

# **A conversation with Rob Mather and Peter Sherratt, February 6, 2015**

## **Participants**

- Rob Mather – Founder and CEO, Against Malaria Foundation (AMF)
- Peter Sherratt – Executive Chairman, AMF
- Elie Hassenfeld – Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director, GiveWell

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

## **Summary**

GiveWell spoke with Rob Mather and Peter Sherratt of AMF in order to learn about what AMF would do with more funding. Conversation topics included AMF's current funding capacity, future funding commitments, prospects for expansion, the role increased funding would play in the organization's advancement, and potential challenges and risks resulting from increased funding.

## **Current AMF activities**

AMF has shared with GiveWell the names of the countries where it is engaged in discussions regarding funding nets but has asked us not to make public the specific countries until the discussions are concluded. In part this is because AMF has agreed in principle co-funding partnerships and wishes to respect the desire of others to respect this timing.

AMF has identified national malaria control programs (NMCPs) in several countries as possible targets for net distribution programs, in addition to its current areas of operation in certain regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Malawi. With the exception of Country A, however, AMF is not actively reaching out to other countries to discuss new net programs, mainly due to a lack of adequate funding. Specifically, the funds currently available to AMF may not be sufficient to conduct net distribution on the scale the countries want.

Update: As of April 21, 2015 AMF is in discussion with several countries regarding contributions of a few million nets in each case, and potentially more.

## **Current AMF capacity**

### **Funding at scale**

The primary concern for most NMCPs, rather than collecting malaria data or developing technology, is filling gaps in malaria net coverage. AMF has observed this in recent conversations with the heads of the NMCPs in both Country A and Country B. The need for nets in the countries AMF is considering run into the millions, not just hundreds of thousands. In Country A, for example, the total need for nets is 9

million, and Country A is typical in this regard. AMF feels discussions with NMCPs are likely to be most productive when a number of millions of nets are being discussed.

### **Staffing**

AMF is a small organization, but believes that it has the staff capacity to handle more distributions. AMF acknowledges that negotiations with governments are often protracted, but says that any delays are usually as a result of NMCPs being under-resourced and very busy, doing their best to deal with many competing priorities. Once AMF receives a response, it acts quickly.

### **Effectiveness of AMF's approach**

#### **Likelihood of these areas receiving nets absent AMF's involvement**

The countries that have historically faced large net gaps, will likely continue to do so as The Global Fund cannot meet the entire need. AMF is confident, at least in the areas in which it currently works, that it is distributing nets that would not otherwise be provided. For example, The Global Fund has said to AMF with regard to Country A, that aside from one funder who may contribute a few million nets in 2016, it does not see currently how the net gap of 9 million nets is going to be closed as there are no obvious other funders. It is less sure of what its impact would be in other areas, as it has not had the funds to sufficiently explore new countries.

#### **Spread of AMF's standards and practices**

AMF is aware its work could serve to spread its accountability standards and practices, and this can be helped to be achieved by funding more distributions at scale (high hundreds of thousands of nets and above) to generate more data to share with the wider malaria community as to how AMF's practices impact malaria rates. AMF aims to strike a balance between funding enough nets in a single country to, and diversification into other countries. AMF would prefer to enter more countries.

#### *Rollout of AMF methodology in Malawi*

In Malawi, the NMCP has adopted some of AMF methodologies to do with data collection and verification in its upcoming 7 million net, 18- district distribution in 2015. Although AMF won't be managing this process, it is interested to observe how multiple districts will carry out distribution according to this particular data-driven approach. AMF believes that it will be allowed access to that data, either directly or via its in-country partners.

#### **Scale of operations and level of influence**

AMF is handling larger numbers of nets than it used to as it has the funds to do so. NMCPs prefer to deal with few funding partners to minimize the number of discussions they need to have. The NMCP in Country A, for example, may have been less likely to have engaged in talks with AMF if only 500,000 nets were being

discussed, or at least discussions would have been less significant to the NMCP, than is perhaps the case with the 5.5 million nets currently under discussion. This interaction between increased capacity and increased influence for AMF forms a virtuous circle, leading to a better chance of a positive outcome.

## **Future funding capacity and commitments**

### **Short term**

In addition to its present commitments, AMF continues to explore potential programs in other countries. It is now planning a three-year program in partnership with The Global Fund to fund 5.5 million nets in Country A. Assuming this distribution goes ahead, it will cost \$17 million over three years, which AMF believes it can handle, assuming additional funds become available. AMF also hopes to provide another 2.5 million nets this year for Country B. Funding the distribution in Country A, the first year of the project in Country B, the nets that AMF will be ordering soon for the Balaka and Ntcheu districts in Malawi, and a planned insecticide resistance study would use up all of the \$17 million that AMF currently has in the bank.

### **Medium term**

AMF's future activities depend on its decision on a \$6 million program in Malawi, which would not begin until 2018 but requires a commitment now. Malawi is now in talks with The Global Fund and wants to know whether to ask The Global Fund for net funding for four districts in which AMF is currently working. AMF would prefer to continue funding nets in these districts itself, in order to maintain continuity and work on expanding its impact. The money for this program would not be needed until the beginning of 2017, and AMF is cautiously optimistic that it can get these funds by then. However, if it commits to this project and all of the above short-term programs, AMF will not be able to move forward on conversations with a number of other countries unless it receives significant additional funding. Thus, AMF is considering going on a fundraising drive.

## **Effects of additional funding for AMF**

AMF would like to have \$50 million in funding versus the \$17 million it now has, but its capacity does not increase in a linear way with every increase in funds.

Substantial change to AMF's capacity—its flexibility and its ability to engage in more conversations with new countries and/or regions—is most likely to come in increments of \$10 million, with noticeable effects on the factors listed below.

### **Distribution capacity**

Having another \$10 million would allow AMF to discuss funding 3 million nets for one country, such as Country C or Country D. If AMF got two or three infusions of \$10 million each, it could begin talks with not just one other NMCP or organization but several, knowing that it could deliver if all of them went forward. The more \$10 million lots of funding AMF gets, the more simultaneous discussions it can have.

## **Leverage with other countries**

Additional funding would also give AMF some strategic leverage, as the heads of NMCPs will become aware that AMF is in talks with other countries, and their knowledge of this potential “competition” may help speed up their decisions.

## **Other implications of additional funding**

Having more programs to negotiate and monitor would allow less time for Mr. Sherratt and Mr. Mather to give public presentations and build donor relationships. More time would have to be spent on travel and meetings, in order to ensure confidence in potential partners’ resources and philosophy.

## **Potential challenges**

The greatest challenge AMF faces is finding individuals within key organizations who are willing to embrace AMF’s standards for accountability, although it is starting to see some positive shifts related to this issue in Malawi and DRC. Other persistent challenges include risks of distribution, such as net theft or diversion and low rates of net hang-up.

## **Potential distribution delays in AMF’s target areas**

While AMF would like to concentrate on getting nets out in 2015, most of the countries it is considering working with use a three-year planning horizon, meaning AMF has to commit to distributions potentially three years in the future. (There are exceptions, as AMF’s discussions with Country B have revolved around the need for more immediate coverage.) However, AMF believes that staggering distribution across multiple years can allow it to provide some immediate assistance while also learning from its experience in the first year and incentivizing AMF and its partners to work well together.

Country A, for instance, is facing a three-year gap in net coverage, and although The Global Fund has said that it may be able to provide funding for 2015 and 2016 on its own, it would prefer to work with a partner organization to fund nets through 2017. The three-year program that AMF is currently negotiating with Country A would distribute 2.2 million nets in the first year, 1.8 million in the second year, and 1.5 million in the third year. This schedule will give AMF an opportunity to assist with closing the gap, as well as learn from its experience working with partners in Country A. The three-year planning horizon also gives an incentive for everyone to ensure the program is successful and will be carried over into the next two years. AMF finds this arrangement preferable to distributing all 5.5 million nets at once.

## **Financial commitment needed**

AMF is more concerned with having money available once a distribution agreement is signed than it is with having more money in its account immediately. If AMF were to be offered a significant amount of new funding, it would most likely ask the funder to keep it as a conditional commitment until AMF had had a chance to do the

necessary work of meeting with countries, finding partners, and getting agreements signed.

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