

A conversation with Thomas Mather, July 11, 2017

Participants

- Thomas Mather – Founder and CEO, MaxMind
- Josh Rosenberg – Senior Research Analyst, GiveWell
- Catherine Hollander – Research Analyst, outreach focus, GiveWell
- Chelsea Tabart – Research Analyst, GiveWell

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

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Thomas Mather as part of its investigation into family planning programs. Mr. Mather has written publicly about his donations to family planning charities (see links below). GiveWell spoke with Mr. Mather in order to better understand his views on existing monitoring and evaluation in the family planning space.

Major takeaways

- Mr. Mather has written publicly about his giving to family planning charities in a variety of online forums, e.g.:
 - <http://www.familyplanningcharities.org/>
 - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/EffectiveFPCharities/>
 - http://effective-altruism.com/ea/n1/my_cause_selection_thomas_mather/
- GiveWell noted that, based on its preliminary analysis, it seems that there is little rigorous research on the impact of particular charities' family planning programs on contraceptive uptake. For example, there seem to be few randomized controlled trials or high-quality quasi-experimental studies (such as difference-in-difference studies) that assess whether programs have led to increased contraceptive use. Mr. Mather generally agreed with this conclusion. His understanding is that there are few charities that have conducted high-quality experimental or quasi-experimental studies of their programs. A focus of Mr. Mather's giving has been to support such studies.
- Mr. Mather noted that one group that seems to have relatively strong impact evaluation is the Nigerian Urban Reproductive Health Initiative (NURHI, <http://www.nurhi.org/>), led by the Johns Hopkins Center for Communications Programs. Mr. Mather roughly estimated NURHI's impact on modern contraceptive prevalence rates (mCPR) using data from NURHI and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS): See <http://www.familyplanningcharities.org/>. [Note: since this conversation, a working paper assessing the impact of NURHI was posted here: http://medhealth.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/file/3788/auhe_wp1704]

- Mr. Mather is currently supporting Avenir Health to conduct a study that will leverage existing data from surveys and programs to estimate the impact of Marie Stopes International's mobile outreach programs in multiple locations.
- Mr. Mather noted that Performance Monitoring and Accountability (PMA) 2020 collects the highest quality data that he is aware of on the quality of family planning services. PMA Agile may be a useful platform to monitor and evaluate particular charities' programs.

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