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Highlights from MDG week

Here's some of our favorite bits from around the interwebs:

Obviously a highlight was [Esther Duflo's quote](#) on the lack of accountability for the goals:

"Nobody is going to come from Mars and say, 'You didn't reach the goals, so we will invade' — there is no onus."

Then there was the [microcredit civil war](#), between "Old school microcredit institutions as social business Muhammad Yunus, Founder and Managing Director, Grameen Bank, versus microcredit as profitable Vikram Akula, Founder and Chairperson, SKS Microfinance."

We also liked the point made by [Laura Seay \(Texas in Africa\)](#) and [Laura Freschi \(AidWatchers\)](#), who both noted the conspicuous absence of any actual poor people from all these meetings talking about poor people.

A welcome development was the increased focus on measurement, transparency, and results, which even got an endorsement [from Bono](#). It seems that perhaps the global recession is bringing a sharper focus on value for money in aid, as Western citizens worry more than usual about waste.

[Hillary Clinton's big new idea](#) for improved cookstoves was, well, not all that new. As Alanna Sheikh said, this new initiative "*will need to market the stoves intensely*" if it is to be effective.

Marketing is crucial, but not enough, to solve this "last mile" problem of the actual adoption of technology, as IPA researcher [Sendhil Mullainathan spoke about](#) in his TED talk last year. Sendhil listed a wide array of technological fixes in health and agriculture which already exist but simply aren't being used. All too often the biological problems have been solved, but it is the psychological last mile which we don't understand.

"the first 999 miles are all about science ... we have testing, we go to the lab, we try it again, we have refinement, but you know what we do in the last mile? 'oh this is a good idea, people will like this, lets put it out there.' The amount of resources we put in are

disparate, we put billions of dollars into fuel efficient technologies, how much are we putting into energy behavior change, in a credible, systematic, testing way?"

So what is needed is marketing and psychology, mixed with the scientific method.

And finally, how about a little happiness?

"My highlight ... was the speech from the Prime Minister of Bhutan. He called on the voluntary adoption of a ninth MDG: happiness. Bhutan has long rejected mainstream development paradigms, opting to measure its country's progress not by improvements in Gross National Product, but Growth National Happiness."

September 27, 2010