

# Global Poverty FAQs

This list is based on the Giving Game FAQ. It contains general questions about effective charities working in global health and poverty, as well as specific questions about three GiveWell charities: GiveDirectly, the Against Malaria Foundation and the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative.

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## General Questions

### Why don't you address the root causes, not the symptoms?

It would be great to find out how to stop these problems entirely, and some charities are working on trying to change systems, such as changing policies in high and low income countries to reduce inequality. However, it is not easy to work out what the root causes of poverty are, and even if we did know for sure, they might not be easy to solve. Actions like pushing for political change could be really high impact, but it can be really hard to make a difference in that way, and sometimes there are unforeseen negative consequences. So, while it is important to consider how we can change systems, we must be pretty cautious about what we do.

It is also helpful to do things that are almost guaranteed to help. We know diseases such as malaria reduce the wealth of an area significantly, so if we are able to reduce malaria and other diseases this should help bring people out of poverty.

## Does charity and aid really work?

- A lot of charity work is probably ineffective, and there are many examples of aid and development having no real impact, or even causing harm. But, that's exactly why it's so important to find the best charities. And there are some things that minimise the negative consequences. Basic health care interventions like preventing common diseases is very unlikely to cause more harm than good. For example, vaccinations have saved hundreds of millions of lives. Even the people that are very negative about aid agree that health care is good for a community. Giving people money is also low risk because the people get to choose how they want to spend it.
- Though some aid may do little or no good, there's a convincing argument that the average dollar spent on aid has been well worth it. The lives saved by money spent on the eradication of smallpox work out at ~\$25 per life saved, using conservative estimates. So even if we assume that all other aid spending has been completely useless, we could still easily justify the total money spent on the grounds of smallpox eradication alone. If we assume an upper bound of \$4 trillion spent on aid, smallpox eradication alone would still give us a figure of around \$67,000 per life saved, approximately what the UK government will spend to give one of its citizens two years of healthy life through the National Health Service.
- And there are plenty of other examples of successes of aid. From 2000 to 2015 a lot of effort has gone into malaria reduction and 450 million cases of malaria were prevented, 6.2 million fewer people died of malaria over that time period as a result of these interventions. And since 1990, the percentage of children dying before they reach the age of 5 has more than halved—partly because of charity.
- [Source \(well targeted aid\)](#), [Source \(Smallpox\)](#), [Source \(Malaria\)](#), [Source \(Child Mortality\)](#)
- However, you don't have to donate to non-profits to try to have an impact. There are many other opportunities for having a big impact, including for-profit entrepreneurship, policy, politics, advocacy, and research.

## How are the people you're trying to help involved in the decision-making?

- The possibility that we don't actually address the needs of the people we are trying to help is real, and a risk we have to remain constantly vigilant about.
- Some people support the charity [GiveDirectly](#) because it gives cash to people in poverty, leaving it entirely up to them how they spend the money. This might empower people in poverty to a greater extent than choosing services that may ultimately not be desired by the local community.

- Other charities such as the [Against Malaria Foundation](#) offer resources (in their case bed-nets) that people can choose whether to take.

## Why don't you look at charities that are in <insert country>?

We care about people all over the world - people here in our country and people far away too. It turns out that you can help far more people with a donation if the money goes to the world's poorest people than if it goes to those in need in <insert country>. This is because the global poor have less money and healthcare than even the poorest here, and your dollar goes a lot further in a very poor area. So, if you share our ethic that everyone is equally worthy of help, and would rather help many people and not just one, it makes sense to help those in developing countries. In addition, most donations from people in wealthy countries, go to charities that work in those wealthy countries, leaving very little for the countries that are the worst off. Of course, you may not share this ethic, in which case it might make sense for you to find an effective charity locally.

## What are the best charities locally?

It is really hard to say. It is difficult to do the research to evaluate charities, and charity evaluators like GiveWell and The Life You Can Save just focus on charities that work in low income countries because they believe that all people are equally worthy of help, and a donation can go much further, and help more people if it goes to the very poorest people in the world, who live in developing countries. So, there isn't a lot of rigorous analysis done on local charities. But if want to donate locally you can try to do your own research to find effective charities. GiveWell has some [guidance on what to ask charities](#).

## Why not make micro-loans (e.g. Kiva)?

Microloans are when you give someone a small loan to start or expand a business. Recipients of microloans often have high interest rates and require borrowers to begin making repayments shortly after borrowing, which is not realistic for people who are starting or expanding a business. While microloans have improved the lives of some people, they have been harmful to others as they have gotten into debt and haven't been able to repay the loans. The evidence on the impact of cash transfers is stronger than that for micro-loans, and many effective altruists support the charity GiveDirectly, which gives people money that they don't have to pay back. [Source](#).

## What do you think about Charity X?

If you haven't heard of the charity

I don't know about that charity sorry. It isn't one of the ones that I've seen recommended by charity evaluators.

### Local charity

I don't know about that charity's cost-effectiveness. It isn't one of the ones that has been highly recommended by the charity evaluators. Effective altruism generally considers people equally worthy of help- people in this country, and people far away too. It turns out that you can help far more people with a donation if the money goes to the world's poorest people than if it goes to those in need in here. This is because the global poor have less money and healthcare than even the poorest here, and your dollar goes a lot further in a very poor area. So if you share our ethic that everyone is equally worthy of help, the charities most recommended by GiveWell will probably have more impact with your donation. Of course you may not share this ethic, in which case it might make sense for you to find an effective charity locally.

### Large International Charity

There are very few large charities like <insert mega charity. that the charity evaluators recommend. Partly because they are hard to evaluate. Most of them don't share exactly what they do with their money, nor do they conduct careful studies to work out what to do. Most of these mega charities do many different things - some of these things are probably really cost effective, but some things they do are not as effective. So, they aren't likely to be able to do as much good with your donation as a charity that puts all their money into highly cost effective interventions like bednets and deworming.

Note: Oxfam is [recommended by The Life You Can Save](#).

[Source](#)

## What about the charity's overhead?

Sometimes people judge a charity on the percentage of money going to administration and fundraising - this is called the overhead. But a small overhead doesn't tell you that the charity is doing a good job - in fact charities sometimes cut down on admin, monitoring and evaluation because their donors want to see a small overhead. But admin, monitoring and evaluation is often what is needed for a charity to improve and become more effective.

Having said that. Most charities recommended by GiveWell have quite low overheads. For example

GiveDirectly: [88% of the money you donate gets to the household](#)

Against Malaria Foundation: 100% of the money goes to buy nets - this is because they have donors that specifically fund the non-net expenses. However even if you include that money in the overhead is very low - [less than 1% goes into administration](#).

## Doesn't saving lives contribute to overpopulation?

Not in the long term. People living in extreme poverty have the highest number of children born per woman. But as communities are brought out of poverty, and the child mortality rate drops, the number of children born per woman drops dramatically. In fact, some researchers have argued that bringing people out of poverty is the very best way of curbing population growth.

More information from [Our World in Data](#), [Hans Rosling](#), [Bill Gates](#).

## Specific Charity FAQ

### GiveDirectly

(more info here: <https://www.givedirectly.org/faq>)

### About GiveDirectly

GiveDirectly gives very poor households in East Africa cash. Each household gets around 1000 US dollars — and that money has no strings attached, they can spend it however they want. That's a lot of money for people living on less than 1 US dollar per day. GiveDirectly uses careful studies to work out the impact of the money. They found that people do actually spend money on things they really need, like food, medicine or a metal roof to replace a leaky thatched roof. The money isn't wasted on alcohol or tobacco. Perhaps most importantly, the cash transfers improve life satisfaction. GiveDirectly is also very cost-effective—it improves people's lives far more per donation than most charities do, indicating, unsurprisingly, that people living in extreme poverty are well placed to know what they need.

## Does giving people money cause the prices to rise?

Give Directly has studied this, and hasn't found any inflationary effect so far. They have commissioned another study to look into this potential issue more carefully.

<https://www.givedirectly.org/research-at-give-directly>

## Does giving out the grants cause other people to get resentful?

GiveDirectly has a phone line where people can call if there are problems associated with the cash transfer. And yes, sometimes the people that don't get cash are resentful of their neighbours that do. 5% of recipients have noted tension in their community because of the grants. They have studied the effect of the grants on crime, and there was no noticeable increase in crime. GiveDirectly is now organising its transfers so if two neighbours in a similar financial situation they will both get grants.

## Does everyone take the money?

No, there are people who refuse. It varies a lot by area - some area people are suspicious. Which is understandable, if someone came up to you and offered you a thousand dollars you'd be pretty suspicious too.

## How do they decide to whom to give cash transfers?

They choose regions to work in using poverty data from national surveys and then send field staff door-to-door in those communities to collect data on poverty and enroll eligible households. These are households with low levels of assets, people with thatched roofs, and people who are homeless.

## Do you give money to men, women, or both?

They give money to both men and women. There was a study done on comparing transfers to men and women. They found that overall both genders used money responsibly. They let households decide on a case-by-case basis which adult to enroll. Their decisions are usually driven by convenience – for example, one parent may already have the official IDs needed to open a mobile money account. Slightly more than half of the recipients to date are women.

## Do recipients need to have a mobile phone to participate?

No. Households need at least a SIM card to participate, and they give SIM cards to households that do not already have one. They also give recipients the option of purchasing a phone, using some of their transfer money.

## Does GiveDirectly grants significantly stimulate the local economy?

Direct Cash Transfers probably have a positive effect on local economies overall (especially if there are a lot of recipients in the same community) but we don't yet know how significant that is. GiveWell mostly recommends GiveDirectly for the impact on the recipients' themselves, rather than their communities at large.

## Against Malaria Foundation

### About the Against Malaria Foundation

In 2018 over 200 million people fell ill due to malaria, and around half a million people died, mostly small children. So malaria is a huge problem, but it is also very inexpensive to treat. The Against Malaria Foundation distributes mosquito nets to put over people's sleeping areas so they don't get bitten by a mosquito and infected while they sleep. There have been numerous experimental studies showing that bednets reduce deaths due to malaria. Malaria rates have been dropping in the last 20 years [mostly because of bednet distribution](#), but there are still many at risk people that don't have access to a net. These nets cost less than 5 US dollars to make and distribute, so distributing nets is one of the lowest cost ways we know of reliably preventing deaths.

### Don't the nets get used for fishing or uses other than covering beds?

There have been some concerns raised about whether people use their nets for the purposes they were meant for. There have been some cases where people use their bed nets for fishing, which could mean insecticide gets into the waterways. However there is no evidence so far that this causes harm to the fish stocks. This potential negative has to be balanced with the overwhelmingly strong evidence that nets save lives. The Against Malaria Foundation does random checks on their recipients they found a 70% of the people who received a net are hung correctly in their houses. There is really strong evidence from randomised control trials that if you distribute the nets the malaria rates, and deaths, go down, so it's very clear that it is worth distributing them.

<https://blog.givewell.org/2015/02/05/putting-the-problem-of-bed-nets-used-for-fishing-in-perspective/>

<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2018/10/18/17984040/bednets-tools-fight-mosquitoes-malaria-myths-fishing>

<https://www.givingwhatwecan.org/post/2015/12/bednets-have-prevented-450-million-cases-of-malaria/>

Incidentally, it is also a myth that fishing using bed nets has been a cause of overfishing, This is almost certainly the result of big fishing trawlers, which can catch thousands of times more fish than any one person with a net.

People don't use bed nets because they are uncomfortable/people aren't concerned about malaria?

The net certainly would reduce the breeze, so it isn't all that comfy on a hot night. Certainly people in countries with malaria aren't as scared of the disease as you might expect. I guess it is the same with us and the 'flu - [several hundred thousand people die of the 'flu each year](#), and most of the time we aren't all that worried about it unless it is a particularly bad outbreak. However, the evidence shows people really do use the nets. The Against Malaria Foundation does random checks on their recipients they found a 70% of the people who received a net are hung correctly in their houses. There is really strong evidence from randomised control trials that if you distribute the nets, malaria rates (including deaths) go down, so it's very clear that it is worth distributing them.

<https://www.givingwhatwecan.org/post/2015/12/bednets-have-prevented-450-million-cases-of-malaria/>

Is the insecticide toxic to people?

The insecticide is toxic to insects like the mosquito but has very low levels of toxicity for mammals such as humans. We can never be sure that something is 100% safe but these mosquito nets are being used in areas where there's a very high chance of people getting malaria so it is better to use the net and accept the low potential risk from the insecticide.

[https://www.cdc.gov/malaria/malaria\\_worldwide/reduction/itn.html](https://www.cdc.gov/malaria/malaria_worldwide/reduction/itn.html)

Does giving out bed nets cause people not to value them?

Studies have shown that giving people bed nets, rather than selling them, does increase the number of nets being used and reduces malaria overall. There is some evidence that if you give somebody a bed net they are less likely to want to pay for their next net after the first one wears out because they might think someone will give them another net in the near future.

<https://blog.givewell.org/2012/05/30/giving-cash-versus-giving-bednets/>

Do the mosquitoes become resistant to the insecticide?

It does seem that the mosquitoes are developing a resistance to the insecticide and not dying quite as quickly as they did in the past, however the nets still provide a strong protective effect and Against Malaria Foundation is testing new insecticides.

<https://blog.givewell.org/2012/11/09/insecticide-resistance-and-malaria-control/>

<https://www.againstmalaria.com/NewsItem.aspx?newsitem=Update-on-actions-to-deal-with-insecticide-resistance-in-some-mosquitoes>

At least one type of net with a new insecticide - piperynol butoxide (PBO) - has recently (late 2017) been put into use, and early studies suggest these are greatly reducing the problem of resistance.

## Where are the nets made?

The nets are manufactured in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, China, and Tanzania. So mostly the nets are created far away from the people that are using them. AMF found that it is cheaper to use large manufacturing firms that can produce many nets than to have small factories in each area they service, so using the large firms means more people can be protected from malaria.

<https://www.againstmalaria.com/NewsItem.aspx?newsitem=Where-do-we-buy-our-nets-from>

Given that, AMF does like to buy nets locally whenever it seems cost-effective to do so (as in the case of Tanzania) and they are often looking for more opportunities to do so.

## Does handing out so many nets hurt local economies by preventing locals from selling them?

The reduction in malaria due to the distribution of bednets seems to more than make up for whatever economic harm this might do at a local level. Since far more people are using nets than there would be otherwise, not only are more illnesses and deaths prevented, but there is most likely an overall positive impact on local economies as well, since people are more able to work or go to school (not only because far fewer of them are getting sick, but fewer still have their hands tied looking after them).

## Can we eradicate malaria?

Though there is currently no cure, many countries have already eradicated malaria, including the USA, where malaria was common in the southern states. Nets help by reducing the number of mosquitoes flying around with the disease. Some scientists are developing a vaccination against malaria, and others are investigating how mosquitoes can be engineered so they can't carry the virus.

## How should the nets be disposed of?

This should be the sole responsibility of national malaria control and elimination programmes. They should only collect old/damaged nets if this is not going to leave a community uncovered, and only if this doesn't interfere with bandwidth re distributing new nets. It is also recommended that nets are not taken away unless there is a good plan for disposal (ie. burial in non-permeable soil or incineration in a properly closed-off space).

## Is having fewer mosquitoes around beneficial for other animals?

Yes. There are mosquito transmitted diseases that affect many different kinds of animals.

## Can mosquitoes transmit HIV?

Thankfully, no! This is for three reasons: mosquitoes don't transmit blood to the people they bite (only their saliva); HIV cannot replicate inside a mosquitoes gut (it gets completely broken down, in fact); HIV circulates in very low levels throughout human blood. Even if the first two points weren't factors, far more blood would have to be transferred from person to person than a mosquito ever takes out in order to create a new infection.

## Why does AMF fund nets and not malaria pills?

Both can be very effective ways to reduce the risk of infection. AMF concentrates on nets, and other charities, like Malaria Consortium provide pills to prevent people from contracting malaria during the season when mosquitos are the most common. One positive of nets is that they don't have side effects, which can be common with malaria pills, but pills protect people all day, whereas nets only protect people when they are in bed.

## Are nets just a temporary fix?

There is some evidence that they could have significant long term impact. They reduce the total number of mosquitoes carrying malaria, so the net doesn't just help the owner, the net helps reduce malaria in the whole community. Also reducing malaria rates in a country increases the wealth in the country as people are better able to work or study.

## Schistosomiasis Control Initiative

### What is the evidence that deworming helps in the short term?

Evidence for deworming is a pretty complicated. There have been short-term studies on the impact of deworming on health and education, but those studies are inconclusive. Part of the problem is that all kids get dewormed whether or not they have a large worm burden, so it might be that there are positive effects on some kids, but not others. There's one really good study of the long-term effects that show that kids that are dewormed go on to have a higher income as adults. But because it's only one study we should be a little suspicious about the result. To feel confident that deworming helps in the long term we would want to see several studies saying the same thing. <https://blog.givewell.org/2016/12/06/why-i-mostly-believe-in-worms/>

### Are there side-effects of the pills?

The pills don't have common side effects. There are some cases where people have reported negative side effects from taking the pill. The side effects can be painful - headaches, abdominal

pain, nausea, vomiting and fever. These are temporary, uncommon and believed to be outweighed by the positive effects of the pill.

Where do the pills come from?

From pharmaceutical companies. Most of them are donated, so that means most of the money that SCI provides pays for the distribution of the drugs.

How do people get the worms?

Through contact with contaminated sources of water (such as lakes and rivers). Any physical exposure can lead to infection (the schistosomes are small enough to pass through the pores of your skin. I know, gross).

How long can the worms last in your body if untreated?

The worms can live in your body for many years, and there are some cases of them living for as long as 40 years inside a human host-body.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4672382/#R6>

What do the pills contain?

A drug called praziquantel which is effective against many parasitic worms, especially schistosomiasis.

Any chance that worms become resistant to the pills?

There is no strong evidence of this happening, though there has been no deep investigation yet.

Do we have any idea how many cases of schistosomiasis have been prevented by deworming pills?

Unfortunately, we don't have good data on this. It seems that a little less than half of people at risk from schistosomiasis are currently receiving treatment. Not only does this mean that way more people could be dewormed if more donations were made, but SCI in particular has a lot of room for more funding.

More specifically, The World Health Organization estimates that back in 2016, there were 206.4 million people worldwide in need of preventative treatment, and 89 million reportedly received such treatment.

If people contract schistosomiasis from contaminated water sources, why don't we focus on cleaning up those water sources instead?

That would be amazing! Unfortunately, it doesn't seem possible yet so avoiding such water sources and taking the pills is the best that people at risk can do for now. There is some

research being done on how to disrupt the worm's life cycle. The worms all have a time where they are living inside water snails, so killing the snail kills the worms. One technique is poisoning the snails, but unfortunately the poison kills other useful animals like fish too. Scientists are also working on introducing prawns, crayfish and predatory fish to eat the snails that are infected with the worms. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4153826/>