



# The charity founder

Volunteering can have far-reaching impact. For **Simon Maddrell** it completely changed the direction of his life, culminating in setting up his own charity

## A life-changing moment

I was an 18-year-old Venture Scout and increasingly aware of poverty in the developing world. An article in *Scouting* about an expedition called Harambee 83 in Kenya really caught my attention. Within 22 months, 14 of us were packing our bags in preparation to build sand dams and water tanks to collect water from domestic roofs for Harambee 85.

## Leading an expedition

During the planning stages I was introduced to Joshua, a Kenyan agriculturist who had pioneered a method of conserving water in drought-afflicted areas. His model was to terrace land to retain water in the fields during the rainy season, with the surplus held in sand dams.

Fundraising and planning took two years. Together with Joshua, I aimed to raise £14,500 and build a dam, six barrages and 30 water tanks – we actually raised £32,500 and built three dams, six barrages and 70 water tanks. The difference it made to the community was stark – water shortage was no longer a problem, even though large swathes of Africa were suffering from drought.

## The road to charity

I'd initially planned to study medicine but, after Kenya, changed to international development. I went back to Kenya regularly, and did a socio-economic study of the area as part of my degree dissertation.

Having tried unsuccessfully to get a job in an international development charity, I began a commercial career. But it wasn't what I was passionate about, so when I was made redundant I used my redundancy money to help fund a project to add tree-planting to the work Joshua had started.

It proved successful, and I set up Excellent Development. It's been seven years of hard but incredibly rewarding work that resulted in Joshua and I winning both Environment Charity and Overall Winner in the Charity Awards 2008.

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We provide funding for community projects in Kenya. The people we help don't get anything for free. If a community wants to build a dam, they collect the sand and stones necessary – and then spend two weeks building it. We provide craftsmen to help but they do the work: that way, it's their dam. In the last seven years, communities we work with have dug 1,000km of

terracing, built 200 dams and planted over half a million trees.

## My vision for Scouting

Scouting provides a wonderful opportunity for young people to learn more about the environment and to get actively involved in outdoor activities and community projects.

Sustainable living is a daily battle in parts of the world where climate change is taking effect, and I think there is an opportunity for Scouts to experience being involved in projects to help combat these problems and learn about sustainable development.

My vision is that soil and water conservation will be accepted as the primary method to combat poverty and climate change. I know how terracing, sand dams and trees can create the potential for farmers to transform their lives – and I've also had the privilege to meet hundreds of farmers who have created sustainable lives for themselves and their families.

It's great that the World Scout

Moot is taking place in Kenya next summer. It'll give UK Scouts the opportunity to travel somewhere different and connect with Scouts around the world.

I hope my story will inspire new generations to do the same.



## more info

Excellent Development offers project work in Kenya. [www.excellentdevelopment.com](http://www.excellentdevelopment.com). The World Scout Moot takes place 27 July-7 August 2010. [www.scoutmoot2010.org](http://www.scoutmoot2010.org)