

GiveWell conference call

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0:00:00 Elie Hassenfeld : Okay, this is Elie Hassenfeld from GiveWell. I want to thank everyone for joining us. Because of the large number of people on the call, only GiveWell staff members are going to be able to be heard on this call. If you have any questions as you go, please just submit them to info@givewell.org and put question in the headline and we will get to it as we're going through this call tonight. We intend the call to last for about an hour though we're also happy to stick around as long as people want to, to continue to answer any of the questions that come in. We are recording this call and we will be posting a transcript of it to our website after the call.

0:00:50 EH: So I just want to give a quick overview of how the call is going to go. I'm going to give an overview of the research process that we used this year to identify outstanding charities and then Holden is going to come and he'll summarize the strengths and weaknesses of our top two charities. And at that point, we'll pause to answer any of the questions that come in. After that, we'll discuss some of our other standout organizations that we found this year as well as our plans for identifying recommended charities next year.

0:01:25 EH: And just one more introductory note before we get started. We know that there's a lot of variability on this call in terms of how much people know about GiveWell and our process. Our aim is to make the call comprehensible to those are less familiar with us. So we aren't assuming that any anyone here has a particular background or understanding of GiveWell and we hope that people will feel free to email in anything they're wondering about, any question that they have, and not worry about whether something we answer somewhere else on our site. Answering your questions is really what this call is for.

0:01:57 EH: So let me just give a hopefully a pretty brief overview of the research process that we used this year. So, in general, our approach to evaluating charities is to start by considering as many charities as possible and then systematically narrowing that list down using flags that we use to mark particularly promising charities. Now, we'll find that list of charities that we start with in lots of different ways. We'll consider any charity that is recommended to us using our online web form or any other method. We'll look at charity funded by donors who approach us and we find interesting or promising. We look at charities recommended by academics working in areas we're considering. We'll also look at charities just because they're tax filing, classified, and working internationally which is the area that we prioritized.

0:02:43 EH: The bottom line is that the goal which to start with as many charities as we can and then narrow the list down from a larger list as we can start with. And this year, we started with a list of hundreds of organizations and then we narrowed it down using these flags. And we go in to all the details of the flags and how we use them and which organizations we flagged in what ways on our website. But these flags among other things include organizations that published details and compelling reports for their programs effectiveness on their website. Organizations that are working in areas that we'd already determined to be particularly cost effective in having particularly strong evidence thesis, often these were international health programs.

0:03:28 EH: Also, organizations that we thought could really high upside and by high upside we mean programs that could benefit people above and beyond just the direct benefits of the program at the time it was occurring. So that could include programs like research where information gained from the research could impact many future programs or organizations that commit to rigorously and publicly evaluate their programs so that other organizations could learn from this particular organization's successes and failures. And finally, we flag organizations for working in particularly

promising causes such as water. So if... One example of a promising cause is the cause of water where we felt that if organizations could demonstrate that they were bringing access to clean water to those who didn't have it, we might ultimately be able to recommend that charity to donors. And so we flagged any organization working in the cause of water.

0:04:29 EH: So then the full list is on our website and this is just to give an idea of how we go about our process that this first step is identifying lots of organizations and then flagging them with the organizations that have characteristics we find promising. Once we flag them, we'll go through and try to identify ones that... Of the ones we flag the most promising and we'll go on to the next part of our process which is a phone call with the organization.

0:04:54 EH: This year, we contacted about 75 different charities for a phone call. Often, these calls last between 45 and 90 minutes. We'll ask charities basic questions about their activities and what they do, but also how they know whether their activities are working. And most importantly, in some centers, what they would do with additional donations. This is the question that we refer to as room for more funding. And we'll ask them to send us documentation supporting the answers that they give us on the phone to these questions. And we'll review the documents and write up our review and these are the reviews that you often see in our website.

0:05:30 EH: In almost every single case, our review process for an organization ends after that first phone call, reviewing of documents, and then writing up a review because we'll see that we still have some major questions about the organization and we're not optimistic about additional rounds of questioning will lead us to resolve them and then ultimately recommend the charity. Now, obviously we know that we're making decisions at that point based on limited information and we always base attention between continuing to dig deeper on individual organizations or spending time investigating new ones. But we feel that based on the experience we've had evaluating charities over the last few years, at this stage in the process we have a reasonable view of how likely a charity is to succeed.

0:06:15 EH: Now, there are these other organizations that we still think are quite promising even after this first stage. And for these we continue to go back and forth with them trying to answer all the questions we have. And in 2011, we had roughly 10 to 15 organizations that went to this stage. By September of this year, we had narrowed this large list all the way down to three organizations that we thought were the top contenders for our highest ratings. And we went in October to visit all the organizations in the field. Three of us went to Malawi to visit programs associated with the Against Malaria Foundation or AMF and Schistosomiasis Control Initiative also known as SCI. And two of us went to Delhi to visit Operation ASHA. So now I'm just going to turn it over to Holden and let him talk about our two top rated charities, AMF and SCI.

0:07:11 Holden Karnofsky: Okay. So this is Holden. Like Elie said, I'm going to talk about our top two charities and hopefully this will also give people a little more sense of our process as well because I'm going to emphasize the nature of activities that we look for. And then after this we're going to take questions, and then around 7:45, we'll talk briefly about some of the other topics. So the first group I'm going to talk about is the Against Malaria Foundation and I'm going to call them AMF. This is a charity whose mission is to distribute long-lasting insecticides treated nets in Africa. I'm just going to call them nets for the rest of the call. And what these are, they are bednets treated with insecticides that you can put over your sleeping space to protect yourself from mosquitoes which transmit malaria. Distribution of nets is one of the most proven programs out there that isn't

already fully funded. So there are a lot of really high-quality studies employing randomization that decides who gets the nets and who doesn't, and then following people up to see what happens with malaria. There are five of these studies looking at the effects on mortality. And a meta-analysis by the Topman Collaboration which is one of the sources we trust most kind of aggregates the results and says that there's a significant impact on child mortality, and that you can save a child's life cost effectively.

0:08:35 HK: There is also other benefits to nets. They can reduce anemia, they can reduce malaria, improve general health. So after studying through this, distribution of nets has gotten to be pretty big in global health. There is a bunch of charities doing it and there's a lot of money going into it. But as far as we can tell, it's still not nearly enough to cover the people at risk. There's a big gap of people who could be benefiting from nets who aren't and that's where the Against Malaria Foundation comes in. So basically what they do is they pay for nets and they get the nets to field partners and then they work with the field partners to make sure that the nets get distributed and that as appropriate data gets collected on when the nets arrive, who gets the nets, and whether people continue to use the nets.

0:09:26 HK: Now there are other organizations like I said out there that pay for nets. Some of them do multiple things. Some of them just do nets like Against Malaria Foundation. The reason that Against Malaria Foundation is the one that we focused on is it started a few years ago. They caught our eye with their commitment to transparency. And so while all the other organizations, I think there's a lot of questions about exactly where these nets are going and what is known about them. With Against Malaria Foundation, even when we first came across them years ago, they were publishing on their website just for every net distribution what the status is, where it is. When it gets finished, they have a post distribution report. They have photos of people getting the nets and they've just been very generally open with any information asked of them.

0:10:17 HK: So for a long time we had them rated as one of our top charities because nets is one of the most proven programs and because they were standing out on their transparency and accountability in distributing nets. But they weren't our top charity. One of the big concerns we had was they weren't collecting data on who was using the nets properly, and they told us that they were planning to collect that data in the future. Now, a lot of charities tell us that they're planning to collect more data in the future, but AMF has actually started to come through. And they have been collecting these close distribution usage survey. They've been posting into their website and so in our view, this is a place where a lot of groups are falling short and AMF is picking things up on this front.

0:11:06 HK: There have been other changes in AMF too. They're now doing fewer small scale distributions in going to do more large scale distributions. So large scale distributions in our views, they are more cost effective. They're easier to coordinate with the government net programs because you can kind of bring, in a sense, the whole district to distribute nets. And so there are advantages to them and it's also easier to keep track of a smaller number of distributions, so we see that as a positive change. They are currently in the midst of their first large scale distribution. This is being implemented by Concern Universal in Malawi with funding from [0:11:44] [REDACTED] and Against Malaria Foundation. We visited this distribution in Malawi. We spent several days there seeing the different parts of what it involved. We came away feeling good about the organization doing it, about the daily collection, and about the whole process. And basically AMF is going to use future funds to do more of these large scale distributions. Our estimate is that every... That a life is saved is

for under \$2000 a piece in terms of total money spent, and that's including delivery costs and data collection costs and everything.

0:12:23 HK: That's definitely an estimate. It could change tomorrow. It's very, very hard to estimate cost per life saved and there's always a lot of assumptions you can make and a lot of old data you have to use, but that is the best we've done. It's an honest estimate. It's not an advertising number and it's only referring to lives saved. It does not include any of the other benefits of reducing malaria, on general health, healthcare costs, on anemia, and that sort of thing. So that's the basic case for AMF. They're not perfect. We think no charity is perfect and there's always questions. So we still don't know for sure that these nets are being used properly and then malaria is falling. The data we do have suggests that usually nets do get used properly and usually malaria does fall. But this is something we want more information about and will be learning more about. And so there are things AMF is doing that are relatively new to it and there are questions in the future. It's not a sure thing, but we think as far as getting a lot of bang for your buck, helping a lot of people per dollar spent, it's the best opportunity we know of right now. So that's AMF...

0:13:35 EH: Before... Before Holden... Just before Holden moves on to SCI, I just wanted to give everyone a quick reminder. If you have questions as we're going, the best way to get them to us is to submit them over email to info@givewell.org and put question in the subject line and then we'll see them and we'll answer the question on the call.

0:13:57 HK: Yeah, that's right. Okay, so now I'm going to talk about our number two charity. That's the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative and I'm going to call them SCI for the rest of the call. They focus on deworming. So what that refers to is that all across Africa, there's very large numbers of people infected with worms. And the worms include roundworm, whipworm, hookworm and schistosomiasis. SCI focuses on schistosomiasis, but they treat all four of the infections I just said. These infections rarely kill people, rarely hospitalize people, and so a lot of people don't even know they have the infections. But being infected with a worm is obviously not good for your health and these infections are very, very common. So in some communities, you'll see 70%, 80% of children being infected with schistosomiasis. It's very cheap to treat these infections. It's also one of the most straightforward interventions in global health. It's just kind of once a year or so you try to get children together or adults in some cases, give them a pill. The pill kills the worms, and there are a lot of people in the world who could be benefiting from deworming and aren't. So there's a lot of room for more money there. And we think SCI has an outstanding track record of reducing worm infections. So they run multiple national control programs. They collect the data on worm infections before they go in and after. And you can see that in most cases, infection rates are falling dramatically. In one case, from around 60% to around 8% for the national data.

0:15:36 HK: It's not perfect evidence. There are questions we've raised about these studies, but it is probably... It is definitely some of the best evidence of effectiveness we've ever seen from a charity in terms of really showing that they caused a drop in disease. This is also very cheap. So SCI we estimate spends about 50 cents per person treated and that's including all costs. So the big question that people usually have about this sort of thing is what is the impact of deworming people in terms of quality of life? And unfortunately, this is a very difficult question to answer. The evidence on it is very thin. We've worked very hard to understand all the literature out there on what worms do to you and what deworming can help you with, and it is hard to say. So I'll tell you briefly what we know.

0:16:26 HK: First off, I think the most robust quality of life impact for deworming that we've seen is reducing anemia. So anemia is a medical condition where you don't have enough hemoglobin concentration in your blood. It doesn't have really distinctive symptoms other than kind of tiredness or weakness. But it is measurable and it's something where there is a relatively small effect or what we believe a real effect of deworming on anemia. There are a bunch of other effects that deworming is believed to have. So a medical condition such as an enlarged liver and enlarged spleen, blood in the urine, these are very... There is not good quantification of how much deworming reduces these symptoms. Often these symptoms are not always serious medical conditions. So but that is still more evidence that deworming is relevant to kind of general health.

0:17:23 HK: And then finally, there's this possibility that deworming contributes to developmental effects later in life. So the idea is that if you're deworming children, you're helping their physical development. And when they get older, they'll be stronger and/or better educated and able to earn more and be more productive. And there is some evidence that deworming does help people in this way. I would say the evidence is limited. I would say there are issues with the evidence, but I would say it certainly suggests that developmental effects are strong possibilities. And so that basically the story with deworming is that it's very cheap to do. And so if there's even a possibility of helping people in that kind of lasting significant way, that's going to make deworming a pretty good deal.

0:18:15 HK: Now, I wish I could give you a number like \$2000 per life saved for deworming. I can't. Like I said, the effects are subtle and they're hard to quantify. We have done our best to come up with a kind of cost-per-equivalent life saved, and that would be looking at things like developmental effects and trying to estimate how often they're happening and then how much different sorts of people would value them, relative to as being alive. Our kind of standing, very, very rough estimate is that it's about \$2000 to \$4000 per equivalent life saved. However, we think it could be much more or much less. And so, this is just not... It's not a place for estimation as straightforward as the bednets, but certainly there's a strong possibility that it's as good or better and certainly both from that and the common-sense case, for how cheap it is, it... We believe it is a great value. Deworming adults, we believe, is providing less value than deworming children because you miss developmental benefits. You're not... You don't have that same dynamic you can look to for effects later in life, so we've ball parked that in that category of \$10,000 per equivalent life saved. But again, these numbers are very rough and they can all change, and they could be way too high or too low. So the bottom line is we think it's probably not quite at the bednets level, but still an excellent, excellent value for a donor, and if those are your values, you should think about it.

0:19:46 HK: So, the final topic I'm going to address and then we're going to break for questions, is the relative pros and cons of the two charities and why we chose to rank AMF number one and SCI number two.

0:19:58 HK: So, first, a point in favor of SCI, I think, is the track record point. I think if you're looking for a charity that you can call proven, I think SCI is more deserving of the label proven than AMF. They have demonstrated multiple times in reduction in disease rates and AMF is... They have demonstrated that they can get nets to people, which is usually about as close as you come to a proven case, given the case for nets. But I think there is an edge for SCI though. So for people who are kind of in the high end of skepticism and wherever there's a missing piece part of the puzzle that makes them uncomfortable, I think there's a case for SCI there.

0:20:40 HK: On the other hand, kind of counterbalancing that, we think AMF has more of what we

call an upside. So there's more of a kind of chance that your donation will do a really huge amount of good, an outsized amount of good. And that's for a couple reasons. One is that AMF is smaller and it's earlier in its development, and so we think the money we can get to AMF is more likely to be kind of critical funds in AMF's development. And we think that could be ideal because AMF is a special organization in our opinion. Another way in which it has upsides, there's a lot of money going into nets. It's hundreds of millions of dollars a year that net distributions tend to have very thin data collection. I think people are not learning as much as they could from how these things normally go. And so, if AMF is doing it the right way, they can be providing pilots for government programs and they can be generating information that's useful to everyone, and everyone has a very large number of dollars going into nets. So, there's some upside considerations for AMF.

0:21:46 HK: The next couple of advantages for AMF both pertain to intangibles, and these are completely subjective things, so we're not pretending that we have proof of anything I'm about to say, but we also think that we wouldn't be telling the donors the whole story if we left it out. We think you guys have the right to know what we're thinking. So we do... We are confident in both organizations enough to call them our top charities, which is saying a lot. We take this very seriously. They're both transparent. They both answer all our questions well, but we do give an edge to AMF here. We are more confident in the organization. We had an easier time communicating with them. We are less worried about sort of finding something out later than we should have found out before. Again, these concerns are small with both, but with AMF, we think there's an edge. If unanticipated events come up, the confidence level of AMF handling them kind of in a way that we end up agreeing with. Again, it's a slight edge.

0:22:45 HK: The other intangible is around the scholars and research, and so part of what you do when you support bednets or deworming is you're betting on the opinions of the scholars who study these things. Now, we've examined the research and judged it for ourselves, but you're still reliant on scholars for generation of data and a lot of interpretation of that data, and we believe that malaria scholars, they appear to us to be more reliable than deworming scholars. This is something we're going to be writing more about. The bottom line is that we have come across fewer red flags and unanswered questions when reviewing the research on malaria than reviewing the research on deworming, and that has implications because, in the future, we still have 100 unanswered questions about both, but we expect more of those questions to be kind of answered in a way that maintains our confidence in the consensus for malaria than for deworming.

0:23:47 HK: The final reason that we ranked AMF number one has to do with cost effectiveness. We do think there's a slight edge for nets in cost effectiveness, but it's not decisive and it's hard to tell, but it's a little bit of a stronger edge when you compare nets to the activities that we understand as SCI plans for the next dollar. This is an analysis that we do call "room for more funding" where we try to figure out, "Alright, this charity does these activities, but where does the next dollar bill, where does your dollar go?" And based on our understanding of the answers to that, we think a lot of the answers to that question... Yeah, in deworming high risk adults. Our estimates say that's not as good as use of money as given in children. That doesn't mean they're doing the wrong thing, it just means that kind of where the room is for the planning. And so when we look at the whole picture, we feel like you're probably accomplishing more per dollar spent with AMF. That's our thinking on the two organizations.

0:24:48 HK: I want to wrap this part up just by stressing that AMF is our top recommendation, but they both are outstanding. We think you should feel great about giving to either. We feature them

both very prominently on our top charity page, and that's on purpose because we want to get a lot of money to both. We think that's going to create learning opportunities for us as well and following what happens with that money. We think if you give to either of these two charities, you can feel pretty confident that you've taken one of the best steps available to an individual donor.

0:25:19 EH: Okay, so now we're just going to move on to answering some of the questions that have come in. I just want to continue to encourage you to send them into info@givewell.org if you have questions. One of the questions that came in was about AMF's shift from smaller scale to larger scale distributions and asking about any estimate we have for any efficiency gains from moving to the larger distributions. Let me just say a couple quick things and also let Holden jump in afterwards if he'd like. Basically, our understanding is that the major gains from moving from smaller scale to larger scale come from two things, not necessarily efficiency in reduced cost. So, one big gain is the opportunity to be more proactive about targeting the areas that are being reached with nets. In the smaller scale type, AMF had a process for determining that each of the applications it received from charities that were applying for bednets was being sent from a zone that was at high risk for malaria. But in the larger scale process, AMF is able to work with the national malaria control programs to identify areas that are in particular need of nets. In that way, I think the process allows for more proactive targeting of areas that need nets.

0:26:30 EH: A second gain from the larger scale distribution is that there's some degree of indication that there's improved effectiveness when nets cover entire areas as opposed to covering just smaller parts of areas. For example, you have a gain from covering, let's say, 100% of people in a village than covering 50% of people in two villages. And AMF's larger scale distributions give it the opportunity to do that. Holden, is there anything you want to add on this question?

0:27:23 HK: Not really, I mean, I think this question is not crucial to our evaluation of AMF because we've focused on our evaluation of how much good is done by the future activities. We've focused in on the large scale and we've been trying to quantify the difference.

0:27:34 EH: Another question, and this one is pretty common about the work AMF does in terms of distributing nets, is that there's a lot of money that goes to malaria and lot of [0:27:52] [REDACTED] like The Gates Foundation. Why is it individual donors and why aren't those [0:27:59] [REDACTED] allowed to fund these? Just two things on that. First of all, like, we are pretty convinced by the research that we've done that there isn't a net gap. Meaning that money that comes in now is going to go to fund nets for people that would not otherwise have them. And in a lot of ways, that seems like the most important question for individual donors to be asking. In terms of the larger funders, The Gates Foundation, The Global Fund, and the Gates Foundation in particular has its own set of priorities. They're spending a lot on developing vaccines. Just the fact that they have a lot of money clearly doesn't mean that they can do everything, and similarly the Global Fund itself is facing some challenges. We don't believe it's the case that there's adequate funding currently available for nets. We believe strongly that donations that come in to AMF are going to provide nets to people who need them.

0:28:53 HK: I think something that confuses a lot of people on the issue of nets, and it has confused us too, is there's a lot of money going into nets and there's a lot of publicity around them. And so it's easy to like lose sight of the other side of the equation, which is the need. The need is just huge. It would take an enormous amount of money to cover all the people who could benefit from nets. So when you match the two up, I think the need is greater than the money.

0:29:21 EH: One thing to keep in mind on that is just that nets don't last forever. You give out nets one year and then three years later the same folks will need nets again because nets degrade and tear and so they need to be replaced.

0:29:36 HK: Right.

0:29:37 EH: Another question was about the fact that there is now a lot of focus on developing a malaria vaccine and it may be available in the not too distant future. Given that vaccines are going to be available, why does it make sense for us to recommend an organization like AMF that won't necessarily be the best intervention, let's say, four or five years from now. Obviously, we don't have a very strong or confident view about what the world will look like in five years, but nevertheless to us, we're reasonably confident that... We believe that giving money to AMF now is saving lives today and that those nets will be used. It's certainly not the case that a vaccine is available today and so what we do is recommend that the donors give to bednets now because that's what's needed, and if in the future that changes then our recommendations will change.

0:30:34 HK: Our model cost-effectiveness of bednets is based on two to three years of usage, so we're not... You don't need to see if this is going on forever to get those benefits and I think two to three years, I mean, it's going to be a long time before a really effective malaria vaccine becomes a dominant strategy.

0:30:53 EH: So I just want to switch over quickly a question about SCI. So well... Holden mentioned that there's a lot of evidence for the decrease into disease rates as a result of deworming and someone wanted to know whether there's evidence of impacts on life outcomes. Like increased test scores in school, increased employment, increased income that are seen as a result of the decreases into these. Holden, you want to take that one?

0:31:19 HK: There's nothing we would say... I'm sorry. Go ahead. Yeah. So there's nothing that we would say is really conclusive on the level kind of the effectiveness on mortality. There are studies that are pretty good and pretty encouraging. One of the most famous is the Miguel and Kremer Study of the effects of deworming on attendants and there were followups many years later showing impacts potentially on height, potentially on income. These studies... There are some issues with them. One is that they took place in an unusually... An area with an unusually large amount of water and then El Nino hit in kind of the middle of the study causing the prevalence rates to go way up from where they already were. So it's not the most representative situation. We have other issues with these too and we've written up our issues with these studies on our website and our write up of deworming. So, I mean, I would say that it's logical that deworming does improve health and income down the line. It's logical and there's evidence suggesting that it's very possible, but I wouldn't say there's something conclusive.

0:32:27 EH: Okay. Another question that came in was about the cost effectiveness estimates that we've done for these charities and the fact that we can't nail everything down. And so, the question was whether these are things that we expect to nail down in the near future like in the next year or two or are these are just questions that we don't anticipate to be able to nail down at all. We've written a lot about our approach to cost effectiveness estimates and how they play a role in our ratings on our blog over the last few months. I'll give my perspective and also let Holden give his on cost effectiveness.

0:33:04 EH: My impression is that, there's always... We always could get new information and I think we will. We'll get some new information that will help us slightly improve our understanding of the cost effectiveness of these two interventions, but we've spent just a ton of time over the last couple of months really debating all the details of the cost effectiveness estimates, seeing all the evidence that we could possibly find about the cost effectiveness of these activities, and I would be surprised if those views changed significantly in the near future. Meaning that we found information or we gained confidence in information that led us to have significantly different estimates than what we have today.

0:33:49 HK: Yeah. I mean cost effectiveness estimation is just... Nobody has found a way to do it in charity that is really robust and reliable and you can really bet on it. I mean, one good example of this is what the work we did earlier this year. The World Health Organization publishes cost effective estimates for deworming has been out there for five years. We looked into them and we found out that they were off by the 100x, so they just had like spreadsheet errors and things like that where they had published a number of \$3.41 per unit of life improved, which is... It's called a dolly and the right number was more like \$300 just by their own calculation. So this is... It's just the area where like I don't think anyone has figured out a method for making these calculations totally reliable. You're always using thin data, lots of extrapolation and lots of guesswork. The world changes just after when we collect this kind of data on it, but we've done the very best we can and all of our cost effectiveness estimates are completely... We share all the details behind them and we provide spreadsheets where you can look at them and if you think one of the numbers we're using looks up, you can enter your own number, we calculate it. We show what happens to the numbers under different assumptions if you start disbelieving some things that are very debatable what happens to the number. So it's all up there and we've done the best we can, but we think these numbers have to be used as a guide and not taken literally.

0:35:18 EH: Okay, we had a question about AMF's process for deciding where to work. AMF uses government data from the countries in which it works to decide where to work on the levels of malaria in those areas. And so, one of the questions we got about that is, is the quality of the data that AMF relies on, high enough quality, that it is... High enough quality and also giving enough information that its nets are likely to be targeted appropriately.

0:35:53 HK: Yeah. So basically there's limited information on malaria transmission that... In a given region. I mean, it's expensive to collect that information and then it's going to go out of date quickly. And so, AMF and the world malaria, kind of, control effort in general, are not getting nets to where like you have necessity of the perfect [0:36:13] [redacted] nets this week. They're generally going off, kind of, very general patterns in where they believe malaria is common and they're getting their nets there. In defense of AMF I believe that this is the same situation that people were in when they did the original study, showing the nets reduced mortality. So, I don't believe that they... That in those studies they were finding the perfect week or perfect place there either. And so, basically, the way we feel is that those studies are based on multiple times going into areas where malaria is believed to be pretty high and then they got great effects. That's similar to what AMF is doing and so we expect similar results.

0:37:00 EH: So, one question, and we've gotten a lot this year and someone sent in for this call is, we said that AMF and SCI are two top rated charities in 2011 and that, obviously, is what... The best recommendations we can make to you as donors today. But how does AMF and SCI, how do they

compare as giving opportunities to VillageReach, which we recommended at the end of 2010? What we thought about VillageReach as donation opportunity in December of 2010, and then, also how does it compare to what we expect to find next year? So, Holden do you want to answer this... This one about how it compares between years.

0:37:49 HK: Yeah, it's always hard to say because we're always getting better at our research and more thorough, so in any given year we know more than we knew the year before. I think that... My kind of general feeling right now is that VillageReach last year was a little better opportunity given numbers to me than these other opportunities, but it's hard to say and we're going to have to go back to VillageReach to check that belief because I think in the end we ended up being more thorough with these two guys than we were with VillageReach and we were pretty thorough with VillageReach. And generally the more thorough you are with a charity, the more room for doubt you find and the more issues come up. And so, it's hard to compare two charities when you've investigated one a lot and the other not so much. The general sense is that the... I feel a little better about VillageReach last year when they had this need for money, but right now we don't think it does and I think these two charities are great.

0:38:44 HK: As far as next year I am optimistic that we'll find better giving opportunities next year and every year so that's most of what I can say, but I think there's also advantages to giving now in terms of, if you help people today those people can help other people and there's an argument for a, kind of, interest rate on good accomplished. So in my view... I personally will be getting my normal amount this year and I'll be dividing it not evenly, but dividing it between those two charities and that's where I am, if you want to know. I think that's where most of the people of GiveWell are though it's a little hard to say, but that's where we stand.

0:39:24 EH: A question related to the fact that SCI is not registered charity in the United States and you'll see if you go on the website that donations at SCI are processed through the Imperial College Foundation. SCI is a registered charity in UK. It's a... It's housed out of Imperial College and so donations are going from Imperial College right through SCI. We don't think that the fact that it's not registered in the US means anything, should mean anything to donors. I've visited SCI's offices in London. I've visited AMF in London too. We certainly believe they're both reputable organizations beyond just being outstanding in the ways that we've described and that donors giving to both of them will get, will give tax benefited donations.

0:40:21 EH: So another question and this relates to GiveWell overall is on that... All of the... Our two top charities and also five of the six ones that we call "stand-outs" are focused on international aid programs as opposed to domestic programs. And so, the question is do our ratings... Are they restrictive for donors who prefer to fund domestic charities?

0:40:46 EH: And the simple answer to that question is that, "Yes, they are." We at GiveWell are focused on finding the very best charities that we can for donors who more or less share our values. And we are particularly compelled by the opportunities to help people for relatively little money that are available internationally. When GiveWell got started in our first year, we initially split our research between international programs and domestic programs and after doing that we came away with the impression, and all of this is still available on the website, that when you fund programs internationally you can accomplish very big things, like saving lives or fundamentally changing people's lives with programs that have very strong evidence basis and cost very little.

0:41:36 EH: And then, in the US, the evidence that the programs are working and making a difference is a lot "thornier." The problems have been tried to be solved for a long time with... Often with limited success and even to run the programs is much more expensive. And so, we're not sitting here saying to all donors, "You... ", that all donors should do what GiveWell says and what we think is right, but we see ourselves as serving a particular type of donor who shares the similar values to us. And for those donors we think that giving to international charities will suit them best. So that is where we focus most of our efforts and we expect to continue to focus most of our efforts there in the future.

0:42:22 HK: Yeah. I want to add one piece of clarification. Elie said we serve donor with similar values to us. That may sound like we have some kind of idiosyncratic values that we expect people to share and I think that wouldn't be the right message. I mean our values, broadly, are global humanitarian. So we consider all lives to be of equal value regardless of whether if someone is African or American. We want to see a tangible improvement in quality of life. Beyond that I think... We have a lot of disagreements within staff about things like preventing suffering versus empowering people. I think that in a lot of ways our values are pretty typical and so the big picture is that we have been drawn to internationally the necessity of global health because the needs are extremely great because your money goes very far there and because health programs, despite being very proven, are not rolled out to everyone. And so there is a lot of places where you can see this thing works and makes a huge difference in someone and it's really cheap. And because the evidence is so good people are able to strip it down and deliver it as efficiently as possible and change their lives as possible. So that's why we like global health, but we know all these stuff is subjective so what we try to do is find the best charities we can for people that have a similar outlook.

0:43:39 EH: So I want to pause on the Q&A now and just touch on some of the other standout organizations that we found this year, which was another topic that we want to make sure to cover in this call. So I want to talk about the five organizations that are standouts that work internationally. Before talking about each of them individually, I just want to give a little context for what we mean by a standout organization. So we mean a couple of things. First, we think that... It means that the organization has fully participated in our process and we have learned a lot about them. Like I described in our process before how much we end up learning about an organization does depend on how promising we found them at the time we began to engage with them. There's other some degree randomness in terms of how deeply we investigate an organization, but nevertheless the fact that the standout organizations were all happy and willing to go through our process, which is reasonably rigorous says a lot about them.

0:44:42 EH: The other thing we mean by standout is these are all organizations that we spent a lot of time investigating and we think that they are doing a lot of good, and that donors who are particularly interested and value the programs that those organizations are running can feel good about giving to those organizations. So while there's more arbitrariness, I guess you could say to the standout organization than to our top charities in terms of who gets that title. At the same time we think that donors can feel good about standout organizations if they are interested in supporting the types of programs that those charities are running. Let me just quickly run through these organizations and again feel free to send in questions about these or still SCI and AMF to info@givewell.org.

0:45:31 EH: So I'll just talk about these in alphabetical order as opposed to some rank order. One

organization is called GiveDirectly. GiveDirectly is a young organization. Their program is to directly provide cash grants directly to poor individuals in Africa. Their aim is that 90% of the cash that they take in goes right to poor people in the form of cash. Now this is an interesting model, and some people I think hear this and think it sounds like a great idea, that this is exactly what charity should be, getting money to people and letting them help themselves and spend it the way that they see fit. Other people think it sounds like just an awful idea. That it just can't possibly work. But we're excited that an organization like GiveDirectly exists because we think this is the type of option that should be available to the donors who are interested in this type of program.

0:46:26 EH: In particular GiveDirectly is really interesting and we commend them because they are running a randomized control trial in their program, meaning that there should be results that tell us how well it's working, and they have also pre-registered the trial, meaning that they have specified what data they will look at and how they will measure whether the program is effective. So that means that we will be able to look back once the papers are published and see how well their results compare to the questions they said they were going to ask. As an organization they've also been really open with us, very transparent, and answered all our questions reasonably. On the other hand, it's worth keeping in mind they are very young, they're very new, and they don't yet have the kind of track record that we usually prefer to see in the organizations we recommend most strongly.

0:47:15 EH: Another one of the standouts is Innovations for Poverty Action, it's also known as IPA. IPA is an organization that does randomized controlled trials of the types of programs that charities run. And they are trying to answer questions like, "What is the impact of microfinance?" Meaning if there are people who are taking out loans from banks, how much better off are they that they have access to these loans then they were before they had access to the loans, or alternatively for programs distributing bednets to prevent malaria. Is it better to distribute these bednets for free so that more people can access them or is it better to charge people a small amount so that the individuals who received the nets have some skin in the game so to speak and are, therefore, perhaps more likely to use them? And so on both of those questions in particular, we think IPA has done research that's affected the conversation about how to run programs most effectively, and so we think that's great. It's also worth noting that they've been also very strong in terms of their transparency and openness to outsiders to hold them accountable for what they're doing.

0:48:30 EH: Third one of our standouts is Nyaya Health. Now, Nyaya Health works with the government to run a health clinic in rural Nepal. And in general, we find the approach of providing comprehensive health care to be pretty intuitively appealing just as a way to help people. We first got excited about Nyaya because they stood out to us because of their extreme commitment to transparency. They're an organization where you can go on their website and you can see that they're just publishing a ton of information about what they're doing and what's happening on the ground in a way that's really rare among charities and can give you as the donor on the ground here in the US sense of what's happening over there.

0:49:16 EH: A fourth organization on our standout list is called Pratham, and Pratham works on education in India. Now, Pratham is not an organization we've spent as much time investigating as we have these other standouts, but it stands out to us for a couple of reasons. First, it works in an area, international education, where there's very limited evidence at all about what works, I should say rigorous evidence about what works. And Pratham has worked with academic research groups to evaluate its programs using randomized controlled trials. And that commitment to monitoring is one that we commend them for. Also, when we were living in India last year, we visited Pratham a

couple of times and overall had positive feelings about them, and when we've been back to India and have spoken with people working for other charities, they've always said extremely positive things about Pratham. So we feel for donors who are interested in developing world education, Pratham is a group we know the most about and that it has really distinguished itself by participating in rigorous research.

0:50:20 EH: The final standout organization that I want to touch on, which is... It works internationally... It's called the Small Enterprise Foundation or SEF. SEF is a microfinance institution, which is basically a bank. It's based in South Africa and it provides small loans to poor individuals. Microfinance is a really popular cause. We sort of have mixed feelings about it. We ultimately think that microfinance could be helping a lot of people by giving them the capital they need to run their businesses. At the same time, it could be hurting a lot of people by giving them high debt burdens and asking them to pay off their debt with extremely high interest rates.

0:51:08 EH: At this point, we don't think that there's strong evidence that it's helping people or more than it hurts them or vice versa, so the evidence is really mixed. A couple of years ago we looked... We just did a project where we were looking for the best microfinance institutions we could find, and the way that we did this is we flagged ones that were very focused on client welfare. Meaning how good are the programs for the people that it serves as opposed to just being focused on the bank balance sheet, which is a lot of the data you see coming from microfinance institutions. And on that measure, the Small Enterprise Foundation really stood out for its focus on client welfare because it was monitoring its own dropout or retention rate. Meaning how many clients take out a single loan and never come back and how many clients take out loans and then come back repeatedly to stay with them and take out more loans. With the idea that people who take out one loan and never come back probably didn't find the service all that valuable, but people who are retained, who pay back their loan, and then come out and take back out another loan will be [0:52:14] service.

0:52:16 EH: Also, Holden visited SEF when he was in South Africa, and he had a positive view of them. And when they applied to us for a grant and when we gave them that grant a couple of years ago, they used it for implementing a client education program. Again focused on improving client welfare as opposed to just improving the balance sheet. And so overall we have a picture of the Small Enterprise Foundation as a microfinance institution that has a rare focus on client welfare relative to the other institutions that we've looked at. So, I'm going to pause there for about the standouts and Holden, in the last few minutes before we call, why don't you talk about some of our plans for finding outstanding charities next year.

0:53:02 HK: Yeah, some people wanted to hear about our plans for next year. There's not a ton I can say at this point. Usually in November and December, we are very focused on finishing our report for the year. Then in January we're very focused on reflecting, doing our annual reports, self-evaluating, figuring out what the plan is, and we tend to make a lot of blogposts on that. So if you're interested in this topic and anything, just stay tuned and watch the blog especially in January and February. Quickly, we have kind of a three-pronged... Three strategies for finding more outstanding organizations.

0:53:33 HK: The first is what we already do, and that's just cast the net very wide, talk to as many organizations as we can, ask our critical questions, and look for ones that are standing out where they really have a proven track record, where they accomplished a lot of good for the dollar spent,

or they have a chance of making a really huge impact, but they're not already funded. That's strategy one and we have plenty of work to do there. There's lots of charities we'd like to look at because they got referred to us, because we saw something interesting on their website, we haven't gotten to them yet, and that's something we're thing about. Another possible strategy is to take the causes that we think are most promising and really go deep on them and talk to everyone in the area and do all the research and understand the causes well enough to make a recommendation.

0:54:20 HK: And so, there are certain areas where we think the evidence is good enough and the intervention is cheap enough and effective enough that it really lowers the burden of proof on a charity doing it, and so if you go to a charity with the potential influence that we have and you work with them, you will often be able to get something good going on. Not guaranteed, but it's something that we're thinking about. So, vaccines, very proven very cheap, very effective. Nutrition interventions, things like iodizing salt or giving out ready-to-use therapeutic food. These are pretty proven cost-effective interventions. There's control of various other diseases like a disease that causes elephantiasis. We're also interested in clean water as an intervention that we think may have some potential, but we need to learn a lot more about it. So that strategy too, is really kind of homing in on these areas where we think we'll find someone and then if necessary kind of working with charities to set up something that works for our donors.

0:55:22 HK: And strategy three is GiveWell Labs. So GiveWell Labs is something we announced a few months ago on our blog. We're going to be writing more about it. It's basically the experimental arm of GiveWell, so it's the anything goes arm of our research process. It's directed more at larger donors like seven-figure donors where you don't have to give to a charity and understand the whole charity, but instead you can fund a project and you can take a big risk and you can do things that really fall outside the bounds of the research we've done to date. So, that's something we don't have a lot to say about right now. It's very experimental. It's very new. And we'll be writing a lot more about it. These three strategies are all things we've thought about, but none of them are things that we're definitely going to do, except GiveWell Labs, which we are going to definitely put some work into. So that was just a very preliminary picture of what things might look like next year, but if you want to know, again definitely follow the blog.

[pause]

0:56:22 EH: So, I think that we've covered most of the things that we wanted to in the call. There are still questions that are coming in and also questions that have come in before that we haven't answered. So, we're planning to stay on the line and continue to just run through these and answer them. But sort of the formal... The formal plan for the call has come to an end. We also are going to be posting the audio and the transcript from this call. So if you have to hop off the line you will have the chance later to view the answers that we give to these questions.

0:56:59 HK: And, of course, you can always email us the questions.

0:57:02 EH: Yep, true. Feel free to always let us know if you have questions. So a question that came in was about... There was a debate on our blog a while ago between Natalie and Holden about the goals of giving to charity. In very brief, whether it's about helping those who are in need most or... And that would be giving to people who are extremely poor and need extremely basic things or whether it's a better goal to... Or another goal of helping people who are at... Who are in need, but are nevertheless not in the most dire need. And helping those people who are slightly better off

reach their full potential. And Natalie came out on the side of wanting to help those in greatest need and Holden was on the side of helping people reach their fullest potential. And so the question was, how do our recommendations this year apply to that debate? So, I'll just give my perspective and let the others jump in if they want to. I think both AMF and SCI focus primarily on people in Sub-Saharan Africa who are having problems because they aren't able to essentially afford very basic things. De-worming treatment costs on the order of 20 cents per dose, and nets cost on the order of \$5, so these are things that are very inexpensive and both of these organizations are ones really helping people who are in pretty much in the worst possible positions. Holden, do you have anything to add to that?

0:58:46 HK: Not really. I mean, one thing to keep in mind is that Natalie and I do disagree on these things, but we agreed on our top two charities and on the order of those top two charities. So a lot... There's a lot of philosophical debates in charities that are potentially relevant, but when you start requiring that you really be confident that something works and that it's getting the maximum value out of money and all of that, a lot of these questions are not decision-relevant at any given point in time.

0:59:17 EH: Okay, another question was about AMF's approach to verifying the people who need nets. And so the question was, has AMF considered the possibility that some of the people who come to these meetings won't want to sign up at these meetings because they're done in public and it might be a little humiliating or shaming to have to come out and do this in public. And also, another question related to that was, is the approach that AMF took in Malawi also expected to be taken in other countries that they go into in other cultural contexts?

0:59:54 HK: Right. So a point of clarification on the process for distributing nets. The village meeting is not how they do their primary data collection on some of these nets. The primary data collection is on having health surveillance assistance go door to door. And they go to each person's house, they look at the number of sleeping spaces, and they write down the number of nets that are needed. The village meeting is a verification meeting. That is if people want to come and hear how many nets are signed up for and correct any errors for the record that is their opportunity to do it. So I think that's an important point. The meetings I went to, there were a lot of people there. The village headman was there. People were able to line up afterward and register their concerns a little more privately, so it didn't look like something to be super concerned about now.

1:00:44 HK: Could you have a situation where some people are missed in the door to door and to they're kind of embarrassed and don't want to show up in the village verification meeting? Well, yeah. The answer to that is yes, you could. And there's a lot of ways in which not every single person who needs the net might get a net and not every single net might go to someone who needs it. But in general, our take is that most of the nets that are distributed are going to be used. We believe that they have some of the best data analysis we're going to... We've been able to do and so that's pretty much where we stand. But yeah, it is a valid question.

[overlapping conversation]

1:01:22 HK: It's not only cost-effectiveness analysis for net distribution, we've included a wastage parameter that you can go into our spreadsheet and change the wastage parameter. We think that most of the wastage is already accounted for in other numbers we are using. But if you want to see what happens when you get more pessimistic and that seems wasted, you can do this.

1:01:45 EH: Okay, I'm going to run through a few questions that are not related to our top charities. So one question was will we have a future focus on charities which have a tax status in countries outside the United States. Where countries have a tax status is not a major criterion for us. We do like it when our recommended organizations are able to take tax-advantaged donations for US donors since US donors make up the vast majority of the people who use our research. But we will consider any charity that we think has a good possibility of being one of the best places for individuals to give. And then we'll figure out dealing with the tax status after the fact. So with the Small Enterprise Foundation, which I've mentioned earlier on the call, they're not registered as a US-registered charity, but donors can give to them and get a tax deduction by giving to GiveWell and we just pass along the funds to SEF.

1:02:46 HK: Generally, if an organization is charitable, then something, then you can find a way, right? If an organization's purpose falls within what is supposed to be for the US, there's usually a way that can be found even if it's uptaking the money and giving it to them and making the judgment the best which are charitable purpose.

1:03:04 EH: So we had a few questions about our expectations for money move meaning money that goes through our website to our top charities, how we expect it to be split between charities, and how we expect that to be split between larger donors and smaller donors? I think the best answer to that question is that we don't really know. In terms of... GiveWell is a relatively young organization and we don't have much history to use in terms of predicting what will happen in the future. And so, on those different questions, I just look to history as the best indication of what will happen in the future. And so over the course of this year, we've roughly been... Had about three times the money moved over the course of the year as we did in 2010 that is roughly what we expect in December. December's a very different month because so many people choose to give then and so it's hard to predict what will happen. We also don't really know what will happen in terms of the split between the top two charities.

1:04:05 EH: Holden mentioned that we believe that both AMF and SCI are the strongest ones that we found, and therefore, we think both should get a significant amount of money. And personally, we're going to split our donations between those two charities giving a larger portion to AMF, but we don't really know how others will behave. And we just don't know how those will be split between larger donors and smaller donors.

1:04:32 HK: So another question that came in, somebody ask why the same process would catch charities next year that we didn't catch this year. And so the answer is just that there's a lot of charities who we didn't get to this year and that we would like to get to next year. But obviously, there's just a lot we haven't looked at that could be good. On the other hand, the percentage of random charities that we talk to that turn out to be contenders is very low. So again, that kind of pursuing the same process is not something that we're definitely going to do. It's something we might do.

1:05:07 HK: Another question that came in was asking about the connection between... The relationship between SCI, which... They're our number two charity, Deworm the World, which is a non-recommended charity that also works on deworming and then J-PAL, which is a kind of a research organization similar to IPA that does randomized control trials. And this person was noting that J-PAL, when they talk about deworming, use only to SCI and now they want to deworm the

world instead. And does that affect our opinion of SCI? So the answer is no it does not. J-PAL, IPA, and Deworm the World are very, very tightly connected. We believe the connections there are personal. Deworm the World is essentially founded by IPA, which has got a huge overlap with J-PAL in terms of who the scholars are there.

1:05:57 HK: So I think they have every right to promote the organization that they basically founded, but I don't take it as evidence that that organization is better than SCI. And the bottom line is that, you know, we see a track record for SCI that we don't see for Deworm the World. We see an understanding of where the next dollar goes for SCI that we don't see with Deworm the World and that's why we recommend SCI, but our mind is always open. Deworm the World is pretty high on the list for organizations we'd like to learn more about and might recommend in the future, but where we stand right now we're much more confident in SCI.

1:06:31 EH: So we had one question on just about our general approach to metrics and the type of metrics that we're looking for. So I'll just read this question. It says "Are you working on encouraging aggregated value for money indicators? Such as, for instance, those used by the Robin Hood Foundation with their financial return on investment applied to their grand-key programs or Marie Stopes International with their standardized measure of couple years of protection? Are we looking at things perhaps in case of quality-adjusted life years in the case of developing country poverty reduction?" You know, very briefly, our take on aggregated metrics has always been that of

they don't seem to apply well to the specific charities that one wants to look at. We always find that when we review organizations like AMF and SCI, we have very different questions that we care most about for those two organizations and trying to fit them into the same framework and the same process. Even for two organizations like AMF and SCI, which in the world of charity, are incredibly similar in terms of what they're trying to do and what they're trying to accomplish, doesn't really work well.

1:07:51 EH: And so, the approach that we take to evaluation is one focused much more on asking the question that pertains specifically to the charity and its programs. The questions you need to ask to have confidence that the program is working, you know the questions you can see on our review pages for each of those organizations, and not worrying as much about trying to fit everything into a one size fits all measure. And when we've seen attempts to try to do that, we often just... We find them very difficult. And so, even when we attempt to do our cost-effectiveness estimates we struggle to... We don't... We often don't find that piece of information is ultimately the deciding factor because it's often other. We don't have the input, the data to input, that would allow us to reach very confident conclusions about that.

1:08:17 HK: Yeah, the thing in all that is, I think cost-effective estimation and metrics like that are helpful as a guide and as an organizing principle, and they're helpful when people publish estimates where they're spelling out all the reasoning that goes into their numbers. Then you have a great way of seeing, how they're thinking, and what you agree with, and what you don't. And then if you agree with everything they're thinking then maybe you can use the numbers. What we see a lot of, and what we think is really unhelpful and makes it even worse, is when people just publish the numbers. They don't say anything with how they reached the numbers. And to us, that's not helping anyone make any decisions because we know how unreliable these numbers are, and so it's basically, you have to decide if you believe these which are often used as evidence pieces or marketing pieces. I think there is no better example of that than our work on the World Health Organization estimate

earlier this year where this number was out there being quoted by everyone for five years saying deworming was one of the most cost effective interventions out there. Well, the number was off by 100x and no one was ever able to check it because the details weren't published.

1:09:43 EH: Alright. So, we have, we have one more question that we are going to address, so we'll do that and we'll sign off. So, if you've been holding back on sending a question in, now would be a good time to send it in. So, I'll read this question and then I think Holden will try to answer it, which is "Do you assess the management systems of enterprises in terms of their use of value, which highlights the value delivered? Meaning however a social enterprise decides to assess value, given their mission and perception in poverty reduction, to everyone in the enterprise, the way that profit is highlighted to everyone in a commercial enterprise?"

1:10:21 HK: I guess I don't. I would need clarification of exactly what's being asked there. So, if the person wants to email in again, we'd be happy to take it. Otherwise, we'd be happy to take that question off line or discuss it another time, but I think... I think I would need more clarification of what's being asked there.

1:10:47 EH: Okay. Okay. So, we are all out of questions. If we missed your question, don't hesitate to email us at info@givewell.org and we will, we will try to back to you. In particular, if you have any remaining questions about our top charities, our process, where to give, or anything that you don't find on our site. Our goal is for this call to help give some basic context for the organizations and answers questions, but we hope that all the details are on our website. And so, if there is anything you're wondering about that you're not finding, please don't hesitate to let us know because we want to make sure that that information is available to you. Okay. Well, with that we'll wrap up. So, thank you again to everyone for joining us, we really appreciated you taking the time and for submitting all the... All the really great questions. Don't hesitate to be in touch.