

Conversation with GiveDirectly, October 20, 2014

Participants

- Piali Mukhopadhyay – COO, International, GiveDirectly
- Stuart Skeates – Uganda Field Director, GiveDirectly
- Richard Ekeu – Senior Field Officer, Uganda, GiveDirectly
- Steven Olinga – Field Officer, Uganda, GiveDirectly
- Emmanuel Okello – Field Officer, Uganda, GiveDirectly
- Eliza Scheffler – Research Analyst, GiveWell
- Josh Rosenberg – Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by GiveDirectly.

Summary

GiveWell staff met with GiveDirectly field officers in Mbale, Uganda to discuss the role that they play in the enrollment process and thoughts they have on GiveDirectly's model. The conversation covered challenges that field officers face, mainly at census, registration, and backcheck, as well as thoughts they have on GiveDirectly's targeting criteria and transfer size. GiveDirectly COO, International and Uganda Field Director also contributed to the conversation.

About Richard Ekeu, Steven Olinga, and Emmanuel Okello

GiveWell spoke to three of GiveDirectly's field staff members in Uganda:

- Mr. Ekeu is the only Senior Field Officer working for GiveDirectly in Uganda; he helps to oversee the whole enrollment process. Prior to his role at GiveDirectly, Mr. Ekeu worked as a field monitor at World Vision and another humanitarian organization.
- Mr. Olinga is a Field Officer with GiveDirectly; he was on the census and audit teams and conducts follow-up calls to recipients who have received transfers. Mr. Olinga graduated from university with a major in business and a minor in human relations and has worked as an enumerator for the Ugandan national census.
- Mr. Okello is a Field Officer with GiveDirectly; he was on the backcheck and audit teams. Mr. Okello is about to finish university, and has previously worked with an AIDS support organization as well as Innovations for Poverty Action, where he was a research assistant.

All three field officers speak multiple languages, including English, Luganda, and Ateso (a local language spoken in the villages in which GiveDirectly has worked).

Major challenges of field operations

GiveWell asked the field officers about what challenges they encounter in carrying out the different stages of GiveDirectly's process.

Census

At the census stage GiveDirectly field officers visit every household in a village and collect information about them, including housing materials. Field officers bring maps that GiveDirectly has had prepared by members of the village and also find a person who lives in the village to serve as a guide and show them the boundaries.

- It is challenging to educate village residents on the intentions of the GiveDirectly program, how it has come to their village, where it has been previously, and how it operates. Some people say to the field officers, "you are telling us about GiveDirectly, but some programs come here and they have not brought us anything."
- There was one situation where people from a particular church believed that GiveDirectly staff have demons in them, and the churchgoers shouted at the field officers when they visited the village.

GiveDirectly did not used to do a census of the whole village before registering eligible households. The census was added so that GiveDirectly could have a full picture of the village, not miss any households, and would be better able to track households that were shifting around. Also, without a census documenting information about each household, it is more likely that word would spread about households being registered and other households would try to pose as eligible when they were first visited.

Registration

- Some people at registration still do not believe it is possible that GiveDirectly actually gives cash transfers, because they are used to NGOs giving out goods like blankets or cornmeal. People believe that the quickest way to get money is to pay allegiance to the devil, so they want to know where the money comes from. There was one particular pastor who was saying that the money is not safe, and some of the people in that village refused to register for transfers because of this myth, however the pastor registered himself. An old woman who was registered had never had a phone before, so when she received a message in the middle of the night and the phone lit up, she was afraid the phone did have evil spirits in it and did not want to keep it.
- It is difficult to access certain areas when it rains, so field officers have to wait and return another day. This can delay the registration process for certain households.
- There have been cases where politicians have tried to take credit for the cash transfers in order to win votes. The field officers made it clear from the census stage that GiveDirectly is not political and the money is not from government. Local Councilpeople are made aware when GiveDirectly is coming to their village, so they sometimes communicate to the village residents that they helped

bring GiveDirectly. Local Council people may also attend cash out days, and though they do not have a formal role, their presence could imply otherwise.

- Some recipients refuse to be included in the census, but when they see GiveDirectly staff following through during registration, they request to be included or say they were missed the first time. It is GiveDirectly's policy not to register households that refused at census.
- People who are ineligible can get upset when GiveDirectly comes to register households and does not register them. These people will ask why they are not eligible, and field officers say it is because they have a metal roof, but they say they do not have plastered walls, and if they could get transfers they would plaster their walls. There is a lot of discontent among the people who are left out by the criteria.

Backcheck

The backcheck team visits households that have been registered to re-collect information collected at registration such as names and ID numbers. When visiting households, backcheck field officers do not reveal information previously documented about the households (e.g., would not call someone by the name that is written), because they want to see if the new information they are given matches up.

- A challenge of backchecks is that field officers often end up teaching recipients how to use their cell phones and mobile money accounts, so that they can access their money and are less likely to be scammed. Field officers will teach recipients how to check their balance and distinguish messages that say they received money from other messages. Field officers will sometimes write out instructions for recipients in the local language that describe step-by-step how to operate the phones and mobile money accounts. Recipients often do not understand the importance of keeping their PIN numbers secure. Some elderly recipients do not want a trustee to manage their transfers, but they are unable to remember their PIN numbers or read the messages on their phone, so they are more likely to have issues receiving transfers. Some people are still skeptical that the money will actually come, even after they have received messages on their phone, so they don't pay attention to the instructions about how to use the mobile money account.
- Sometimes people get impatient during the backcheck process; they don't understand why their photo has to be taken twice. People can also get frustrated because they see GiveDirectly staff in the village for backcheck and assume that the money is coming, but actually they still have to wait. Sometimes people in the villages spread rumors that the money is coming before it is scheduled to be sent. Transfers for the Uganda 2M campaign were pushed back because of the staff fraud in the Uganda pilot, so that caused a delay.
- Since villages are located in rural areas, accessibility can be a problem. Field officers wear boots when visiting villages, but some homes are in swampy areas, and if it rains, the field officers can literally get stuck.

Audit

GiveDirectly's current procedure for identifying households to audit:

1. GiveDirectly collects information about recipients during the first three stages of a campaign: census, registration, and backcheck. Some information, such as recipient name, GPS location, housing materials, and identifying photograph, is collected at more than one stage and then checked for mismatches. (These checks are currently conducted using Excel but will eventually be automated through Segovia technology. One exception is comparing identifying photographs of recipients, which is done using Mechanical Turk.)
2. Each mismatch in recipient information is assigned a certain weight depending on how likely it is to be an indication of gaming. (GiveDirectly said that it determined the likelihoods of various mismatches indicating gaming by conducting an analysis of the mismatches present in past cases of gaming. We did not review this analysis.) GiveDirectly said that the mismatches with the highest weights are mismatches in identifying photographs and housing materials.
3. Each recipient is assigned a total mismatch "score" (the composite of all their weighted mismatches). Recipients with scores above a certain level are audited.

In the Uganda 2M campaign, about 30% of the eligible households qualified for audits. GiveDirectly had a lower bar for audits in this campaign than usual, because it was especially concerned about fraud resulting from the involvement of former GiveDirectly staff.

Thoughts on targeting

Mr. Ekeu thinks that roofs are too rough a way to target poverty because some people may live under an iron roof but actually be very poor (e.g., someone who inherited an iron-roofed house from his grandfather, or a widow whose late husband built her an iron-roofed house long ago). Ms. Mukhopadhyay said that GiveDirectly hears this kind of feedback from a lot of its field staff, but believes that building materials are still a good criteria on average. It is also considering modifying its targeting criteria to include certain types of people who may be especially vulnerable whether or not they live under an iron roof. GiveDirectly field staff said that people within the villages have a perception of who is more or less poor.

In Kenya, GiveDirectly experimented with a community-based targeting process, whereby residents gave input on households that they felt were deserving of transfers but had been excluded by GiveDirectly's criteria. GiveDirectly felt that to do this process well required significant resources (staff time) and that the benefits were not worth the costs. In addition, some of the villages involved in this experiment gave feedback that they would prefer for GiveDirectly to make the decisions about targeting.

Logistical challenges in Uganda

The logistics are significantly harder in Uganda than in Kenya. For example, when GiveDirectly enters a new village in Uganda, over 90% of recipients need SIM cards because they did not previously have cell phones, and about 70-80% of recipients need national IDs. GiveDirectly coordinates registration drives for people to get national IDs - they buy national ID booklets, print a photo of each recipient to put in the booklets, and have the Local Councilperson stamp the booklets to approve them. GiveDirectly was able to reach 85-90% of people through these registration drives, returning IDs within about 1 week of visiting eligible households. In the Uganda 2M campaign, there are 9 villages, and GiveDirectly was able to put them all through the national ID registration process within 1 month, so that 90% of eligible households were ready to receive transfers when payments started. (The remaining households will receive their transfers on a delayed schedule, once they complete registration.)

GiveDirectly also facilitates recipients signing up for a mobile money account with MTN by having an agent visit the villages. Once recipients have signed up for an account, MTN generally activates their line within 2-3 weeks. By the time the backcheck team visits villages, most recipients' lines are active.

Thoughts on transfer size

We asked the field officers what they think about the current transfer size (\$1000), and whether they'd choose to keep it at that level, increase it, or decrease it, given the effects that an adjustment would have on how many people GiveDirectly would be able to serve.

Mr. Okello: Typically there are multiple households on one compound, each inhabited by relatives of the same family, and any household that meets the targeting criteria can receive transfers. Mr. Okello said that it may make more sense for GiveDirectly to group some households on a compound together so that transfers are shared across them, rather than each eligible household receiving the full \$1000.

Mr. Okello also said that if GiveDirectly increased the size of the transfers, that could create a high level of dependency. One of the messages that field officers send is that people should use the \$1000 transfers to develop themselves as much as possible, but if someone knew they were getting \$2000, they may stop farming, for example. With \$1000 people can get some things but not everything; it is the right amount.

Mr. Ekeu: Mr. Ekeu prefers reducing the amount of money in each transfer and expanding the recipient base to reach everyone in the village. He said that the current targeting model causes bragging and unrest in the communities. The people who don't benefit may be brought to use force to get some of the money, such as by breaking into recipients' homes. Mr. Ekeu suggested that it would be better for GiveDirectly to provide all households in a village with some amount of money, even if it was less for households that are currently deemed ineligible (e.g., \$100). This way, each of the households would be busy figuring out how they would spend their own money rather than how to get money from another.

Mr. Olinga: Mr. Olinga said that to reduce extreme poverty the bigger transfer is better, but he didn't have a strong opinion on \$1000 transfers to some people versus \$500 transfers to twice as many. [This is how we posed the question to Mr. Olinga.]

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