

## **A conversation with Grace Hollister and Dr. Alix Zwane, March 30, 2015**

### **Participants**

- Grace Hollister – Director, Deworm the World Initiative, Evidence Action
- Alix Zwane – Executive Director, Evidence Action
- Timothy Telleen-Lawton – Research Analyst, GiveWell
- Tyler Heishman – Research Analyst, GiveWell

**Note:** These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Dr. Zwane and Ms. Hollister.

### **Summary**

GiveWell spoke with Dr. Zwane and Ms. Hollister of Deworm the World to get an update on its program plans and new funding gaps. Conversation topics included plans for new or expanded programs in Nepal, Vietnam, and Ethiopia, funding needs, and a timeline for meeting those needs.

### **Nepal program plans**

[Note: After this conversation, on April 25, Nepal suffered a major earthquake. As a result, Deworm the World's plans to scale up deworming efforts in Nepal have been delayed indefinitely.]

### **Background**

Deworm the World is in early discussions with Nepal's government about expanding the reach of the country's deworming programs. Deworm the World estimates that Nepal has a higher than 20% prevalence of schistosomiasis or soil-transmitted helminthiasis (STH). Previous mapping data reported a prevalence of over 50%, but that figure is likely no longer accurate.

The Nepalese government's planning commission initiated contact with Deworm the World, which sent its India country director, Priya Jha, to Kathmandu for a meeting, which J-PAL facilitated. The conversation revealed that school-based health programs are not fully operating in all areas of the country, and Nepalese officials have expressed interest in getting technical assistance from Deworm the World, particularly with scaling up their programs. Deworm the World has contacted the government about further steps and is awaiting a response from health and education officials.

### **Budget**

Deworm the World has estimated very roughly that its three-year program in Nepal would cost about \$6 million (\$2 million per year). This is based on a cost per child of no more than \$0.50 and a target population of about 6 million children. However,

the latter estimate is based on the outdated prevalence survey data mentioned above. Deworm the World will need to conduct a new survey to determine an exact target population and a more accurate budget.

### *Estimated cost per child*

Deworm the World has derived its rough cost per child estimate for Nepal using some assumptions from its India programs (about \$0.10 per child) and adjusting upward given the difference in scale compared to the Indian states in which they work. The adjustment accounts for the fact that India's cost per child is especially low, in part because Indian government officials do not receive any additional remuneration for their work on the deworming program.

Deworm the World believes that Nepal's government will not supply funds for program implementation, unlike in India. Most of the implementation funds for Nepal will likely need to be raised externally, at least in the short term. It is not yet clear how much of Nepal's implementation costs will go toward allowances.

### **Activities**

Deworm the World will likely provide technical assistance in Nepal, using Delhi-based deworming staff. It will probably not pursue a full-engagement model with a dedicated, locally based team, as it does in Rajasthan and Bihar in India. This would make the Nepal model more similar to that used in Ethiopia, which uses global and Kenya-based staff to provide support.

### **Implementation timeline**

Deworm the World hopes to begin a three-year program in Nepal, with the first round of deworming to be held at the end of 2015 or beginning of 2016. However, depending on how quickly the government is able and willing to act, it may wait to begin implementation until mapping is complete, which could be time-consuming due to the country's geography. Deworm the World will take sufficient time to ensure that the program is carefully planned out.

### **Funding timeline and potential sources**

Deworm the World would like to secure the funding needed for this program as soon as possible. Although it has enough funding to sustain its activities for another six months to a year, it cannot adequately plan the program (e.g., by scheduling trainings) without an assured source of implementation funding. Nepal differs from India in this way, because India has an ongoing deworming program that will continue as soon as the government gets the funds to execute it. If Deworm the World can only commit to providing technical assistance to Nepal, with no funds for implementation, the government will not agree to a program, so lack of funding becomes a constraint at an earlier stage.

Deworm the World has committed to carrying out a diagnostic survey, which would involve members of its India team visiting Nepal to make an assessment. The cost of this trip is already covered. However, at some point afterward, Deworm the World would have to commit to a prevalence survey, and at a later point, after the survey results are in, it would commit to implementation. Both would require an assured source of funding, although the cost of the survey would be lower than that of implementation.

As it does in India, Deworm the World could sign a letter of intent with the Nepalese government to get approval for the prevalence survey, then sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) only once the survey is complete and has demonstrated a need for deworming. This would mitigate the risk of entering into a contract before prevalence is established. Deworm the World could also conduct its survey before the end of the year, so it can demonstrate to GiveWell that there is a need for the program by the time the giving season begins.

#### *Nominal grant from Good Ventures*

Deworm the World has entered into agreements in the past without having all the funding needed, and so can afford to be somewhat flexible. For instance, Good Ventures could provide some assistance outside of its normal giving season by giving Deworm the World a small grant (e.g., \$25,000–\$30,000) up front, to ensure that it can cover travel costs and give it time to develop a more precise budget. Good Ventures could also sign a contract with Deworm the World stating that upon the signing of an MoU with the Nepalese government, or another similar milestone, Good Ventures will provide further funding in an amount to be determined. Although Deworm the World could cover the amount of the nominal grant itself from general funds, the combination of a nominal grant and the contract would help Deworm the World signal its level of commitment to the Nepalese government and get approval for the program. The contractual amount could be for one year's worth of implementation funds or for a percentage of one year (e.g., \$500,000–\$1 million), which would leave a significant gap to be filled by GiveWell-influenced donors.

The nominal grant will not be needed until the Nepalese government contacts Deworm the World to set up further meetings. However, Deworm the World would like to have a better understanding of its funding situation going into these meetings.

#### *Other potential funders*

It is unlikely that other institutions will provide any funding for Deworm the World's efforts in Nepal. As an example, one large funder is focused on deworming in countries that the World Health Organization has identified as particularly high-burden and high-population, which does not include Nepal.

### **Challenges of overall budgeting and planning**

## **Timing of GiveWell's giving season versus multi-year planning**

Investing significant time in scaling and improving a program should ultimately enable the government to maintain the program itself, with minimal external support. Signaling a multiple-year commitment is also important for building trust with governments. For these reasons, Deworm the World does not want to enter Nepal for only a year without assurance of funding for future years.

In some countries, Deworm the World only gets enough funding to cover one year of activity, which makes advocacy with governments and planning difficult. The more of a commitment Deworm the World can show, the easier it will be to get the investment from the government that is necessary to a successful program.

Deworm the World's program planning is also subject to events that may occur in between GiveWell's giving seasons. At the end of 2014, Deworm the World was unable to provide a complete picture of its plans. Since then, it has developed a clearer idea of those plans but is unable to act on them until it has secured more funding, which may not happen until GiveWell's giving season begins at the end of the year. The result could be that Deworm the World must move more slowly on Nepal.

## **Variable costs for per diems and allowances**

Implementation costs are often driven by country norms around per diems and allowances, which vary significantly from place to place. In India, these costs are very minor, because the government workers involved in deworming, such as teachers, do not generally receive allowances for attending trainings or participating in deworming. The exception is accredited social health activists (ASHAs), whose pay is incentive-based and covered in part by a budget allocation for National Deworming Day. In Kenya, however, it is the norm for many government officials, including teachers and community health workers, to receive allowances for attending trainings. This is a difference in the cost of doing business, and which makes some programs, such as Kenya, more expensive. Deworm the World must work closely with the government to build trust, which in part translates into understanding the norms around involvement of government employees in programs such as deworming. Deworm the World endeavors to ensure that governments understand the longer term implications of budget items such as allowances, as governments will eventually have to bear these costs itself. However, in general, Deworm the World has little leverage for negotiation in this area.

In any case, Deworm the World does not believe that the cost of allowances in Vietnam and Nepal will greatly change its budget estimates in those countries, which should not exceed the Kenya cost of \$0.50 per child.

## **Flexible funds and general reserves**

Deworm the World has about \$1 million in reserve funding, which would sustain it until the end of 2015. It could use these funds to cover the first stages of work in Nepal and count on future funding from donors for scale-up. This is a similar concept to that of the nominal grant and would be an acceptable use of reserve funding.

To ensure that Deworm the World has enough funding when it needs it, its reserve funds may need to be increased. Assuming it gets no other funds from donations through GiveWell or other sources before the end of 2015, Deworm the World's current reserves are not enough to help it move forward as fast as it would like. Having \$5 million in reserves instead of \$1 million might be preferable. More assurance around funding is particularly necessary to make progress on the Nepal program because Nepal is a new area and Deworm the World has less information about it and no existing commitment there.

### **Ethiopia program plans**

In collaboration with the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI), Deworm the World is planning to initiate a five-year national deworming program in Ethiopia. Deworm the World and SCI have established a good relationship in Ethiopia and have been working with the government since late 2014 to design a national school-based deworming program. Due to the collaborative nature of the initiative, Deworm the World plans to request funds jointly with SCI.

### **Target number of treatments**

The goal of the program is to provide 100 million deworming treatments to school-age children. The target is based on existing mapping data, although more surveying is needed to finalize the number. There is no plan at the moment to include preschool-age children in the program, but Ms. Hollister believes that there may be another mechanism planned to reach these children.

### **Budget and funding gap**

Developing cost projections for the program has been a major part of planning over the past few months. Deworm the World and SCI have secured large funding commitments from CIFF and the Ending Neglected Diseases (END) Fund, and SCI will apply some funding from its reserves. The END Fund and CIFF will make their grants directly to the Ethiopian government, with a separate grant from CIFF to Deworm the World and SCI for technical assistance.

However, based on current projections, the program is facing a \$3–5 million gap in implementation funding, primarily in years 3, 4, and 5. Deworm the World and SCI are in the early days of finding funds for this stage of the program. Because the first two years of the program are covered, the funds to close this gap are less immediately needed. However, Deworm the World believes that it is not necessarily easier to fund a program once it has produced demonstrable results. Many donors are less interested in funding existing programs than in helping to start one, because they prefer to be associated with a unique, new venture. Deworm the World has

experienced this issue in Bihar state in India, where it was able to establish a deworming program but found it difficult to get funders interested in continuing it.

It is not yet certain whether the implementation funding needed for years 3, 4, and 5 would be granted directly to the government or through a partner such as SCI or Deworm the World, because the mechanism for implementation has not been decided. A mechanism among donors to pool funding to target programs or geographic areas, rather than targeting individual organizations or governments, would help reduce the burden on each program partner. For example, reporting on the grant could be standardized for all partners, thus simplifying the Ethiopian government's reporting obligations. This would also allow new partners to join work on a program more easily.

### **Vietnam program plans**

Deworm the World has designed an integrated deworming, hygiene education, and sanitation program in Vietnam in collaboration with the NGO East Meets West, and the partners have begun working with the government on program start-up. The three-year program includes mass drug administration in four provinces, with Deworm the World specifically supporting integration of deworming best practices into the existing government program to treat STH. The goal of the program is to demonstrate the feasibility of cost-effective STH treatment at scale, with the objective of having the government fund a national school-based deworming program to treat all at-risk kids. Data from other provinces show a prevalence of STH greater than 20%. Further prevalence surveying will be conducted this year to determine the need in additional areas.

### **Timeline**

Deworm the World is still in the early stages of its program in Vietnam and does not plan to expand the program this year. This is in part because it is planning an impact evaluation of a hygiene education component, which, if found effective, will be implemented across all provinces.

### **Budget**

The estimated cost of expanding the Vietnam program will be \$2.6 million over three years, at a cost per child of approximately \$0.40 to 0.45. Deworm the World has worked extensively with the government to arrive at this figure and feels very confident in it.

Deworm the World is planning to support the program for three years. It hopes the government will be positioned to run the program independently after that. If Deworm the World gets additional funding for Vietnam, it would be used to expand the program to other provinces requiring treatment for STH. If it does not get additional funding, it will conduct it on a smaller scale and then ask the government to both sustain the existing program and expand it.

### **Funding**

Deworm the World will likely wait to expand its Vietnam activities until further mapping and impact evaluation have been completed. Because of this, it can wait until the next giving season to get additional funding for Vietnam.

As in Nepal, the government will be better incentivized to expand the program, assuming a need is found to exist in other provinces, if Deworm the World has already secured funding for a scale-up. This is less of a concern in Vietnam, however, because Deworm the World is already implementing the program in four provinces, so there is less need to signal a commitment to the government by securing funding. For this reason, if Deworm the World had another \$3–5 million, it would not choose to make a further commitment in Vietnam at this time, because it would prefer to fund a program in a new country rather than expand within an existing area.

### **Potential expansion into other countries**

Deworm the World has been exploring possible programs in other countries, including Nigeria, Namibia, South Africa, Indonesia, and the Philippines. These countries are still under consideration, but less of a priority than Nepal, Vietnam, and Ethiopia. Preliminary conversations about a Philippines program and preliminary work on a Nigeria program are scheduled for early April 2015.

*All GiveWell conversations are available at <http://www.givewell.org/conversations>*