

## A Conversation with John Fawcett on September 3, 2013

### Participants:

- John Fawcett – Global Legislative Director, RESULTS
- Alexander Berger – Senior Research Analyst, GiveWell
- Sean Conley – Research Analyst, GiveWell

**Note:** This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by John Fawcett.

### Summary

GiveWell spoke with John Fawcett as part of its shallow investigation of advocacy around US foreign aid. Mr. Fawcett discussed the work of RESULTS, a foreign aid advocacy and policy organization, including how issues are chosen, how campaigns are run, past successes, obstacles to success, and plans for the future. He also shared thoughts on the current situation in US policy and foreign aid and on other organizations in the field.

### RESULTS

RESULTS is a grassroots anti-poverty organization. It focuses strictly on advocacy and policy; it does not deliver any services. It does not receive any government money. RESULTS' model is to identify and coordinate American citizens who are interested in global poverty and give them the skills and training necessary to reach out to Congress and the local media and promote a certain policy agenda. RESULTS tends to work with a small number of motivated and engaged individuals who intend to work over time to establish a relationship with their local congressional office or editorial board. The issues RESULTS works on within global poverty are global health, global education, microfinance, and economic empowerment.

As legislative director, Mr. Fawcett oversees RESULTS' policy and advocacy campaigns on global poverty issues. He is involved on the legislative side in Washington, but RESULTS' political influence comes from the strength of its grassroots base, so his work includes coordinating with the grassroots members.

### *Choosing issues*

When choosing issues, RESULTS puts an emphasis on global health, education, and microfinance and related issues, and is oriented towards interventions which will have a disproportionate impact on the poorest – not just the bottom quintile, but the bottom quintile of the bottom quintile. Staff look for areas where no one is doing advocacy, or where RESULTS could complement existing advocacy. Any potential issue area has to be "campaignable," i.e. interesting and attractive to grassroots campaigners, with the possibility of an impactful policy change (as a result, RESULTS does not engage the private sector as an advocacy target because there is no possibility for public policy change). RESULTS prioritizes issues based on the current policy environment. For example, near the

end of this year there will be a replenishment conference for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which will be an opportunity to maintain or, hopefully, increase US support. Preparing for that opportunity and advocating for as much support as possible for the Global Fund will be a top RESULTS priority for the remainder of the year.

RESULTS does a combination of pushing issues that are already on the table, such as funding the Global Fund, and working to get new issues onto the agenda. For example, RESULTS advocated for the Obama administration to allocate a small amount this year to the Global Partnership for Education and succeeded. The Global Partnership for Education is the only multilateral financing organization dedicated to basic education. Previously the Global Partnership for Education had not been on the administration's development agenda at all.

### *Campaigns*

An example of the work that RESULTS does is the campaign it carried out around the Global Fund replenishment conference in 2010, which was similar to work it will conduct for the 2013 Global Fund conference and for other campaigns in the future. The first step is clearly defining what is being asked for: how much money over how many years, and which years. The target should be a stretch goal but realistically deliverable. In 2010, RESULTS used a combination of grassroots media and congressional connections to mobilize pressure and support for the US to make a multiyear commitment to the Global Fund. This involved mobilizing grassroots members to pressure members of Congress to sign a letter to the president asking for a commitment. The letter was signed by about one hundred members of Congress. Further support came from grassroots members mobilizing media in their communities, by writing letters to the editor or op-eds to be placed in local papers or by meeting with the editorial board of a paper and asking them to write an editorial in support of the position. The work might involve sending, for example, an HIV/AIDS advocate from a country deeply affected by HIV/AIDS to accompany the grassroots members to media meetings in order to talk about their own personal experiences.

RESULTS does a small amount of grass-tops lobbying, although that is not its area of comparative advantage. RESULTS staff work with decision makers, such as staff at the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, the Office of Management and Budget, the State Department, and the White House.

There are instances where RESULTS works "defensively" to prevent a policy change rather than "offensively" to encourage a change, normally around the budget and appropriations process, although those instances tend to involve both offensive and defensive work. In rare cases the work might involve attempting to stop the passage of an amendment on the floor that would cut a program's funding, but normally the work is done behind the scenes to prevent that amendment from ever reaching the floor. Proactively pushing to get more funds in an area is often the best way to prevent the funding from being cut.

RESULTS works with a number of members of Congress who are concerned about the issues RESULTS works on. Actions include working with congresspeople on appropriations legislation or on advocating a position to the President. It is important to have dedicated individuals championing a policy. The victories normally don't come from convincing 51% of Congress to vote for a bill, but rather from a handful of passionate and engaged individuals working behind the scenes, with enough supporters in the background to give the dedicated individuals room to maneuver.

Some global development issues, like family planning, are politicized, but most are not, so often getting traction requires only a few members of Congress to support an idea. When the subcommittee of the appropriations committee that allocates foreign aid funding is making decisions, a strong opinion from one or a few members can have a large influence. Members of Congress advocating a position to the President can also have a significant effect.

#### *Coordination with other organizations*

RESULTS is normally aware of the other groups in the space, as the number of groups advocating on any of the issues RESULTS works on is fairly small. Because the groups know each other, coordinating their work is normally done informally.

#### *Obstacles to RESULTS' success*

The issues RESULTS works on don't typically encounter political resistance but instead struggle due to a lack of attention. People (ordinary citizens as well as decision makers in Congress) don't know about the problems, don't know that achievable, cost-effective solutions exist, or don't know that there is action that they can take. That lack of awareness is the biggest barrier to RESULTS' success.

Overcoming that obstacle requires a mix of education and inspiration with compelling messages and messengers. For example, on the issue of funding for the Global Fund, there is a lack of awareness that AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria could be completely controlled within our lifetimes if sufficient resources become available. Pushing that message and having people talking about those issues from a variety of perspectives is important. RESULTS believes in the power of grassroots advocacy. Informed citizens, in combination with grass-tops participants who can get in touch with decision makers directly, can have a big impact.

Other challenges for RESULTS include the US fiscal environment, political gridlock, and implementation challenges once money is distributed. An emerging challenge for the field of development broadly is the growing demand for transparency and evidence of impact. Demonstrating how each dollar spent helps someone will be the new standard, and not all USAID programs are at that point. Lots of work will be required by the government and by outside groups to demand evidence of impact and communicate that evidence to constituents and other interested groups.

### *Potential for expansion*

RESULTS seeks to expand its work to cover more geographies and more members of Congress. It currently has a presence in around 40 states. In small states, citizens can have a disproportionately large impact because they are more likely to have contact with their representative and senators. It is also important to cover the districts of the significant decision makers in Congress. RESULTS is currently not well-represented in all small states, and so it believes that expanding in the optimal areas is more important than simply increasing its number of grassroots members.

### *Successes*

RESULTS has had a number of successes in recent years, including the reauthorization of PEPFAR in 2008. The PEPFAR reauthorization was a legislative process rather than a presidential budget request. RESULTS worked on that bill, especially on the tuberculosis section, which has proved crucial to PEPFAR. Due to continuing budget resolutions, there is unlikely to be another vote on PEPFAR funding in the near future, making the 2008 bill very important. The 2010 pledge to the Global Fund was the first pledge of its kind to any multilateral institution of that type, and so was a significant accomplishment that set a precedent for that type of giving. The pledge increased the US contribution to the Global Fund and that money has been protected despite challenging budget cycles. The US pledge in the following year to the GAVI Alliance was another notable success. The pledge was of a smaller magnitude than the pledge to the Global Fund, but was a significant increase. The administration has also protected that increase.

### **The current political environment**

Partly as a function of political gridlock, there has been a lot of focus on policy change that the president can accomplish without Congress. In recent years, the contentious budget debates have resulted in the use of continuing resolutions, which extend the previous year's funding levels. Thus, foreign aid bills have not come to the floor for a vote for some time and are unlikely to be voted on soon, which has elevated the importance of working directly with the executive branch. Members of appropriations committees can still be important, however, as their views are taken into account by the executive

The Obama administration has been supportive of the types of policies that RESULTS favors, so for the past few years RESULTS' work has been more about supporting US leadership than about pushing back against resistance to or neglect of global aid. The administration has significant power over how money is spent. For example, the three-year pledge to the Global Fund in 2010 was not legislated by Congress but was instead placed in the president's budget request, an approach that initially upset some people in Congress, although Congress then appropriated the pledge. A similar approach was taken to make a three-year commitment in 2011 to GAVI Alliance. The administration has a lot of flexibility and RESULTS is trying to work within that flexibility.

### **US Agency for International Development (USAID)**

Congress micromanages USAID to a certain extent, especially relative to development agencies in other countries, such as the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). This approach does have some advantages. Bureaucracies can be slow to change, so legislative prodding from Congress can increase the agency's effectiveness, and the involvement of Congress allows citizens and outside groups to have input into USAID's decisions. There aren't viable alternative proposals to this system, and suggestions such as creating a cabinet-level department for international aid are interesting but unlikely to make progress soon.

Another difference between USAID and DFID is that in the UK when money is pledged the process is more or less finished and the money is sent, but in the US the budget process means the money gets pledged, put in the president's budget, and then is voted on by Congress.

There are some interesting possible reforms within USAID. For instance, Administrator Shah's push on procurement reform – getting more money spent locally, using local capacity – is something RESULTS supports. The food aid reform proposal was rejected by Congress, and that rejection shows that there are interests on the other side of reform proposals. RESULTS was supportive of the food aid reform but not as directly engaged as other groups. There was organized opposition to that proposal, largely from the bigger contractors who have an organization that acts as a trade group.

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