

Jo Elizabeth Butler C'76

Founder of the Ethiopian Children's Appeal

During my 30 years with the United Nations, I had the opportunity to work in Ethiopia, and I was struck by the beauty of the country and the richness of the culture, but also by the poverty and development challenges. I became friends with some of the neighborhood children and kept asking myself, "What can I do to make their lives special?"

I had their school uniforms made. I bought school supplies. During the drought of 2001, I raised enough money to deliver three tons of food to a rural school. And when the drought subsided I asked the community what they needed. They told me, "School buildings, classrooms, teachers' quarters." With help, we built them. And before I knew it, I had a little grass-roots association.

I call it a "virtual charity" because there are no administrative costs. I'm a one-woman show. I pay my own way to Ethiopia to deliver food, school supplies, books and sports equipment, with the help of volunteers.

Twelve years ago we began to support the work of two young Ethiopian-born Americans who started a home for 17 children with HIV/AIDS. All the children had lost their parents to HIV. I've been their adoptive grandmother for 12 years, and I have seen four of them graduate from university.

We're trying to set up an organic garden/farm, but there are serious water problems. A nearby river is polluted and the water from the local borehole is too high in fluoride and sodium. So my biggest goal over the last year has been to figure out how I can bring clean water to the school and the community.

I would say my best project so far has been creating a virtuous circle. Over the last 16 years I've been able to help not just the children with education and vocation, but also the entrepreneurs—because I'm buying from them and selling their goods to raise money—and the farmers, because we buy food locally.

I wasn't thinking, "I'm a nonprofit." I was thinking that I was helping, and that it's so important, not to give back, but to give.

I want people to know that Ethiopia is one of the richest places I know: rich in people, culture, history. When I'm there I don't think I'm in a "least developed" country. I think I'm in a vibrant, dynamic place.



Bill Cardoni

To help support the Ethiopian Children's Appeal, Butler learned to make jewelry, which she sells at a series of fundraising bazaars. All profits go to the organization.