

THE FP TOP 100 GLOBAL THINKERS

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Foreign Policy presents a unique portrait of 2010's global marketplace of ideas and the thinkers who make them.

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38. Esther Duflo

for putting hard numbers to a bleeding-heart pursuit.

ECONOMIST, MIT | CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

"Imagine you have a few million dollars that you've raised.... You want to spend it on the poor. How do you go about it?" Esther Duflo, a French native who heads the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Poverty Action Lab, **asked in a talk** this year. Her pathbreaking research aims to put hard numbers behind such decisions, identifying the most effective ways to fight endemic problems such as poverty and malnutrition.

Now Duflo is trying to ensure that those ideas are put into practice. After teaming up with several colleagues to show that treating children for intestinal worms dramatically improved school attendance, her MIT lab helped launch Deworm the World, an NGO that has worked to raise money to treat 3.6 million children in Kenya. She has also devised a number of innovative methods to overcome people's natural tendency to procrastinate -- for example, providing time-limited discounts on fertilizer purchases to local farmers. By focusing on these works, Duflo is proving that the dismal science still has some relevance in the real world.

Reading List: *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, by Rajiv Chandrasekaran; *Summertime*, by J.M. Coetzee.

Kindle or iPad? Books, so far.

39. Mohamed Nasheed

for putting a face -- his own -- on the peril of climate change.

PRESIDENT | MALDIVES

In October 2009, shortly before the Copenhagen climate negotiations went bust, Mohamed Nasheed and a dozen of his cabinet ministers strapped on scuba tanks and wet suits and convened at an **underwater conference table** near the capital city of Malé. Communicating by hand signals, they signed a declaration calling on countries to cut their carbon emissions. Afterward, Nasheed was asked what would happen if they didn't. "We are going to die," **he said**.

Since taking office two years ago, Nasheed, a 43-year-old former human rights activist, has become the world's most environmentally outspoken president. He has made his home on a string of atolls in the Indian Ocean that sits an average of just 7 feet above sea level -- a poster child for the need to stop global warming. Last year he vowed to set a symbol of change by making the Maldives the world's first carbon-neutral country within a decade. Now he's accusing the United States of being the **biggest obstacle** to fighting climate change. "It's a '60s-style catalytic, dynamic street action."

"If the people in the U.S. wish to change," he told a British audience, "it can happen."

Read more: Nasheed **talks** to FP about battling climate change and saving his country from going under.

40. Abdolkarim Soroush

for driving a stake through the dark heart of Iran's theocracy.

58. Sendhil Mullainathan and Richard Thaler

for bringing behavioral economics out of the ivory tower.

ECONOMIST, HARVARD UNIVERSITY | CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

ECONOMIST, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO | CHICAGO

The main stumbling-block with traditional approaches to development, Sendhil Mullainathan said **in a talk** this year, is "this little three-pound machine that's behind your eyes and between your ears" -- the human brain. "This machine is really strange, and one of the consequences is that people are weird. They do lots of inconsistent things." Mullainathan, winner of a MacArthur "genius" grant and co-founder of think tanks at MIT and Harvard, is determined to work with human inconsistency, not against it, in fighting poverty.

Until the financial crisis, Mullainathan's work was mostly focused on the developing world, particularly his native India. More recently, however, like his longtime collaborator Richard Thaler, the University of Chicago economist famous for his "**nudge**" theory of social policy, he has turned his subtle approach on the victims of the U.S. housing crash. Mullainathan and Thaler have argued for more sensible policies toward struggling borrowers and defaulters: reshaping the mortgage code to avoid opaque language, restructuring existing mortgages, and staying in touch with panicked borrowers. Three-pound machines everywhere are grateful.

SENDHIL MULLAINATHAN

Best idea: Fantastic new social-science data sets: Google searches to predict recessions, night lights in satellite images to measure economic activity, cell-phone calls to measure social networks -- the list is growing and growing more interesting. With new data come surprises; I can't wait to be surprised!

China or India? China for economic growth; India for political freedom; neither for human rights.

Kindle or iPad? On a long flight, a movie or a video game is a must, so ...

RICHARD THALER

Reading list: *The Big Short*, by Michael Lewis; *The Checklist Manifesto*, by Atul Gawande; *Fault Lines*, by Raghuram Rajan.