

Celebrities Could Change the World 1000 Times Faster

Here's a plea to the rich and famous: when you support charities, focus on developing world health. Just across the ocean, billions of people are suffering from immense poverty, illness, and death. You—we—can prevent much of it. Please don't limit yourself to "giving back" to your hometown or alma mater, and don't pick causes only because they stir your passions.

Bigshot Giving versus Big-time Needs

The [largest charitable donations of 2013](#) were mainly given to American universities. Fmr. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, for example, gave \$350 million for scholarships at Johns Hopkins. Other billionaires funded sports at Michigan and dorms at Yale. Only about [3% of U.S. foundation money](#) currently goes to international causes. [Celebrities](#), likewise, have usually supported first-world endeavors—consider [Mel Gibson's](#) \$6 million church and [Taylor Swift's](#) \$4 million offering to the Country Music Hall of Fame. Make no mistake: these are well-intentioned, generous gifts that do many good things. First-world problems are real and important.

But third-world poverty is incomparably extreme. [1.4 billion](#) people live under \$1.25 per day, and [6.6 million](#) children died in 2012 of easily preventable causes. In choosing a cause, we must remember that everybody's needs matter equally. Any charitable investment involves trading off the opportunity to use the same money elsewhere. Mr. Bloomberg, for example, might have sent the Hopkins donation to universities in East Africa. There, a [full scholarship](#) would cost no more than US\$1500 apiece—about three-quarters of [median household income](#) in the region. That's assuming a focus on higher education.

Some of the world's best giving opportunities are at the nexus of *primary* education and health in the poor world. So attests [GiveWell](#), a charity evaluator founded in 2007 by two former hedge fund analysts, which recommends charities that demonstrate high impact, use funds transparently, and have room for more funding. According to their website, charitable dollars can do [hundreds of times more good overseas](#) than in the US, and most of the currently-best-known giving opportunities are in [global health](#), with two deworming charities topping the list. At about \$1 per treatment, [SCI](#) and [Deworm the World](#) alleviate worm infestations, helping children grow and learn normally and improving employee productivity. Altogether, GiveWell's top charities are about [\\$53 million short](#) on funding through 2015. That's nothing a few multi-millionaires can't fix.

Moral Priorities

When someone will suffer greatly or die but we could easily help them, it would seem wrong not to help (as philosopher [Peter Singer](#) has famously [argued](#)). Spatial proximity seems pretty irrelevant: it should make no difference whether the suffering person is next to me, or just across a pond or ocean, if I can help just as easily and certainly in both cases. But now recall that 6.6 million children die per year (18,000 per day) due to easily preventable causes. This fact indicts almost all of us in the developed world who don't donate substantially to those causes. When we realize that any \$5K donation could have saved at least [one young child](#) from dying of malaria, giving that money instead to a museum or sports facility looks like a moral blunder.

Relieving widespread suffering is as simple as supporting GiveWell's top charities. I can think of no more heroic use of your money and influence.

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