

DEERFIELD

MAGAZINE

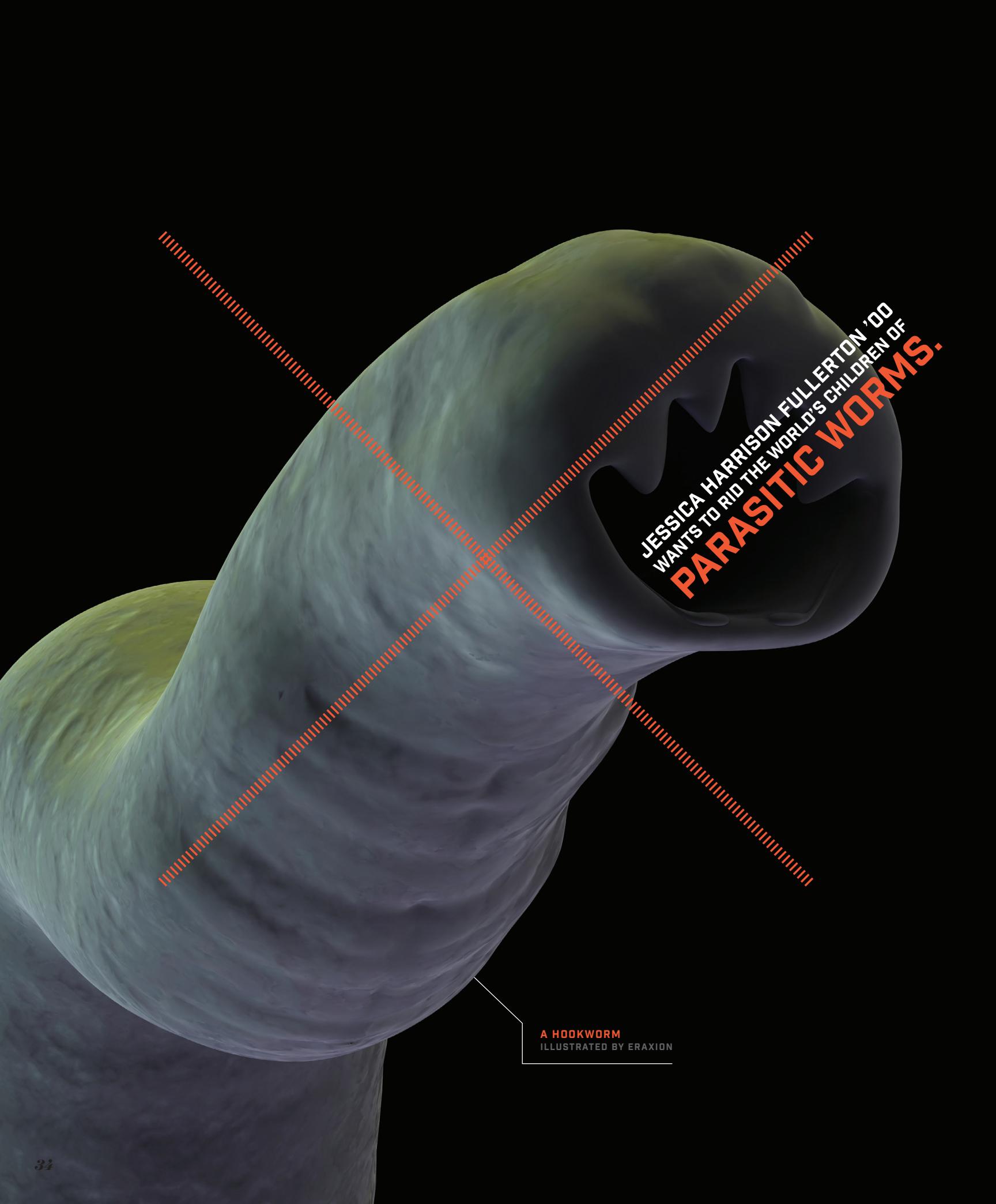


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DEERFIELD MAGAZINE REPRINT
“Scaling What Works,”



JESSICA HARRISON FULLERTON '00
WANTS TO RID THE WORLD'S CHILDREN OF
PARASITIC WORMS.

A HOOKWORM
ILLUSTRATED BY ERAXION

SCALING WHAT WORKS

BY NELL LAKE

Jessica Harrison Fullerton '00 wants to rid the world's children of parasitic worms. It's not, she knows, the most "sexy" of goals. Nor are worms the most dramatic of global problems: Think *terrible diseases in the developing world*, and you're much more likely to conjure Ebola, AIDS, cholera.

Yet parasitic worms are an enormous public-health problem. They impair people's lives in pervasive and enduring ways. Worldwide, over 870 million children are in need of treatment for debilitating parasites, but less than 280 million have been treated, according to a recent World Health Organization report. Worms deprive children of nutrients, can prevent kids from going to school, and can compromise their learning and brain development.

So while the issue tends not to receive as much attention or funding as some other tropical diseases, eliminating worms as a public-health problem, Ms. Fullerton says, could dramatically improve children's well-being worldwide.

Ms. Fullerton is associate director of the Deworm the World Initiative, a program of Evidence Action, a nonprofit organization working in Southeast Asia and East and Southern Africa. Evidence Action focuses on taking interventions that have proven effective in the developing world and expanding those strategies on a much larger scale. Ms. Fullerton's Deworm the World program is helping governments use

school systems to treat worms nationwide in Kenya and India. There is also a program developing in Vietnam.

"There's no reason why kids should suffer, and their education, health, and livelihoods be impaired by this disease," Ms. Fullerton says. Three major pharmaceutical companies provide deworming drugs for millions of children at no cost. Distribution of those treatments is effective and inexpensive—ranging from ten cents to about 50 cents per child, per year, depending on the country. In Kenya last year, with Deworm the World's technical assistance, the national government treated 6.4 million kids—over 80 percent of at-risk school-aged children. In India, the government's program treated an estimated 140 million children earlier this year. The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab at MIT, a leading research and advocacy organization, lists deworming as a "best buy" in both education and health interventions, and calls it "an education policy priority."

Even so, Ms. Fullerton says, "the global community is only treating about 35 percent of the at-risk school-aged kids worldwide." So with government programs established in Kenya, India, and one under way in Vietnam, she asked, "Where could we go next and have the most impact?"

Because Ethiopia has a large population of at-risk kids, Ms. Fullerton set her sights there.

THE HIDDEN DANGERS OF PLAY: In Ethiopia, and all over the developing world, kids play outside. Because of poor sanitation, lack of infrastructure, and open defecation, they get infected with parasitic worms through contaminated soil or water. Mass deworming treats all children, regardless of their level of infection, because worms have a negative impact on children who may not even know they are infected. In the long-term, improved sanitation and infrastructure is the solution—as was the case in the American South that was endemic with parasitic worms for much of the 19th century until significant improvements in sanitation. But in the meantime, programs like Deworm the World that help implement deworming in schools are helping kids live healthier and more productive lives even without those larger, more expensive and longer-term changes.

With low enough incidence and prevalence, worms cease to be a public-health problem. In this sense, deworming is like a vaccination program, with parallels to the disappearance of smallpox and polio in the US. The difference is that vaccines are preventative, while deworming is curative, for a time. But by continually reducing the prevalence of worms in children and their environment, there may come a day when the problems these organisms cause will be wiped off the list of public-health challenges that poor children face.

It's the sort of problem and potentially happy outcome that Ms. Fullerton has long been attracted to. "From a very young age," she says, "I've been drawn to books and classes and people who are interested in making the world a better place, in some way, shape, or form." Her approach: to bring sharp business savvy to difficult social puzzles. Ultimately, she says, "I'm just a big nerd—I like to solve problems."

MODERN TIMES: Deerfield helped Ms. Fullerton to develop a keen "interest in the world outside of the US and what I had previously known." She credits much of this expansion of her adolescent curiosity and concern to a history course called Modern Times, which she took her senior year. Teacher Tom Heise designed the course in the mid-1990s for seniors who'd already taken US History. (Modern Times is now taught by history teacher Joe Lyons.) The two-term course, Mr. Heise says, "alerted students to the kinds of issues they were likely to encounter as they headed out into the world; it gave them a sense for where those issues came from." This meant exploring the fundamental "confrontation and argument" among three primary political ideologies in the 20th century: liberalism, Marxism, and fascist totalitarianism—and the dynamics these gave rise to.

"An animating idea," Mr. Heise says, "was to have students be able to pick up a copy of the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* or whatever else, and understand where those headlines came from." The course also continually encouraged students "to think about moral problems, about how one sorts through those, and about our obligations to one another."

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This sort of moral reflection came up in many topics of study; Ms. Fullerton remembers that learning about the horrors in Rwanda particularly shaped her interest in having a positive impact on others' lives.

THE BUSINESS OF THE SOCIAL SECTOR: After Deerfield, Ms. Fullerton attended Middlebury College, studying geography, political science, and Spanish. She spent a semester in Chile learning about economic development and globalization. After Middlebury, she says, "I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, but I knew that I wanted to build a robust skill set, so that I could eventually apply it to solving problems to improve people's lives."

She worked first for Kaiser Associates, a consulting firm providing advice to Fortune 500 companies "on all kinds of problems, from launching a new product, to defending market share, to mergers and acquisitions." She enjoyed "working in teams, thinking strategically, doing quantitative analysis—as well as qualitative interview work." But she also wanted to feel she was contributing positively to society and people's lives. So after two years with Kaiser, she joined Dalberg Global Development Advisers, which, she says, takes "rigorous, strategic, analytical consulting practices and principles from private sector firms and applies them to clients in international development."

MAKING CENTS OF THE NUMBERS

LOCATION / NO. TREATED

10¢
/PER CHILD/PER YEAR

RAJASTHAN STATE, INDIA / 10,842,705

Most Recently Completed Deworming Round:

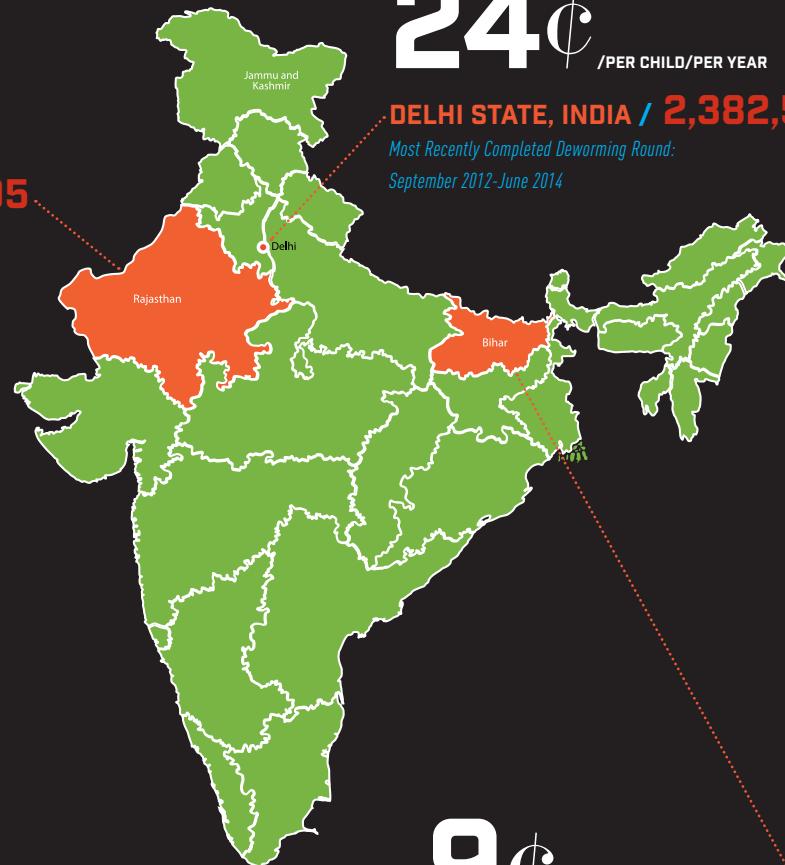
July 2013-August 2014

24¢
/PER CHILD/PER YEAR

DELHI STATE, INDIA / 2,382,517

Most Recently Completed Deworming Round:

September 2012-June 2014



9¢
/PER CHILD/PER YEAR

BIHAR STATE, INDIA / 16,225,546

The largest school-based deworming program

in the world to date. Most Recent Deworming Round:

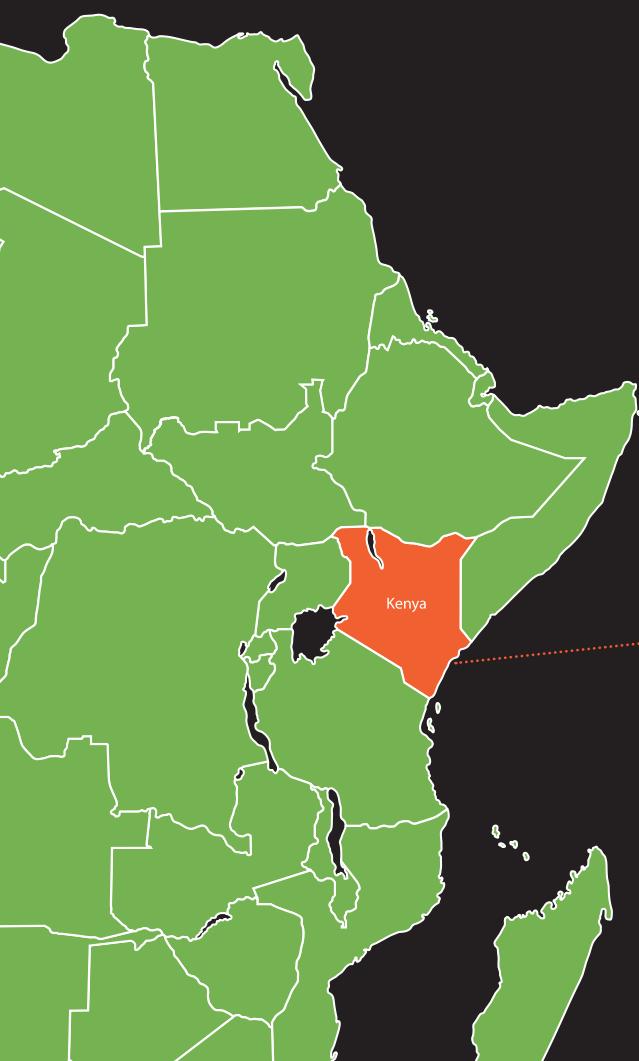
August 2013-July 2014

56¢
/PER CHILD/PER YEAR

KENYA / 6,405,462

Most Recently Completed Deworming Round:

July 2013-August 2014





Stephanie Skinner

Ms. Fullerton considered such “nerdy” questions as: “How do you scale this program from 300 sites predominantly in South Africa, to thousands of sites across Africa? What countries do you go into, and how do you think about the model, and should there be partnership with the government or other nonprofits?”

She loved the work. Clients included the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Human Rights Watch, and the African Development Bank. But her favorite project was with a small nonprofit called Mothers2Mothers in South Africa. The organization works with HIV-positive mothers to train HIV-positive pregnant women to prevent transmission of the virus to their fetuses. Women can achieve this in part through taking antiretroviral drugs on a strict schedule.

In South Africa, Ms. Fullerton worked with another Dalberg staff member to develop strategies for bringing the program to many more women. Ms. Fullerton considered such “nerdy” questions as: “How do you scale this program from 300 sites predominantly in South Africa, to thousands of sites across Africa? What countries do you go into, and how do you think about the model, and should there be partnership with the government or other nonprofits?” She and Dalberg recommended several possible ways to expand. Today the program operates in eight additional countries, and has reached more than 1.2 million people. And Ms. Fullerton learned a lot, she says, about extending the reach of high-impact programs.

She went on to get her MBA from Columbia and, in a dual-degree program offered by the two schools, her MPA at Harvard’s Kennedy School. She graduated in the spring of 2012. Next she worked for the Bridgespan Group, a consulting firm, and joined the Deworm the World Initiative in the fall of 2013.

People with MBAs, like Ms. Fullerton, use words like impact and strategy and cost-effectiveness and scalable and skill-set and returns on investment. People with MBAs (like Ms. Fullerton) who want to do good use these words to talk about solving social problems. “I see a lot of people who work in nonprofits who don’t think strategically and who don’t think about cost-effectiveness. I think there’s a lot of waste in aid and nonprofits because people aren’t taking a harder look at numbers, and thinking about returns on investment.” Still, she’s quick to add, a business approach is “not sufficient.” Were nonprofits suddenly flooded with businesspeople and bankers, “it wouldn’t make nonprofits better,” she says. “I think there’s an important kind of humility and interpersonal communication style that is needed in development, that you don’t get from going to business school.” She

hopes to “operate in a middle ground, between the hard-nosed business person only interested in the bottom line, and a wide-eyed dreamer who just wants to have a positive impact on the world. My interest is in asking, ‘How do you get the best outcomes possible by using the best tools that are available?’ In many cases those tools, I think, we can derive from companies and business organizations.”

SCALING UP: “We’ve learned a lot, and the best way we can have impact is by sharing what we’ve learned with other countries, so that they can replicate our best practices and avoid the mistakes we’ve made,” Ms. Fullerton says. Last September, she flew to Ethiopia to investigate whether Evidence Action could support a deworming program there. Within a few months, she forged a partnership with Dr. Mike French from the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative and the Federal Ministry of Health, who set their sights on launching a national school-based deworming program.

“I didn’t know anyone, and I sort of knocked on the door at the Ministry of Health and asked if I could be helpful,” she says. Since then, she’s been traveling often to Addis Ababa, meeting with members of the Ministry of Health and the nonprofit Schistosomiasis Control Initiative. Together they are working to develop an “efficient distribution system,” Ms. Fullerton says, for deworming tens of millions of children. The work in Ethiopia has also allowed Deworm the World’s Kenya staff to travel to Addis Ababa to share their insights and lessons learned working on the national deworming program in that country.

Evidence Action’s Deworm the World Initiative works with governments around the world to use schools and teachers for national deworming programs. Ms. Fullerton is working with the Ministry of Health to develop a training program in which staff at the national level train workers at regional levels, who train others at local levels, who train teachers, in a “cascade” of training. One benefit of this approach is that it is scalable—the program can apply lessons learned in other contexts and create a broad, national program, using the pre-existing school infrastructure.

The most interesting and challenging problems, Ms. Fullerton believes, are those that require her to motivate people from different cultures and backgrounds, who “need to feel a sense of ownership and accountability for the work that I catalyze.”

“The hardest thing about my work is dealing with different types of people. It’s not just building the financial model. It’s building a massive financial model, and helping a government person feel like they’re comfortable with it and it’s theirs and they can use it going forward. I like that. My favorite thing (and greatest challenge) about my work is how multi-dimensional it is; it’s about doing really rigorous analysis and connecting with people. My favorite moments are when I’m sitting next to a person from the Ministry of Health and feeling like they have a new tool or strategy for something that was blocking their progress before.”

Ms. Fullerton recalls long meetings with an administrator with the Ministry of Health, Birhan Mengistu: “We talked through everything”—from how many days it would take for trainers to travel to rural regions, to the amount and cost of fuel for trucks that deliver treatments. It was labor-intensive, detail driven work.

As they worked, Ms. Fullerton and Mr. Mengistu periodically took breaks for Ethiopian coffee—“rich, dark coffee that looks more like mud.” During one such break, she asked Mr. Mengistu how he was feeling about the budget. She acknowledged that the work was laborious. Yet Mr. Mengistu seemed thrilled. He smiled and said, “Oh I love it. It’s wonderful,” Ms. Fullerton recalls. “Going forward, he’ll be able to use this model to forecast other neglected tropical disease programs”

—and consider the many details that go into creating an accurate budget.

Ms. Fullerton’s emerging Ethiopian program is built on previous successes: Deworm the World’s assistance to the governments of Kenya and India enables them to treat close to 80 percent of their at-risk, school-aged children. Ms. Fullerton is aiming for similar

success in Ethiopia. This April the Ethiopian program launched, treating more than 3 million children in targeted areas. In October, the program will expand and begin treating more than 12 million children every year. She expects that by 2020 Ethiopia will be able to treat worms in 80 percent of its school-aged children. By working with governments, helping them build skills, designing cost-effective strategies and making them scalable, Ms. Fullerton hopes that “worms will no longer be a public health problem, that all children will have access to the treatments that they deserve, and grow into healthy, educated adults.” //

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