

Dear Supporter,

The first thing I must do in this annual letter to you, our wonderful Kitchen Table supporters, is apologise because the gap between this and my last letter has been more than a year. My excuse is that I had allowed myself to be persuaded that the almighty internet makes so-called “snail mail” unnecessary. That is obviously true in most respects, but I like to think writing a letter establishes a more personal connection and for me, as the founder of the charity, that is important.

For those who might be relatively new to the KTCT perhaps I might explain briefly why I set it up some twenty years ago. I had spent many years of my life as a BBC foreign correspondent working in some of the most deprived countries in the world – especially sub-Saharan Africa. I saw for myself the devastating effects that real poverty can have – above all on children and their mothers trying desperately to give them a decent life. Another was a degree of disillusionment with many existing charities. I recognised three pressing needs.

- The most obvious, of course, is three square meals a day – or at least a nourishing breakfast and supper – for the children especially.
- The second is basic health care for both mother and child.
- The third is education – for girls as well as boys.

Teaching children to read and write really does transform their lives. That’s why we have built or renovated more than 600 schools or classrooms over the years. It is a tragedy that so many children are forced in their early teens to leave the villages where they were born to seek a new future in the nearest city. Instead they too often become the victims of ruthless criminals who force them into crime or prostitution or die tragically early deaths in the gutter.

A basic education gives them the chance of a new life.



At Kitchen Table we get regular feedback from schools and villages and the message is invariably the same: You have given us hope.



A decent water supply is something else that transforms lives. Without it the village women or their daughters have to trudge miles every day to collect water from rivers that may themselves be polluted. We’ve enabled more than a million people to enjoy the basic necessity of turning on a tap and watching clean water come out.

Then there are the children who have been born disabled and their mothers who have had no professional medical help during their pregnancies or giving birth. We have helped build and equip twelve health centres in the last ten years, trained many hundreds of midwives and financed some wonderful projects in countries like Malawi where the workshops make wheelchairs for children disabled at birth.



The workshops also provide jobs and training for the local men and enable the mothers of the disabled children to work in the fields knowing that their children can go to school rather than have them strapped to their backs or leave them lying in their huts staring at the ceiling.



We also help the many who rely on subsistence farming to feed their children and enjoy a modest income by supporting training and providing basic tools, seeds and pesticides to subsistence farmers.

I believe passionately that it is possible to sum up the purpose of our small charity in one word. That word – and I make no apology for having used it already in this letter – is hope.

But I am a realist.

Over the decades I have served on the boards of international charities like Save the Children and seen organisations such as Oxfam operating in the field. Too often I have been left feeling frustrated. Too often unnecessary bureaucracy gets in the way. Sometimes – tragically in the case of Oxfam – bad people have abused their status to prey on the very desperate people they are meant to be protecting from harm. And too often, it seems to me, “big charity” becomes “big business”.

It surely cannot be right for someone running a charity to earn as much as someone running a large, profitable commercial organisation. And do they really need to pay so-called consultants vast fees to tell them what their own common sense dictates?

Of course it’s true that many do a vitally important job with the minimum of resources and the world needs organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross. But I believe it also needs tiny organisations such as our own.

I first had the idea for Kitchen Table when my father died. My mother had died many years earlier. She’d never fully recovered from the death of my little sister. Dad had worked into his eighties in spite of the fact that he had been blind for much of his childhood and never fully regained his sight. He and my mother – despite their poor health and poverty – made sure we did our homework every night and got into grammar schools. I left school at fifteen – university wasn’t really an option for poor kids like me in those days - but I managed to get a job on a tiny local paper and that was the start I needed. I had hope.

I wanted to donate my father’s modest legacy to a charity that he and my mother would have approved of. But I struggled to find one that did not spend a disproportionate amount of its income from donations on administration and so-called “PR”. Hence the name Kitchen Table. We have no swanky offices. In fact, we have no offices at all. My kitchen table serves the purpose perfectly well. We sit around it every so often to make whatever decisions are necessary.

By “we” I mean my fellow trustees and me. The only “benefit” they receive is a bowl of soup cooked by my own fair hand, which they pretend manfully to enjoy! Nobody is paid a penny – except the LCVS, the splendid organisation based in Liverpool which is itself a charity and handles our finances to comply with the Charity Commission’s exacting standards. We pay them a very small fee in return for their accountancy work.

The success of Kitchen Table on one level is due entirely to my voluntary colleagues. Above all to Brian Donaldson, who has his own admirable charity in Madagascar where he served as British Ambassador for several years. He spends an enormous amount of time vetting the stream of applications for a grant. Some of them are worthy, some less so. Brian is ruthless in weeding out the less deserving.

But of course the people who have made Kitchen Table the effective charity that I believe it has become are you, our supporters. It goes without saying that without you we could not have survived, let alone succeeded in doing what we exist to do.

And that is bringing hope where there was none.

Please accept my thanks for your support.

Yours sincerely

**John Humphrys**

