Family planning best way to lift gender equalit

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espite progress in many societies, women almost everywhere still suffer from significant levels of discrimination.

Even in countries where gender equality has advanced furthest, women are over-represented in lower-paying jobs, underrepresented in senior government and business positions, and on the receiving end of most domestic violence.

In parts of the developing world, things are much worse. In many cases, traditional cultural norms prevent girls from obtaining any real education; lead far too many to marry and bear children while still adolescents; and bar women even from opening a bank account.

At the turn of the century, the international community adopted an ambitious set of targets: the Millennium Development Goals Much has been achieved since then, including in the area of gender equality, but we still have a long way to go. Though girls in the developing world today are much more likely to go to school, they still grow up shouldering a disproportionate burden of poverty, poor health, inadequate education,

discrimination, and violence

Most people around the world agree men and women should be treated equally, and we also know that empowering women is a highly effective way to help families and societies lift themselves out of poverty. So how can we achieve the most gender equality at the lowest

Working out the costs and benefits of a programme to improve women's rights is not easy, but analysis by my think tank, the Copenhagen Consensus, offer some valuable insights. For example, investing a dollar in family planning programmes can yield benefits worth \$120 – an amazingly high return. This information is particularly pertinent now, as the United Nations' 193 governments ready the next set of international goals to guide the world's approach to development until 2030. Given that there are many important targets but limited resources, hard choices have to be made. So which targets to increase gender equality should be included?

A useful way to make direct comparisons between targets is to analyse how much each will cost to achieve and how much good achieving each will do. The Copenhagen Consensus has asked

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more than 60 top economists to make this assessment across the full range of relevant issues, including education, food and energy security. and ending violence against women.
It is clear that gender equality has

a number of important components, but reproduction is a key issue in determining life opportunities. In particular, allowing women to decide if, when, and how often they become pregnant leads to fewer deaths in childbirth and fewer infant deaths. It also gives mothers more time to devote to raising their children and investing in the next generation. It is not surprising, then, that money spent on family-planning

can such a good investment.
But there are other gender targets to consider. The best way to reduce violence against women, lift them out of poverty, and empower them is to break the cycle of early marriage and childbirth.

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Such a large change is not easy to achieve, but if girls can stay in school longer and have decent job opportunities available after they organizations available after they are likely to marry and bear children later. In rural India, recruiters for well-paid backoffice jobs visited randomly selected villages over a period of three years. Female employment rose and women aged 15-21 were 5-6 per cent ss likely to get married or give birth over this period. Moreover, better job opportunities created an incentive to become better educated. As a result, younger girls in these areas stayed in school longer, and women enrolled in training courses More broadly, the evidence from

different approaches and countries is that spending one dollar on improving women's access to economic opportunities vields about \$7 in health, education, and poverty alleviation benefits. Other studies show that spending a dollar on improving girls' education is also a sound investment, producing \$5 of

benefits for each dollar spent.

There are plenty of other possible gender-equality targets that seem unquestionably good, but for which we do not have cost/benefit estimates. For example, ensuring that women have equal rights to inherit, sign a contract, register a business, or open a bank account would cost little, but could have far-reaching economic benefits.

Likewise, increasing women's political representation would cost little, whereas the benefits would often be welcome but difficult to quantify. Essentially, women's priorities would begin to take equal precedence with those favoured by men. There is no simple way to achieve something as complex as gender equality. But economic analyses can help show us where we can do the most good, Clearly, the international community needs to consider the case for family planning carefully when formulating its priorities for the next set of development goals. Project Syndicat

Bjorn Lomborg, an adjunct professor at the Copenhagen Business School, founded and directs the Copenhagen Consensus Center, which seeks to study environmental problems and solutions using the best available analytical