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<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/oct/10/millen...>

Millennium Villages Project: does the 'big bang' approach work?

The Guardian's *Poverty Matters* development weblog recently highlighted development experts questioning the impact of the Millennium Villages Project. IPA Research Affiliate **Chris Blattman** weighs in, calling for more thorough evaluation of "*the theory of the big push*":

The nub of the issue was well put by Chris Blattman when he asked on his blog what the MVP will prove. That "a gazillion dollars in aid and lots of government attention produces good outcomes"? This is hardly surprising, says Blattman. The point, he adds, is how we test "the theory of the big push: that high levels of aid simultaneously attacking many sectors and bottlenecks are needed to spur development; that there are positive interactions and externalities from multiple interventions".

As Blattman says, the reverse could be true - "that marginal returns to aid may be high at low levels and that we can also have a big impact with smaller sector-specific interventions". There has been plenty of development along the latter lines in recent years, such as mass distribution of malaria bed nets for example. Which is the most effective, sustainable form of aid? It's a very good question.

The problem for the likes of Blattman, Clemens and Demombynes is that, for a number of reasons, the MVP - despite the huge investment of resources, expertise and effort - is not going to help answer the question one way or the other. The evaluation process is simply not rigorous and open enough..."

Read more on their recommendations for randomized and longitudinal evaluation [here](#).

Update: [MVP responds](#) to critics, arguing "When we began the project, we knew that randomised trials would not be the appropriate methodology for evaluating it's impact. Our focus was, and is, on designing operational systems across many sectors to achieve the eight MDGs, a task that is far more complex than can be addressed in a standard clinical trial."

October 10, 2011