



# Nigel Harris recommends...

**After four years as Chief Executive of New Philanthropy Capital, Nigel Harris gives us an insight into his own charitable giving. He explains how his passion for international development led him to support a charity driving change in some of the toughest areas of the world.**

## **Which charity do you feel most passionate about?**

I have been a trustee for the last couple of years of Medair UK, the UK affiliate of the Swiss NGO, Medair. Medair provides life-saving relief and rehabilitation in disasters, crises and conflict areas. It works with the most vulnerable people in the world in conflicts that are ongoing, or areas which are difficult to access, including Sudan, Afghanistan and Madagascar. It tends to anticipate crises—it was in Darfur long before it became a magnet for NGOs.

## **You must be asked to support charities all the time—how did you select this one specifically?**

Partly because it deals with genuine needs and works in some of the world's toughest areas. It is also interesting, as it attracts the bulk of its money from government funders, (such as USAID, ECHO and various UN agencies) based on its great results: it spends around \$25m annually and reaches over 2.5 million people.

I was also interested from a personal perspective because it is underpinned by Christian values both in terms of who works there and how they work, rather than who they help. And finally, it works in an area that NPC is unlikely to be involved in directly—even as we move into more international work—therefore I knew there wouldn't be a conflict of interest.

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## **NPC's mantra is about measuring the effectiveness of charities. Does Medair do this well?**

It's relatively straightforward for Medair to measure its outcomes around service provision, such as vaccinations and water supply. But it also measures the work it does around behavioural change. For example, it works in an area of Afghanistan, called Badakhshan, which is one of the most underdeveloped and remote provinces in the world—in winter, the only access is by horse or foot.

Medair has been the driving force behind dramatic improvements in health-care in this region, which suffered from horrendous levels of maternal and child mortality—25% of children never reached their fifth birthday. It introduced female doctors to clinics to treat women, who for cultural reasons, had never previously attended health clinics. It has also been excellent at tracking beneficiaries' feedback and sharing results with the rest of the NGO community.

## **Have you found that running NPC has altered the way you support charities?**

Yes, I strongly believe it is important for an organisation to have unrestricted funding as it gives it the flexibility and the speed to react. Restricted funding is the curse of the charitable sector—it is very difficult to plan 3 or 5 years on when your funding stream is only 3 to 6 months. It obviously helps enormously if you're a charity that raises funds from the general public—you can assume the funding streams will continue. But for organisations that don't have the brand awareness it is very difficult. I believe that you can have the greatest impact by

supporting a charity whose results you're convinced by and whose values you share by giving it core funding it can leverage.

## **What have you learnt about supporting charities that you think other donors should know?**

I'd recommend donors ask four simple questions of a charity they are thinking of funding—what does the organisation do, why do they do it, what is success for them, and how do they evidence that success?

I'd also argue for unrestricted funding. But unrestricted doesn't mean unaccountable funding. Donors should still expect management to report back and explain their results.

I'd also encourage people to take up trusteeships as it's a really good way of getting engaged with the charitable sector and leveraging your own skills to make a difference.

## **If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing in the world, what would it be?**

I feel passionate about the development of a proper market around the charitable sector: where those who've got capital are brought together with NGOs who can use capital effectively to change lives. NPC is part of this embryonic development, along with others, and I'd love to see that scale up on a global basis.

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