



HIV/AIDS, Hunger, Free Trade and Malaria Top Experts' List

Copenhagen Consensus' expert panel of economists has decided that HIV/AIDS, hunger, free trade and malaria are the world's most urgent problems.

Combating HIV/AIDS should be at the top of the world's priority list. That is the recommendation from the Copenhagen Consensus 2004 expert panel of world-leading economists. About 28 million cases could be prevented by 2010. The cost would be \$27 billion, with benefits almost forty times as high.

The panel assigned the highest priority to new measures to control and treat HIV/AIDS. Spending assigned to this would yield extraordinarily high benefits. Although the costs are considerable, they are tiny in relation to what can be gained. Furthermore, the scale and urgency of the problem are extreme, especially in Africa where entire societies are threatened with collapse.

"Fighting disease is a good investment", expert panelist Bruno Frey said today. "Disease causes nine-out-of-ten preventable deaths in developing nations among children and adults. Diseases that are under control in the industrialized world kill many people in developing nations. HIV/AIDS is an illuminating example of that."

Hunger is number two on the expert's list. Diseases caused by iron, zinc, iodine and vitamin A deficiency can be resolved by providing micro-nutrients. This would have an exceptionally high ratio of benefits to cost. The experts recommend investing \$12 billion to resolve this problem.

"Today 3.5 billion people lack iron. It is extremely important to do something about malnourishment, especially among children. I give that proposal a very high priority," said Nobel Laureate Professor Douglass North, Washington University in Saint Louis.

Free trade is number three on the expert list. The costs will be very low. The benefits will be extremely high – namely up to \$2400 billion a year.

"Free trade will benefit both rich and poor countries," said Nobel Laureate Robert Fogel, University of Chicago. "Trade barriers do not require a big investment to produce a large return. Here, we need political will – and the return will be huge. The entire world's economy will benefit from free trade, and more wealth will mean that we can afford to solve more of the world's greatest challenges."

Besides HIV/AIDS, malnutrition and free trade, options to ameliorate malaria and the lack of water and sanitation were highly ranked by the "dream team" of economists.

The experts have in total discussed 38 possible solutions to ten of the world's greatest problems. They chose to rank 17 of these solutions, as they found there was insufficient information on the others. They divided the 17 into "Very Good," "Good," "Fair" and "Bad" projects (See full results on next page).

The experts have responded to the question: if we had an extra \$50 billion to spend to improve the world, what should we do first? Here the panel unanimously recommends that \$27 billion should be spent combating HIV/AIDS, \$12 billion for malnutrition, that there should be free trade which will have very low costs, and that \$13 billion should be spent combating malaria.

The Economist co-sponsored Copenhagen Consensus 2004. Deputy Editor Clive Crook, who took part in the experts' meetings, said: "The starting point of Copenhagen Consensus is that the world faces many problems, and we cannot afford to solve them all, here and now. The positive message from the experts is that there are some extraordinarily good solutions. HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, trade barriers, and malaria – these are problems that can be addressed effectively.

The architect of Copenhagen Consensus, Environmental Assessment Institute director Bjorn Lomborg, is pleased the experts have reached a concrete result.

“I am proud that the goal of Copenhagen Consensus has been achieved: a prioritized list of solutions to the world’s great challenges. The experts have used their knowledge and insight. It has been fantastic to witness their engagement in reaching concrete solutions. Copenhagen Consensus has already started an important global debate on prioritizing resources. That debate will continue. I hope academics, politicians and citizens will each take part in this necessary discussion.”

The “dream team” of eight of the world’s top economists retired on Sunday for closed-door discussions at Eigtveds Pakhus in Copenhagen. Over the course of five days, they discussed and prioritized solutions to ten of the world’s greatest challenges.

On the basis of extensive scientific material prepared especially for Copenhagen Consensus, the experts evaluated the effects and costs of 38 approaches to combat or solve these problems. More information at www.copenhagenconsensus.com. The results of Copenhagen Consensus Youth Forum, which shadowed the proceedings of the expert panel, were publicized on Friday May 28. A separate release was issued, available at www.copenhagenconsensus.com/yf

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BRIEF RESULTS ON NEXT PAGE – MORE INFORMATION ON WEBSITE

The Dream Team's Results: Priorities of 17 Solutions to the World's Greatest Challenges

VERY GOOD PROJECTS

1. Diseases: Control of HIV/AIDS
2. Malnutrition: Providing micronutrients
3. Subsidies and Trade Barriers: Trade liberalization
4. Diseases: Control of Malaria

GOOD PROJECTS

5. Malnutrition: Development of new agricultural technologies
6. Water and Sanitation: Small-scale water technology for livelihoods
7. Water and Sanitation: Community-managed water supply and sanitation
8. Water and Sanitation: Research on water productivity in food production
9. Governance and Corruption: Lowering the cost of starting a new business

FAIR PROJECTS

10. Migration: Lowering barriers to migration for skilled workers
11. Malnutrition: Improving infant and child nutrition
12. Malnutrition: Reducing the prevalence of low birth-weight
13. Diseases: Scaled-up basic health services

BAD PROJECTS

14. Migration: Guest-worker programs for the unskilled
15. Climate: Optimal carbon tax
16. Climate: The Kyoto Protocol
17. Climate: Value-at-risk carbon tax