

**Chairperson’s Report 2022**

**Introduction**

The imposition of lockdown in March 2020 seems an awful long time ago and the last two and a half years have proved challenging for the Link along with most other charities universally. It is good to be able to organise a face-to-face meeting for all of our loyal supporters after such a long time and I would apologise for not being able to attend. Work commitments are keeping me away from Hastings this week, I’m afraid, but I leave you in the capable hands of the Vice Chairman, Derek.

We have tried to maintain communication with Members and the wider community in the Uk and in SL through the regular Newsletters we have started to produce and hopefully you have found these useful. We will shortly be producing an Autumn Newsletter to bring you up to date on recent developments.

We have managed to continue to meet as Trustees throughout Covid using Zoom which has been a saviour for a lot of organisations, and have tried to maintain the momentum of projects by regular communication with our partners in Hastings SL.

Fundraising has proved extremely difficult during lockdowns but we have managed to generate some income and I’m pleased to say we have been able to resume our fundraising activities in recent months. We had the Open Air Concert at the Friary Gardens on 3 July raising over £750. Thank you, Roger, for organising this. The Wine Tasting Evening on 23 July also proved very successful raising an amazing £835. Thank you to Lynn for organizing it. More recently we had the Music Quiz on 23 September. An enjoyable evening was had by all and it raised over £570. Thank you to Lesley-Ann for the teasing questions once again. We are working hard on ideas for future fundraising events so if anybody has any suggestions, please let us know.

In spite of the lockdown we have achieved some amazing results which my colleagues will tell you About This evening in more detail. We completed the construction of the new Triage and Isolation Unit at the Health Centre and recently sent a consignment of supplies and equipment to the team there. The School Farms Project has gone from strength to strength with an increasing number of schools and some other community associations now participating. Thanks have to go to our Trustees, Isabel, David, Roger and the team in SL, Jietta and Francis, for maintaining its momentum and expanding it so dramatically.

We were also fortunate to be donated a large consignment of new school clothing by a local manufacturer, Superstitch, and these were shipped to SL recently and distributed to the partner schools.

Fundraising for our key project, the Schools Sanitation Project has proved extremely difficult and given the scale of it we need to seek significant sponsorship if we are to deliver its aspirations. It is also clear that we need to find a supervisor in Hastings SL with some technical ability to oversee the project on the ground and keep it on track. We are also looking for grant opportunities wherever possible.

Please remember that you can all help raise funds when you shop on-line If you’re an **Amazon** user you can sign up to  <https://smile.amazon.co.uk/>  Sign up to **Give as You Live** for all of your on-line shopping . <https://www.giveasyoulive.com>    Alternatively you can sign up to **Easy Fundraising**  <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/hslfl/>

In each case, you just nominate the Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link (charity nº 1127137) as beneficiary. It is SO easy. It costs absolutely nothing for you as the customer and there is a popup that says how much is being donated.

 In an effort to raise the profile of the Link and its work and try to attract sponsorship we have produced a short film which you will see for the first time this evening. We hope it hits the right mark and we will be working on spreading the word with it in the coming months.

It is sad to say that after many years of sterling support as our Honorary Secretary, Robin has decided it is time to stand down and we are desperately seeking a replacement. It will be hard act to follow but I’m sure Robin will be the first to tell you that whilst it is often busy and sometimes hard work, the rewards make it all worthwhile and the team of Trustees do all they can to support the role. Please give it some serious thought, and if you think it is something you would like to do, we would love to welcome you to the team.

I would close by thanking my colleague Trustees for their sterling support through the Covid pandemic, thank all of you, our supporters for your continued interest and support and thank our wider group of supporters in the UK and in Sierra Leone. Without all of you we could not achieve what we do.

I look forward to a future filled with fundraising activities and progress with our projects to support the community in our Twin Town.

Thank you all once again.

Richard Homewood,

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