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Subject: gates to me
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Thank you for sending this information along. I have seen at least five similar proposals in almost as many years. Note that nright one of these gentleman are MDs and neither have experience in implementing programs in the developing world. Their business model is based on a billion people being willing to pay \$5 each and I am not sure that would be realistic.

We supported a similar program a few years ago, since the strong argument can be made that if people can see better (either near/far sighted correction) they can be more productive. There were a few lessons:

1. Standalone technologies and items (cookstoves, toilets, etc) - with cel phones being the big exception - do not typically catch on in the developing world. Even if they improve quality of life. In my evaluations, it seems that the marketing just didn't reach the poorest, the financing packages were not available to make the items affordable (even if there was demand), there were no places to get repairs, and small things (like glasses, bikes, etc) were frequently lost or stolen and unreplaceable (parents didn't see value in product for their children if it could be easilly lost).

2. Here are some of the now dewfunct similar efforts - some have even been presented at TED:

- Scojo Foundation [REDACTED]
- AdSpecs (Centre for Vision in the Developing World) <http://www.vdw.ox.ac.uk/2minuteintro.htm>
- Focus on Vision (really cool and for \$4, check out how they do it...no machines needed) http://www.focus-on-vision.org/index_en.php
- Adaptive eyewear (uses water!) <http://www.visionforanation.org/> and <http://adaptive-eyewear.org/>

There are many more - just google "low cost eyeglasses" AND "developing world"

Where there was a short term bump, was when a program like this was imbedded into a larger organization that could not only utilize this as an entry point, but also had the reach and ability to market and finance the glasses. BRAC (www.brac.net) is the world's largest NGO and they tried to bring cheap glasses (under \$3) to the poor ([REDACTED]) a few years ago. It worked for a few months. I think what happened was that the middle classes and "richer" poor bought glasses but the truly poor weren't biting.

While ideas like this could in theory put developed world glasses makers out of business, rich people don't mind paying more for stylish lenses and somehow are comforted by all the big machines used to assess refractive error.

In the developing world, these guys are unlikely to succeed unless they link up with a large organization already implementing health/vision programs or can find a way to work directly with governments to include their products into national health care planning. For ideas on groups that are active in the developing world, a good place to start might be above. If they want to take a national government approach, I would suggest countries where public health reaches the poor effectively, like Peru - Mexico, Thailand, Turkey or even Botswana. The latter seems like the most viable option for scale since there is also the possibility of cross-subsidy from those who can afford to pay (payor mix).

I think the future of this type of thing in the developing world would probably be closer to some of the ideas above. A box full of fully self-programmable (though low tech) spectacles that can be readjusted as needed and requiring only you and your own brain to make them work.

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