

“We need to DO MORE”

Patricia Parker talks to Jenny Fraser about her Sudan children's charity Kids for Kids.



Patricia in Darfur in 2008.

Tall began 25 years ago when Patricia Parker visited Sudan.

She was so inspired by the people she met that she launched a charity to help families of Darfur facing starvation.

This spring, as Kids for Kids celebrates its milestone anniversary, founder and former CEO Patricia looks back on the charity's accomplishments.

Patricia travelled to Sudan in 2001 to visit her son Alastair who was working as a Foreign Office diplomat.

“I was dreading it,” Patricia recalls. “I couldn't speak Arabic, it was blisteringly hot, and I am very fair.”

The capital Khartoum was basic and dirty but the place spoke to Patricia.

She planned simply to return home and tell people what she had seen.

“I had no intention of starting a charity.”

Patricia and Alastair journeyed to Darfur, a desolate area.

“It's as far from Khartoum as London is from Rome.”

“In the scrub desert, we

saw a little figure,” Patricia says.

This tiny nine-year-old boy, who Patricia discovered was called Ibrahim, was trekking for seven hours to fetch water.

“We were travelling with the water engineer of a leading children's charity,” she explains.

“He claimed, ‘No-one walks seven hours to reach a pump. Maybe two or three.’”

Patricia asked to meet Ibrahim's mother.

“She had three goats, whose milk was keeping her children alive. Ibrahim was fetching water for the goats.”

Patricia also spoke to the village girls, who were terrified of childbirth.

“Female genital mutilation was running at one hundred per cent, and mothers were



Kids for Kids helps children and families facing starvation in Sudan.



The poorest families are loaned five goats.

sewn up again after labour.”

With hospitals basic and miles away, Patricia knew she had to do something.

“I had discovered the lack of water, the importance of goats.

“Then I saw they had no veterinary help, and something must be done about childbirth.

“It was clear this village wasn't the only one.

“I knew this must be an international charity with a big reach, to help the people as much as possible.”

Back in Khartoum, Patricia and Alastair held a lunch for several influential women

on International Women's Day.

Knowing she had this chance to make an impact, Patricia pondered a name.

“As I sat at my laptop it came to me: goats for children and, of course, children helping children.” Kids for Kids was born.

Patricia wanted to ensure the Kids for Kids projects would exist and thrive without her presence, and those the charity aided would be educated to help themselves.

“It was much, much more than providing goats and water. That wouldn't have transformed people's lives long term.”

Kids for Kids villages are a perfect example.

Individual villages apply to be adopted by the charity.



Smiling faces in one of Kids for Kids' adopted villages.

To date, the charity has 110 villages on its roster.

The application process is rigorous.

“The awful question we ask is, ‘How many children died last year, and from what?’

“Then you understand what they are facing.”

Once the village is adopted, the poorest families are loaned five nanny goats for two years.

The families and children are taught to look after the goats, which they can't sell until the loan ends.

“Not only do the children immediately have milk, but the mother is able to sell milk and yogurt to the village.”

Due to the provision of a shared billy goat, each family should own



Under the fierce Darfur sun, families seek shelter in a tree's shade.

22-32 goats at the end of the loan period.

At this point, they pass on five to another family, and sell some.

One of Patricia's favourite moments is asking the mother how she will spend her money raised from the goat sale.

“When she says, ‘I'm buying my husband a donkey cart’, I love it.

“That's akin to the wife buying her husband a shop. That really is empowering.”

Adopted villages can apply for a kindergarten, health centre or veterinary unit.

“The village promises to maintain the building.”

Kids for Kids builds the structure, including trees, latrines, and an enclosing wall to keep the sand away.

“We are thorough, so that when we are no longer involved, it can be self-sustainable.”

Providing trees is vital.

So far, they have planted 53,000 drought-resistant trees.

“As soon as Darfur got a mobile network, I provided our village leaders and

midwives with mobiles and they send me receipts.

“I'll get a thumb print when the beneficiaries have received their goats.”

Keeping this audit trail is important to Patricia.

“If someone came to me and said: the money you sent to this village went on arms, I could say, ‘No, it didn't, and here's the proof.

“If you go and see Mrs Saeed, she will show you the mosquito net.”

“The donations we are given come from people's pensions or are raised from their own efforts.

Everything we spend must create a maximum benefit.”

Sudan has been gripped by violence since 2023 and Kids for Kids is providing food, blankets to sleep on, and mosquito nets.

“Our priority is to get the children healthy and give them a better future.”

Kids for Kids villages continue to be an important focus.

“People have moved to our villages because they have healthcare, handpumps, vet care. They are stronger.”

What's next?

“They need computers, proper training. I want to introduce trauma counselling.

“I dread to think how they will get over the fear and violence they've suffered.

“All these projects are only a sticking plaster if we can't do something about climate change.

“Darfur is at the forefront of global warming.”

In 2021, Patricia was

awarded an OBE for her work.

The charity has recently appointed a new CEO.

“I'm going to run the projects and be chairman, but I'm thrilled we've appointed Andy Caudell as our CEO. He's already making an impact.”

And the little boy, Ibrahim?

Patricia is delighted to report his two eldest children attend a Kids for Kids kindergarten.

As for Patricia?

“I'm always looking for the next thing. More people are in need, particularly now.

We need to do more.”

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Since April 2023, when tension erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces and paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces, Sudan has been gripped by violence.

Over 15 million people have been displaced. Famines, civilian killings and sexual violence are rife. Hospitals and health systems are non-existent, and aid agencies struggle to operate.

Kids for Kids helps the children of Darfur who are facing starvation.

“Each of us can make a difference. No child is too young to raise money for a goat,” Patricia says.

“Host a coffee morning. Talk to your church, your book group. Spreading the word makes a massive difference.”

Kids for Kids doesn't advertise or have large corporate donors.

“We are a people's charity. We aren't supported by big organisations. We are supported by individuals.”

• Find out www.kidsforkids.org.uk.



Mosquito nets save the families' lives.



With a donkey's help, a girl fetches water.