IDinsight

GiveWell Advisory – Approaches to Monitoring Program Reach

13 June 2022

Note: *No party (GiveWell or IDinsight) has yet committed to conducting the following project. These thoughts are preliminary, and input is highly welcome.*

Introduction

GiveWell is a charity nonprofit dedicated to finding the most cost-effective ways to improve lives globally. They identify evidence-backed, underfunded "top charities" by assessing them according to four criteria: 1) evidence of effectiveness, 2) cost-effectiveness, 3) transparency, and 4) room for more funding. GiveWell re-evaluates top charities annually according to updated information that top charities provide.

To demonstrate continued cost-effectiveness and room for more funding, top charities have typically conducted coverage surveys. These exercises generate estimates of the percentage of the target population surveyed that the charity has reached. While coverage estimates give an indication of how much of the target population remains unreached (room for more funding), GiveWell ultimately prioritizes knowing the number of people the charity has served for its cost-effectiveness calculations. Converting coverage estimates to the number of people served requires accurate estimates of the target population ("the denominator"), which can be notoriously elusive. Further, GiveWell has discounted program estimates of the number of people reached based on count data because they are not able to gauge how accurate these estimates are.

Emerging technologies may present new opportunities to generate more accurate and more verifiable estimates of program reach. These innovations could span from satellite imagery to estimate populations to digital tools to more accurately and objectively record counts. Several top charities are currently exploring innovative ways to capture count data more accurately. Based on initial conversations between GiveWell and IDinsight, this note outlines an initial engagement to better understand and assess opportunities to improve estimating the denominator or the target population to ultimately lead to better estimates of program reach.

Proposed Activities

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The goal of this engagement would be to identify potential digital tools and approaches to estimating the number of target beneficiaries of GiveWell's top charities.

To achieve this goal, IDinsight proposes to conduct the following activities:

Desk Review

IDinsight would conduct a desk review including internet research and expert interviews with internal and external stakeholders. The aim of this review would be to: 1) identify organizations that are developing and/or using innovative approaches to estimate populations (e.g., Grid3); and 2) understand what these approaches are, their risks and benefits, and the requirements for their use (e.g. network connectivity, devices for all intervention distributors, etc).

Interviews with Top Charities

IDinsight would also conduct interviews with a subset of GiveWell's top charities to understand how they currently estimate the number of target beneficiaries, the opportunities and limitations of this approach, and the potential for alternative approaches.

The output from these activities would include:

- **A summary of various approaches** that could be used to more accurately estimate target populations. For each of these approaches, we will share the benefits and limitations of these approaches, the system and technology requirements, as well as outstanding questions.
- **Recommendations for further piloting or verification.** This might include verification in the field or piloting. IDinsight can explore with GiveWell which of these recommendations it would make sense to pursue in a follow-on engagement.