Getting Better – Why Global Development is Succeeding – and How We Can Improve the
World Even More by Charles Kenny

Review by: Victor Quiroz

The book Getting Better, by Charles Kenny ultimately explains that the world today faces many challenges in alleviating poverty throughout developing world. These challenges include a lack of access to education, health services, and other basic human needs such as food or clean water. However, despite these challenges through continuous innovations in medicine, technology, education, and governments, over time the economic situation has improved and that the world has become a much better place to live. Kenny does a great job of debunking some of the beliefs that have inhibited public efforts to increase the quality of life. For example, one of those beliefs is that growth models have a direct impact on improving the economic situation in poor countries. However, the reality is that policy changes and models have little effect on a countries growth. Kenny claims that what really causes a country to grow cannot depend on just attribute (such as education, technology, or investment), but the driver of that growth really depends on where the country is and what it faces during the long haul. Another topic that Kenny covers (which I really enjoyed learning about) is how the world has escaped from what is known as the Malthusian Trap. The Malthusian Trap suggests that, “the only check on population growth is near starvation”. According to the Malthusian Trap, mankind had essentially capped out its highest levels of production. As a result, when populations increased income diminishes. Vice-verse as the death rates increases so does incomes across the population. Kenny explains that these ideas held true up until about the time of the industrial revolution. As a result, income per person dramatically increased and so did the quality of life. This is one example how technology and innovation broke the Malthusian Trap and paved the way for a better world today.
We are joined today by Charles Kenny, who is an English/American economist and senior fellow at the Center for Global Development. He’s the author of several books including Overselling the Web: Development and the Internet, The Upside of Down: Why the Rise of the Rest is Good for the West and Getting Better: Why Global Development Is Succeeding—And How We Can Improve the World Even More, published by Basic Books, is now out in paperback, with a foreword by Bill Gates. A summary is available here and in the Chronicle of Higher Education. Getting Better: Why Global Development Is Succeeding—And How We Can Improve the World Even More, published by Basic Books, is now out in paperback, with a foreword by Bill Gates. Foreign Policy features Getting Better in its Book Club series here, the Globalist has it as its book of the week here, and I discuss the Africa bits with All Africa here, and I did a ‘book chat’ with David Leonhardt of the NYT here and he was kind enough to name it his book of the year (the LA Public Library system included, it in their list, too). Getting Better: Why Global Development Is Succeeding—And How We Can Improve the World Even More, published this month, is an exercise in framing—trying to shift the way we feel, as well as think, about development and aid. It does it rather well. Two big frames: One means encouraging the spread of relevant technologies and ideas. Interestingly, Kenny accepts that we don’t know how to create growth and so advises against it being a focal point for aid. Stick to vaccines and education, much of it delivered by the public sector. It’s a seductive message which reminds me of the speech by Mr and Mrs Gates in London last year, which had me sorely tempted to say ‘forget all that politics and power stuff, let’s just get the vaccines out there.’ If you happen to discover the book “Getting Better: Why Global Development Is Succeeding and How We Can Improve the World Even More” by the American economist Charles Kenny, you are really lucky. The author proves that the human race is succeeding and the global development is taking place. He also suggests the ways to improve the world and make it a better place. Listen to the summary at Blinkist or Listen to the book at Audible. We can solve our tasks faster and work more productively with the help of technology and electronics. There are people who are questioning the positive impact of technology. However, their blame and critique are not reasoned. Of course, there are some concerns, especially coming from the educators and young learners’ specialists. Why Global Development Is Succeeding and How We Can Improve the World Even More—Getting Better by Charles Kenny. Formerly with the World Bank, American economist Charles Kenny is a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development and the New America Foundation. He writes for the magazine Foreign Policy and has published many articles in various publications addressing the correlation of economic growth, health and happiness. Go Premium and get the best of Blinkist. Upgrade to Premium now and get unlimited access to the Blinkist library. Read or listen to key insights from the world’s best nonfiction. Upgrade to Premium. What is Blinkist?