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Let my dataset change your mindset

That's the slogan of Hans Rosling, who runs the website Gapminder.org. I hope you've seen and made use of Gapminder before -- if not, please go rectify the situation immediately. In essence, it's a free online tool for helping people visualize data, especially for helping people see the larger patterns in changes over time and across countries. For those of us who geek out about new ways to tell stories with data, Gapminder provides unlimited hours of entertainment.

For instance, just now I went and chose four random countries to look at on the [Gapminder graph-building tool](#). Okay -- they weren't totally random, since I didn't actually scroll past the letter C. But whatever. Anyway, I chose to look at GDP/capita versus life expectancy between 1800 and 2007, for Australia, Bangladesh, Botswana, and China. I know that life expectancy and income has certainly risen in all of these countries in the last 200 years, but aside from that broad generalization, I didn't really know what to expect. From [running a quick data visualization](#), I learned the following things:

- Australia experienced 80 years increasing income with NO improvement in health, before suddenly skyrocketing up 30 years-worth of life expectancy.
- Bangladesh had a life expectancy of 22 (?!!) around the turn of the 20th century, and and experienced gradually increasing life expectancy with essentially no increase in income until very recently.
- Botswana achieved enormous improvements in both life expectancy *and* income until 1990. Then life expectancy took a sudden 20-year plummet over just a decade between 1990 and 2000. Hmmm.... what happened in southern Africa around that time? But there was no corresponding decrease in income!
- China's life expectancy grew after the Communist revolution (with no increase in income), with the exception of a dip to levels BELOW THOSE IN 1800 in the early 60s. Then, around 1980, income took off.

Some of these thing I knew before, some I didn't. Some I knew, but hadn't really thought about. Gapminder shows all of it in a colorful, easy-to-read format, in a graph that took me 30 seconds to build.

The second-most-fabulous thing about Gapminder is that its creator, Hans Rosling, is pretty much the archetype of a Swedish public health professor. He gives fabulous lectures using Gapminder, which you can watch online. I'd recommend starting [here](#), with his recent talk to the US State Department. There are also lots of other videos [here](#), on topics ranging from

debunking myths about the 3rd world, to the miracle in Bangladesh, to sex in Sweden.

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