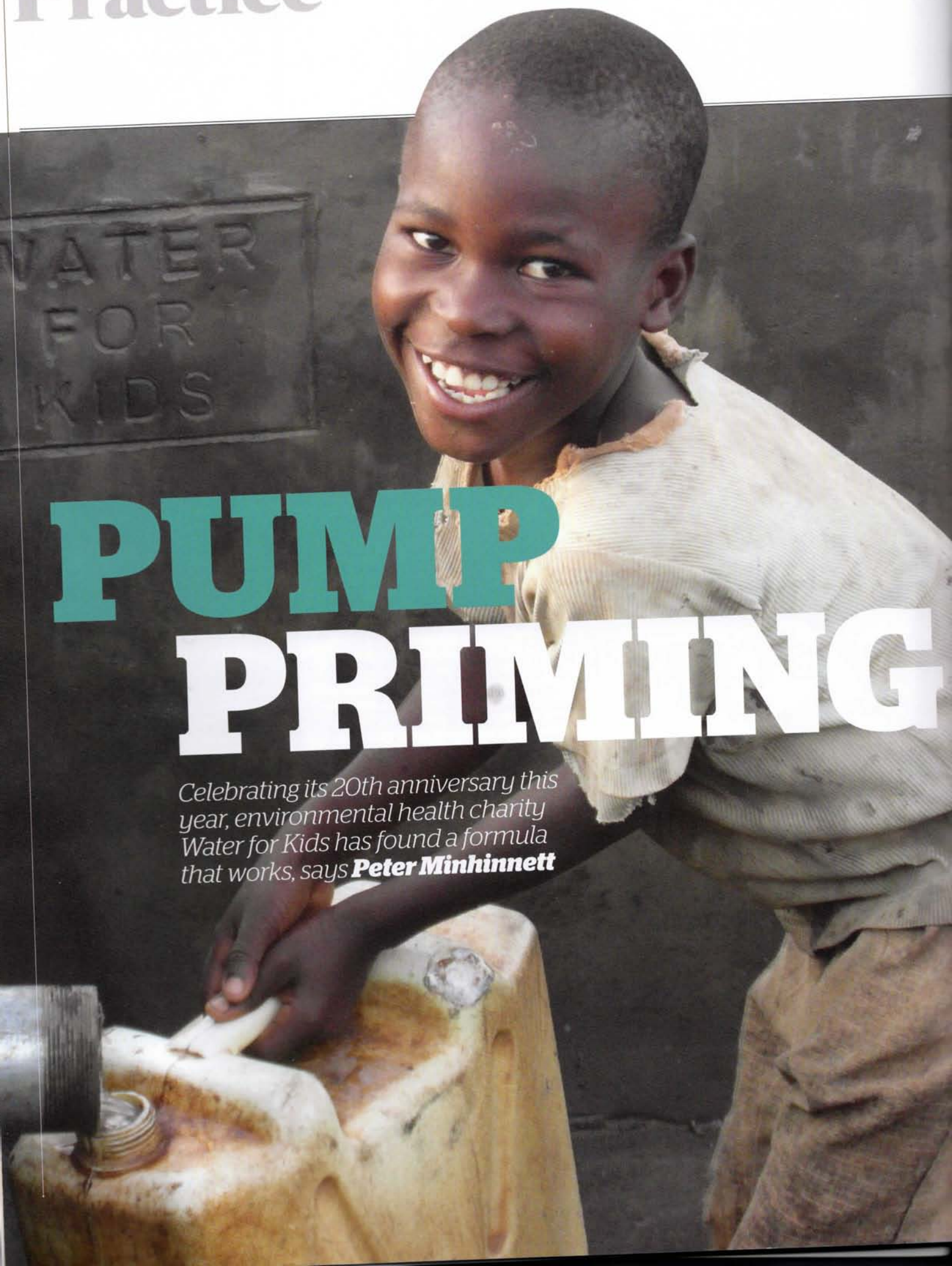


# Practice



# PUMP PRIMING

*Celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, environmental health charity Water for Kids has found a formula that works, says **Peter Minhinnett***



In the UK and throughout the world, it seems that health care is more successful in attracting funding than the prevention of illness is. We have not made a clear enough case for the benefits of EHPs working internationally and in partnership with our peers.

Medical doctors want the funds for new hospitals and to cure sickness, resulting in less investment in preventative health care. But the charity of which I am chairman, Water for Kids, has clearly demonstrated the spin-off benefits of providing safe water and effective sanitation in low-tech, cost-effective interventions. Obviously, just washing your hands helps to prevent diseases from spreading. But for that you need safe water. Safe water also means fewer days missed from school, which improves children's education; agriculture and building become so much easier with reliable water supplies, too.

Water for Kids began in 1996 after two EHOs, Stewart Petrie and David Clapham, visited Peru as part of a scheme to help eradicate cholera. They were concerned that people in small, sometimes remote, settlements needed environmental health services in general and safe water in particular.

They looked for a charity addressing these issues, but couldn't find one. So they set up Water for Kids. The name was chosen because it is a good description of what the charity does and if kids have water, so does the rest of the community. The emphasis on children also suggests an investment in the future.

'Every handover of a project is a highlight for me. The community are always so pleased to have a water supply. I have heard it said that it's like a dream come true. Our work will benefit local people for years to come'

**Sara Emanuel,**  
WfK secretary

We have come a long way since then. Over the past two decades, we have provided water, sanitation and hygiene education to 154 communities in nine countries, transforming the lives of almost half a million people. A safe water supply means that communities can more easily grow food to eat and sell, as well as build better homes and new classrooms. Children have been able to attend school more regularly, because there have been fewer cases of diarrhoea, cholera and worms.

Providing water and sanitation on grid makes sense in towns, but is problematic in rural areas, even in the UK, due to its prohibitive cost. Obviously, providing water of drinking quality in houses is the ideal. But in developing countries, people and even hospitals may not be able to pay their utility bills.

Flushing toilets can also waste a resource provided at great cost. Alternatives such as Eco-San, a waterless toilet system that also provides compost, has been trialled by Water for Kids and shown to work and save money. Solar technology, which is only just reaching some rural communities in African countries, is also of great benefit.

Increasingly, donors are looking for charities with low overheads, high efficiency and trustworthiness, and we are proud to have found a formula that works. In the past few years, we have focused our efforts in Africa, by organising study/work trips for EHPs and other volunteers. We also facilitate links between environmental health colleagues throughout the world, and assist in the development of professional institutions and training courses in colleges and universities.

In Zambia, our partners in the Zambia Institute of Environmental Health manage all Water for Kids' projects. In Uganda, a team of three is being trained to work closely with communities to ensure the sustainability of nearly 100 small projects. We will soon be working on a project in Kenya again, thanks to the generosity of the North-East region of CIEH.

Our trustees and volunteers pay their own costs for visits to the recipient countries. Having selected the key local personnel, we give close oversight to local salaries, expenses and standards. We monitor performance and give feedback on progress to trustees and donors, all of whom also have a personal commitment of their own to the charity.

We find that we speak the same language and working with the district EHPs responsible for the areas in which we operate means they can keep an eye on the projects long after we have handed them over. We also encourage the setting up of local water committees to manage projects and raise their own funds.

In places like Iganga in Uganda, residents show great energy and initiative, with obvious entrepreneurship. When you give them the offer of help – with the condition that they provide part of the work or the money themselves – they respond with energy and

'Charities like this don't get the credit they deserve but they raise thousands of pounds for really worthwhile projects that make a huge difference. Long may it continue'

**Matthew Pennycook MP,**  
WfK supporter

enthusiasm. That is a real step towards making them more effective as part of the wider economy.

I recently revisited Zambia, where I worked for three years in the 1970s. I was concerned that unlike in Uganda, some of the more remote rural areas seemed to be standing still. But the Zambian government is endeavouring to make things better. In the past year, it has provided boreholes in rural areas to help meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goal for clean water and sanitation. But the need is so great that the local EHPs can easily identify more villages with a high density of population that would be suitable for Water for Kids-type projects.

Understandably, governments and large NGOs focus on large infrastructure projects in urban areas, such as providing water in slums. But we would like to see the UK's Department for International Development among others working more with small charities like ours to facilitate what can be life-changing projects.

We can demonstrate that small and simple aid projects, like the ones that we facilitate, are the essential pump-priming for larger initiatives. Improvements to local water supplies act like a lubricant, removing the drain on people's energy caused by having to find and carry water. Good water supplies and sanitation also make rural people less likely to move to the city and live in slums, which is what often happens if they cannot sustain a livelihood locally.

So what next? We do not necessarily want Water for Kids to grow significantly in the next two decades, but we do want to have a more stable income base. To this end, we are applying to charitable trusts and seeking out more corporate supporters to partner with us.

We will continue to focus on our work in Uganda and Zambia and, when funds are available, we will give grants to other charities to provide water and sanitation on a basis similar to the one we use in Tanzania. If and when we have more funds, we would like to work closer in other countries where our help is needed, such as Malawi and Sierra Leone.

Above all, we will continue to work with EHPs for the next 20 years, as managers of our projects and people on the ground who will be there after each project has been completed. They will help to ensure that the water supplies and good hygiene practices are sustained long into the future.

We are looking forward to another 20 years getting a little bigger and stronger, doing more of the same, and doing much better. **E**

**This article has been written with the full support and assistance of the trustees of Water for Kids. Please support us by setting up a standing order, organising a fundraising event, subscribing to our newsletter Newsplash or joining our Facebook group**

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**Peter Minhinnett**  
is chairman of  
Water for Kids

# Food and Food Safety – what does the future hold for us? Regulation, enforcement, challenges and solutions

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