previous insights here: [Thirteen insights for successful development policies](#)

Damien de Walque. [Projecting the trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic: A review of available tools](#)

March 2020 - By now, most of us have become used to the frightening daily drip of numbers about the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of new cases and deaths, together with cumulative figures, are reported by the media all over the world. Many are familiar with the Johns Hopkins University map and dashboard which is frequently updated. The European Center for Disease Prevention and Control maintains a similar tool. The JHU tool offers numbers at the subnational level for some countries, which is useful as the spread of the disease varies greatly within country.

Deon Filmer & Adam Wagstaff. [How service providers are paid matters as much as how much they are paid](#)

February 2020 - What key insights have emerged from development economics in the past decade, and how should they impact the work of the World Bank? A new working paper Toward Successful Development Policies: Insights from Research in Development Economics from the Bank's research department captures 13 of the most significant insights in the world of development economics.

Here's insight #3 on how health and education service providers should be paid in order to ensure the delivery of quality services. See all previous insights here: [Thirteen insights for successful development policies](#)

Deon Filmer & Adam Wagstaff. [Policymakers need to focus on the quality and not just the quantity of services delivered](#)

February 2020 - What key insights have emerged from development economics in the past decade, and how should they impact the work of the World Bank? A new working paper *Toward Successful Development Policies: Insights from Research in Development Economics* from the Bank's research department captures 13 of the most significant insights in the world of development economics. Here's insight #2 on the importance of focusing interventions on improving the quality – and not just the quantity – of services provided in health and education. See all previous insights here: [Thirteen insights for successful development policies](#)

2019

Adam Wagstaff. [How well are countries doing on universal health coverage? An assessment of 111 countries on UHC Day](#)

December 2019 - December 12 each year is Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day. The tradition dates back to 2012 when the United Nations General Assembly unanimously endorsed a resolution urging countries to accelerate progress toward universal health coverage – the idea that everyone should get the health services they need, and that families who get needed services should not suffer undue financial hardship in the process.

Kathleen Beegle & Dominique van de Walle. [What can female headship tell us about women's well-being? Probably not much](#)

June 2019 - In the last week alone, we reviewed two studies that assessed gender inequality by comparing outcomes between female- and male-headed households. This was surprising to us, as it seems an outdated approach. We thought it would be worthwhile to make some observations about why comparing female- and male-headed households tells us very little (if anything) about gender gaps, at least in Africa (if not everywhere). There is more than enough here to argue against comparing households with male and female heads to capture differences in male and female well-being or gender equality.

Owen Ozier. [Why ex-post power using estimated effect sizes is bad, but an ex-post MDE is not](#)

May 2019 - The following two cases are quite common when reading/refereeing/trying to publish estimates of some effect size in an impact evaluation: Case 1: the authors don't have that large a sample, or have an outcome that is measured quite noisily, but they report large and significant treatment effects. The critical reader wonders whether the study was well-powered, so the authors take (or are asked to take) their estimated effect size and standard error, and ex-post calculate that power was really high.

Deon Filmer. [Learning from impact evaluations. Lessons from Cambodia](#)

May 2019 - What happens when a study of a program's impact finds that the intended effects are negligible or even negative? When the Government of Cambodia, supported by the World Bank, launched a project in 2008 to expand preschools and other preprimary education programs, Deon Filmer and his research colleagues tracked the impact on children from low-income households.

Benjamin Daniels. [Making Analytics Reusable](#)

March 2019 - Since 2005, the share of empirically-based papers published in development economics journals has skyrocketed, reaching more than 95% by 2015. Today, lab-style research groups and teams typically maintain in-house capacity for the entire research workflow. This development means that new, scalable methods for ensuring high-quality research design, data collection, analysis, and publications are needed for evidence to remain transparent and credible. We call these workflows "reusable analytics", because they are research processes that can be

verified by outside teams, or repurposed for a different analysis by the same team later on. Research teams almost universally plan to adopt such processes, but there is also a pervasive sense that actually making analytics reusable is costly and difficult.

Benjamin Daniels. [Tools of the trade: Using iemargins to graph impacts with standard error bars \(IE Analytics update\)](#)

February 2019 - It's been nearly 5 years since David McKenzie showed us how to add standard error bars to Stata mean estimation comparing treatment and control groups. A recent reader email wrote to suggest that this how-to was due for an update, so here it is.

2018

Damien de Walque. [What Burkina Faso can teach us about scaling up early childhood programs](#)

November 2018 - When Damien de Walque started working on a trial of cash transfers in rural Burkina Faso, some of his colleagues at the World Bank were sceptical. "People were saying, are you just crazy?" he recalled. "How are you going to distribute cash in remote villages without a banking system?"

Owen Ozier. [Power to the Plan](#)

December 2018 - The holidays are upon us. You might like to show off a bit by preparing something special for the ones you love. Why not make a pre-analysis plan this holiday season? You're thinking, I do that every year, but we want to tell you about a new twist: using a dash of endline data!

Damien de Walque. [Service delivery to the poor: A labor of love or just another job?](#)

December 2018 - Many public policies and nearly all international aid aim to improve the well-being of the poor. Front-line service providers may not embrace this goal, however. Is this mismatch important? Can it be corrected? These questions are crucial for the success of public policies meant to equalize services to the poor and non-poor. Recent evidence suggests that money helps – but how we select service providers matters, too.

Adam Wagstaff and Patrick Hoang-Vu Eozenou. [A massive new dataset to help promote health equity and financial protection in health](#)

October 2018 - Today we're (re)launching HEFPI—aka the Health Equity and Financial Protection Indicators database. HEFPI sheds light on two major concerns in global health: a concern that the poor do not get left behind in the rush to achieve global health goals; and a concern that health services should be affordable. Neither concern featured in the MDGs; both feature prominently in the SDGs.

Tim Evans and Adam Wagstaff. [New data released to help tackle health disparities and catastrophic health expenditures](#)

October 2018 - The last 20 years or so have seen many shifts of emphasis in global health. Among them, two stand out: a concern that the poor do not get left behind in the rush to achieve global goals and a concern that health services are affordable.

Jishnu Das. [Comment on Fair progress? Economic mobility across generations around the world.](#)

October 2018 - Should I stop kidding myself that learning leads to educational opportunity? We

want to make sure that children learn. We agree that schools aren't delivering. But will policies to improve children's test scores also enhance equity and opportunity in an increasingly unequal world? I worry that they won't even come close. Think about it this way. Learning is a goal in itself; it is hard to participate with dignity in a globalised world without knowing how to read or write. But that's not the only goal we are selling; we are also arguing that "learning is a ladder to opportunity" – what holds the poor back is the low quality of schools they now attend in increasingly higher numbers.

Jishnu Das. [Magnets for discrimination? Affirmative action in Maryland](#)

September 2018 - How do we ensure that education systems adequately compensate for the multiple deprivations that children from poor families may face? Where do we want to be in that line between rewarding effort and compensating for disadvantage?

Dominique van de Walle. [Religion and widowhood in Nigeria.](#)

September 2018 - African widows often face considerable disadvantage relative to married women in their first union. How much so depends on the society they live in, with pronounced hardship in some contexts, yet benefits to widows in others. In the absence of effective policies, their situation is likely to depend heavily on the social-cultural norms applying to women following widowhood. In a recent paper, Annamaria Milazzo and I investigate this issue by comparing the well-being (as measured by BMI and rates of underweight) of young (15-49) Nigerian widows and non-widows across Christian and Muslim groups using the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) of 2008 and 2013.

Jishnu Das. [What's wrong with political leaders citing research?](#)

July 2018 - Today's finance-research complex closely links funding to "impact", which includes evidence of policymakers and politicians citing the research in question.

Damien de Walque and Christine Valente. [Skipping school and how to reduce it? The value of information and incentivizing parents vs. children](#)

June 2018 - If one of our children is skipping school without our approval and if we have not excused him or her before, my wife and I quickly receive a text message (see screenshot below), an email and a phone call from the school district. A serious discussion in the evening will ensue.

Damien de Walque. [Cigarettes or the Greek Islands? Did the deal my dad offer me have lasting effects?](#)

May 2018 - In the first part of this blog, I went down memory lane and told you about my teenage years and how my parents had managed to make sure I abstained from tobacco by offering to pay for a high school graduation trip if I did not take up smoking.

Damien de Walque. [Cigarettes or the Greek Islands? The deal my dad offered me](#)

May 2018 - When I was a teenager in Belgium, my parents wanted to make sure that I wouldn't become a smoker. At the age of 15, I had tried a few cigarettes with friends and they were worried I would pick up the habit. They could have organized a complicated system of surveillance and sanctions to monitor and prevent my smoking behavior.

Jishnu Das and Clement Joubert. [Firming up pay equality](#)

April 2018 - That women are paid less than men for the same job is unacceptable. Yet, as countries name and shame firms to tackle pay disparity, some caution is necessary. Firms are not countries,

and equality within firms may imply little equality in the economy. For instance, contracting out low-paid jobs where female workers happen to be a majority (nurses versus doctors) will enhance pay equality for the remaining workers within the firm.

2017

Damien de Walque. [Measuring quality of health care using video vignettes](#)

October 2017 - Quality of care is a crucial determinant of good health outcomes, but is difficult to measure. Survey vignettes are a standard approach to measuring medical knowledge among health care providers. They give surveyed staff a typical case with symptoms and ask them to provide a diagnosis and recommend a treatment course.

Damien de Walque. [Video Vignettes: Lab-in-the-Field Experiment in Burkina Faso](#)

October 2017 - The video vignettes were applied within the context of a “lab-in-the-field experiment” in Burkina Faso that tests effects of various incentive measures on provider performance within the context of a “laboratory” setting. We designed video vignettes representing cases related to maternal and early childhood care. The cases followed symptom description and treatment protocols as defined by Burkina Faso’s national therapeutic guidelines as well as WHO IMCI guidelines. The cases were developed and tested with nurses at the two nursing schools in Ouagadougou in January 2014.

Deon Filmer and Halsey Rogers. [Learning to realize education’s promise](#)

September 2017 - The 2018 World Development Report (WDR), [Learning to Realize Education’s Promise](#), launched this week. While it draws on research and collective experience—both from within and outside the World Bank—it also draws on the personal experience of the team members, including the two of us. What inspires the focus on learning for all is that we both have seen the possibilities of widely shared learning, but we’ve also seen what happens when those possibilities aren’t fulfilled.

Owen Ozier. [Trouble with pre-analysis plans? Try these three weird tricks.](#)

July 2017 - Pre-analysis plans increase the chances that published results are true by restricting researchers’ ability to data-mine. Unfortunately, writing a pre-analysis plan isn’t easy, nor is it without costs, as discussed in recent work by Olken and Coffman and Niederle. Two recent working papers - “Split-Sample Strategies for Avoiding False Discoveries,” by Michael L. Anderson and Jeremy Magruder (ungated here) and “Using Split Samples to Improve Inference on Causal Effects,” by Marcel Fafchamps and Julien Labonne (ungated and updated here) - propose some very clever refinements to address some of the challenges inherent in pre-analysis plans.

Jishnu Das. [Teachers’ salaries: Too many bucks for the bang?](#)

July 2017 - Despite an influential view that countries should increase teachers’ wages sufficiently to be able to attract top college graduates to the profession, the available evidence from the U.S. suggests that that’s the wrong advice. Key research studies show that this is wrong for low-income countries as well. If anything, when it comes to teachers in developing countries, there are already too many bucks for the bang.

Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, and Asim Ijaz Khwaja. [The power of information in improving school performance](#)

June 2017 - Giving parents information on the performance of schools in Pakistan improved test scores and enrolment, and reduced the cost of private school tuition. Providing information to

citizens can improve services for the poor, swiftly and at relatively low cost. That, encouragingly, is the lesson emerging from recent experiments in Uganda (Björkman and Svensson 2009), India (Banerjee et al. 2011), and Indonesia (Banerjee et al. 2015) as well as observational research in the US (Hoxby 2000) in sectors as diverse as health, voting behaviour, access to subsidised food and education. Buoyed by these positive results, we were interested in investigating the impact of information (specifically, school and child report cards) on education markets, but with a two-fold twist (Andrabi et al. 2013). First, we work in an environment where there are both public and private schools; the latter receive no subsidies and face little (if any) de facto regulation in terms of prices or standards setting. Second, we were interested in what would happen if we intervened in an entire market, rather than a subset of consumers within the market.

Jishnu Das. [\(re\) Searching for impact: Further thoughts](#)

April 2017 - I was also directed to discussions of research and impact such as social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern's talk on impact in research funding (hat tip to Andrew Brandel at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen, Vienna) and the fascinating panel at the recent American Economic Association meetings on the problems with publishing in the economics profession (h/t my colleague Quy-Toan Do). Strathern's discussion on the tension between research as a description of the present and the funder's desire for prediction provides much food for thought on the fundamental role of research. Similarly, the AEA panel's take on an increasing obsession with publishing in the top-5 journals and the damage it may cause to the economics profession is a must-listen for those interested in how academia is responsive and concerned with the incentives generated within the profession. Three further points arose in the discussion that followed.

Steve Knack, Brad Parks, Takaaki Masaki. [The Bank punches above its weight. But where and why?](#)

April 2017 - In October 2015, the Washington Post ran a story that compared the World Bank's performance to that of other bilateral and multilateral development finance institutions. It identified the Bank as a leader among its peers in the value-for-money that it provides to its shareholders (and their taxpayers).

Emanuela Galasso and Adam Wagstaff. [What cost childhood stunting? And what returns to programs combatting stunting?](#)

March 2017 - Child #115181 in the Demographic and Health Survey we're looking at is 38 months old. Let's call her María. Her older brother, child #115201, is 51 months old. Let's call him Alejandro. Despite their 13-month age difference, María and Alejandro are both 92cm tall. María is rather short for her age – she's at the 18th percentile of the reference population of well-nourished children. She'd be 96 cm if she were average. Alejandro is extremely short – he'd be over 10cm taller if he were average height for his age. He's so short for his age, in fact, that he's not even at the 1st percentile. Technically Alejandro is 'stunted' – at -2.64 his 'height-for-age z-score' is less than 2, meaning his height-for-age is less than 2 standard deviations below the median of the reference population.

Caitlin Brown, Dominique van de Walle, and Martin Ravallion. [Informational constraints on antipoverty programmes: Evidence for Africa](#)

March 2017 - Policymakers face challenges when trying to identify the right targets for antipoverty programmes. This column assesses whether the data typically available to policymakers in sub-Saharan Africa are up to the task. Commonly used proxy means tests are found to perform worse than simpler methods in identifying poor households. Moreover, analyses of nutritional status

reveal substantial inequality within households, suggesting that household-based measures are not very effective in identifying disadvantaged individuals.

2016

Adam Wagstaff, Damien de Walque, Jed Friedman, Sven Neelsen.

[Financial incentives in health: supply- vs. demand-side. Your help is needed!](#)

December 2016 - A blogpost on financial incentives in health by one of us in September 2015 generated considerable interest. The post raised several issues, one being whether demand-side financial incentives (like maternal vouchers) are more or less effective at increasing the uptake of key maternal and child health (MCH) interventions than supply-side financial incentives (variously called pay-for-performance (P4P) or performance-based financing (PBF)).

Jishnu Das. [Of quacks and crooks: The conundrum of informal health care in India](#)

November 2016 - I usually don't wake up to hate mail in my inbox. What prompted this deluge is a recent paper that evaluates the impact of a training program for informal health care providers (providers without any formal medical training) in the state of West Bengal, India (paper summary). Training improved the ability of informal providers to correctly manage the kind of conditions they may see in their clinics, but it did not decrease their overuse of unnecessary medicines or antibiotics.

Stuti Khemani. [Making politics work for development](#)

July 2016 - Fear of openly confronting politics can come in the way of achieving economic development goals. To help address this problem, the Development Research Group of the World Bank prepared a report synthesizing the vanguard of economics research on the functioning of political markets to understand the implications. It yields insights for strengthening existing transparency and citizen engagement policies with potentially powerful consequences for economic development everywhere, in poor and rich countries alike.

Damien de Walque. [Should cash transfers be systematically paid to mothers?](#)

July 2016 - When I was a high school student in Belgium, our history textbook included a reproduction of a painting entitled "The Drunkard" by Eugène Laermans. The painting was included in the section describing the history of the labor movement in the country and its achievements in passing legislation aimed at improving the situation of the working class. In particular, the painting was meant to illustrate why the Belgian law introducing child benefits – monthly transfers to all families raising children until age 18 (or until age 25 as long as they are still students) - stipulates that these benefits are paid to the mother. The law still holds today, even if it allows for exceptions when the mother is not present in the household.

Jishnu Das. [India's informal doctors are assets not crooks](#)

April 2016 - This article was originally published on SciDev.Net. Read the original article. Most of us would agree that when it comes to healthcare providers, some training is better than none. Yet even this seemingly innocuous statement is highly contentious in India, where training primary care providers who lack formal medical qualifications is anathema to the professional medical classes.

Adam Wagstaff. [Health and the SDGs: Out of the doldrums, heading for the rapids](#)

March 2016 - Until quite recently, things were looking good for health in the SDG process. It wasn't always so. Two and a half years ago, at the time of the high-level panel report on the SDGs, the

health SDG discussion was actually stuck in the doldrums. Health was the only area to get less column inches than in the MDGs. The proposed goals and targets were pretty much business as usual. The only real hint of any new thinking was the addition of a target to reduce non-communicable diseases, but it was subsumed within an old target and looked very much like an afterthought.

Deon Filmer. [Youth employment in Africa: what policy makers can do](#)

January 2016 - Just under two years ago, I, along with a team from across the World Bank, co-authored a report, Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa, which tackled the growing gap between the aspirations of African youth and the realities of the job markets and what governments should do about it. With an expected 11 million young Africans entering the labor market every year well into the next decade, the findings and main messages of the report remain relevant.

Isis Gaddis and Dominique van de Walle. [Data gaps: The poor typical household surveys miss](#)

January 2016 - Standard measures of poverty and inequality are calculated at the household level—assuming resources are pooled and shared equally among its members. The World Bank Group’s new global poverty estimates, for example, are based on consumption per person—the average consumed by individuals within the household.

Dominique van de Walle. [The shock of widowhood: Marital status and poverty in Africa](#)

January 2016 - In Western economies, widows were historically among the poorest and most vulnerable individuals until the introduction of pension schemes and widow benefits in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One might expect a similar situation in developing countries with underdeveloped safety net and insurance mechanisms, as well as high levels of gender inequality in rights, human development, and access to assets and employment. Yet, despite the likely relevance of widowhood in the lives of African women, surprisingly little is known about the well-being of Africa’s widows.

2015

Adam Wagstaff. [Saturday, December 12 was UHC Day. What have we learned in the last 12 months about Universal Health Coverage?](#)

December 2015 - It turns out lots of interesting things happened on December 12. Beethoven had his first lesson in music composition with Franz Joseph Haydn (1792), Washington, D.C. became the capital of the US (1800), Guglielmo Marconi sent the first transatlantic radio signal (1901), Kenya declared independence from the UK (1963), The Beatles played their last UK concert (1965), and Ed Sheeran announced he was “taking a break” from social media (2015). Oh yes, and the UN endorsed a resolution calling for countries to “provide affordable, quality health care to every person, everywhere” (2012). Which makes December 12 UHC Day.

Dominique van de Walle. [Poverty is falling faster for female-headed households in Africa](#)

December 2015 - Living standards have risen and poverty has fallen considerably across Sub-Saharan Africa since the late 1990s. But are all groups sharing in the gains? In particular, what about Africa’s many female-headed households, often thought to be poorer. Have they been left behind?

Dominique van de Walle. [Poverty is falling faster among Africa’s female headed households](#)

October 2015 - A sizeable number of households in Africa today have female heads. Based on the latest Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), 26% of all households Africa-wide are headed by

women. Although there are cross-country differences, the shares both of the population living in female headed households (FHHs) and of households headed by women, have been rising over time. The data show quite clearly that the probability that a woman aged 15 or older heads a household, controlling for her age, has been increasing since the early 1990s in all regions and across the entire age distribution.

Adam Wagstaff. [Financial incentives in health: the magic bullet we were hoping for?](#)

September 2015 - After years of bad news from developing countries about high rates of health worker absenteeism, and low rates of delivery of key health interventions, along came what seemed like a magic bullet: financial incentives. Rather than paying providers whether or not they show up to work, and whether or not they deliver key interventions, doesn't it make sense to pay them—at least in part—according to what they do? And if, after doing their cost-benefit calculations, women decide not to have their baby delivered in a health facility, not to get antenatal care, and not take their child to be immunized, then doesn't it make sense to try to change the benefit-cost ratio by paying them to do so?

R. Kanbur and A. Wagstaff. [Inequality of opportunity: Useful policy construct or will o' the wisp?](#)

June 2015 - Reducing inequality of opportunity, rather than inequality of outcome, is often heralded as an appropriate target for policy. This column explores the challenges of identifying inequality of opportunity. Disentangling how effort and circumstance contribute to outcomes is difficult, and this leads to a tendency to underestimate inequality of opportunity.

M. B. Nyqvist, L. Corno, D. de Walque and J. Svensson. [Risk, Sex and Lotteries. Can lotteries be used as incentives to prevent risky behaviors?](#)

April 2015 - Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) and other types of financial incentives have been used successfully to promote activities that are beneficial to the participants such as school attendance and health check-ups for children. CCTs pay a certain amount if the condition is verified.

J. Coarasa and J. Das. [Primarily Small: The Private Health Care of the Poor](#)

February 2015 - Over the past year or so, we've been given the opportunity to speak to different audiences about the role of the private sector in various global health issues. On a recent occasion, the conversation started by showing the picture above to a room full of health experts. The audience was told that they were looking at a private, for-profit clinic in Kenya and were asked what kind of location they thought provided the setting for this picture.

D. de Walque. [Can incentives lead to sustained impacts? The case of rewarding safe sex](#)

January 2015 - Economists believe that incentives matter and that they can be used for changing people's behaviors. Incentives are used for encouraging school attendance and performance or for increasing the coverage and quality of health care delivery. But a recurrent question is what happens once the incentives are discontinued? Are the incentives' effects going to be sustained even after their payment is stopped because individuals would have been nudged towards a different behavior? Or are those effects going to die down and disappear once incentives are removed?

Incentives and Teacher Effort

Winter 2015 - School survey data from Lao PDR show that nonmonetary incentives can be effective in motivating teachers to increase their effort.

[Research Digest](#)

How Effective Are Efforts to Raise Voluntary Enrollment in Health Insurance?

Winter 2015 - An experiment in the Philippines suggests that achieving universal health coverage through voluntary enrollment will not be easy.

[Research Digest](#)

How Insecure Property Rights Affect Migration in China

Winter 2015 - Land tenure insecurity reduced the rate of migration from rural to urban areas in China during the 1990s and early 2000s.

[Research Digest](#)

Adam Wagstaff. [A guide to the top World Bank blogs and blogposts of 2014](#)

January 2015 - Since 2011 I have been doing a roundup of the 200 most read World Bank blog posts of the year, and comparing World Bank blogs in terms of their shares of top-200 blog posts.

What did blogging at the World Bank in 2014 look like?

2014

Varun Gauri. [The Story of the 2015 World Development Report: Mind, Society, and Behavior](#)

December 2014 - English settlers to the New World believed that the climate of Newfoundland would be moderate, New England would be warm, and Virginia would be like southern Spain. These beliefs were based on the seemingly common sense view that climate is much the same at any given latitude around the globe.

Jishnu Das and Jeffrey Hammer. [Are Institutional Births Institutionalizing Deaths?](#)

November 2014 - On November 12th in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh, twelve women who had received tubal ligations died. The tragic incident highlights the unfortunate reality that for many people around the world, hospitals and clinics may not satisfy the most basic assumption that visiting them will make you better. Equally worrying is the Indian government's singular focus on increasing 'institutional deliveries' and family planning that led it to celebrate a surgeon who had performed 100,000 sterilizations, now spending no more than 4 minutes on each "case".

Owen Ozier. [Deworming improves child cognition. Eventually](#)

October 2014 - You could be forgiven if you found deworming to be something of an enigma. Some have hailed it as one of the most cost effective interventions for improving school participation in developing countries. Yet two recent review papers, drawing together the lessons from many studies, find insignificant effects of deworming on learning specifically and only uncertain evidence on cognition more generally. How could this be?

Damien de Walque, Martina Björkman Nyqvist and Jakob Svensson. [From "Power to the People" to "Information is Power"](#)

October 2014 - Poor quality plagues public service provision in many developing countries. For example, doctors in Tanzania completed less than 25% of the essential checklist for patients with malaria, a disease that is endemic in the country. Indian doctors asked an average of one question per patient ("What's wrong with you?"). In Uganda, the average absence rate among primary school teachers was 27% and 37% among primary health center staff.

Adam Wagstaff. [We just learned a whole lot more about achieving Universal Health Coverage](#)

August 2014 - Subsidized health insurance is unlikely to lead to Universal Health Coverage (UHC); insurance coverage doesn't always improve financial protection and when it does, doesn't

necessarily eliminate financial protection concerns; and tackling provider incentives may be just as – if not more – important in the UHC agenda as demand-side initiatives. These are the three big and somewhat counterintuitive conclusions of the Health Equity and Financial Protection in Asia (HEFPA) research project that I jointly coordinated with Eddy van Doorslaer and Owen O’Donnell.

Adam Wagstaff and Ravi Kanbur. [Inequality of opportunity: the new motherhood and apple pie?](#)

August 2014 - On the face of it, questioning the usefulness of “inequality of opportunity” seems about as wrongheaded as questioning the merits of family vacations, Thanksgiving or dessert trolleys. What’s not to like about it? Well, as we argue in a recent World Bank working paper, the idea is not quite as useful as it might at first glance appear, and is in fact rather dangerous. But turned upside down, it might yet be useful.

Adam Wagstaff and Caryn Bredenkamp. [Were the poor left behind by the health MDGs?](#)

July 2014 - Thanks to Thomas Piketty, we’ve heard a lot this year about rising inequality. And with just over a year to go before the MDG ‘window’ closes, we’ve also heard a lot about the ‘post-2015 agenda’. In a paper with Leander Buisman that just came out in the World Bank Research Observer, we bring these two themes together and ask: “Were the poor left behind by the health MDGs?” Influenced perhaps by all the talk of rising income inequality, there are certainly plenty of pessimistic folks out there who think that health inequalities, too, are on the rise; that the better off are likely to have seen much faster improvements in MDG indicators than the poor.

Transactional Sex as Risk-Coping Behavior

Spring/Summer 2014 - Transactional sex rises after shocks, suggesting that access to insurance or savings may have public health implications.

[Research Digest](#)

Damien de Walque. [Stratified randomization and the FIFA World Cup](#)

June 2014 - When I start working on a new impact evaluation, I often begin with a workshop in the country where the study will be conducted. The workshop brings together government officials, both at the central level and from the regions and provinces where the intervention will take place, other stakeholders such as NGOs or other UN organizations, and representatives of the research institution that will implement the survey.

Louise Fox and Deon Filmer. [Meeting the Youth Employment Challenge in Africa – Six Myths](#)

May 2014 - As the world's youngest and poorest region, Sub-Saharan Africa faces a major jobs challenge. Half of the population is under 25, and every year 11 million people enter the labor force — mostly youth looking for work. After more than a decade of rapid growth and expansion of educational opportunities, youth have high aspirations and expectations, and African policy makers are concerned about how to meet them. Jobs and opportunity are at the top of the development agenda.

Is Workfare Really Cost-Effective?

Winter 2014 - India’s Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, established through a 2005 law, is explicitly aimed at reducing rural poverty.

[Research Digest](#)

Shanta Devarajan and Jishnu Das. [Jishnu and Shanta Talk Transfers](#)

January 2014 - *Shanta*: Jishnu, your blog [post](#) and [mine](#) on cash transfers generated a lot of

comments. Some people argued that giving poor people cash will not “work” because they will spend it on consumption rather than on their children’s education, which is something we care about. What do you have to say to that?

Deon Filmer. [Youth Employment—A Fundamental Challenge for African Economies](#)
January 2014 - In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia’s sprawling capital, Mulu Warsa has found a formal-sector job as a factory worker thanks to her high school education. In Niamey, a city at the heart of the Sahel region, Mohamed Boubacar is a young apprentice training to be a carpenter. And in Sagrosa, a village in Kenya’s remote Tana Delta district, Felix Roa, who works on a family farm and runs a small shop, dreams of a better life if he can find the money to expand the business and move to a more urban area. His family is too poor to support him through secondary school.

2013

Adam Wagstaff. [A guide to the top World Bank blogs and blogposts of 2013](#)
December 2013 - In both 2011 and 2012, I did a roundup of the most read 200 World Bank blogposts of the year, and compared the performance of the various World Bank blogs in terms of readership. What did blogging at the World Bank in 2013 look like?

Adam Wagstaff. [How and why do countries vary so much in their use of health services?](#)
December 2013 - I’ve been struck recently by how little we (or at least I) seem to know about variations in use of health services across the world, and what drives them. Do people in, say, India or Mali use doctors “a lot” or “a little”. Even harder: do they “overuse” or “underuse” doctors? At least we could say whether doctor utilization rates in these countries are low or high compared to the rate for the developing world as a whole.

Adam Wagstaff. [What exactly is the public-private mix in health care?](#)
December 2013 - I’ve been in quite a few meetings recently and read quite a lot of documents where people have made claims about the relative sizes of the public and private sectors in health care delivery. A recent [report](#) from the World Bank Group on the private sector in Africa claims that “the private health sector now provides half of all health services in the region.” A document I reviewed recently claimed that “much” of medical care is provided by the private sector – an assertion I hear quite often.

Damien de Walque. [Risking Your Health](#)
November 2013 - All over the world, people engage in behaviors that are risky for their health. They smoke, use illicit drugs, drink too much alcohol, eat unhealthy food or adopt sedentary lifestyles, and have risky sexual encounters. As a consequence, they endanger their health, reduce their own life expectancy, and often impose harmful consequences on others.
[French](#) | [Spanish](#)

Jishnu Das. [Is the New York Times Ethicist a Better Economist than....The Economist?](#)
November 2013 - The Sunday before last I woke up to a couple of articles in the New York Times Magazine and The Economist. In the first article, [the New York Times ethicist was asked a question about Halloween candy](#): Are dentists who purchase candy from kids (thus protecting their teeth) and donate it to poor families engaging in “*thoughtless, unethical and unprofessional*” behavior?

Adam Wagstaff. [The Academic Sting Operation](#)
October 2013 - Nobody likes to be stung. Doctors regard it as unethical. Publishers say it betrays the

trust of their profession. But the fact is, as three recent studies have demonstrated, sting operations can be extremely effective at exposing questionable professional practices, and answering questions that other methods can't credibly answer.

Dominique van de Walle. [Long Term Impacts of Household Electrification in Rural India](#)
October 2013 - It is estimated that 1.3 billion people in 2009 were still without electricity. Many rural households in the developing world continue to cook with wood and biomass (mainly dung), and spend a lot of time collecting and preparing fuel for domestic use. Across the world, these time (and resulting health) burdens are thought to be higher for women and the children under their care.

Expanding Social Insurance Coverage in Urban China

Fall 2013 - Among developing countries, China is unique not only in its rapid growth over the past 30 years but also in its simultaneous gradual transition from a planned economy.
[Research Digest](#)

Adam Wagstaff. [Health and the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Stuck in the Doldrums?](#)
June 2013 - The high-level panel report on the post-2015 development agenda...offers a nice opportunity to reflect on how---over the last 15 years---we have seen some serious global shifts in values, expectations and motivations.

Damien de Walque. [Public randomization ceremonies](#)
June 2013 - Randomization might- at first – sound like a scary word for health policy makers and professionals. They read medical journals and know from their training that randomized trials are scientifically rigorous designs to evaluate the impact of a program. But their first inclination might be to prefer to have the randomized trial in somebody else's backyard. Randomization seems politically difficult. How to explain it to the people who will have to wait for the new intervention?
RBF website: [English](#) | [French](#)

Adam Wagstaff. [Were Gordon Brown and I right? Were poor children actually left behind by the Millennium Development Goals for education?](#)

June 2013 - It's quite fun being picked up by a prime minister. Not literally of course. Unless you happen to be a baby seized from your mother's arms during an election campaign, in which case it must be rather exciting, and quite possibly the highlight of the day. No, I mean being picked up in print.

Jishnu Das. [A Data Guide to Sir Michael Barber's "The Good News from Pakistan"](#)

June 2013 - Shanta's blog reported on Sir Michael Barber's approach to implementing service delivery or "Deliverology". Sir Michael was back at the World Bank on June 6th to present "[The Good News from Pakistan](#)", where he outlined the impressive changes in Punjab, Pakistan as a result of his leadership in delivering deliverology. As a discussant, with Dhushyanth Raju's inputs (Dhushyanth is a Senior Economist in the World Bank's South Asia education team), I examined and triangulated the existing data. Despite my original excitement about the method and the results after reading the report, I am reluctantly forced to conclude that at the moment the data do not support the report's claims (see my [presentation](#)).

Adam Wagstaff. [Cost-effectiveness vs. universal health coverage. Is the future random?](#)

May 2013 - I've been blogging a bit about Universal Health Coverage (UHC) recently. In my "[old wine in a new bottle](#)" post, I argued that UHC is ultimately about ensuring that rich and poor alike

get the care they need, and that nobody suffers undue financial hardship from getting the care they need. In my "[Mrs Gauri](#)" post, I used my colleague Varun Gauri's mother as a guinea pig to see whether the general public feels that UHC is a morally powerful concept and whether it could be expressed in a way that the general public would find accessible.

Shanta Devarajan and Jishnu Das. [User fees and abuser fees](#)

April 2013 - If user fees for health have been so vilified (including in comments on this blog), why are we bringing the subject up again? Because new evidence calls into question the prevailing view, namely that removing user fees leads to: (i) increased use of health services and hence to (ii) improved health outcomes. Confirming (i), the recent literature shows that (ii) does not always follow.

Adam Wagstaff. [Reconciling the two "sciences of delivery"](#)

April 2013 - Last week on [Let's Talk Development](#), I asked what the term "science of delivery" (SOD) means. I suggested that SOD is about moving from thinking about "what to deliver" to "how to deliver". We know, for example, the interventions that cut child mortality (bednets, vaccinations, breastfeeding, etc.) but these interventions reach too few children, and the trick is to get them delivered to more.

Adam Wagstaff. [So what exactly is the "science of delivery"?](#)

April 2013 - The World Bank's president, Jim Kim, has now made two major speeches outlining his vision for the institution – one at the [Annual Meetings](#) the other at [Georgetown University](#) on April 2 ahead of the upcoming Spring Meetings.

Adam Wagstaff. [Should inequality be reflected in the new international development goals?](#)

March 2013 - The last few months have been a busy time for inequality. And over the last few days the poor thing got busier still. Inequality is now dancing on two stages. It must be really quite dizzy. **We need an inequality goal. No we don't. Yes we do**

One of the two stages is the post-2015 development goals. At some point, someone seems to have decided that reducing inequality needs to be an explicit commitment in the post-2105 goals. The [UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda](#) wrote a report on inequality and argued that "addressing inequalities is in everyone's best interest."

Adam Wagstaff. [Using an iPad to increase your productivity: a roundup](#)

March 2013 - It's a while since I [blogged](#) about the iPad. I thought it might be useful to pull all my tips on this handy little gadget (including some new ones) together in one post. I'm going to focus for the most part on using it to improve productivity, but there will be some thoughts at the end on using the iPad to have a little fun.

Adam Wagstaff. [Universal Health Coverage and the post-2015 development goal agenda. And Mrs Gauri](#)

March 2013 - In a recent [blogpost](#) I asked whether Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is old wine in a new bottle, and if so whether that's so bad.

I argued that UHC is ultimately about making sure that "everyone – whether rich or poor – gets the care they need without suffering undue financial hardship as a result." I suggested UHC embraces three important concepts:

- equity: linking care to need, not to ability pay;
- financial protection: making sure that people's use of needed care doesn't leave their family in poverty; and

- quality of care: making sure providers make the right diagnosis, and prescribe a treatment that's appropriate and affordable.

Adam Wagstaff. [A Sketch of a Ministerial Meeting on Universal Health Coverage](#)

February 2013 - I had been warned—I found it hard to believe—that WHO ministerial meetings can be rather dull affairs of little consequence. Ministers typically take it in turn to read their prepared speeches; their fellow ministers appear to be listening attentively through their headsets but some, it seems, have been known to zap through the simultaneous translation channels in search of lighter entertainment. Speeches aren't played over the loudspeakers for fear of waking jetlagged ministers from their afternoon naps. WHO is a very considerate organization: it likes to make sure that while on its premises visitors reach “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being.”

Adam Wagstaff. [Universal health coverage: Old wine in a new bottle? If so, is that so bad?](#)

February 2013 - It's easy to see how the concept of universal health coverage (UHC) became so elusive.

At the start, the idea must have seemed straightforward enough. Lots of countries "covered" only part of their population, and several were making efforts to expand coverage to "uncovered" populations. China, for example, started out on this process in 2003, trying to expand coverage to the rural population that lost coverage when the old rural cooperative medical scheme collapsed following the de-collectivization of agriculture in 1978.

Damien de Walque. [Transferts monétaires conditionnels au Burkina Faso: Pour quels enfants les conditions sont-elle importantes?](#)

February 2013 - Auteurs: Richard Akresh, Damien de Walque et Harounan Kazianga

Dans une [récente étude](#), nous présentons les impacts sur l'éducation d'un projet-pilote de transferts monétaires au Burkina Faso¹, dans la Province du Nahouri. Ce projet-pilote est accompagné d'une évaluation d'impact expérimentale randomisée pour mesurer et comparer, dans le même contexte en zone rurale au Burkina Faso, l'efficacité de transferts monétaires conditionnels et non-conditionnels qui ciblent les ménages pauvres.

Varun Gauri. [MDGs that Nudge](#)

January 2013 - What should replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) when they expire in 2015?

Ask your mom or dad.

In a [recent working paper](#), I argue that we need MDGs that nudge – MDGs that frame development issues in ways that capture the attention and enthusiasm of non-experts (regular people).

Damien de Walque. [For Which Children Do Conditions Matter in Conditional Cash Transfers?](#)

January 2013 - Co-authored with Richard Akresh and Harounan Kazianga.

Social safety nets are actively promoted in developing countries both as responses to financial crises and as mechanisms to alleviate poverty. Conditional cash transfers, which are now common in Latin America but remain rare in other regions, are also seen a way to reduce future poverty by investing in the human capital of the next generation ([Fiszbein and Schady, 2009](#)). While both conditional cash transfers (CCTs) and unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) provide poor households with resources, UCT programs do not impose conditionality constraints. An important question is whether and how conditions influence the outcomes they seek to improve.

Stuti Khemani. [Buying Votes versus Supplying Public Services](#)

January 2013 - There is one simple answer to the “[what-will-it-take-to-end-poverty](#)” question: it will take courageous politicians who actually implement the policies we already know are needed. Politicians, even the well-intentioned ones, are too often unable to implement good policies, because bad policies are needed for their political survival. For example, vote-buying, the direct exchange of “gifts” or money for political support during elections is widespread in many developing countries. For the first time, [new research](#) provides direct empirical evidence that where vote-buying practices are more prevalent, governments invest less in pro-poor services.

Adam Wagstaff. [Human Development and Inequality of Opportunity: a rejoinder to Ferreira](#)

January 2013 - My colleague and (I hope still) friend, Chico Ferreira recently took the trouble to write a [comment](#) on my earlier [LTD post](#) on measuring inequality of opportunity in the context of human development. Early on in his comment, Chico also paid me the compliment of a being a “clever guy”, which was nice until I read on and found that while he agreed with some of what I said there was a lot he didn’t like. Now Chico is a really clever guy, and this is an area he knows a lot about. So I realize I’m treading on thin ice when I say I’m not completely convinced about his ripostes. But let me take the risk. Chico’s not just super-clever – he’s also very nice. So if the ice cracks and I fall in, I think there’s a good chance he’ll pull me out.

Adam Wagstaff. [Some thoughts on human development, equal opportunity, and universal coverage](#)

January 2013 - I was asked recently to advise on some ongoing work on human development, equal opportunities, and universal coverage. The work was building on [previous work](#) undertaken by the World Bank in its Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region that had developed a new index known as the Human Opportunity Index (HOI).

2012

Adam Wagstaff. [A guide to the top World Bank blogs and blog posts of 2012](#)

December 2012 - Last year I wrote a [post](#) listing the most read 100 World Bank blogposts of 2011. I also [compared](#) the Bank’s 26 English-language blogs with one another in terms of how many posts they got in the top-200. 2012 was an even more successful year for World Bank bloggers.

Adam Wagstaff. [Where in the world is a hospitalization least affordable?](#)

December 2012 - In the developing world, a hospitalization is one of the things that families – especially poor ones – fear most. This came through in country after country in the World Bank’s [Voices of the Poor](#) exercise. Here are just some examples: *A man from Ghana is quoted as saying: “Take the death of this small boy this morning, for example. The boy died of measles. We all know he could have been cured at the hospital. But the parents had no money and so the boy died a slow and painful death, not of measles, but out of poverty.”*

Adam Wagstaff. [Shocking facts about primary health care in India, and their implications](#)

December 2012 - There’s nothing quite like a cold shower of shocking statistics to get you thinking. A [paper](#) that came out in Health Affairs today, written by my colleague Jishnu Das and his collaborators, is just such a cold shower.

Owen Ozier. [Microfranchising in Nairobi hits the BBC](#)

November 2012 - This week, the BBC and the International Rescue Committee blog both featured a project that I am evaluating together with coauthors Maddalena Honorati and Pamela Jakiela. IRC

approached us because they were interested in conducting a rigorous impact evaluation of their project.

Adam Wagstaff. [When the snow fell on health systems research: a symposium sketch](#)
November 2012 - It was the perfect finale. In the vast high-tech auditorium of Beijing's International Convention Center, the audience jostled in the queue to pose questions to the final plenary panel of the [Second Global Symposium on Health Systems Research](#).

Adam Wagstaff. [How can health systems “systematic reviews” actually become systematic?](#)
October 2012 - In my [post](#) “Should you trust a medical journal?” I think I might have been a bit unfair. Not on The Lancet, which I have since discovered, via comments on David Roodman’s blog, has something of a track record of publishing sensational but not exactly evidence-based social science articles, but rather on Ernst Spaan et al. for challenging the systematicness of their systematic review of health insurance impacts in developing countries.

Shanta Devarajan and Jishnu Das. [Improving access to drugs: Fitting the solution to the problem](#)
October 2012 - [Patricio Marquez’s post](#) correctly identifies lack of access to quality medicines as one of the constraints to poor people’s health in Africa. But the solutions he recommends—more public money for “essential drugs benefits”, building resilient institutions, and providing physicians with better scientific information and guidelines about drug prescriptions—are unlikely by themselves to improve poor people’s health outcomes.

Adam Wagstaff. [Who’s writing what in the ‘Knowledge Bank’? And is it being used?](#)
October 2012 - An organization with ‘motor company’ in its name might produce several types of vehicle (cars, trucks, etc.) in several variations (models) at several different plants, and might sell these vehicles in several different regions of the world. The company wouldn’t last long if it didn’t know how many of each model – and at what cost – it was producing in each plant, and how many – and at what price – it was selling in each region. In the World Bank – where we like to think of ourselves as the ‘knowledge bank’ – we produce several types of document in several vice presidencies (VPUs) and we make them available in hard copy and in electronic format in all regions of the world.

Jishnu Das. [Poor by \(revealed\) choice Parts II and III: implications and critique](#)
October 2012 - Where do the differences between the absolute and the relative poverty measures come from? Because eventual discussions over a country’s poverty numbers will be held with each country, the increased estimates may look like the WB is suddenly changing the goal post. Therefore, it is useful to think of the difference between absolute and global poverty as emerging from a two-part decomposition and an internal consistency requirement.

Jishnu Das. [Poor by \(revealed\) choice: A neophyte’s guide to Martin Ravallion’s proposal for global poverty targets](#)
October 2012 - Spurred by a renewed focus on eradicating poverty, many discussions at the World Bank are around “targets”: for poverty reduction. Martin Ravallion recently presented his proposal at our development seminar. The talk had 2 parts. The first part proposed a “global” poverty line(s) to set targets; the main innovation here over the WB standard of “you are poor if you live on less than \$1.25 per day” is the proposal of a new relative notion of poverty. The second part forecasted poverty declines and proposed ‘reasonable’ and ‘ambitious’ targets for global institutions under

different scenarios.

Adam Wagstaff. [Should you trust a medical journal?](#)

September 2012 - While we non-physicians may feel a bit peeved when we hear “Trust me, I’m a doctor”, our medical friends do seem to have evidence on their side. [GfK](#), apparently one of the world’s leading market research companies, have developed a [GfK Trust Index](#), and yes they found that doctors are one of the most trusted professions, behind postal workers, teachers and the fire service. World Bank managers might like to know that bankers and (top) managers come close to the bottom, just above advertising professionals and politicians.

Adam Wagstaff. [Tracking withdrawals from the ‘Knowledge Bank’](#)

September 2012 - As I reported in my [last post](#), Jim Kim’s arrival as World Bank President has reinvigorated the debate about the idea of the World Bank being a ‘knowledge bank’. In the post, I argued that the knowledge produced by the Bank – whether gleaned from its lending operations, or from its research and other analytic work – is a global public good, and that we should therefore assess the success of the institution in its knowledge work not in terms of how specific ‘client’ governments value the outputs of its knowledge work but rather in terms of how people around the world use and value them.

Adam Wagstaff. [So what exactly is a “knowledge bank”?](#)

September 2012 - Unsurprisingly, with the recent arrival of a new president fresh from the groves of academia, the halls and meeting rooms of the World Bank are buzzing once again with talk of the “Knowledge Bank” or KB for short. But what exactly is a “knowledge bank”?

To my mind the paper that pins the idea down best is “Positioning the World Bank” by Chris Gilbert, Andrew Powell and David Vines in the *Economic Journal* in 1999.

Adam Wagstaff. [Measuring universal health coverage – plus ça change?](#)

September 2012 - In case you hadn’t noticed, there’s a growing clamor for a global commitment to universal health coverage (UHC). You might have seen the recent special issue of the *Lancet* on “the struggle for UHC”. Inevitably, accompanying this clamor, there’s been a lot of wracking of brains on how to measure progress toward UHC. With the excitement of a new political agenda, there’s understandably a desire to carve out a new measurement agenda too. While not wanting dampen people’s enthusiasm for the UHC cause, I would like us to reflect whether on the measurement agenda we’re building enough on what’s been done before.

What Are the Health Effects of Universal Health Care?

Summer 2012 - The developing world—and some of the developed world too—is in the midst of a major push toward universal health coverage. A key objective is to narrow gaps in coverage and thus improve the population’s health. Improvements in health would be of value in their own right. [Research Digest](#)

FOCUS: Aid Effectiveness

Spring 2012 - Donor organizations recognize that political support for maintaining or increasing levels of aid depends on improving perceptions of its effectiveness. In 2005, in response to concerns about the quality of aid, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness moved implementation issues to the top of the international aid effectiveness agenda.

[Research Digest](#)

Retirement Behavior among China's Older Workers

Spring 2012 - In China as in other countries, developing and developed, population aging raises the prospect that both formal and informal mechanisms for supporting the elderly will come under strain over the next 20 years.

[Research Digest](#)

Adam Wagstaff. [Yet more on coping with information overload with an iPad](#)

May 2012 - Last year I wrote a couple of posts on coping with information overload using an iPad, one in [July](#) and the other in [December](#). The iPad world continues to develop apace, so here's a quick update, this one - as requested - complete with links to the apps.

Owen Ozier. [Early Childhood Interventions Conference](#)

May 2012 - Why aren't all early childhood interventions most effective at the same age? Should we be checking that our randomizations are balanced according to genes that influence behavior? Should we be gathering biological outcomes, in addition to economic ones, even when the intervention does not involve biology?

Early childhood interventions - usually working through either health or education - can have very long-lasting effects, some of which are even transmitted to the next generation. Two weekends ago, the Chicago Initiative for Economic Development and Early Childhood (CEDEC) held a conference to survey what is known in this area and provide a forum for sharing findings from recent projects.

Varun Gauri. [The Law's Majestic Equality?](#)

April 2012 - Literary writers do not think much of the law. In the last century, Anatole France wrote, mordantly: "The majestic equality of the laws prohibits the rich and the poor alike from sleeping under bridges, begging in the streets and stealing bread." More recently, Aarvind Adiga says, "The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters. . . . The judges? Wouldn't they see through this obviously forced confession? But they are in the racket too. They take their bribe, they ignore the discrepancies in the case. And life goes on."

Adam Wagstaff. [A vast treasure trove of development knowledge just opened up](#)

April 2012 - Today's launch of the [World Bank's Open Knowledge Repository](#) (OKR) and [Open Access Policy](#) might not seem a big deal. But it is.

The knowledge bank's assets are huge, but until today were hard to access

The Bank is a huge producer of knowledge on development. This knowledge surfaces in formal publications of the Bank - the institution publishes books and flagship reports like the World Development Report. It also surfaces in publications of external publishers, including journal articles - up to now, these external publications haven't been seen by the Bank as part of its knowledge output despite the fact they dwarf the Bank's own publications in volume and in citations. The Bank's knowledge also surfaces in reports, and in informal "knowledge products" like briefing notes and other web content.

Adam Wagstaff. [Are the Knowledge Bank's staff under-specialized?](#)

March 2012 - Ideas often come from unexpected quarters. Last week, Ricardo Hausmann came to the World Bank to talk about his work on economic complexity. I missed the seminar, but afterwards read his [Atlas of Economic Complexity: Mapping Paths to Prosperity](#). (I had actually already looked at the stunning - but rather confusing charts - of his coauthor Cesar Hidalgo after reading Tim Harford's great new book *Adapt: Why Success Always Starts with Failure*.)

Damien de Walque. [Rewarding safe sex](#)

March 2012 - Prevention strategies have had limited impact on the trajectory of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. New, innovative approaches to behavioral change are needed to stem the epidemic. In a joint effort with many colleagues, and in collaboration with the Ifakara Health Institute in Tanzania and, the University of California at Berkeley, we launched a study with the acronym RESPECT (“Rewarding STI Prevention and Control in Tanzania”).

Adam Wagstaff. [Humanizing health systems](#)

February 2012 - In 1960, I wouldn’t have been writing this blog post. For a start I was just a baby at the time. Second, we were several decades away from 1994 when Justin Hall – then a student at Swarthmore – would sit down and tap out the world’s first blog. Most importantly of all, though, according to Google’s ngram viewer, people didn’t write about health systems much in 1960 (see chart). Usage of the term in books took off only in the mid 1960s, waned in the 1980s, and then started rising again in the 1990s. This doesn’t look like a statistical artifact. Usage of the term “Nobel prize” has stayed relatively constant over the period, and while the term “health economics” has also trended upwards, the growth has been much slower. So “health systems” is a fairly new term – and it’s on the rise.

Damien de Walque. [Professional Hazard: Migrant Miners Are More Likely to Be Infected with HIV](#)

February 2012 - Swaziland and Lesotho are among the countries with the highest HIV prevalence in the world.

Recent nationally representative estimates reveal an adult HIV prevalence equal to 26% in Swaziland¹ and 23.2% in Lesotho.

These countries have two other main features in common: they are small countries bordering South Africa and, during the past decades, they were exposed to massive recruitment efforts to work in South African mines. For more than a century, about 60 percent of those employed in the mining sector in the Republic of South Africa were migrant workers from Lesotho and Swaziland.

Philip Keefer and Stuti Khemani. [Do Informed Citizens Receive More, or Pay More?](#)

February 2012 - One widely-accepted political economy research finding is that informed citizens receive greater benefits from government transfer programs. The evidence for the impact of information comes from particular contexts—disaster relief [in India](#) and welfare payments in the USA during the [Great Depression](#). Do other contexts yield similar results? [New research](#) on the distribution of anti-malaria bed nets in Benin suggests: “No.” Instead, local health officials charged more informed households for bed nets that they could have given them for free.

Stuti Khemani and Philip Keefer. [Who ends up being more accountable - governments or citizens?](#)

February 2012 - In our (justifiable) enthusiasm for transparency, we rarely ask whether information provision leads private citizens to help themselves, thereby relieving governments of their responsibilities. If so, we may not be quite there (yet) in finding tools that improve government accountability.

2011

Adam Wagstaff. [A New Year’s Guide to the top World Bank blog posts of 2011](#)

December 2011 - 2011 was a highly successful year for World Bank blogs; four posts chalked up more than 10,000 views over the year; the year saw the launch of the highly

successful [Development Impact blog](#); and two of the Bank's blogs (Development Impact and [Africa Can End Poverty](#)) have featured in [Palgrave's top-50 Economics blogs](#). The table below lists the top-100 World Bank blog posts of 2011 based on page views over the period November 1, 2010 – November 19, 2011. For those interested, click here to see how the Bank's 26 English-language blogs compare to one another in terms of the number of posts they have in the top-50, top-100, and top-200. (Keep in mind, however, that Development Impact was running for only part of this period.)

Rachel Heath. [Stitching together the future: the effects of the garment industry on girls' schooling in Bangladesh](#)

December 2011 - We want to increase (girls) education... but what's the best way to do this? A lot of education policy has been based on the philosophy immortalized in the classic movie Field of Dreams: "Build it and they will come." That is, researchers and policymakers have examined the effects of programs that lower the direct or indirect costs of schooling, for instance, through building schools ([Burde and Linden 2010](#)), providing conditional cash transfers to parents ([Fiszbein and Schady 2008](#) and references therein) or directly to students ([Baird, McIntosh, and Ozler 2011](#)) or inputs such as textbooks ([Glewwe, Kremer, and Moulin 2009](#)), school meals ([Vermeersch and Kremer 2004](#)), or uniforms ([Evans et al 2009](#)).

Adam Wagstaff. [More on coping with information overload with an iPad](#)

December 2011 - In July I wrote a [post](#) on this blog about coping with information overload using an iPad. Rather to my surprise, a few people actually read it. Four months on I thought I'd share with you some new apps and new uses of old apps. It turns out that four months is a long time in the iPad world right now.

Berk Özler. [What the HIV prevention gel trial failure implies for trials in economics](#)

December 2011 - For the World AIDS Day, there is a sign at the World Bank that states that taking ARVs reduces rate of HIV transmission by 96%. If this was last year, a sign somewhere may well have read "A [cheap microbicidal gel](#) that women can use up to 12 hours before sexual intercourse reduces HIV infection risk by more than half – when used consistently." Well, sadly, it turns out, so much for that.

Adam Wagstaff. [A Thanksgiving guide to the top World Bank blogposts of 2011](#)

November 2011 - Here's some reading material for Thanksgiving in the event you get some time to yourself. The list below of the Bank's most-read 100 blog posts in 2011 contains some real gems. Before you start reading, you might be curious how the Bank's 26 English-language blogs compare to one another in terms of the number of blog posts they have in the top-50, top-100, and top-200.

Adam Wagstaff. [Are the Knowledge Bank's assets actually being used? The case of the World Bank's Human Development sector](#)

November 2011 - According to its first-ever [Knowledge Report](#), published earlier this year, the World Bank spends over \$600 million a year on "core knowledge services" – research, economic and sector work, technical assistance, "knowledge management", training, and the like. Yet as the authors of report concede, precious little is known about the impact of this spending.

Berk Özler. [Family Planning Whack-a-Mole](#)

November 2011 - Since I [reviewed](#), back in April, the paper by Ashraf, Field, and Lee on the effect of providing vouchers for injectable contraceptives to women in reducing unwanted pregnancies in Lusaka, Zambia, I had been worrying about the use of these modern, convenient, and reliable

technologies in those parts of the world in which HIV is highly prevalent. My thinking was that if there is a causal relationship between adopting modern contraceptives and risky sexual behaviors (such as unprotected sex), then the same technology that reduces pregnancies can also increase HIV transmission. And, in areas with high HIV prevalence and among certain sub-populations (such as uninfected individuals in serodiscordant couples), it is not clear whether this trade-off favors promoting family planning over concerns with HIV.

Jed Friedman. [Pooling risk, saving for health, looking inside the body: what mobile phones may soon allow us to do everywhere](#)

November 2011 - On my return from a long work trip in Thailand and the Philippines, I stopped at the University of Southern California to attend the [4th global health supply chain summit](#). I typically enjoy attending meetings outside my immediate discipline since I get to hear about new ideas in fields far from my own. This conference was no exception. What caught my eye were the many talks concerned with new applications of mobile technologies and how they may eventually be used to improve population health and welfare.

Emanuela Galasso, Margaret Grosh, et al. [More than we expected: what we would like to know about Conditional Cash Transfers—Part I](#)

November 2011 - A week ago we hosted an informal workshop with some academic researchers, policymakers and World Bank staff to review "[The second generation of evaluations](#)" of CCT programs. We finally have the [website](#), where you can see all the presentations made available by the authors and video of the event. Two posts in the Development Impact blog ([here](#) and [here](#)) go into more detail on the effectiveness of conditions — their theory, evidence and the conflicting values around them. In blog posts today and tomorrow we'll summarize discussion of the whole workshop.

Emanuela Galasso, Margaret Grosh, et al. [More than we expected: what we would like to know about Conditional Cash Transfers—Part II](#)

November 2011 - A week ago we hosted an informal workshop with some academic researchers, policymakers and World Bank staff to review "[The second generation of evaluations](#)" of CCT programs. [Yesterday's post](#) recounted where we stand with respect to 'Opening the Black Box', parsing out what we can about which design features help to produce the human capital impacts that are one of the programs' twin goals. Today we summarize the rest of the discussion.

Berk Özler and Francisco Ferreira. [Conditions work! But are they a good thing? \(Part II\)](#)

November 2011 - Yesterday, [in Part I of this post](#), we argued the extant empirical evidence suggests that the conditions cause a substantial amount of the desired behavior change intended by CCT programs. In other words: the "substitution effect" due to the condition may well be larger than the "income effect" of the transfers. For example, in the case of the Malawi experiment, the income effect was responsible for less than half of the total impact on school enrollment.

Berk Özler. [When Medical Progress is not Enough](#)

October 2011 - In [this article](#) in the NYT from a few weeks back, there is this quote from Dr. Stefano Bertozzi, director of H.I.V. and tuberculosis for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation: "That we have men that are willing to be circumcised and we haven't been able to mobilize the resources to get them circumcised — it's really inexcusable that it's taking as long as it is. This is the equivalent of a 60 percent effective vaccine for men. It's my No. 1 priority in Africa. It's clearly the most obvious, most cost-effective intervention we could use to dramatically change the course of H.I.V. in the near future."

Berk Özler and Francisco Ferreira. [Conditions work! But are they a good thing? \(Part I\)](#)
October 2011 - One of the questions discussed at the recent World Bank workshop on the "Second Generation of CCT Evaluations" (website, complete with at least some of the presentations, [here](#)) was the role of the first *C* in the performance of the CCT: how important is the *condition* in accounting for the outcomes of conditional cash transfer programs? Are we just wasting time and resources by monitoring and enforcing conditions, when simply giving out the cash with no strings attached would do an equally good – or perhaps an even better – job?

Markus Goldstein. [When policy goes wrong: The effects of US restrictions on abortion](#)
October 2011 - Two weeks ago, David flagged an interesting [paper](#) by Bendavid, Avila and Miller in the Bulletin of the WHO which reminded me of a [paper](#) I had been following by Kelly Jones, a revised version of which has just been posted. Both of these papers look at the effect of the U.S. Mexico City Policy (a.k.a. the Global Gag Rule) and are interesting not only for their results, but also because they provide a nice example of how we can do evaluations of wide-sweeping policies.

Berk Özler. [Cash Transfers: What have we learned so far? What are the implications for policy? What more do we need to know?](#)
October 2011 - Tomorrow and on Tuesday (October 24-25), there is a workshop at the World Bank titled "CCTs: The Second Generation of Evaluations." If you are at the World Bank or in the DC area, you may want to make your way to this event, as it promises to be a good one – focusing on research conducted on the topic in the past three years or so. The website is here, according to which, there are three main goals: (i) present key results from selected recent high-quality impact evaluations, (ii) discuss the implications of those new lessons for policy (as well as their external validity) and (iii) identify gaps in existing knowledge regarding CCTs.

Adam Wagstaff. [Beyond Universal Coverage Part III](#)
October 2011 - *Should we try to incorporate the cost of forgone care into a measure of financial protection?*
In my [first post](#) on UC in this series I argued that UC is best thought of as a means to achieving lower inequalities and improved financial protection in the health sector, but that in practice UC is unlikely to be sufficient – and may not even be necessary – for us to achieve these goals. In this post, I want to probe a little on the measurement of financial protection; in particular I want to ask whether it should incorporate an allowance for forgone care.

Adam Wagstaff. [Beyond Universal Coverage Part II](#)
October 2011 - *Quantity inequalities may be dwarfed by quality inequalities*
In my [last post](#) on UC I argued that UC is best thought of as a means to achieving lower inequalities and improved financial protection in the health sector, but that in practice UC is unlikely to be sufficient – and may not even be necessary – for us to achieve these goals. In this post, I argue that our focus on narrowing inequalities in the quantity of care is leading us to ignore another and potentially more important type of inequality in the health sector: inequality in the quality of care.

Adam Wagstaff. [Beyond Universal Coverage Part I](#)
October 2011 - *Health sector inequalities and financial protection – is UC enough?*
Since the publication of the [2010 World Health Report](#) "Health Systems Financing: The Path to Universal Coverage", the "universal coverage" (UC) agenda has accelerated worldwide. In this post, I ask how far UC is likely to narrow health sector inequalities and improve financial protection. In the next two I pick up a couple of other themes: the need to look beyond the quantity

of care to the quality of care; and how far we should try to incorporate the cost of forgone care into a measure of financial protection.

Markus Goldstein and Jishnu Das. [The perfectionists versus the reductionists](#)

September 2011 - Women perform 66 percent of the world's work, and produce 50 percent of the food, yet earn only 10 percent of the income....

--Former President Bill Clinton addressing the annual meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative (September 2009). Impressive, heart-wrenching, charity-inducing, get off your sofa and go do something heart breaking, But Wrong. It's a problem isn't it? Almost all those twitter-sized 140 character, pull-all-the-right-heart-strings messages (& yes, the "oh-we-did-so-great" messages like [David](#) gently took aim at) are usually wrong. Or at least don't stand up to detailed scrutiny without many, many caveats.

Markus Goldstein. [Education, fertility and HIV: It's complicated](#)

September 2011 - An interesting, recently revised working [paper](#) by Duflo, Dupas and Kremer looks at the effects of providing school uniforms, teacher training on HIV education, and the two combined. This paper is useful in a number of dimensions – it gives us some sense of the longer term effects of these programs, the methodology is interesting (and informative), and finally, of course, the results are pretty intriguing and definitely food for thought.

Varun Gauri. [Are you poor? Then file a lawsuit](#)

September 2011 - In 2010, the Delhi High Court issued a landmark ruling on the right of poor women to access maternity benefit schemes. The case involved Fatema, a woman suffering epilepsy, who went into labor in May, 2009. Although Fatema's mother went to the hospital to request an ambulance and assistance, as the baby girl was also suffering an epileptic seizure, she was turned away.

Dominique van de Walle. [Neglected and poor widows in Mali](#)

September 2011 - In common with many readers, I was aware of the discrimination and severe disadvantage faced by widows in many countries.

Nonetheless, I was completely unprepared for what I found when I looked closely at the data for Mali. As documented in my recent paper (Lasting Welfare Effects of Widowhood in a Poor Country, 5734), Malian women who have experienced the shock of widowhood, sometimes very young, have lower living standards than other women of the same age. These detrimental effects persist through remarriage and are passed on to their children – possibly more so to daughters – suggesting an intergenerational transmission of poverty stemming from widowhood.

Adam Wagstaff and Sofi Bergkvist. [Health System Innovation in India Part III](#)

August 2011 - Taking high-quality affordable primary care to the rural poor with the help of handheld computers, telemedicine, and P4P.

In our [first post](#) in this series, we showed how illness in India causes financial hardship and leaves Indians—especially poor ones—with limited access to affordable good-quality health care that can actually make them better. In our last post, we outlined the Aarogyasri scheme—a novel government-sponsored health insurance program in the state of Andhra Pradesh that has the potential not just to reduce financial impoverishment but also raise quality standards in hospital care. In this post, we discuss an innovative private-sector approach to delivering and financing primary health care in rural Andhra Pradesh.

Radio Access and Service Delivery in Benin

Summer 2011 - In many developing countries citizens are unable to hold governments accountable for better service delivery, but they also underestimate the benefits of the services that government offers. Donors have long believed that access to mass media addresses both problems. They finance community radio, especially in Africa, to reinforce accountability in new democracies, and they support mass media programming to encourage households to change their health practices and to send their children to school.

[pdf](#)

Trends in Adult Mortality around the Developing World

Summer 2011 - In a new paper de Walque and Filmer combine data from 84 Demographic and Health Surveys from 46 developing countries to analyze trends and socioeconomic differences in adult mortality. They calculate mortality based on the sibling mortality reports collected from female respondents ages 15–49.

First, adult mortality is different from child mortality. While under-five mortality shows a definite improving trend over time, adult mortality does not. Moreover, the cross-sectional association between under-five mortality and national income is quite a bit stronger than that for adult mortality.

[pdf](#)

Adam Wagstaff and Sofi Bergkvist. [Health System Innovation in India Part II: Aarogyarsi](#)

August 2011 - *More than health insurance for the poor*

In our [last post](#), we showed how illness in India causes financial hardship and leaves Indians—especially poor ones—with limited access to affordable good-quality health care that can actually make them better. In this post, we outline a novel government-sponsored health insurance program in the state of Andhra Pradesh (AP)—a program that has the potential not just to reduce financial impoverishment but also raise quality standards in hospital care.

Berk Özler. [Evaluating a large cash transfer program? Don't ignore Regression Discontinuity Design](#)

August 2011 - One of the more common requests I receive from colleagues in the World Bank's operational units is support on evaluating the impact of a large cash transfer program, usually carried out by the national government. Despite the fact that our government counterparts are much more willing to consider a randomized promotion impact evaluation (IE) design these days, still this is often not possible. This could be, for example, because it has already been announced that the program is going to be implemented in certain areas starting on a certain date. When randomization is unavailable in such cases, one of the tools available to us is regression discontinuity design (RDD), which does not get considered as frequently as it should be in my experience.

Jed Friedman. [The promise of participatory women's groups in South Asia: Can education and empowerment save lives?](#)

July 2011 - Each year almost 4 million children die within the first four weeks of life, many from preventable or treatable causes. Much programmatic aid is now devoted to devising ways to ensure that simple effective health practices, such as ensuring a more sterile birth environment, are adopted on a wide scale. A number of recent evaluations from South Asia suggest that the active involvement of local women's groups in problem solving can be among the most cost-effective interventions to prevent deaths.

Jed Friedman. [Reporting from the International Health Economics Association 8th World Congress](#)

July 2011 - I'm currently attending [this large conference](#) in lovely Toronto and trying to pack-in as many sessions as possible. A handful of papers have stood out to me – two evaluations of on-going pay-for-performance schemes in health and two methodological papers related to the economics of obesity. Though I am excited to share them with readers, we need to remember that these are all works in progress to varying degrees – most of them not yet even [working papers](#) – and so all reported findings should be taken with the caveat that they are subject to change.

Adam Wagstaff and Sofi Bergkvist. [Health System Innovation in India Part I: India's health system challenges](#)

July 2011 - India's health system faces some major challenges. In some respects, the hill India's health system has to climb is steeper than that facing other developing countries. The good news is that the innovation that India is famous for in [other sectors](#), as well as in [health technology](#), is now starting to make itself felt in the health system. Not only may these ideas benefit India's poor; they may also provide food for thought for other countries.

Adam Wagstaff. [Coping with information overload—with an iPad](#)

July 2011 - Life before the web was neatly compartmentalized. Research was produced by researchers who wrote articles for academic journals; news was written up by professional journalists who wrote for newspapers and talked on news broadcasts on the TV and the radio; policy was made by politicians and policymakers behind closed doors in smoke-filled ministries in capital cities; and entertainment was crafted by professionals and delivered in theaters, cinemas and on the TV.

David McKenzie. [The new big randomized trial that you should know about – randomized Medicaid](#)

July 2011 - Given the massive debate in the U.S. about government health insurance, the just released results of a new experiment are justly making headlines. In 2004, the state of Oregon, due to budgetary shortfalls, closed its public health insurance program for low-income people. In early 2008, the state decided it had enough budget to fund 10,000 new spots. Given that it expected demand for these new slots to far exceed supply, the state Government opened up a sign-up window, getting 90,000 people to sign-up for a waitlist, and then used random lottery draws to select people from the waitlist.

Damien de Walque and Deon Filmer. [HIV/AIDS, the silent war in Africa](#)

July 2011 - Under-5 mortality is often used—perhaps implicitly—as a measure of “population health”. But what is happening to adult mortality in Africa?

In a recent working paper, we combine data from 84 Demographic and Health Surveys from 46 countries, and calculate mortality based on the sibling mortality reports collected from female respondents aged 15-49. The [working paper is available here](#) and the [database we used for the analysis can be found here](#).

Berk Özler. [Social barriers to schooling help explain persistent educational inequities](#)

July 2011 - *Today's post comes from guest bloggers Hanan Jacoby and Ghazala Mansuri...*

In thinking about why girls' educational attainment is relatively low and has been slow to improve in many parts of south Asia, social scientists appeal to two kinds of arguments: (1) Parents have ingrained preferences favoring human capital investment in sons over daughters and/or (2) the economic returns to education remain substantially higher for males than for females.

David McKenzie. [An underappreciated benefit of experiments: convincing politicians when their pet projects don't work](#)

July 2011 - New York City has suspended payments in a pay-for-performance program for teachers after an experiment found the program had not worked. From the [New York Post](#):

Another attempt by the city to improve student performance through cash payments has failed, much to the surprise of Mayor Bloomberg.

"I would have thought it would have had a bigger effect," the mayor said, responding to findings that millions of dollars in bonuses paid to teachers over the last three years to boost student test scores didn't do a thing to upgrade their underperforming schools.

Berk Özler. [Hurting People while Trying to Help?](#)

June 2011 - [A piece in this week's Nature](#) reports that a large vaccine trial for HPV, which can cause cervical cancer, is in trouble in India due to serious violations of ethical rules and informed consent. The trial, which was hoping to assess the acceptance of the vaccine and the cost of administering the vaccine in different parts of the country, apparently had headmasters of the girls' schools signing consent forms in addition to other violations. Can you imagine someone sticking a needle in your teenage daughter's arm without your or, if she is old enough, her own informed consent? According to the director of the vaccine project "...All necessary ethical approvals were there; the problem was how different individuals or teams implemented it."

Jed Friedman. [What makes health workers get up in the morning? Paying-for-performance and worker motivation](#)

June 2011 - Economists have long noted that the price mechanism can be effective at modifying human behavior. Psychologists classify this aspect of behavior motivation as extrinsic motivation, meaning that the behavior is induced by external pressure. If I increase my hours worked due to an overtime premium then I can be said to exhibit extrinsic motivation - I am responding to the price schedule offered me. In contrast to extrinsic motivation, psychologists posit intrinsic motivation as arising from within the individual. If the overtime premium is not needed for me to put in maximal hours because of my enjoyment or satisfaction in completing the job then I am intrinsically motivated to work long hours.

Jed Friedman. [Verifying the performance in pay-for-performance: What little we know and how we can learn](#)

June 2011 - Numerous recent discussions on the future of development financing focus on the delivery of results and how to mainstream accounting for results in aid flows ([see here for one review paper by Nemat Shafik](#)). This "results based approach" to aid is gathering steam in many contexts. Recent examples include the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) [which has recently adopted a results based approach to allocate aid across countries and sectors](#). Another is Results Based Financing for Health (RBF) where the World Bank, with financing from the Norwegian government and DFID, [is piloting RBF schemes in the health sector](#) in various developing countries.

Berk Özler. [What happens when people refuse to update their beliefs?](#)

June 2011 - Last week I wrote about "treatment as prevention." Because being treated by a combination of ARV drugs effectively prevents the transmission of HIV from an infected person to his (her) uninfected partner, the idea is that if we were to test as many people as possible, find out who is infected, and offer them ARVs, we could make significant headway in preventing the spread of HIV. In other words, test and treat.

Berk Özler. [Advocating a treatment that may not help the treated?](#)

June 2011 - Last month, NIAID released [news](#) that treating HIV-infected partners in mostly heterosexual HIV-discordant couples at 13 sites around the world reduced HIV transmission to the HIV-negative partner by 96%. This is obviously great news and an important scientific advance. Its implications may well be far reaching in terms of HIV prevention in the future. But, I am not sure they justify 'test and treat' as prevention policy touted in some corners now.

Jed Friedman. [Speak to the computer: the promise and challenges of measuring secrets through computer assisted interview](#)

June 2011 - Markus's [previous post](#) on the measurement of sensitive information has started the ball rolling on a major topic that we all confront in field work – accurate measurement. This is an especially acute issue for studies that investigate socially undesirable or stigmatized behaviors such as risky sexual practices or illegal activities.

David McKenzie. [A new impact note series](#)

May 2011 - I've just been alerted to the [From Evidence to Policy](#) series produced by the World Bank's Human Development network. These short and slick notes present some of the key findings from impact evaluations the World Bank has been doing in the HD area. Their [latest note](#) looks at results from a randomized experiment that tested whether paying healthclinics in Rwanda performance incentives improved health quality.

Berk Özler. [Is it OK to flash money to snip the goods?](#)

May 2011 - I was circumcised in the hospital as a very young infant. Most children do get circumcised in Turkey, although I suspect that many are not as lucky as I was, including my younger brother, who went through the ordeal when he was around six years-old. I remember him in some pain and discomfort for what seemed like a long period of time to me at the time, even though it was probably no longer than a few weeks if not days...

Jed Friedman. [What happens when the power goes out? Using blackouts to help understand the determinants of infant health](#)

May 2011 - Low birth weight, usually defined as less than 2500 grams at birth, is an important determinant of infant mortality. It is also [significantly associated](#) with adverse outcomes well into adulthood such as reduced school attainment and lower earnings. Maternal nutrition is a key determinant of low birth weight and it's no surprise that nutrition interventions targeted at pregnant mothers can have [significant impacts](#). Maternal nutrition and general maternal well-being are, in turn, partly a function of household resources. Income support programs such as conditional cash transfers [can also help](#) to raise infant birth weight. The link that runs from income support during pregnancy through maternal nutrition and reduced low birth weight to increased schooling attainment and adult productivity highlights the potentially life-long impacts of such temporary transfers.

David McKenzie. [Fighting Malaria with Microfinance?](#)

May 2011 - Diseases like malaria, diarrhea and intestinal worms plague hundreds of millions of people in the developing world. A major puzzle for development researchers and practitioners is why the poor do not purchase available prevention technologies that could reduce the burden of these diseases. While much of the recent literature has focused on price elasticities of demand and behavioral explanations, another potential explanation is that liquidity constraints prevent the poor from undertaking profitable health investments. If this is the main barrier, microfinance could potentially help overcome it.

David McKenzie. [Teachers don't matter says Nobel Laureate: A new study in Science, and why economists would never publish it...](#)

May 2011 - At a recent seminar someone joked that the effect size in any education intervention is always 0.1 standard deviations, regardless of what the intervention actually is. So a new [study](#) published last week in *Science* which has a 2.5 standard deviation effect certainly deserves attention. And then there is the small matter of one of the authors (Carl Wieman) being a Nobel Laureate in Physics and a Science advisor to President Obama.

Berk Özler. [You are in school. Or, so you say...](#)

May 2011 - Regardless of whether we do empirical or theoretical work, we all have to utilize information given to us by others. In the field of development economics, we rely heavily on surveys of individuals, households, facilities, or firms to find out about all sorts of things. However, this reliance has been diminishing over time: we now also collect biological data, try to incorporate more direct observation of human behavior, or conduct audits of firms. And, this is with good reason: self-reports can provide a poor reflection of reality.

Berk Özler. [Reporting from the 8th Midwest International Economic Development Conference](#)

April 2011 - I attended [this conference](#) at Madison, WI last week, which was quite pleasant except the weather – it snowed! On the other hand, the fried cheese curds and scotch ales consumed with friends and colleagues (especially those that traveled thousands of miles to get there: that prize almost always goes to John Gibson from University of Waikato in New Zealand) in the afterhours were nice. So was meeting new people and seeing new work in progress. It could be a small N problem, but it seems to me that there are a lot more people working on two broad areas: savings instruments and gender discrimination. There was a special session on experiments in saving. There were many good papers and a smaller number of not so great ones, but two papers stuck with me more than the others. They both concern malaria in sub-Saharan Africa.

Berk Özler. [Stuff you cannot randomize...](#)

April 2011 - I have been thinking about marriage recently. No, not about my own marital status, but marriage among school-age girls and its effects on future outcomes... While many arguments are made to curb teen marriages (and pregnancies), it is not clear whether these events themselves are the cause of poor future outcomes or they are simply correlated with other background characteristics that are prognostic of future outcomes. A brief survey of the literature indeed suggests that the evidence is mixed; especially when it comes to the effects of teen childbearing on future outcomes.

Adam Wagstaff. [Health reform: A consensus emerging in Asia?](#)

April 2011 - [Amanda Glassman's blog](#) post on Ghana's health insurance program and the firestorm it produced (hat tip to Mead Over) is a reminder of the passions that health reform debates still generate. This is intriguing because my sense is that while we health-reform aficionados are berating one another in the blogosphere, policymakers in Asia are quietly iterating toward something of a consensus on a whole swathe of key issues on health reform. The process isn't always driven by hard evidence, but that's because there isn't much hard evidence either way. I certainly don't see compelling evidence against the emerging consensus—if that's what it is. And what's emerging is rather interesting.

David McKenzie. [Dean Karlan's new book: RCTs – this time it's personal!](#)

April 2011 - [More than Good Intentions: How a new economics is helping to solve global poverty](#) is a personalized helicopter tour of many recent randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in developing

countries. It is written by Dean Karlan, who has been a researcher in many of these experiments, and Jacob Appel, who worked for Dean in implementing many of these experiments in Ghana. The personal stories of people Jake has come across on his travels are used by the authors as a lens to illustrate broader points in the constraints that keep people poor and the policies that might overcome these constraints.

Deon Filmer. [Can Disseminating Information Lead to Better Learning Outcomes?](#)

April 2011 - When my wife and I were looking for where to live in Washington DC, an important part of the decision was the quality of the local public school that our children would (eventually) attend. But how to judge quality? Talking to lots of people was the first step. Taking schools tours was another. But researching test scores was a key factor. We wanted a school with a good learning environment, a sense that parents had a positive feeling about the place—but also wanted to know that the school had a track record of good learning outcomes.

Berk Özler. [Is there an 'unmet need' for birth control](#)

April 2011 - Update: Lant Pritchett has kindly responded to my invitation and posted his thoughts: "No need for unmet need." Check out the comments section.

A water cooler conversation (yes, geeky conversations about development are more common than VCU-Butler matchup in the Final Four around here, sigh...) I was having with a couple of colleagues last week made me wonder if the answer to the question in the title of this post is not clear. One of my colleagues, an economist, started by saying that she came into this thinking that 'unmet need' was a hyped-up notion with no good evidence behind it – a position she (and I) suspected is held by many economists: we think some demographers made this stuff up!

Jed Friedman. [On experimental evaluations of systems interventions](#)

April 2011 - A quick look at the burgeoning literature on policy evaluations will reveal a preponderance of evaluations of demand side schemes such as conditional cash transfers. There is an obvious reason for this beyond the promise that such interventions hold: the technology of treatment allows for large sample randomized evaluations, either at the household or community/village level. As long as financing is sufficient to sample an adequate number of study units, study power will not be a concern.

Access to HIV/AIDS Treatment and Risky Sexual Behaviors

Winter 2011 - In December 2009 an estimated 5.2 million people in developing countries were receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART) and in Sub-Saharan Africa nearly 37 percent of people eligible for treatment were able to access those lifesaving medicines, according to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). This is an extraordinary achievement when one considers that as recently as 2003 only a few privileged HIV/AIDS patients had access to ART in Africa. The scaling up of ART in Africa has saved many lives and will continue to do so.

[pdf](#)

Damien de Walque, H. Kazianga, et al. [Could easier access to AIDS treatment increase risky sexual behaviors?](#)

February 2011 - By the end of 2009, an estimated 5.2 million people in low- and middle-income countries received antiretroviral therapy (ART). In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 37% [34%–40%] of people eligible for treatment had access to those life-saving medicines ([UNAIDS 2010](#)). This is an extraordinary achievement, considering that as recently as 2003, relatively few people living with HIV/AIDS had access to ART in Africa. The scaling-up of ART in Africa and other regions has saved the lives of countless people and we hope will continue to do so.

Stuti Khemani. [Do informed citizens hold governments accountable? It depends...](#)

February 2011 - We are increasingly—and more openly than ever—grappling with what to do about the problems of politics and government accountability. Much emphasis and faith seem to be placed on the role of information and transparency. Using information interventions to enable civil society to hold their governments accountable seems so eminently sensible that it's become an end in and of itself, an “already known” and ticked box. Is it?

Adam Wagstaff. [Four cheers for the “results agenda”](#)

February 2011 - The development community hasn't exactly only just woken up to the fact that development is about achieving something. Projects have had logframes since time immemorial, showing how project activities and spending are expected to lead ultimately to development outcomes—things that matter to people, like health and learning. But the “[results agenda](#)” (an agenda that dates back to 2003 but which seems to be gaining momentum) has the scope to be transformative in at least four ways.

Adam Wagstaff. [Whither the development agency's flagship report?](#)

January 2011 - The Economist carried a couple of stories recently about how two hitherto major institutions in my home country ([newspapers](#) and [pubs](#)) have been forced to adapt in the face of changes in public preferences. Many didn't—as a result newspaper circulation and pub numbers have both fallen dramatically. The newspapers and pubs that did survive operate very different business models from the newspapers and pubs in existence even 10 years ago. Some data I've assembled make me wonder whether—like the newspaper and pub—the development-agency flagship might not also be an institution in need of reform.

Adam Wagstaff. [The \(gradual\) democratization of development economics](#)

January 2011 - We've read a good deal recently about the democratization of research. [UNESCO's Science Report 2010](#) showed a growth in the developing-country share of science research. As UNESCO Director General Irina Bokovo put it in her Foreword: “The distribution of research and development (R&D) efforts between North and South has changed with the emergence of new players in the global economy. A bipolar world in which science and technology (S&T) were dominated by the Triad made up of the European Union, Japan and the USA is gradually giving way to a multi-polar world, with an increasing number of public and private research hubs spreading across North and South.”

Jishnu Das. [Life in a School](#)

January 2011 - We usually think of schooling as a positive learning experience. However, sometimes this is not always the case. As recent news reports in the [Hindu](#) and on [NDTV](#) from India remind us, unfortunately for some children in low-income countries, schooling can be a nasty, brutal and short experience. They may suffer physical abuse, humiliation and be forced to endure the worst possible learning environments, while returning for the same punishment day after day after day.

Damien de Walque. [Is male promiscuity the main route of HIV/AIDS transmission in Africa?](#)

January 2011 - Sexual transmission is considered to be the main source of the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa¹.

The pervasive if unstated belief in the HIV/AIDS community is that males are primarily responsible for spreading the infection among married and cohabiting couples. A U.N. report entitled [Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis](#) reported: “Nearly universally, cultural expectations have encouraged men to have multiple partners, while women are expected to abstain or be faithful.”

and “Faithfulness offers little protection to wives whose husbands have several partners or were infected before they were married.”

2010

Adam Wagstaff and Jishnu Das. [Who's listening to the "knowledge bank"?](#)

November 2010 - We now know quite a lot about the supply of research on development, and about the part the World Bank plays. We [know](#) that the World Bank publishes a lot, that most research in the world is by researchers in high-income countries, and [that](#) were it not for the Bank there would be far fewer journal articles about developing countries.

Adam Wagstaff. [What's the "universal health coverage" push really about?](#)

November 2010 - Maps, like pictures, are often worth a thousand words. The map above comes from an article in the medical journal *The Lancet*. The article is part of a campaign to make 2010 the year of a big push toward universal health coverage. Over the course of the next three days, over a thousand health systems researchers are gathering in Switzerland for the [First Global Symposium on Health Systems Research](#); the theme of the symposium is "science to accelerate universal health coverage". Next week, health ministers from around the world will gather at an [international ministerial conference](#) on "Health Systems Financing – Key to Universal Coverage" hosted by the German government. At the conference, the World Health Organization will launch its [2010 World Health Report](#) entitled "Health Systems Financing: The Path to Universal Coverage".

Jishnu Das. [Are Non-Cognitive Gains in Education More Important than Test-Scores?](#)

November 2010 - Most educational interventions are widely considered successful if they increase test-scores -- which indicate cognitive ability. Presumably, this is because higher test-scores in school imply gains such as higher wages later on. However, non-cognitive outcomes also matter---a lot.

Jishnu Das. [Too little knowledge is a dangerous thing](#)

October 2010 - [Stefan Dercon's wordle](#) based on our data of the countries that economists work on led [Chris Blattman](#) and [Tyler Cowen](#) to wonder why there are more papers on Latin America relative to Africa in the *Journal of Development Economics*, a leading journal in the field of development economics. We looked at this issue in our paper on [the Geography of Academic Research](#); here are four figures to add to the discussion (two of them are in our paper).

Adam Wagstaff. [Checking up on the assets of the knowledge bank](#)

October 2010 - *Bhanwar Gopal, an artist from the Barefoot College, prepares traditional Rajasthani masks for plays and puppet shows with material from recycled World Bank reports. "We keep getting these reports that no one reads, so we decided to put them to some use," founder Bunker Roy says. [Source and image: [BBC](#)]*

Regardless of its veracity (we'll come to that in a moment), the BBC's story raises a couple of serious questions. Exactly how much does the Bank publish? And does it have any impact? The second question is, of course, hard to answer. But as Martin Ravallion and I found out when we tried to answer [both questions](#), even the first isn't easily answered.

Jishnu Das. [The Black Hole of Pakistan](#)

October 2010 - Critics of Washington's largesse to Pakistan -- totaling roughly \$18 billion dollars in civilian and military aid since 9/11 -- are quick to point out that Pakistanis still have a worryingly

low opinion of the United States. A [recent](#) Pew Research Center poll found that 64 percent of Pakistanis regard the United States as an enemy. Over the past five years, Pakistan has been labeled the "front line" of the war on terror, and many media reports and polls have painted [a portrait](#) of a Pakistani public hostile to the West. Reports of Pakistan's alleged "trust deficit" seem to have had a dual effect. Some Western officials have wanted to reverse the tide by extending largesse to Pakistan, but others have been discouraged from trying to shovel additional billions of dollars just to earn the good graces of the Pakistani public.

Damien de Walque. [Rivalité fraternelle au Burkina Faso | English](#)

August 2010 - L'école, une opportunité rare, objet de choix stratégiques dans les familles. "Ici, pour les parents, l'école n'est pas une priorité". Cette réflexion, empreinte de fatalisme, est souvent entendue comme explication des taux de fréquentation scolaire faibles dans certaines régions d'Afrique. Une étude récente menée dans la Province du Nahouri au Burkina Faso¹ suggère que la situation est plus complexe.

Jishnu Das. [Notes from the Field: Comparing Three Villages in Madhya Pradesh](#)

July 2010 - I was in the Indian state of [Madhya Pradesh](#) recently. Madhya Pradesh, or MP, as most Indians know it – is a big state in the middle of the country. It also has some of the poorest human development indicators in the country.

Jishnu Das. [Notes From The Field: Playing Chicken in India](#)

June 2010 - It's 1998 and I am 23 years old. My thesis advisor, [Abhijit Banerjee](#) of MIT, along with some others, is trying to do, what would become his first, randomized evaluation in Rajasthan, India. The sacrificial goats appear to be me and Chris (the other research assistant on the project). Our threesome is completed by an old Yezdi motorcycle that has a tendency to go into reverse on starting it up.

Jishnu Das. [Education, Test-Scores and Other Things That Matter](#)

May 2010 - A lot of my work is on test-scores. Here is a (very partial) list of what we know about test-scores, why they may be important (and why they may not). In future blogs we hope to take up each of these topics in greater detail. We cite the papers we know below.

How Financial Crises in Donor Countries Affect Aid

Spring 2010 - The global financial crisis has been a major shock to the developing countries, reducing their income growth rate by 7 percentage points between 2007 and 2009. International aid has helped to cushion this shock, but there is now a risk that aid budgets could come under pressure. It is the donor countries that were hit first by the crisis, and as a group they suffered steep declines in income last year. Given the strains on their economies, donors' willingness to give aid could fall, even though the need for aid remains great. A recent paper by Dang, Knack, and Rogers looks at patterns of aid giving by donor countries hit by financial crises in the past, to give some insights into what may lie ahead.

[pdf](#)

Turning Research Into Practice: Evaluating the impact of conditional cash transfers in Burkina Faso

March 2010 - While CCT programs have proliferated in the past decade, there remain open questions and issues about their implementation and the mechanisms by which they have an impact in different institutional environments. Since 2004, Damien de Walque has been working with Operations colleagues in the Africa region to design and evaluate alternative cash transfer

programs in Burkina Faso to support communities made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. The impact evaluation aims to contribute both to the efficient design of safety nets in the country and to a better understanding of the mechanisms by which CCTs have an impact. The hope is that this may also benefit other countries in Africa and elsewhere as they implement similar CCTs or other social protection programs.

[pdf](#)

Stuti Khemani. [Pitfalls of “voice” and transparency](#)

February 2010 - A [new paper by David Yanagizawa](#) finds tragically large effects of access to radio on violence in Rwanda, concluding that “hate radio” may explain as much as 9 percent of the genocide. Aside from such blatant risks of propaganda through mass media, there are more subtle arguments cautioning against wholesale enthusiasm for greater transparency and information to improve governance and accountability.

Jishnu Das. [The Challenges to Creating Country-Specific Policy](#)

January 2010 - *Editor's Note: Jishnu Das and Quy-Toan Do are Senior Economists in the World Bank's Development Research Group. They are authors of a working paper [U.S. and Them: The Geography of Academic Research](#).*

Sit in on policy discussions and dialogues with governments and development institutions and two themes recur time and again: “What policies, specific to our country, can improve ___ outcomes” (fill in the blank from a large list including growth, poverty, education, and health) and; “We are not sure that the policy in Y country is really relevant for us because of differences in ___ (fill in the blank from options including institutions, legal regimen, culture, and diversity among others).

2009

Turning Research Into Practice: Measuring absence of teachers and medical providers

December 2009 - High levels of absence of teachers and doctors from schools and clinics are not only a direct barrier to better human development outcomes, but also a symptom of poor governance and accountability. Halsey Rogers reflects on how DECRG’s research on absenteeism—undertaken in part in collaboration with Operations staff—not only received extensive attention in the media and academia, but also led to shifts in the focus of lending and analytic work by Bank Operations.

[pdf](#)

Obstacles to achieving Paris Declaration targets

December 14, 2009 - The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness sets targets for increased use by donors of recipient country systems for managing aid. A consensus view holds that country systems are strengthened when donors trust recipients to manage aid funds, but undermined when donors “micro-manage” aid through their own separate parallel systems. Despite this consensus, there are many obstacles to achieving the Paris Declaration targets. Steve Knack explains...

[pdf](#)

Turning Research Into Practice: Health Reform in China

September 2009 - In 2003 China’s government asked the World Bank to study its rural health system and propose ideas for reforming it. The assignment led to a multi-year AAA program, involving research, policy dialogue, capacity-building, and a report. Adam Wagstaff joined the team, and reflects here on the experience.

[pdf](#)

Demographic and Socioeconomic Patterns of HIV/AIDS Prevalence in Africa

Fall 2009 - Despite an accumulation of evidence about patterns of HIV prevalence in Africa, many misconceptions persist. Kathleen Beegle and Damien de Walque explore the methods and unusual evidence on the link between demographic factors, socioeconomic status, and HIV/AIDS.

[pdf](#)

Windfall revenues from both foreign aid and natural resource exports can weaken governments' incentives to design and maintain efficient tax systems

Summer 2009 - This is the sobering conclusion to emerge from research by Stephen Knack, who urges mitigating measures such as ensuring that windfall revenues do not all go to the central government and scaling up donor-financed technical assistance aimed at building revenue-raising capacity.

[pdf](#)

Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, et al. [FP: The Madrasa Myth](#)

June 2009 - Four authors argue that in the fight to save the country's next generation, more should be done towards building up mainstream and affordable private schools in Pakistan.

On May 3, the *New York Times* published a lengthy description of Pakistan's education system. The article, like so many before it, rehearsed a well-known narrative in which government schools are failing while madrasas are multiplying, providing a modicum of education for Pakistan's poorest children.

Timing of Evaluations and Duration of Exposure Affect Estimates of Program Impact

Spring 2009 - Impact evaluations often ignore the importance of timing and duration. A study by Elizabeth M. King and Jere R. Behrman cautions that evaluations need to be timed right in order to ensure that impacts are adequately captured. It also argues that duration of exposure can be exploited as a means to measure impacts.

[pdf](#)

The Preference for Sons Does Not Always Decrease with Development

February 12, 2009 - New evidence suggests development does not reduce parental preference for sons over daughters in countries where such a preference exists. Indeed, modernization may be associated with higher, not lower, son preference in some areas.

[pdf](#)

Public Opinion Influences the Level and Effectiveness of Foreign Aid

February 2, 2009 - During severe economic downturns such as the world is experiencing, public attitudes toward aid will determine whether or not donor governments will be able to generate support from voters and taxpayers for more aid.

[pdf](#)

2008

Does Community Monitoring Improve Public Services? Diverging Evidence from Uganda and India

September 16, 2008 - Diverging results from evaluations of two community monitoring programs in health and education suggest that local monitoring does not guarantee better service delivery.

[pdf](#)

Public Health in Chad: Connecting Spending and Results

August 2008 - The capture and leakage of public funds in the social sectors deprive poor people of the education and health care they need. A recent study in Chad shows that when public funds reach health centers, they make a positive difference in people's access to health care, a reason why it is important to ensure that they do.

[pdf](#)

Armed Conflict and Schooling: Long-term Evidence from Cambodia and Rwanda

May 25, 2008 - New data on the microeconomic impacts of war for non-combatants show that the journey out of conflict is a shaky one—for a long time, especially for young people. Two recent studies investigate the long-term effect of genocide on schooling outcomes in Cambodia and Rwanda. They both find long-term negative impacts for the affected cohorts.

[pdf](#)

Rural to Urban Migration in China: How Do Migrant-Sending Communities Benefit?

April 8, 2008 - Research on the effects of rural to urban migration in China shows a positive relationship between consumption and income of households in migrant home communities, but no significant relationship between migration and investment in non-agricultural productive assets. The ability to migrate is also associated with a drop in secondary school enrollment.

[pdf](#)

Improving Nutritional Status through Behavioral Change: Lessons from Madagascar

January 11, 2008 - A recent impact evaluation study of a community based nutrition program in Madagascar shows that malnutrition can be improved over the short- and long-term when mothers participate in community health programs that promote behavioral change in nutrition, feeding, and hygiene practices. The study highlights important complementarities between maternal education, knowledge, and community infrastructure to achieve improvements in children's nutritional status.

[pdf](#)

Schooling in Developing Countries

Spring 2008 - The expanding frontier of research on education in developing countries offers many lessons for policy.

[Research Digest](#)

Improving Nutrition through Community Growth Promotion in Uganda

Spring 2008 - A rigorous evaluation confirms the efficacy of a community-based approach to promoting children's growth.

[Research Digest, pdf](#) Aug '08