

A conversation with Alix Zwane on December 20th, 2013

Participants

- Alix Zwane, PhD – Executive Director, Evidence Action
- Elie Hassenfeld – Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director, GiveWell
- Timothy Telleen-Lawton – Research Analyst, GiveWell

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

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Alix Zwane about updates from the Deworm the World Initiative (DtWI).

Deworming in India

The Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) has decided not to make a grant to DtWI for service delivery in India at this time. DtWI had been optimistic about receiving significant funds (~\$1 million/year) for scale-up in India, and GiveWell had included this projection in its room for more funding analysis. This change increases DtWI's funding needs.

Conversations with CIFF continue about potential support for other aspects of DtWI's work.

New opportunities

Evidence Action shared thoughts on additional programs it might implement in the future.

Bed nets

Evidence Action is considering programs based on a paper by Pascaline Dupas, Vivian Hoffmann, Michael Kremer, and Alix Zwane called Micro-Ordeals. The paper discusses a study in Kenya where patients at a health clinic were separated into at least two groups: those offered free chlorine solution for treating water at home and those offered a coupon that they could redeem elsewhere for chlorine solution. The paper found that when offered free chlorine, virtually everyone accepted versus only 60% of those offered the coupon. However, when water in the homes was later tested to see how many households were using the chlorine, a similar number of households were using it in both groups. The results suggest that giving coupons for health goods rather than the goods themselves might achieve similar outcomes while distributing a significantly smaller amount of items.

Evidence Action is interested to see whether this approach would work for bed net distribution to children in Kenya alongside a deworming round. When each schoolchild receives a deworming pill, they would also receive a coupon for a bed net, which would add little additional cost to the deworming program other than the cost of the nets themselves. If, as in the Micro-Ordeals study, a high percentage of coupon users actually used the bed nets, it could be a particularly cost effective way to encourage more bed net usage.

To that end, Evidence Action has worked with Tam Tam. Currently, Tam Tam is a small organization that is largely volunteer-run and has limited capacity. Tam Tam volunteers are helping Evidence Action answer key questions about this opportunity such as what percentage of bed nets given through coupons would end up getting properly used, whether it makes sense to give coupons to schoolchildren rather than other household members, and whether schoolchildren tend to use regular sleeping spaces that could actually be covered by bed nets. This effort is still in a research and exploratory phase and Evidence Action and GiveWell agreed that there are many questions about effectiveness and cost effectiveness outstanding that would inform future investments.

Remedial education

Evidence Action is supporting early planning by the Kenyan government on scaling up a job creation/ remedial education program in Kenya with support from the Poverty Action Lab at MIT. This program may continue to grow and could be part of the future Evidence Action portfolio, but this is uncertain at this time.

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