

Evidence Action Policy Plan

January 2018

Overview of Evidence Action

Evidence Action was launched to bridge the gap of taking field-tested research on what works and implementing at-scale solutions that improve the lives of hundreds of millions of people. We were spun out of Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) in 2013 and remain keenly focused on ensuring our programs are rigorously evaluated and monitored, meet exceedingly high benchmarks for cost-effectiveness, and are grounded in sound evidence. Importantly, we have had great success in scaling exceptional programs that today reach over 200 million people across 10 countries, with a relatively small footprint of 350 staff contributing to our massive reach.

Our vision as an organization is to build a world where hundreds of millions of poor people in the poorest places have better opportunities and their lives are measurably improved. We believe that we can best contribute to this vision by aiming to be a world leader in scaling evidence-based and cost-effective programs to reduce the burden of poverty.

We seek to be audacious in changing the way development is done, multiplying several-fold the impact of government and donor dollars in directly improving the lives of the poor. We do this via our scaled programs - reaching hundreds of millions with deworming medication and clean water - and through our Beta incubation work, where we rigorously prototype and test the next wave of transformational programs intended for scale (all meeting very high thresholds for cost-effectiveness and evidence of impact).

Achievement of our vision requires an ambitious strategy to build the next generation of outstanding programs while maintaining support to our current at-scale programs. As highlighted below and in our overall track record, each of our future and current programs will achieve cost per impact ranking them among the most cost-effective programs globally, meet exceedingly rigorous standards of monitoring and evaluation, and be grounded in a sound evidence base.

Current programs and the Beta ‘incubator’

Deworm the World Initiative supports school-based deworming across Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, India, Vietnam, and Pakistan by providing customized technical assistance to Ministries of Health and Education. We reach over 200 million children at a cost of less than \$0.50 per child per treatment. Our program model is backed by rigorous evidence showing that deworming increases school participation, child weight gain, and future income. A thorough review of the evidence can be found at our website.

Our technical assistance model centers on strong relationships with state and national government implementers; in all our program geographies, we have been invited by government partners to collaborate on high-quality program delivery.

The program also tracks a variety of metrics through process monitoring and coverage validation activities that track program quality and treatment coverage, as well as parasitological surveys that measure program impact. These metrics, coupled with the strong evidence base, allow us to understand program reach and calculate our cost-effectiveness. GiveWell finds Deworm the World to be the most cost-effective opportunity globally given the low program cost and evidence of the impact of deworming.

Dispensers for Safe Water operates 28,000 chlorine dispensers reaching 4.7 million people in rural parts of Kenya, Uganda, and Malawi, where access to safe drinking water is severely limited. To date, the program has averted over 2.5 million cases of diarrhea in children under 5 and saved over 2,000 young children’s lives, in addition to saving over \$10 million in out-of-pocket costs for their caretakers. The intervention is based in rigorous evidence from randomized-controlled trials (RCT) conducted in western Kenya between 2004 and 2010, which demonstrated that adoption of this water treatment intervention was more than 5x higher than baseline adoption. Chlorine dispensers were also the most cost-effective water treatment intervention evaluated by J-PAL in a 2012 study. Today, the program monitors a variety

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of performance metrics in real-time to ensure sustained impact (the most salient are available at our public dashboard). The program also offsets the carbon emissions of our beneficiaries who may have otherwise had to boil their drinking water; to date, we have offset over 1 million tons of carbon dioxide, and we generate revenues from the sale of carbon credits, which contributes to financial sustainability of the program.

Beta, our in-house incubator of new interventions, focuses on systematically building a robust pipeline of new projects that can achieve transformative, scaled impact. In partnership with the research community, Beta identifies highly evidence-based interventions, rapidly iterates on their design to enhance cost-effectiveness and scalability, and rigorously tests them at scale. The result is potential new evidence-based, cost-effective programs that can reduce the burden of poverty on a mass scale. Beta is currently testing interventions such as Winning Start, which leverages the evidence base on “teaching at the right level” to address learning gaps in primary school students, and No Lean Season, discussed further below. Beta uses exceedingly high standards for cost-effectiveness and evidence of impact, and systematically exits programs that do not meet these standards via a four-stage filtering process. The resulting programs are - consistent with our current programming - among the most evidence-based and cost-effective programs globally.

Importantly, the scale-up of evidence-based development interventions may languish without our engagement - our value-add is taking interventions with a strong evidence base, testing and adapting them to the real-world implementation settings that scale requires, and ultimately scaling the ‘winners’ directly or with partners. This critical function bridges the gap between academia and practice, turning rigorous research into real impact on a global scale. The recent success of No Lean Season illustrates the power of this approach in building the next generation of groundbreaking interventions.

No Lean Season is a Beta program that addresses seasonal poverty by offering a migration subsidy of about \$20 to participating households, covering the cost of round-trip bus fare to nearby urban areas that do not experience the same seasonal fluctuations in job opportunities. The intervention is based on rigorous evidence, showing that these subsidies increase incomes by an average of 19% during the “lean season”, and that temporary migrants can provide an additional meal per person per day for their families. We are now testing the Bangladesh program in a large-scale RCT to assess a number of operational dimensions and to assure that the impact holds as No Lean Season grows, and we are exploring testing opportunities in other countries.

Our vision

In the next five years, we aim to be a world leader in scaling evidence-based and cost-effective programs and to play an active role in building the community of stakeholders (funders, governments, and implementers) who are supporting and scaling such programs. Specifically, Deworm the World aims to broaden its reach to over 300 million annually, expanding to Pakistan, additional states in Nigeria, and other high-need geographies while making strides in increased government ownership and program sustainability. Dispensers for Safe Water aims to double its impact to 10 million beneficiaries, in part through testing and demonstrating a partnership/franchising model in new geographies with local and international NGOs (currently being piloted in Ethiopia with the Millennium Water Alliance and CARE). Beta aims to serve as the leading generator of new flagship programs for Evidence Action and the broader development community, producing 2 to 3 new highly cost-effective and at-scale programs over 5 years that ultimately improve the lives of hundreds of millions of people. Our organization must also keep pace with program growth; we will seek to establish Evidence Action offices in new geographies, build sufficient resources to ensure financial and operational sustainability, and communicate our successes (and failures) to a broad set of development stakeholders.

Sustainability

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Evidence Action's organizational budget was ~\$19 million in 2017. Our current 2018 projected spend is ~\$25 million given recent revenue growth. We have a keen focus on financial and environmental sustainability.

On the financial side, the majority of our funding comes from foundations and individuals with which we have long-term relationships - our success in cultivating these sources has grown as our track record builds. However, we are thoughtful about ensuring sufficient financial safeguards, including a focus on securing multi-year grants where possible. We are also prioritizing building organizational and program reserves as well as our overall unrestricted base, the latter contributing to our ability to be nimble and responsive to arising opportunities. We are also making strategic investments in 2018 to further build our fundraising capacity and diversify our funding sources.

Governance

Evidence Action is registered as a corporation under the District of Columbia Non-Profit Corporation Act of 2010. It has tax exempt status from the United States Internal Revenue Service under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code (Employer Identification Number 90-0874591). It is recognized as a public charity and contributions received by it are tax deductible under the Code.

Evidence Action is governed by an independent Board of Directors. These board members are not compensated for services rendered as directors and are reimbursed for travel and other reasonable costs associated with performing their duties. The Chief Executive Officer is also a Director of the Board and receives compensation in the capacity of CEO, with the Board approving such compensation annually. Under its Articles of Association and bylaws, the Board has delegated the authority for the day to day management of Evidence Action to the CEO and the leadership team who implement a system of internal controls to safeguard the assets. No member of the board is able to dispose of any assets of the corporation for personal benefit and on dissolution or liquidation, the remaining assets are to be distributed to an organization/s that are organized and operated exclusively for charitable purposes and are tax exempt under the federal tax code. The board meets quarterly. The members of the board are:

Amrita Ahuja (chair)
Sam Taylor
Dina Pomeranz
Christina Riechers
Shikhar Ghosh
John Gianola
Kanika Bahl (CEO)

Evidence Action is committed to transparency. It maintains a website (evidenceaction.org) on which its annual report, audited financial statements and federal tax return, the form 990, are published.