

A conversation with SCI, March 17, 2016

Participants

- Najwa Al Abdallah – Finance and Operations Senior Manager, Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI)
- Wendy Harrison – Deputy Director, SCI
- Alan Fenwick – Director, SCI
- Ruth Tipples – Departmental Administrator, Imperial College London
- Natalie Crispin – Senior Research Analyst, GiveWell
- Andrew Martin – Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Najwa Al Abdallah, Wendy Harrison, Alan Fenwick, and Ruth Tipples.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Ms. Al Abdallah, Dr Harrison, and Professor Fenwick of SCI and Ms. Tipples of Imperial College London as part of the 2016 charity review process. Conversation topics included SCI's funding and budgeting processes, and an independent assessment of SCI's financial systems.

Funding

2015-2016 financial year

In order to meet its unrestricted funding gaps last year, SCI secured funds from the END Fund for its programs in Yemen, Ethiopia, and Sudan, and from the UBS Optimus Foundation for its Madagascar program.

2016-2017 financial year

SCI expects to be able to cover all of its country program expenditures this year. If gaps emerge, SCI would reduce other expenditures rather than country program expenditures. Depending on the results of its income analysis, SCI might be able to initiate a program in Nigeria this year.

Additional funding

Taking into account the availability of financial resources, human resources, and drugs, if it had additional funding, SCI would consider initiating the Nigeria program and expanding its programs in countries where it already works.

Research funding

Currently, SCI does not plan to allocate any unrestricted funding to research expenditures. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is the primary funder of SCI's research projects. Research expenditures are sometimes excluded from the initial version of SCI's budget, but appear in the final version. While this could be interpreted as overspending, SCI does this to help differentiate between central and country expenditures.

Budgeting processes

Balance statements

It is not possible for SCI to produce balance statements because it is not a financially independent organization.

Human resources expenditures

Before signing new staff contracts or contract extensions, SCI must prove it has the necessary funding for those positions.

Process for allocating program manager workloads

Using a set of weighted criteria, SCI ranks countries based on the approximate level of effort required to implement programs. With this information, SCI is able to identify appropriate country pairings and allocate reasonably sized workloads among program managers.

Budget amendments

Figures and treatment numbers in the initial versions of SCI's annual budgets are based on an optimal situation. They are refined as new information becomes available regarding:

- Drug availability in country and in the market; for example, there can be frequent shortages of praziquantel.
- Epidemiological mapping results.
- Opportunities for cost-sharing with other funders.
- The program delivery capacity of the country's Ministry of Health (MoH).
- The success of SCI's fundraising efforts.

Country contract amendments

SCI has always signed formal contracts with countries, but many were first signed five or six years ago and amended annually to ensure that they accurately reflect the current budget and plans. Other reasons for amendments include deadline extensions or additional donor requirements.

Independent assessment of SCI's financial systems

Imperial College is finalizing an agreement with KPMG, an auditing firm, to conduct an assessment of SCI's financial systems. A primary objective is to increase SCI's capacity to share high-quality financial information with existing and potential donors.

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