

MONDAY, FEB 02, 2015

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Learning's not about enrolment, latrines in school. We're failing children on massive scale'

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MIT economists Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo at The Idea Exchange.

Written by **Harish Damodaran** | Posted: February 1, 2015 12:02 am | Updated: February 1, 2015 9:03 am

*Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo are directors of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, a research centre at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In this session moderated by Deputy Editor **Harish Damodaran**, they speak about their experiments with social sector schemes in India, why NREGA does a "poor" job of identifying the needy and how RTE has contributed to worsening learning levels in*

Why Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo?



MIT economists Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo are

known for using 'randomised controlled trials' to evaluate the success or failure of government intervention programmes. The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. a

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on a direct transfer scheme, where money goes to the beneficiary instead of going to his postal account system. In the course of it, we were dismayed that in places where the programme was put in place, there was a drop in NREGA expenditure. This was not something we were expecting. But

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government makes to their accounts. Once that happens, maybe we'll start to see some money staying. If people had to put money in their accounts, they would think, 'Why bother? I need this much money and I'll use it'. But if the money started in the account, then he might say, 'I don't

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Banerjee: M-PESA is not meant to target. It is a universal platform and the middle-class uses it. That's part of the reason for its success. NREGA targets very poorly, for odd reasons. The idea of the programme was to be responsive. That is where I need a job. Will not it. But something in the

Banerjee: You could do a universal programme where, every week, you go to a place, stand in a line, use biometrics and collect money. Nobody in this room will do it, it is too much of a pain. That generates excellent self-selection. We should have something much more like the old

have been working with Pratham to evaluate programmes that can be scaled up and we are finally confident about two programmes. You don't try to teach nuclear physics to someone who does not do subtraction. Instead, you start with subtraction. If someone doesn't recognise numbers, you

inherited from a colonial education system, which was explicitly aimed at recruiting an elite class that was going to work for them. We still think that anybody who can't learn reading by themselves in Class 1 is a little bit of a buddhu. I think in some sense, a fundamental cultural shift is needed.

is failing every child. I think the key role of assessment is in empowering the community. What is not there in the system — and which now becomes impossible to put under the Right to Education — is knowing where the class stands, and you need to know whether or not this teacher is doing their

Banerjee: This is a very difficult topic, very sensitive. I've seen one study — from Mali. In Mali, everyone used to be taught in French, which is nobody's language and there are lots and lots of local languages. So they switched to teaching in a number of local languages and there were some gains. But

political backlash. Scores and scores of young people will get out after 10 years of education and think, 'I got nothing out of 10 years of education. Give me a job that corresponds to my 10 years of education'. And then, it could take the form of a pretty nasty political resentment.

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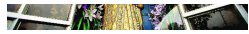
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