

CHAPTER 18

Charity rankers: Who is defining effectiveness?

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Let's say your family decides that this holiday, instead of giving each other gifts, you will donate that money to charity. Where should you give? Let's say you are setting up a new foundation. When deciding to support individuals and organizations to address the world's biggest and most complex problems, where does one begin?

With millions of non-governmental organizations working around the world, the process of knowing where to start can be overwhelming. There is a growing list of organizations evaluating registered charities for the purposes of pointing interested donors in the right direction, but even these services and sites can be confusing or misleading.

So many charity rankers

There are over one hundred organizations, groups, and websites seeking to influence donor giving (Mitchell, 2014). Charity ranking organizations influence billions of dollars of donations annually.

A range of ranking systems exist. For example:

- **Charity Navigator** assesses organizations based on their financial health, accountability, and transparency;
- **GiveWell's** grading system adds project types, cost-effectiveness and determines to what extent an organization can benefit from additional funding;
- **Charity Watch** has a grading system;
- **GuideStar** provides financial data about charities and self-reported progress data;
- **Giving What We Can** assesses interventions based on the impact they have on quality of life;
- **Philanthropedia** has an expert-review process;
- **The Life You Can Save** provides a calculator to determine cost effectiveness;
- **GreatNonProfits** has a peer review system; and

Notes

1. Additional details on these methodologies are available within their respective reports and websites: Charity Watch www.charitywatch.org/charitywatch-criteria-methodology; Giving What We Can www.givingwhatwecan.org/get-involved/what-we-can-achieve/; GuideStar www.guidestar.org/rxg/about-us/index.aspx; Philanthropedia http://www.myphilanthropedia.org/how_we_rank; The Life You Can Save <http://www.thelifeyoucansave.org/Impact-Calculator>; GreatNonProfits www.aboutgreatnonprofits.org/; Wise Giving Alliance www.give.org/for-donors/the-care-we-put-into-our-reports/ [All accessed 26 November 2015].
2. Using these methods, organizations like Against Malaria Foundation and Schistosomiasis Control Initiative have been selected as top charities by multiple charity rankers.
3. For a more detailed analysis of the subject, see: Cochrane, L. and Thornton, A. (2015) 'Charity rankings: 'Delivering development or de-humanizing aid?' *Journal of International Development* 28: 57–73.
4. Names and identifying details, and village name, have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.
5. Mwangi means 'wanderer' in Swahili. Name changed by interviewee to protect identity.
6. Parts of this essay were originally published in *Barefoot Guide 4: Exploring the Real Work of Social Change*, by The Barefoot Collective, 2015, Community Development Resource Association: Cape Town, South Africa. Used with permission.

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