

**The Times Sternberg Award, 11 Downing Street, 6 June 2013**  
**Sylvia's speech**

"I am so proud and delighted to have won this award – and exceedingly surprised given the formidable opposition. When Lindsay Swan, my fellow trustee and nominator, phoned me with the opening quip "Am I speaking to the winner of the Times Sternberg award?" I nearly fell off my chair. I'm just sorry that she is unable to be with us today.

"The award has shown what a small charity can achieve. Even though you have to be ancient to win it, which cuts out a fair bit of competition, it is very humbling that the Venkat Trust, just one very small charity among the 186,000 registered in the UK, should have been brought to the world stage through the great newspaper that is The Times.

"And it means so much to Kovalam, the very poor fishing village near Chennai where, over the last 8½ years, and thanks to all our UK supporters and the excellent team we have in Kovalam, we have seen a sea change in the facilities and standard of education and the opportunities now being given to all the children there.

"Next week sees the opening of the first phase of our most ambitious project – the building of a much needed high school. Some 300 children will be filing into their new classrooms. The school is a joint initiative with the Tamil Nadu Government and when completed it will accommodate a thousand pupils. Then, all the children of Kovalam and neighbouring villages will have an education and career prospects previously denied them.

"I strongly believe that education is the only way to see an end to lives of abject poverty, be they in India, Africa or other developing countries. Filling begging bowls, while necessary, is not a long term solution but education is. Education means good jobs, good jobs mean money and money means an end to impoverished living. And all future generations will benefit.

"My very generous award money has been put to excellent use – I have "bought" a classroom at the new school. The Times Sternberg Room was officially opened at the inauguration ceremony for the high school which I attended in January. It will be there for generations of kids to come, an apt reminder of the generosity of Sir Sigmund Sternberg in partnership with The Times. To you both, and of course to the Chancellor for his hospitality, I say a very big thank you."