



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE HELEN KELLER INTERNATIONAL CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION

Perkins School for the Blind [1902](within Winter, B., 2016)

INTRODUCTION

HKI – charity specialising in the promotion health and nutrition

Background and History of HKI

Research into HKI's Vitamin A Supplementation (VAS) programs

Improving future research

CHARITY REGULATION



Copeland, D. (2012)

- Charity numbers and influence are on the increase – there is risk of mismanagement and need for transparency in their policies.
- Charity regulators have been developed, in order to improve public trust in charitable organizations (Cordery et al, 2017)
- The decline in public confidence in regard to charities has arisen due to wrongdoing including mismanagement of funds, theft and misconduct (Hofmann and McSwain, 2013)

HISTORY



At just 19 months old, in 1882, Helen Keller contracted an illness which left her deaf and blind, but did not affect her mental faculties (Gilsdorf, 2018).



Despite these difficulties she learned sign language at Perkins School for the Blind (Keller, 1905) and graduated from university and became an internationally celebrated lecturer, author and advocate for improvement of the care of the disabled (Gilsdorf, 2018).



Keller founded the Helen Keller International (HKI) organization in 1915 and later contributed to the foundation of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) which seeks to protect the rights of every person in the US (Cloutier, 2015)

BACKGROUND



- HKI is an international non profit charitable organization seeking to improve the lives of vulnerable people by tackling causes of blindness, malnutrition and the contraction of tropical diseases (Zhang, 2018).
- Their continued work into battling trachoma contributed to the progress of the World Health Organization (WHO)'s strategy for the environmental improvement and surgical and antibiotic progression (WHO, 2009)
- In 2009 HKI was awarded the AGFUND International Prize for its Sustainable Control of Onchocerciasis (also known as river blindness) in Africa



GIVEWELL'S REPORT ON ONE OF ITS 'TOP CHARITIES'

- GiveWell published a report on HKI's technical assistance and funding of vitamin A supplementation (VAS) programs in sub-Saharan Africa
- Vitamin A deficiency has been known to cause anaemia and dry eyes which can lead to blindness and fatality of infections (WHO, 2009).
- GiveWell estimate the cost of a vitamin A supplement at £1.35 which puts HKI at one of the top charities in cost-effectiveness - however they have only limited information on the contributions of other organizations implementing VAS programs and only rough estimates of overhead costs

STRENGTHS NOTED IN GIVEWELL'S REPORT

There is strong evidence on the positive impact and cost-effectiveness of VAS (Ching et al, 2000)

HKI has significant experience providing VAS in several countries (HKI.org)

HKI has been transparent in providing detailed information about its programs and expenditures

GiveWell maintains that HKI could constructively use more funding than it predicts it will receive to maximise its VAS activities, due to the programs cost effectiveness

LIMITATIONS RAISED BY GIVEWELL

- GiveWell state they are sceptical about the reported Vitamin A deficiency rates among children of preschool age in areas supported by HKI's VAS programs, as nowadays children may be consuming more vitamin A through nutrition improvement programs
- GiveWell also only reviewed data on national average child mortality. This does not provide information on the impact of HKI's work regionally or locally
- It is unknown whether VAS impacts all infectious disease-related mortalities or just a subset of specific infectious diseases



GiveWell.org (2007)

LIMITATIONS TO GIVEWELL'S ANALYSIS

- GiveWell's report of HKI itself has limitations; the cost-benefit analysis used uses 2015 as a baseline for child mortality rates, which may minimize the positive impact of VAS – the lower mortality rates in 2015 may be due in part to the VAS program
- The findings are based on budget proposals for upcoming programs rather than actual expenditure reports which cannot be entirely reliable
- The use of serum retinol distribution is recommended among pre-school children to assess the need for VAS – however, VAS may only have a temporary influence on levels of serum retinol and retinol-binding protein concentrations (used to evaluate program effectiveness) (Tanumihardjo et al. 2016)

CONVERSATION WITH HKI, (MARTIN, 2017)



HKI has reported a decline in funding and the only funding received for VAS programs in 2018 to not be influenced by GiveWell was a grant from Nutrition International for £201,797 which is not expected to be renewed the following year



GiveWell predict a 100% likelihood that HKI will be granted £3,000,000 from another foundation to cover VAS programs in Côte d'Ivoire and Niger. This will only cover the program for the next 3 years

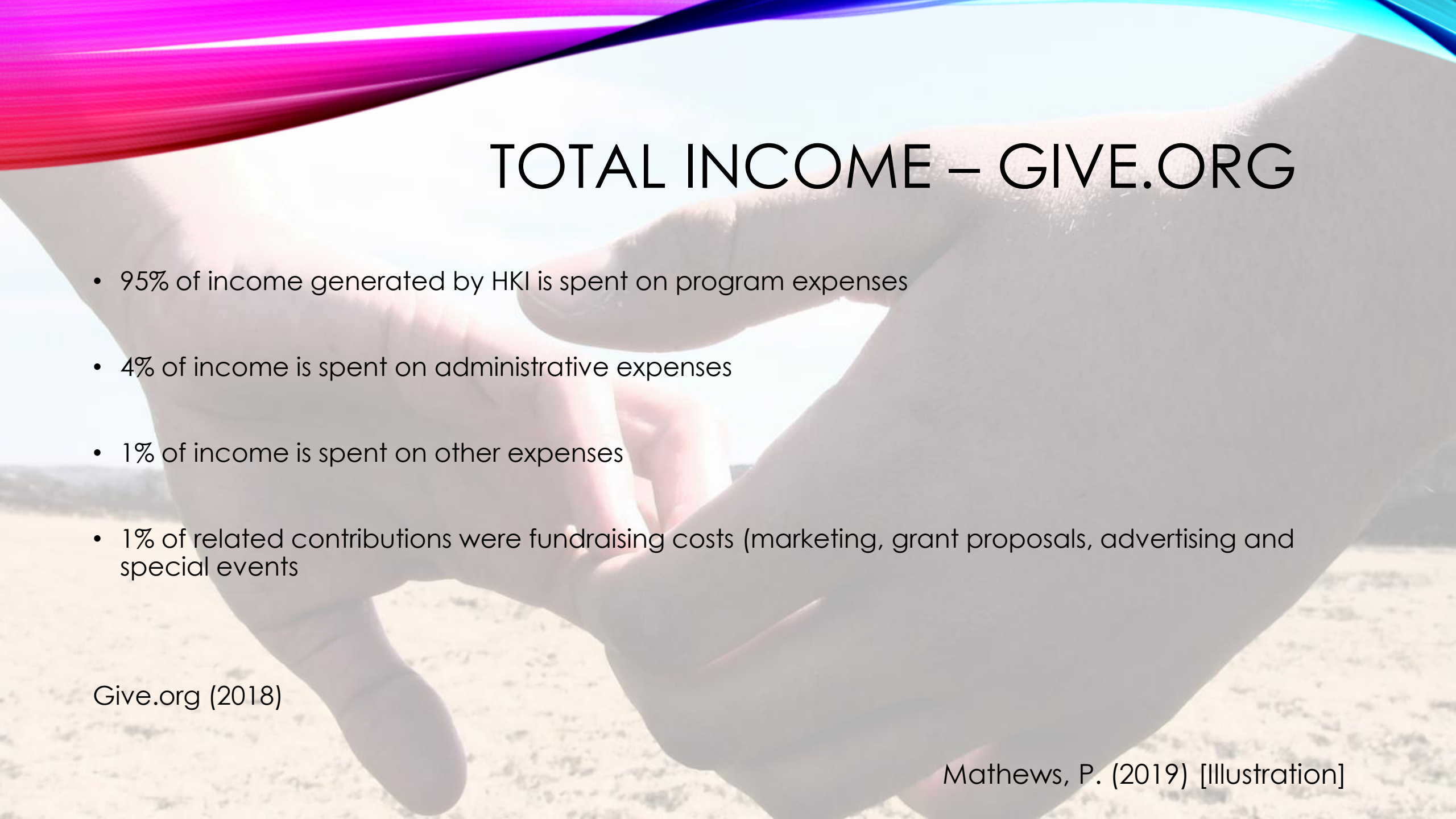


'Donor fatigue' and competition with other child nutrition priorities may be to blame for declining interest in the support of VAS



GIVE.ORG'S 20 STANDARDS FOR CHARITY ACCOUNTABILITY

- The governing board has the authority on charitable organizations, and issue ratings for each standard: met, not met, or unable to verify
- The standards include regulations on governance, measuring effectiveness, finances and accuracy of informational materials
- HKI met all 20 standards in 2018 and reported the total program expenses for the year at \$211,027,319



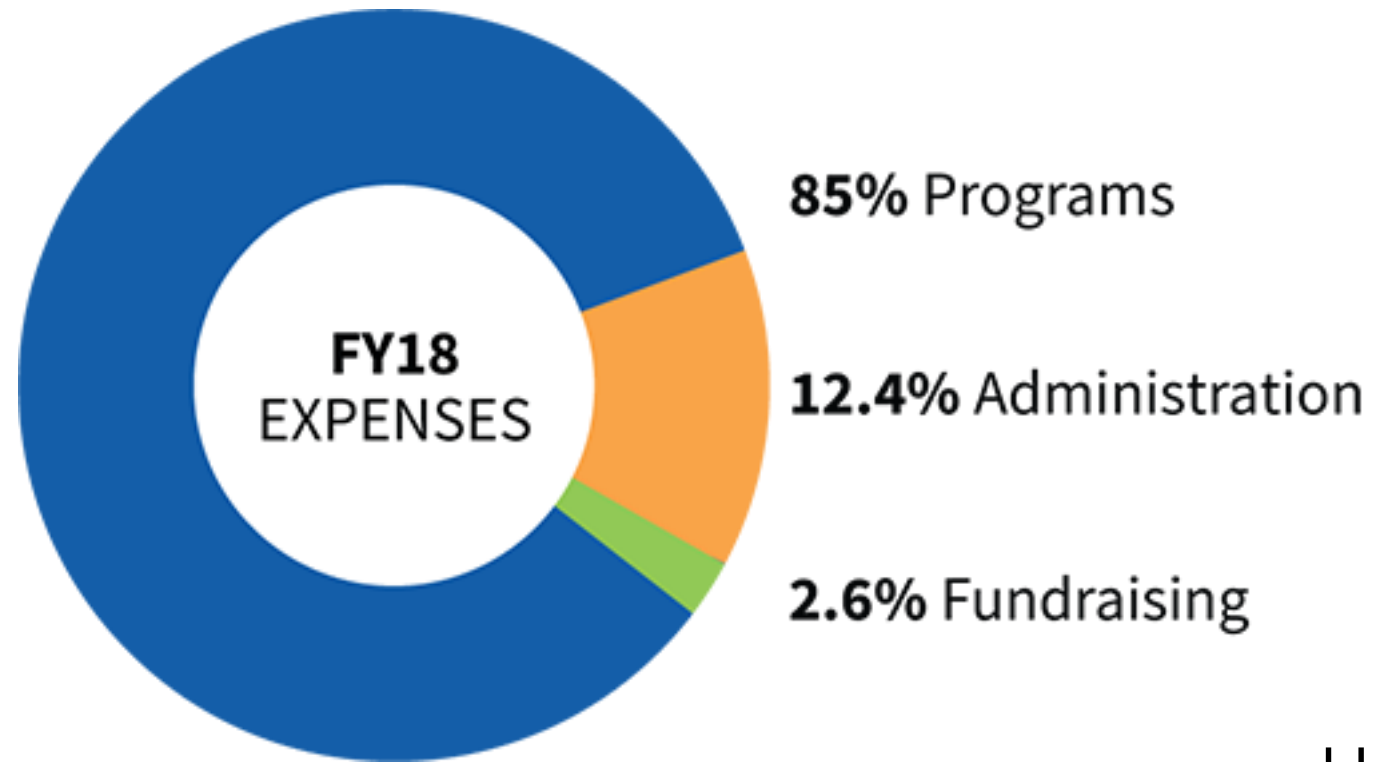
TOTAL INCOME – GIVE.ORG

- 95% of income generated by HKI is spent on program expenses
- 4% of income is spent on administrative expenses
- 1% of income is spent on other expenses
- 1% of related contributions were fundraising costs (marketing, grant proposals, advertising and special events)

Give.org (2018)

Mathews, P. (2019) [Illustration]

TOTAL INCOME – HKI.ORG



HKI.org (2018)



SUCSESSES

- To carry out programs that improve the sight of the vulnerable develop sustainable solutions, HKI reports that it works alongside local communities, the private sector and international governments
- In 2017 HKI functioned in 12 countries distributing vitamin A supplements and deworming tablets to children aged 6 months to 5 years old.
- HKI also screened and provided treatment to over 53,000 in Bangladesh and Indonesia for diabetic retinopathy and performed 35,000 cataract surgeries in Myanmar
- 15,400 free prescription spectacles to disadvantaged young people in the US

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- Olney et al (2013) conducted a process evaluation of HKI's homestead food production (HFP) program in Cambodia to determine whether it was running as expected – in terms of design, delivery and execution – and identify ways in which it could be improved, in terms of impact
 - This was investigated via focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries of the program and assessments of delivery and execution of the scheme components
 - The aim of HKI's program was to improve the health and nutrition of children and their mothers, specifically, to increase their consumption of vitamin A and iron



ADVANTAGES OF THE HFP PROGRAM

- Several different stakeholders were involved in the research planning, which provided a far-reaching view of the intended workings of the program and where these intentions were not being achieved fully
- Village Health Volunteers (VHVs) were supported by HKI and Womens' Service Organisation (WOSO) to conduct trainings to beneficiaries – an approach which appeared to work well
- Homestead food production schemes typically produce consistent and significant improvements in the intake of micronutrient rich foods, enhanced health and an increase in household income and knowledge regarding health



POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Create links with government or other programs to increase access to water
- Increase VHVs' motivation and provide them with more training to ensure their confidence in training beneficiaries
- Provide additional trainings for agriculture and follow up to cover new topics
- Produce marketing to reinforce the importance of high quality food provision to children and their mothers
- Explore other ways in which the program could link with the health sector, including health and nutrition advice advocated by the Ministry of Health

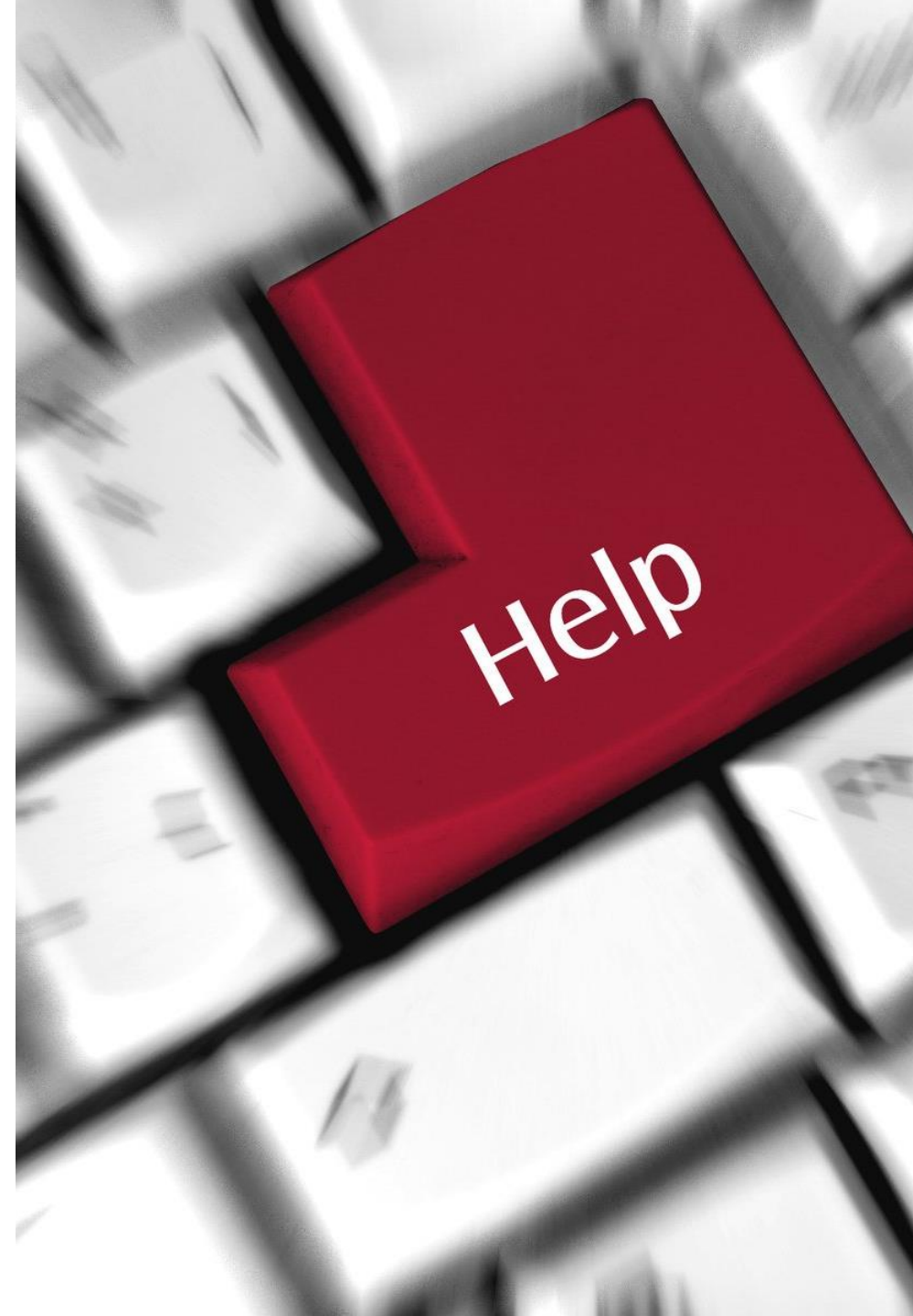
Spahn (2009)

OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES

- Managing the donors' unrealistic expectations of fast results. A network of partners allow for quicker roll out of programs over a greater population involving more resources however this can add complexity and competition over resources and slow the visible results
- Challenging the misconception that once results are visible, the work is completed. For example, just because food has been successfully grown does not mean there will be a demand for it. Targeted marketing should be used to create this demand

(Spahn, 2009)

Ugalde, M. (2019) [Illustration]



CONCLUSION



HKI has met Give.org's 20 Standards for Charity Accountability



Influenced WHO's strategy for surgical, antibiotic and environmental improvement



Strong evidence supporting it as one of the top charities in terms of cost-effectiveness



Provides transparent information about its programs

CONCLUSION

Confounding variables: There is insufficient evidence to suggest that higher levels of vitamin A among preschool age children is directly influenced by HKI

Limited data on local and regional child mortality – research is not representative

The 2017 expense breakdown on HKI's website differs from the 2018 expense breakdown provided by GiveWell with no explanation given

Limitations to the analysis of the Givewell report itself – outcome from impact of VAS potentially minimized, findings based on budget reports rather than expenditure reports

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