

# Can Bill Gates make us all optimists?

by Jonathan Pryke  
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Bill Gates' [annual letters](#) have quickly become one of the most influential aid statements each year. They are brief and intelligent, and often touch on broader themes than just the foundation's activities. [This year](#), Bill and Melinda tackle the development pessimists head on. They argue that by almost any measure the world is getting better, and that in two decades it will be better still. Using smart statistics, accompanied with some bold predictions, the Gates' use their letter to debunk three myths they believe slow down progress in international development.

Speaking on the first myth, that *poor countries are doomed to stay poor*, Bill argues that incomes and other measures of human welfare are rising almost everywhere. He is so optimistic on this point that he goes so far as to predict (taking forward the calls to action from the [World Bank](#) and [UN](#) [pdf]):

*“By 2035 there will be almost no poor countries left in the world.”*

Addressing the second myth, that *foreign aid is a big waste*, Bill addresses key concerns of aid volumes (they are in fact a lot smaller than most people think), corruption (not an issue limited to the developing world, which will be further curbed by technology and transparency) and aid dependence (aid is actually declining as a share of GDP in most countries). He argues that aid remains a fantastic investment. Looking at health aid in particular, Gates references a [recent Lancet article](#) that claims, with the right investment and policies:

*“By 2035, every country will have child-mortality rates that are as low as the rate in America of the UK in 1980.”*

Turning to the final myth that *saving lives leads to overpopulation*, Melinda takes the reigns and argues that “anxiety about the size of the world population has a dangerous tendency to override concern for the human beings who make up that population.” Explaining the strong correlation between child death and birth rates in a country, Melinda argues that the best way to curb global population growth is to

invest in the poor, not insist on their suffering.

The Gates' annual letter is already making waves across the internet (see early analysis from [Blattman](#) and [Humanosphere](#)), and there will no doubt be a lot more discussion and debate in the coming weeks. But at the very least, it will leave some of us a bit more optimistic about what the world will be like in 2035.

## **Author/s:**

### **Jonathan Pryke**

Jonathan Pryke worked at the Development Policy Centre from 2011, and left in mid-2015 to join the Lowy Institute, where he is now Director of the Pacific Islands Program. He has a Master of Public Policy/Master of Diplomacy from Crawford School of Public Policy and the College of Diplomacy, ANU.

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