RETHINK PRIORITIES

Global Health and Development Department

Impact Update

AUGUST 2024

OUR WORK IN ACTION

1. The GHD Department completed two reports for a foundation that were privately shared with a high-net worth philanthropist. The foundation shared that this individual subsequently **redirected tens of millions of dollars in funding to a more impactful field.**

2. The GHD Department's report on lead **influenced an $8M grant** towards a cost-effective intervention.

3. The GHD department produced a report for GiveWell examining serial correlation in lives saved and rebound deaths. This report was cited in GiveWell's post, "Are our Top Charities saving the same lives each year?", where they discussed their concern that their programs may have less impact than they think due to "repetitive saving." **Through a shallow review of empirical evidence, including Rethink's research, GiveWell gained confidence** that they were only potentially overstating the total lives saved by their programs by 10%.

4. Traditionally, foundations funded projects based on preferences toward a particular region or type of intervention (i.e. local optimizers). In contrast, global optimizers allocate resources based on cost-effectiveness. Given the size of the global health and development field, redirecting allocations toward cost-effective projects could be highly impactful.

   CEO Marcus Davis recently presented RP's research on the value of local vs. global optimizers at a private event. A major foundation requested additional information, and shared that **Marcus' presentation sparked internal discussions about donor advising and their nine-figure grantmaking fund.**

Q1 AND Q2 RESEARCH

The GHD Department completed 10 reports, nine of which will be publicly available.

1. **Mosquito nets landscaping (GiveWell):** Presenting key actors and possible challenges for mosquito net programs, to identify potential grant recipients and future research.
2. **Iron fortification and supplementation in LMICs (GiveWell):** Examining the funding landscape, implementers, and challenges to achieving high coverage.
3. **Technical assistance learning agenda (GiveWell):** Detailing how other organizations organize their Monitoring & Evaluation processes and factors that lead to a TA program's success or failure, to inform GiveWell's own M&E efforts.
4. **Vaccines landscaping (GiveWell):** Identifying potential gaps for vaccine grantmaking, including an assessment of data quality, to inform strategic direction and further research.
5. **Impact of mosquito nets on fisheries (GiveWell):** Shallowly evaluating the available evidence regarding the potential harm of mosquito nets used for fishing.
6. **Impact ranking database: A feasibility study (Charity Navigator):** Evaluating the feasibility of developing an impact-ranking database for the over 230,000 charities listed on Charity Navigator's website.
7. **Malaria in pregnancy (Open Philanthropy):** Assessing the burden of malaria in pregnancy, and potential interventions.
8. **Impact 2 model review (GiveWell):** Reviewing a widely-used model for family planning impact calculations, to increase transparency and highlight underlying assumptions.
9. **Cost-effectiveness analysis (Lafiya Nigeria):** Conducting a CEA of Lafiya Nigeria's family planning intervention, as well as exploring considerations for scaling and potential model extensions.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

The GHD Department modeled the near-term cost-effectiveness of Lafiya Nigeria's intervention, in which they upskill trained female health workers to provide family planning counseling and distribute injectable contraceptives to women in remote parts of rural northern Nigeria. GHD researchers estimated that the cost-effectiveness of the intervention is $19 per unintended pregnancy averted at the beginning of 2024, falling to $5 per unintended pregnancy by the end of 2025 when approximately calibrating the model to the current and planned rate of intervention scaling.

"RP completed a cost-effectiveness analysis of our organization. We hope it becomes customary for charities to undergo an external evaluation of their impact and effectiveness, particularly as it relates to scalability. ***While we had put together our own CEA, RP's model was more thorough and comprehensive than ours, and accounted for far more variables than we had the time or expertise to take into account.***"

-Céline Kamsteeg.
Co-Executive Director,
Lafiya Nigeria



The GHD Department completed a feasibility study on creating an impact-ranking database that aims to score the over 230,000 charities that Charity Navigator publishes data on, based on their impactfulness. GHD researchers detailed uncertainties with an automated approach, as well other ways to incorporate impact and cost-effectiveness in charity ratings and guide donations towards more effective organizations, maximizing impact.

As part of J-PAL's King Climate Action Initiative, Rethink Priorities' Environmental Economist, Greer Gosnell, has partnered with a team of academic researchers to develop the technology for smart (wifi-connected) plugs that can convert any 'dumb' electronic or appliance into an interactive device controllable by users and third parties (with users' consent). The team is particularly focused on deploying this technology in India. By enabling 'demand-side management' of electricity, the technology can support the integration of intermittent renewable energy resources like wind and solar into the electricity grid, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and promoting sustainable energy development.

CLIENT DIVERSIFICATION

The GHD Department's revised strategy focuses on diversifying the types of clients they work with to include more traditional philanthropic foundations, national and international funding organizations, and individual donors. Moving funders from an overall lower cost-effectiveness to a still relatively low or middling level of cost-effectiveness can be highly competitive with, and, **in some cases,** more effective than working with funders who are already highly cost-effective.

Interested in partnering with the GHD Department? Reach out!

TEAM EXPANSION



JOHN FIRTH

In July 2024, the GHD Department welcomed **John Firth** as the Director of Global Health and Development. Before joining Rethink Priorities, John held academic positions at Oxford University and the University of Notre Dame, was a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Global Development, and lived in India for two years running randomized trials with J-PAL South Asia. He holds a PhD in Economics from MIT, and a BA in Philosophy from Notre Dame.



TOM VARGAS

In August 2024, **Tom Vargas** joined the GHD Department as a Senior Researcher. Tom is a political scientist by training with extensive experience in international development, education policy, and political economy. He earned his Master's in Public Policy, Development Economics, and International Development from William & Mary and his BSFS in International Politics from Georgetown University.

To learn more about the Global Health and Development Department's researchers, theory of change, consulting services, research process, and publications, please visit our newly updated GHD webpage.