
Letter from Stephen Lewis
December 2017

Dear Friends,

Bill Gates publishes an annual newsletter. As the planet's second richest man (exceeded only by Jeff Bezos of Amazon), he never asks for money for his Foundation. There's never a "DONATE NOW" button. It's a luxury we'd love to have.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation is (slightly!) smaller than the Gates Foundation. Our "DONATE NOW" button flashes exuberantly and continuously. Still, I don't write an annual letter. I do write an annual Holiday/New Year's postcard, except for this year. This year, I break with tradition. This year, I'm sending this direct financial appeal.

But instead of the wail of penury and abject pleading for funds, I'm entirely upbeat. You might ask why. After all, traditional financing, from friendly governments, is in free-fall. Largely because of the pallor of doom cast by Trump, everyone is cutting back: Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Holland, Luxembourg, the UK, all the usual suspects, previously generous, have donned the mantle of Scrooge.

It can be painful and devastating, especially to grassroots, community-based groups like those we fund.

But my spirits cannot be dashed. It's not that I'm some insouciant, rose-coloured romanticist. It's just that our Foundation is so vibrant, accomplishing so much, playing such an increasing role in the world, that it's impossible to contain optimism.

Take the new book on the Grandmother's Movement to End AIDS in Africa: ***Powered by Love***. It's a phenomenal success and not just on the best-seller lists. Every book launch across the country has been a jamboree of exultation. African grandmothers make electrifying speeches, and Canadian grandmothers reply in kind. Book-signings galore. Hordes of people, previously suffering fund-raising fatigue, now re-energized and gung-ho. The sense of solidarity, of success, of beating back the virus is palpable. It's wondrous to watch.

But that's just the half of it. As you're probably aware, the Foundation, over the last two years, has been carefully, scrupulously, methodically gathering information from the projects to chronicle their work. It's a staggering undertaking. It has already yielded thousands of pages of information.

This isn't the usual stuff about numbers of orphans and numbers of meals and numbers of school fees, however crucial and important those dimensions of life may be. No, we're gathering information that goes to the heart of the QUALITY of life ... how life has changed as the necessities have been met and the virus is in retreat.

We're documenting the emergence of resilience, human rights, political engagement, family solidarity, community activities, job opportunities ... everything that speaks to a throbbing, vital

society. I detest the word transformation, but that's what's happening: life is being transformed.

We even have one of those memorable, scientific phrases to describe what we're doing. It's called the "**Impact Assessment Framework**". Absorb it, memorize it, cherish it: the **IAF** is about to enter the international lexicon of unique and incomparable acronyms.

Lest you think I jest, let me point out that our IAF is now being discussed at major meetings of the Funders Concerned About AIDS, at the executive board of UNAIDS, at the board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and scheduled to be discussed at next year's international conference on HIV and AIDS in Amsterdam. What the Foundation is doing has, surprisingly enough, never been done before. It's an astonishing breakthrough in the realm of AIDS research.

And it is already having an appreciable impact. For the first time, there's irrefutable evidence, from the grassroots, to show that community-based groups provide the best and strongest response to the pandemic. I'm actually quite puffed-up about the accolades and plaudits that are being heaped upon us.

So you see, instead of a begging bowl, I come to you with a silver chalice. Making another contribution (or a first-time contribution) to the Stephen Lewis Foundation isn't responding to those who languish in poverty, disease and despair. Quite the opposite! It's a contribution to those who are triumphing over poverty, disease and despair, and we ask only that the triumph endure.

So you see that flashing "DONATE NOW" button (real or metaphorical)? Press it. Humour it. Help us bring it to a fluorescent finale!

Yours sincerely,
Stephen Lewis
Co-Founder and Board Chair

 grandmotherscampaign.org

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