



## THE POWER OF ROTARY PARTNERSHIPS

John Hewko

Rotary International General Secretary and Chief Executive Officer

10 January 2023

You know, it's been said that in today's world — marked by interdependence and rapid change — it's almost impossible to do anything alone.

We see this in business, where companies are increasingly joining together to develop better products or enter new markets. And we certainly see this in the areas of global health, disaster response, and philanthropy. Because making a real difference — and having a meaningful, sustainable impact at scale — is very much about partnership. And successful partnerships are those that bring together organizations with a shared vision and complementary expertise, and where each partner has a clearly defined role and responsibilities.

Now, as district governors-elect, I am sure you are already familiar with many Rotary partnerships, including the remarkable alliance that is working to eradicate polio worldwide. A few years back, *Rotary* magazine ran a story about the global polio partners that broadly described the roles each plays in making the effort a success.

UNICEF was described as the Immunizer, distributing and managing the polio vaccine. CDC was the Virus Hunter, and WHO was the Strategist. And Rotary was the Advocate. And as the Advocate, we bring not only our members' business expertise to the table, but even more importantly, our passion and commitment.

It's our determination that distinguishes us.

We keep fundraising, building awareness, and placing the cause of polio eradication on the front burner for governments worldwide.

In fact, Rotary and our partners are able to make a far greater impact than any individual partner could achieve alone. And, when we eradicate polio through this partnership, our impact will be such that we will leave a legacy for as long as we inhabit the earth. And our ability to have greater impact through partnerships is not only possible at the global level, it is equally important at the regional, district, and club level.

We see this with respect to our new Programs of Scale. Every year The Rotary Foundation makes a significant grant of several million dollars through a competitive process to one Rotary-led project that will have significant regional impact. Last year's winner was a partnership between TRF, Rotary District 9210, World Vision, and the Gates Foundation,

and has a combined budget of US\$6 million. The program's goal is to eliminate malaria in two large provinces in Zambia.

We see the same focus on impact in this year's winner, a partnership to improve health outcomes for mothers and children in Nigeria. It is sponsored by Rotary District 1860 in Germany, in partnership with several districts in Nigeria, as well as the Rotary Action Group for Reproductive, Maternal, and Child Health.

Similarly, partnerships between clubs, districts, and locally based entities and individuals can lead to greater local and more rapid impact.

One example came together just a couple years ago in Bergamo, Italy. You might remember that Bergamo was ravaged by COVID-19 early in the pandemic. Testing at that time was clumsy and ineffective, and the only devices available in and around Bergamo required a particular type of swab that was increasingly difficult to obtain.

So, three Italians — a digital transformation expert, a biotechnologist, and a robotics expert at the University of Milan — worked together on a new modular way to process a large number of different swabs. But they needed immediate funding to get their project off the ground fast. And that's where Rotary District 2042 quickly stepped in.

Working in tandem with support from German Rotary clubs, they raised more than US\$300,000 to fund a new biomolecular lab in a hospital in Calcinato, Italy. Within six weeks, they increased the number of tests per day in the Bergamo area by nearly tenfold. And what they've left behind is a facility that not only tests for COVID but will be instrumental for decades to come in testing other viruses.

And so, there is no doubt that well-structured partnerships — whether at the regional, district, or club level — lead to greater impact, faster outcomes, and a greater return on investment on volunteer time and resources. But there are three other reasons why partnerships are so important.

The first has to do with membership.

And when I talk about membership in this context, it's not only about attracting new members to our organization, but also about engaging those members on projects that energize them and leverage their unique talents.

For example, after working with us on Rotary Family Health Days and our malaria campaign, Dr. Armino Daniel Tiago, the minister of health of Mozambique, decided to join Rotary. This, by the way, is a growing trend across the African continent, as leaders past, present, and future are joining us after working with us closely.

Another great example is Michel Zaffran. He directed polio eradication at the WHO. Through working with Rotary, Michel came to believe that Rotary plays a unique role in the cause he feels so passionately about. He was impressed by our accomplishments, but most important of all, he was won over by our hearts. He said that Rotary

members are “the moral authority in this fight, leading with their personal engagement and resources.”

And so, in 2017, just a year after taking up the lead for polio eradication at the WHO, Michel joined the Rotary Club of Gex-Divonne (Pays de Gex), France. Two years ago, Michel stepped down as head of the WHO’s polio eradication effort. But he continues to make a difference in the fight by taking a role as an End Polio Now coordinator. He continues to lend his decades of expertise to a cause he believes in, only now as part of our Rotary team.

This is the kind of lasting change we want to bring to the world, and not just in the world at large, but also in ourselves. Because partnerships help attract incredible new members like Michel and Dr. Tiago, and energize existing members to champion vital projects and to continue to be part of our great organization.

The second reason has to do with elevating our brand. And this happens in two ways.

The first is by expanding and improving our public image.

For example, over the past 12 years, the Prior Lake Rotary Club in Minnesota has partnered with the Shakopee Sioux Community and a local casino to present a lakefront music festival that draws tens of thousands of visitors each year. The festival raises funds for local and global projects. But it’s also a steady pipeline for membership growth, and it’s made Rotary well-known throughout the Twin Cities region. As a result, this one club has an impact beyond its membership size and the size of its community.

We also burnish our public image by expanding our thought leadership. This is something every club can do. They can partner with prestigious local and regional think tanks and universities to organize events and symposiums on topics where Rotary and the partnering institution have expertise.

For example, RI and Rotarians in the Chicagoland area joined with the University of Chicago to promote specific action that communities can take to advance peace and resolve conflict. And they did this by creating a speaker series that brought together Rotary leaders, peace scholars, global leaders, elected officials, and academics. This series demonstrated something important: that Rotary clubs can be conveners of Positive Peace efforts in their communities.

And the third reason has to do with fundraising.

Our Rotary Foundation and most of our clubs depend on the generosity of Rotarians to provide funding for our organization’s good works.

In other words, our membership base is extremely important for our fundraising efforts. Everything I’ve just talked about — creating projects with big impact, growing our public image, becoming known as thought leaders — helps us attract even more new members.

That in turn expands our donor base. A wider donor base means additional resources for Rotary to make an even greater difference in the world.

But it is more than that. We also attract outside groups that see in Rotary an attractive place to channel their donations and provide additional funds for projects that matter to us and to the people we serve.

So now I want to tell you about one of the most dramatic and impressive examples of our fundraising efforts in recent years — and it involves Ukraine, where we raised more than US\$15 million for Ukraine relief efforts. In fact, what we have done in Ukraine truly demonstrates the Power of Partnerships and everything I have just discussed.

As President-elect Gordon eloquently stated in his theme address, Rotary's tireless work for peace was put on display in Ukraine and is also seen in Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, and numerous places of conflict across the globe.

The Ukraine conflict has dramatically demonstrated what can be done at the district and club level when we partner with other entities. But it is also a human tragedy that continues to unfold, right now, and one that each of us continues to witness in the daily news. The people of Ukraine are suffering through unimaginable hardships.

Deepening those hardships is, without a doubt, a brutal Russian strategy. And it's on a scale that Europe has not seen since the Second World War. Forcing civilians to live without water, electricity, and heat in the winter — in essence, trying to freeze to death more than 40 million people — is a conscious strategy that Russian leaders and TV commentators openly — openly — brag about.

Blowing up hospitals, and schools, and apartment buildings, and train stations full of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the relentless shelling is a strategy.

Turning young children into orphans is a strategy.

It all adds up to horrific, horrific numbers. There are tens of thousands of dead and wounded soldiers on both sides, tens of thousands of killed or injured civilians, and hundreds of billions of dollars in destroyed civilian infrastructure.

We already know about the violence against women, the mass looting, the summary executions, the torture chambers, and the mass graves. And I have no doubt that we will all be stunned, stunned, at the actual figures once the war is over and all of the Russian war crimes have been uncovered and investigated.

And in the face of all of this, it is clear that it's in the DNA of Rotary and our 1.4 million members to do more than simply engage.

We must respond forcefully, and we have.

In addition to the US\$15 million raised in the Ukraine Disaster Response Fund, we are anecdotally hearing about the millions of dollars of additional aid that Rotary clubs and districts are sending directly to Ukraine and its neighboring countries.

But our incredible impact is that much greater thanks to the partners who are helping Rotary alleviate some of that suffering. The projects with partners in Ukraine, the countries bordering Ukraine, and throughout the world are many, and to list them all would take hours. But here are but a few.

Partners like Siemens provided a 40% discount to Rotary clubs in Ukraine, allowing our Ukrainian Rotarians to obtain mobile X-ray machines and other vital medical equipment.

Hartmann donated synthetic skin to Ukrainian Rotary clubs for use in medical burn centers.

The Ukrainian Medical Association of North America, known as UMANA, worked with Chicagoland Rotarians to arrange a club-based disaster relief grant project providing ambulances and medical equipment for 30 hospitals throughout Ukraine.

Ukraine Friends worked with the Rotary Club of Košice and the Rotary district in Czechia and Slovakia to procure and deliver ambulances and medical supplies.

One project by the Rotary Club of Warszawa Fryderyk Chopin in Poland includes a center that opened in September. The center works with partner organizations to employ Ukrainian refugees who are professional psychologists, teachers, and managers to provide mental health services for children who have been traumatized by war.

And I think it's wonderful that in this year, when President-elect Gordon is asking us to put a greater emphasis on mental health, we are supporting a project like this, leveraging our partners and Ukrainian mental health professionals to help children who need traumatic care the most. If we can pull this off in the middle of a war, imagine what we can do if we greatly expand our partnerships in all of the areas where we work around the world. There is no limit to what we can achieve with the right partners.

And so my call to action to you, this year's class of district governors-elect, is to work with your clubs and districts to make these sorts of connections and to encourage the types of partnerships we have discussed today.

Because when we partner with others, we increase our impact — grow and retain our membership, improve our public relations, and expand our donor base. And all of this allows us to do even more of what we do best: We take action, we change lives, and we make the world think of Rotary as people who can and will help our fellow human beings in their time of need.

And that can't help but cement our legacy, as we continue to provide lasting gifts to humanity.

And it's within your power to continue to make that happen.