

# How the simple wind-up radio

Today *The Times* launches its Christmas Charity Appeal, this year in aid of the Salvation Army and the Freeplay Foundation. Here Simon Barnes sees Freeplay's radios transform life in Zambia, where the curse of Aids means that teachers are dying faster than they can be trained

IT'S a great song — 'Seven — take away one — Sees! — Sees — take away one — five! Five — take away one — four!' The class had 75 pupils, all sitting on the floor, and they sang out with fervour.

The music came from a blue plastic radio with a handle in the back while their teacher, Misheck Mwape, chalked the sums on the cracked slate on the wall. This was the village of Mwala in Zambia, three hours off the tar road to the north of Lusaka. You may well wonder about the point of teaching the children of subsistence farmers how to count, that a circle has no corners, and to say: 'How are you? We are fine?'

So ask the villagers. After school, a village meeting beneath the mango tree, and me, to my surprise, called on to address it. 'How did this school come about?' I asked.

Bwalya Kwaila, the chairman of the community education committee, explained that they started the school unilaterally. 'The nearest government schools are 9 kilometres away and 12 kilometres. So we formed this school to serve our community of 14,000 people.' And what does the community do? 'We are subsistence farmers. We sell some food when we can, but we have very little cash. Our soil is good, but we can't afford fertilizer.'

Trapped, then, in the cycle of

## Freeplay Foundation

'Education is a way forward, a way of breaking the cycle, towards greater safety, towards a future'

wound up, and which beans in programmes put together by the Ministry of Education in Lusaka literacy, numeracy, the awareness of Aids. Each subject, in its own way, a source of power.

Freyplay's Lifeline radio is based on a British idea and has been developed to meet the needs of African children. Robustly constructed, it plays for many hours non-stop on wind-up energy or solar power. Mwape, the teacher, was appointed by the committee as a school-leaver, and it is now five years on. 'We started the school before the radio came,' he said. 'But since it came, it has made a very, very big impact. The pupils are now much faster at learning to read and write.'

The village is planning to build a school, and they will do it themselves, from bricks they make themselves, giving the lie to the notion of the prosperous world that Africans do nothing but sit about waiting for handouts. Like everywhere else I visited on a memorable trip, this is a community full of enterprise, full of get-up-and-go, determined to make a hard life ever so slightly better.

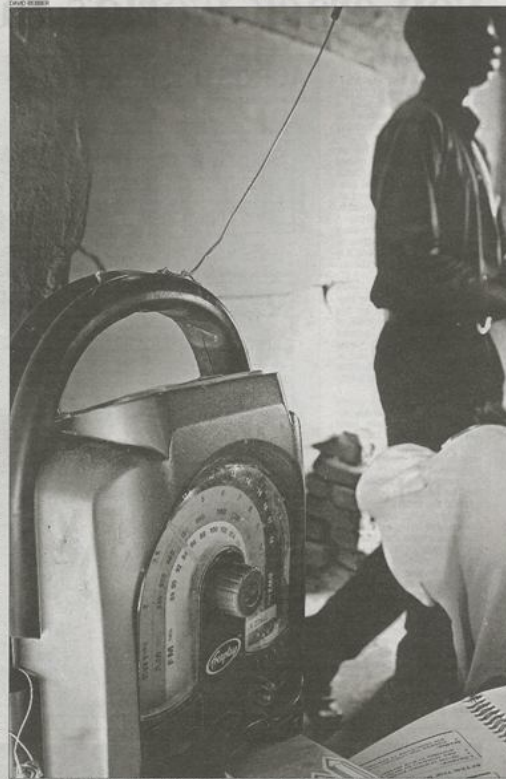
Mwape doesn't actually get paid for teaching, because there isn't very much actual money to be had. The community members have a whip-round for him when they can, and of course, they make sure he is fed. The best payment comes in the respect he has in the community the man to whom the future has been entrusted.

An exceptional man, then, and the sort of person I was to meet in every community I visited: untrained teachers whose work is given structure and coherence and a real sense of oomph from the radio. The radio also gives a sense of privilege: the children know they have something special, something their parents didn't have, something many communities don't have.

'The building of the school is a colossal notion: "We are stretching our arms," Kwaila said. But everybody will get involved in the construction. In Africa, community means rather more than a lot of people living in the same place.

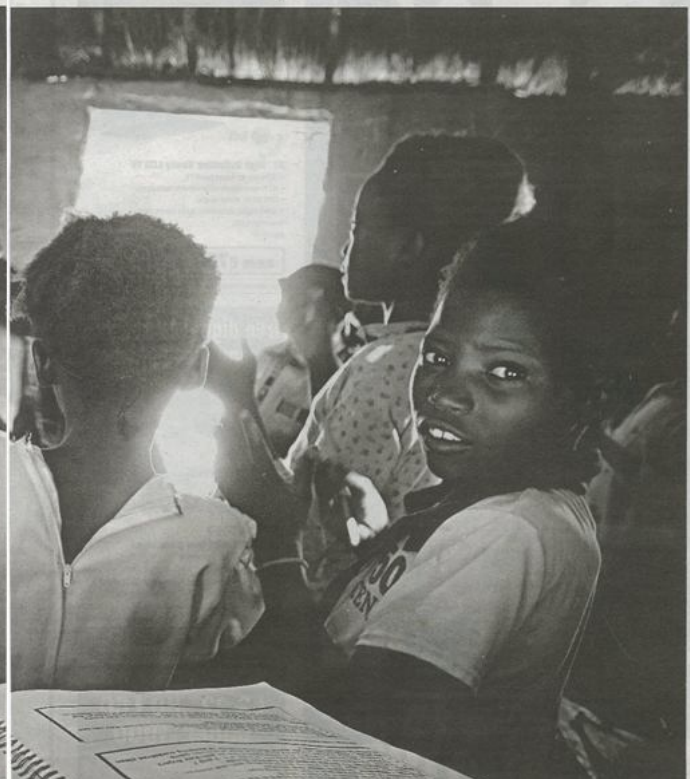
Elsewhere, I was to see construction work in action, the education committee, the people stuck in with spades and pickaxes, and I was to see the extraordinary amount of back-breaking work it takes women carry for impossible distances, and on their heads.

My address to the village was modelled on the speeches of Young Mr Grace in *Are You Ready for Service?* 'You're all doing very well.' What else could I



Pupils at the Mwala Community School in Zambia attend a class taken by the teacher Misheck Mwape, who is given invaluable assistance by an educational programme broadcast on a radio donated by the Freeplay Foundation

# can empower Africa's children



## SUCCESS OF PREVIOUS APPEALS

**Home-Start UK Christmas 2002**  
Amount raised: **£100,250**  
Home-Start has been able to set up new schemes in Bangor, Wolverhampton and west Cambridgeshire. Mick and Sarah are just one couple to benefit. After Sarah gave birth to her third child, Callum, eight weeks prematurely, she woke six weeks later to find Callum in distress. His lungs collapsed and he had to have blood transfusions. He had a meningitis-type viral infection and suffered brain damage. Three months later we were told he had cerebral palsy,' Sarah said. Last June new Home-Start volunteer Val started making home visits to the family to provide them with friendship and support. 'Just to have Val's support for a couple of hours is fantastic. She helps us all in so many ways,' Sarah said.

**Street Child Africa Christmas 2004**  
Amount raised: **£100,000**  
Moses is 10 and lives in the copperbelt province of Zambia. When his father, who is HIV positive, became too ill to work and to pay school fees, Moses was forced to leave school and work. The stress drove Moses away from his home and on to the streets. At night, he slept rough in the marketplace. He was found by a worker from Street Child Africa's partner agency and eventually agreed to move off the streets and into a halfway home before returning to his family.

Patrick Shanahan, of Street Child Africa, said: 'The extraordinary generosity of Times readers has helped us touch the lives of thousands of street children across Africa, like Moses who have nothing and no one to care for them.'

**CARE International Christmas 2003**  
Amount raised: **£180,000**  
In Afghanistan, women are still struggling to recover from the Taliban regime's ban on their working or being educated. Money from Times readers helped one talented female entrepreneur to set up a clothes shop in central Kabul which is now thriving and employs 30 widows, who have gained the skills to support themselves and their families.

Bakhtzadza Niaz, 27, a mother of four, said: 'Maybe the men who own shops will laugh at me because all my clothes are handmade, whereas they import their products mostly from Pakistan, but I'm proud to be making my own clothes.'

**IndependentAge Christmas 2004**  
Amount raised: **£68,000**  
Joan Thornton, 85, devoted much of her life to breeding puppies for Guide Dogs for the Blind. But after arthritis set in, she began to worry about her future and finances. It was a big relief when a neighbour told her about IndependentAge and the charity provided her with a small extra income and specialist equipment, such as her special armchair. Without the chair, which gently propels her to stand up at the touch of a button, she would need constant help. That chair and a walking frame give her the mobility to move about her home. 'I've always been so busy and active. I never imagined that I would be like this,' she said.

**National Autistic Society Christmas 2001**  
Amount raised: **£167,500**  
The appeal marked the 40th year of the NAS, set up in 1963 when one mother, Helen Allison, remarried her home so that her son and others with his condition could be saved from being housed in an institution. David Richards, director of fundraising, said the appeal helped to raise awareness of the charity and autism and Asperger syndrome. 'It also funded essential projects at our schools, including new catering and learning kitchens at Bromley and treatment for breast cancer. She found that having access to the facts about cancer, written clearly and sensitively, helped her through the experience. "Knowledge is power," she said. "Being able to access details of cancer and its treatments enables a patient to be part of the decision making process and not just do as you are told."

**CancerBACUP Christmas 2000**  
Amount raised: **£92,000**  
CancerBACUP was able to employ two more dedicated nurses on its helpline, increasing the speed and reach of its service to patients, their families and friends. Marilyn Deurloo used the helpline, booklets and website during her treatment for breast cancer. More than a quarter of a million people a week use its services, which range from support for isolated older people to help with drug addicts, the homeless and prostitutes.

Together with social services and other local agencies it provides day-care centres and lunch clubs, often with transport provided. It also runs drop-in centres and cafes providing meals and snacks.

Interviews by Alexandra Freen

## THE TIMES CHRISTMAS APPEAL

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Online [www.timesonline.co.uk/timesappeal](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/timesappeal)

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I wish to donate  £10  £25  £50  £75

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All donations will be split equally between the appeal's two causes unless specified in the box below

FREeplay FOUNDATION  THE SALVATION ARMY

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Valid from  Expiry date

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say? True, by European standards they were doing appalling, at least in material terms. But the feeling of a community seeking to reinvent itself, to redefine itself, was inspiring.

Steve Archibald, the Tottenham Hotspur striker, once said that team spirit was an illusion rather than a lot of people living in the same place. 'But I found nothing of the kind. Mwala, and all the other communities I visited, resound with a humbling form of optimism. At the centre of the optimism is the school they founded themselves. In that school, hope is broadcast every weekday, at the turn of a handle.

An avalanche starts at the fall of a pebble; here, an unstoppable upward rush can also be started by a tiny thing.

Leading article, page 23

[www.timesonline.co.uk/append](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/append)

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## In frontline fight against terror

By Alexandra Freen  
Social Affairs Correspondent

THERE is hardly a family in Britain that has not in some way come into contact with the Salvation Army during its 140-year history.

The charity is perhaps best known for supporting the troops during the Second World War, when it was based a short distance from the front line, to help wherever possible.

A significant part of the Salvation Army's work is providing support around the clock to the emergency services as they respond to fires, train crashes, natural disasters and terrorist attacks. After the



organisation allowed in. Its teams worked in shifts, counselling victims and emergency service workers who were recovering survivors and bodies. For four weeks its emergency canteen stayed in the square providing help such as food, drink and shelter. 'When I saw the Salvation Army arrive I knew it was going to be all right,' one rescue worker said on July 7.

The stream of incidents in which the emergency canteen vehicles are involved puts a heavy strain on them. They are also used for community services. Many need replacing and money donated by readers to this year's appeal will help to

purchase new ones. But the Salvation Army is more than an emergency service. Founded in the East End of London in 1865 by a Methodist minister, William Booth, it is now the largest provider of social welfare after the Government. More than a quarter of a million people a week use its services, which range from support for isolated older people to help with drug addicts, the homeless and prostitutes.

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