

Gates' annual letter makes big bet on a bright future

By Ashlee Betteridge

The 2015 Gates letter [came out](#) last week, and as usual, it is a gust of optimism underneath the sails of development believers, making a “big bet” that the next 15 years will bring massive gains for those living in poor and developing countries.

[Last year's letter](#) focused on dispelling development myths, while this year's makes the gamble that “the lives of people in poor countries will improve faster in the next 15 years than at any other time in history”.

Focusing on innovations, the letter predicts four big breakthroughs that will improve many lives throughout the world. These are: that child deaths will go down and more diseases will be wiped out; that Africa will be able to feed itself; that mobile banking will help the poor transform their lives; and that better software will revolutionise learning.

The infectious optimism of the letter is tempered with descriptions of the challenges that lie ahead: for example, the lack of progress that has been made on reducing newborn deaths, the persisting gender gaps in education, and the large numbers of adults around the world who still lack access to basic financial services. Climate change also gets a mention in the introduction, and there is a call to act more aggressively on developing clean energy.

As usual, the letter is highly clickable, integrating video and showcasing data in a user-friendly way. It ends with a call for readers to join what appears to be a giant email database for advocacy called [Global Citizen](#), which is building on the Global Poverty Project's earlier work of the same name. Details on how exactly these

eager and willing Global Citizens will be engaged over the course of the next 12 months remains vague. But in [an interview](#) with Forbes, Bill Gates said the size of the list could reach “millions” and the goal was to get people to become politically active on the issues that interest them. No doubt there are big plans to harness the energy of those who sign up, especially with the Sustainable Development Goals and a potential binding climate agreement to be signed off this year. The Gates’ are betting on it.

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About the author/s

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Ashlee Betteridge was the Manager of the Development Policy Centre until April 2021. She was previously a Research Officer at the centre from 2013-2017. A former journalist, she holds a Master of Public Policy (Development Policy) from ANU and has development experience in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. She now works as a development consultant.