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THE ILLUSION OF SUSTAINABILITY*

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We use a randomized evaluation of a Kenyan deworming program to estimate peer effects in technology adoption and to shed light on foreign aid donors' movement towards sustainable community provision of public goods. Deworming is a public good since much of its social benefit comes through reduced disease transmission. People were less likely to take deworming if their direct first-order or indirect second-order social contacts were exposed to deworming. Efforts to replace subsidies with sustainable worm control measures were ineffective: a drug cost-recovery program reduced take-up 80 percent; health education did not affect behavior, and a mobilization intervention failed. At least in this context, it appears unrealistic for a one-time intervention to generate sustainable voluntary local public goods provision.

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of overseas development assistance can be viewed as a series of attempts to identify and address ever more fundamental causes of global poverty. Oxfam, for example, founded in 1942 as the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, later shifted to "support for self-help schemes whereby communities improved their own water supplies, farming practices, and health provision".¹ In the 1950s and 1960s, it was widely argued that long-run economic performance depended on capital investment and that raising savings through a "big push" (Rosenstein-Rodin 1943) would launch countries into self-sustaining growth or "take-off" (Rostow 1960). Accordingly, the World Bank largely funded infrastructure like dams and roads. By the 1980s international financial institution policymakers decided that capital accumulation and technological progress depended not so much on investment and careful engineering but rather on a better

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1. Refer to the Oxfam website for the details (<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/about-us/history/history2.htm>).

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1007

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