

### **New Year 2019 Honours – Alison Hall receives an MBE for services to Victims of War in Northern Uganda**



HM The Queen is graciously pleased to approve that Alison Hall be appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the New Year 2019 Honours List, for services to Victims of War in Northern Uganda. Alison Hall, age 53, from Shalford, Surrey, was educated at Holy Trinity Primary School and George Abbot Secondary School in Guildford from 1970-1982. She lived and worked in Switzerland for more than 10 years before returning to the UK in 1998 with her young son Josh. Alison worked full-time as a single parent in various marketing roles for companies such as IBM and Dell. She currently works for Ogilvy UK in Shere.

So how on earth did she get involved in supporting victims of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war which raged in northern Uganda from 1986-2006?

In 2007, when working for IBM, Alison went to a conference in Norway where she heard about the plight of farmers in Uganda and how they couldn't afford to buy seeds to grow themselves out of poverty. After the talk she sought out the speaker – Josephine Okot, Managing Director of the seed company Victoria Seeds – about sponsoring one farmer (rather like sponsoring a child through school). Josephine retorted that there were 8 million farmers needing help and they came up with the idea of lending seeds to the farmers so they could feed their families and grow enough to generate some income – micro-finance with seeds. On returning to the UK Alison looked hard for a charity to support. There wasn't one, so with the support of 3 colleagues and friends, Seeds for Development (SfD) was born.

In January 2008, Alison made her first journey to Uganda to visit farmers and initiate a pilot project with one group of 84 farmers. It was during her second trip in 2008 that Alison was introduced to the neediest of people of the country. In northern Uganda there had been a war for 20 years between the government forces and the rebel group the LRA. Millions of people were forced from their homes into camps for internally displaced people. Thousands of children were abducted and forced to be sex slaves and child soldiers, and made to commit the most awful of atrocities. The whole region was devastated and after 20 years in the camps people were being made to return to their homes, which had been destroyed.

Having never experienced anything like this before, Alison was completely out of her comfort zone and found everything totally alien. But she found a connection when she met a group of 64 single mothers (single because they had been raped, or their husbands had been abducted or murdered). They say the eyes are windows of the soul, and looking into their eyes, Alison saw utter despair and sadness and vowed to do something to help them.

Since then her focus has been on transforming the lives of those who need it the most – child mothers, people suffering with HIV and those so poor they have to eat grass to survive. SfD has lent seeds to more than 3,000 farming households. With around 10 people per household, Alison has almost single-handedly helped 30,000 people kick poverty out of their lives and give hope for the future. The farmers pay back the value of the seed and that money is used for community projects and buying more seeds. This model has been hugely successful, the SfD farming families now eat regular meals, send their children to school, build new and safer homes and set up businesses.

SfD supported one of the communities by helping them build and run an Infant School. They called it Vision Hope, the head teacher said that the people had a vision of the future but lacked the hope to make it happen. Alison made it happen! The school opened three years ago and she is now supporting four additional Infant Schools, by paying for two teachers in each school. Children do not eat regularly at home so Alison insists that all children have a cup of maize porridge every day and SfD pays the salary of one cook in each school.

The war meant that a whole generation missed out on an education. To help these young adults, Alison introduced projects to help develop their skills, with training workshops and projects and SfD sells the products – paper jewellery, wooden spoons and beautiful bags to raise funds. Never short of ideas, Alison thought it would be great if her daily cup of coffee was grown by the farmers SfD supports, so Alison embarked on an ambitious project to grow coffee on a commercial scale in northern Uganda from seed!

In 2015 an outbreak of Malaria killed hundreds of people in the communities where SfD works. Nobody was doing anything to help them, so SfD stepped up and raised £10,000. Alison travelled to Uganda to give 2,000 mosquito nets to children and pregnant women and provided hands-on training on how to prevent malaria.

Progress has been phenomenal, there is still a long way to go. Many thousands of people in northern Uganda call Alison their mother. Alison travels from Guildford to Uganda 2-3 times a year to visit the communities, she does this at her own expense, SfD does not pay her travel expenses. Every penny of every donation made to SfD directly benefits the community projects. Alison continues to work full time in the UK, she runs SfD before/after work and at the weekends with help from her best friend Penny Peters, who is a trustee of the charity. Even her SfD website is self-funded, written and managed, more detail can be found at [www.seedsfordevelopment.org](http://www.seedsfordevelopment.org).

There were many letters of support for Alison's nomination including Pauline Latham OBE, MP for mid Derbyshire, who invited Alison to Parliament on several occasions to report on situations such as outbreaks of malaria in the region. (Three of the letters of support are included alongside this press release.)

Alison had no idea that she had been nominated and was shocked and almost speechless when she returned from her latest trip to northern Uganda earlier this month to find a letter on her doormat inviting her to become a Member of the Order of the British Empire.

PLEASE WATCH this very short video made by Alison a couple of months ago to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Seeds for Development: <https://youtu.be/8HyJ9Pvl2o0>.

If you have more time (45 minutes) A Film for Northern Uganda (2016) <https://youtu.be/zX1TpN8pml4> highlights how the people of the region have shown resilience and risen from the ashes. The [UNDP](#) commissioned [Initiatives of Change](#) to make this film, which features 'the child mothers', one of the groups supported by Seeds for Development. Alison acted as a consultant to the film makers.

Alison is always happy to give interviews and talks and can be contacted as follows:

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