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Ecuador Project Fair leads to a long-term partnership

Posted on January 22, 2019 in rotaryservice by Azka Asif, Rotary Service and Engagement Staff

Dr. Vasanth Prabhu from the Rotary Club of Central Chester County (Lionville) in the United States and Galo Alfonso Betancourt Criollo from the Rotary Club of Santa Rosa in Ecuador have been working together on humanitarian projects for over ten years. They first met at the District 4400 (Ecuador) Project Fair, an annual event where local Rotary clubs exhibit their projects to international visitors. Visitors have the opportunity to see first-hand the community needs, as well as experience the local culture while cultivating new friendships with local Rotary members.

We asked Vasanth and Galo to share their experience forming a relationship and implementing projects over the years.



L to R: Galo Alfonso Betancourt Criollo, Dr. Vasanth Prabhu, PDG Juan Prinz, and President Rene Romero Solano of the Rotary Club of Santa Rosa. This photo was taken during the discussion of the Biogas project during the most recent Ecuador Project Fair

Vasanth, what interested you about the project fair in Ecuador?

I was new to Rotary when a flyer containing information about the first District 4400 (Ecuador) Project Fair in 2004 was sent to our club. I wanted to learn more about the fair, but also had a special interest to visit Ecuador since my youth. I had read about the Galapagos Island, its history, the tortoises and other flora and fauna of the region during my teen years. I made a promise to myself that I would like to see the Galapagos when I grew up. One of the added benefits of participating in the project fair was a group tour to the Galapagos.

I have now attended all but one project fair in Ecuador. The fair has given me a chance to meet Rotarians from different parts of the world and interact with them on service projects.

Galo, how long have you been working with Vasanth and how was the relationship formed?

We met our friend Vasanth in 2008 during our first time participating in the Ecuador fair where a good friend of our club, Past District 4400 Governor Juanito Prinz, introduced us. Thanks to Vasanth's support, we have carried out many service projects benefiting our communities over the last ten years.

I believe that the relationship, not only with Vasanth but with members of the Rotary Club of Chester County Central (Lionville), was formed through their many visits to our projects in Ecuador. The relationship has been strengthened year after year thanks to the mutual trust that has been built and by working together in service.

Vasanth, how did you select projects to support?

After learning about the exhibited projects and networking with Rotarians from different parts of the world, in consultation with Past

District Governor Juan Prinz and members of my Rotary club, we decided to support various projects in rural areas of Ecuador that focus on clean water, health and education. Also, we wanted to partner with newer clubs in District 4400 who had not implemented any service projects. The Rotary Club of Santa Rosa had recently been chartered when we first partnered with them.

The current project we are working on for bio-digesters interested us because of the importance of clean water in daily life. I met Galo and his fellow club members and discussed the project with advice from Past District Governor Prinz. The proposal was then presented to my club members and my District 7450's leadership team to review and approve funding — both cash and DDF. We chose to move forward with this global grant project since we have a good track record of carrying out service projects with the Rotary Club of Santa Rosa.

Galo, can you briefly explain the bio-digesters global grant project?

The project consists of replacing existing septic tanks in three rural communities with wastewater treatment plants or self-cleaning bio-digesters to promote a healthy environment, improve the quality of life for community members and protect the water quality of an adjacent river. The communities directly benefited are El Playón, Remolino and Aguas Verdes where 368 people live, made up of 72 families and the project indirectly impacts the city of Santa Rosa's 50,000 members as the river is a water source for them.

How your clubs worked together before the global grant application was submitted? Did you need to overcome any challenges?

Vasanth: I was the primary international contact for the project with two other members from my club serving on the project committee. I was in frequent communication with Galo, who was the primary host contact. The global grant application was drafted by Galo and sent to me for review. Communication was not a problem. We used Google Translate which helped ease the language barrier. Our club has worked on projects in Brazil (Portuguese) and Madagascar (French). Google Translate has always helped us with our communications. Past District Governor Prinz, who is fluent in English, Spanish and German, was a great resource for us throughout the project. We did not come across any other problems throughout the application process or implementing the project.

Galo: Thankfully, in this modern world where communication is very advanced, it allowed us to interact with Vasanth very closely in the planning and implementing process while having ownership of each of the projects we have worked on, which has allowed for a greater exchange of information and timely decision making. We come from different cultures and customs, but this has not been an impediment to working together since we both have a similar passion for service.

Being in School Is Not the Same as Learning

January 22, 2019

The name of the dog is puppy. This seems like a simple sentence. But did you know that in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, three out of four third grade students do not understand it? In rural India, nearly three-quarters of third graders cannot solve a two-digit subtraction problem such as 46 minus 17, and by grade five - half still cannot do so.

The world is facing a learning crisis. While countries have significantly increased access to education, being in school isn't the same thing as learning. Worldwide, hundreds of millions of children reach young adulthood without even the most basic skills like calculating the correct change from a transaction, reading a doctor's

instructions, or understanding a bus schedule—let alone building a fulfilling career or educating their children.

Education is at the center of building human capital. The latest World Bank research shows that the productivity of 56 percent of the world's children will be less than half of what it could be if they enjoyed complete education and full health.



First grade students in Pakistan's Balochistan Province are learning the alphabet through child-friendly flash cards. Their learning materials help educators teach through interactive and engaging activities and are provided free of charge through a student's first learning backpack. © World Bank

Delivered well, education, along with the human capital it generates, benefits individuals and societies. For individuals, education raises self-esteem and furthers opportunities for employment and earnings. And for a country, it helps strengthen institutions within societies, drives long-term economic growth, reduces poverty, and spurs innovation.



"It's never too late for young people to have opportunities to learn. Our youth deserve to be equipped with the skills they need to thrive in an increasingly demanding and uncertain job world. Given that today's students will be tomorrow's citizens and leaders, a good and relevant education is essential to turn aspirations into reality."

Annette Dixon, Vice President, Human Development, World Bank

A global learning crisis

One big reason the learning crisis persists is that many education systems across the developing world have little information on who is learning and who is not. As a result, it is hard for them to do anything about it. And with uncertainty about the kinds of skills the jobs of the future will require, schools and teachers must prepare students with more than basic reading and writing skills. Students need to be able to interpret information, form opinions, be creative, communicate well, collaborate, and be resilient.

The World Bank's vision is for all children and youth to be learning and acquiring the skills they need to be productive, fulfilled, and involved citizens and workers. Our focus is on helping teachers at all levels become more effective in facilitating learning, improving technology for learning, strengthening management of schools and systems, while ensuring learners of all ages - from preschool to adulthood - are equipped for success.

Change starts with a great teacher

A growing evidence suggests the learning crisis is a teaching crisis. For students to learn, they need good teachers, but many education systems pay little attention to what teachers know, what they do in the classroom, and in some cases whether they even show up.

Fortunately for many students, in every country, there are dedicated and enthusiastic teachers who, despite all challenges, enrich and transform their lives. They are heroes who defy the odds and make learning happen with passion, creativity and determination.



A teacher at the Ecoles Oued Eddahab school in Kenitra, Morocco

One such hero works in the Ecoles Oued Eddahab school in Kenitra, Morocco. In a colorful classroom that she painted herself, she uses creative tools to make sure that every child learns, participates, and has fun. In her class, each letter in the alphabet is associated with the sound of an animal and a hand movement. During class she says a word, spells it out loud using the sounds and the movement, and students then write the word down. She can easily identify students who are struggling with the material and adjust the pace of the lesson to help them get on track. Children are engaged and attentive. They participate and are not afraid to make mistakes. This is a teacher who wants to make sure that ALL children learn.



"Given the essential role they play, addressing the learning crisis requires supporting teachers, who are the single most important driver of how much students learn in school."

**Jaime Saavedra
Senior Director, Education
Global Practice, World Bank**

But even heroes need help. We need to be sure that all teachers are motivated to do their best and that they are equipped with what they need to teach effectively.

To support countries in reforming the teaching profession, the World Bank is launching "Successful Teachers, Successful Students." This global platform for teachers addresses the key challenges of making all teachers effective, making teaching a respectable and attractive profession with effective personnel policies, and ensuring teachers are equipped with the right skills and knowledge before entering the classroom and subsequently supporting them throughout their careers.

Technology offers new possibilities for teaching and learning

Rapid technological change is raising the stakes. Technology is already playing a crucial role in providing support to teachers, students, and the learning process more broadly. It can help teachers better manage the classroom and offer different challenges to different students. And technology can allow principals, parents, and students to interact seamlessly. Millions of students are benefitting from the effective use of technology, but millions more are not.

One of the most interesting, large scale educational technology efforts is being led by EkStep, a philanthropic effort in India. EkStep created an open digital infrastructure, which provides access to learning opportunities for 200 million children, as well as professional development opportunities for 12 million teachers and 4.5 million school leaders. Both teachers and children are accessing content which ranges from teaching materials, explanatory videos, interactive content, stories, practice worksheets, and formative assessments. By monitoring which content is used most frequently and most beneficially, informed decisions can be made around future content.

In the Dominican Republic, a World Bank supported pilot study shows how adaptive technologies can generate great interest among 21st century students and present a path to supporting the learning and teaching of future generations.

Yudeisy, a sixth grader participating in the study, says that what she likes doing the most during the day is watching videos and tutorials on her computer and cell phone. Taking childhood curiosity as a starting

point, the study aimed to channel it towards math learning in a way that interests Yudeisy and her classmates.



Yudeisy and her classmates in a public elementary school in Santo Domingo, are part of a 4-month pilot to reinforce mathematics using software that adapts to the math level of each student

We know learning happens best when instruction is personalized to meet the needs and strengths of each child, individual progress is tracked, and prompt feedback provided. Adaptive technology was used to evaluate students' initial learning level to then walk them through math exercises in a dynamic, personalized way, based on artificial intelligence and what the student is ready to learn. After three months, students with the lowest initial performance achieved substantial improvements. This shows the potential of technology to increase learning outcomes, among students lagging behind.

In a field that is developing at dizzying speeds, innovative solutions to educational challenges are springing up everywhere. Our challenge is to make technology a driver of equity and inclusion and not a source of greater inequality of opportunity. We are working with partners worldwide to support the effective and appropriate use of educational technologies to strengthen learning.

When schools and learning are managed well, learning happens

Providing quality education requires building systems that deliver learning, day after day, in thousands of schools, to millions of students. Successful education reforms require good policy design, strong political commitment, and effective implementation capacity. This is extremely challenging. Many countries struggle to make best use of resources and very often increased education spending does not translate into more learning and improved human capital. Overcoming such challenges involves working at all levels of the system.

At the central level, ministries of education need to attract the best experts to design and implement evidence-based and country-specific programs. District or regional offices need the capacity and the tools to monitor learning and support schools. The school principals need to be trained and prepared to manage and lead schools, from planning the use of resources to supervising and nurturing their teachers.

Though difficult, change is possible. Supported by the World Bank, public schools across Punjab in Pakistan have been part of major reforms over the past few years to address these challenges. Through improved school-level accountability by monitoring and limiting teacher and student absenteeism, and the introduction of a merit-based teacher recruitment, where only the most talented and motivated teachers were selected, they were able to increase enrollment and retention of students and significantly improve the quality of education. "The government schools have become very good now, even better than private ones," said Mr. Ahmed, a local villager.

No change can happen without data. Governments need to know what their education systems are missing, or what's being done right, to take the right steps to improve. The World Bank, along with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the UK's Department for International Development, is developing the Global Education Policy Dashboard. This new initiative will provide governments with a system for monitoring how their education systems are functioning, from learning data to policy plans, so they are better able to make timely and evidence-based decisions.

Education reform: The long game is worth it

By their nature, the payoffs from investing in education require patience and persistence. In fact, it will take a generation to realize the

full benefits of high-quality teachers, the effective use of technology, improved management of education systems, and engaged & prepared learners. Global experience shows us that countries that have improved development and prosperity all share the common characteristic of taking education seriously and investing appropriately.

As we mark the first-ever International Day of Education on January 24, we must do all we can to equip our youth with the skills to keep learning, adapt to changing realities, and thrive in an increasingly competitive global economy and a rapidly changing world of work.

The schools of the future are being built today. These are schools where all teachers have the right competencies and motivation, where technology empowers them to deliver quality learning, and where all students learn fundamental skills, including socio-emotional, and digital skills. These schools are safe and affordable to everyone and are places where children learn with joy, rigor, and purpose.

Governments, teachers, parents, and the international community must do their homework to realize the promise of education for all students, in every village, in every city, and in every country.

Peace fellow plants seeds of opportunity and peace for small farmers by Nikki Kallio in the Rotarian

In 2011, Hong Kong native Spencer Leung moved to Thailand to launch the organic operation of a Thai agricultural seed company. He believed that demand for organic food would continue to expand, but he didn't simply want to make money.

Leung applied to become a Rotary Peace Fellow. He became the first peace fellow to be sponsored by District 3450 (Hong Kong, Macao, Mongolia, and China), attending the Rotary Peace Center at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok in 2013. The Chulalongkorn fellowship is a three-month certificate program for professionals who are already working in their field.



Songpot OonCham, Spencer Leung, and Saguntala Vijit discuss ways Songpot can use product traceability labels to enhance his business. Photo by Monika Lozinska

"The more I looked into it, the more I believed organic agriculture could be a powerful peace building platform," Leung says. "So I finished the course and used my own savings to start Go Organics."

Go Organics aims to improve productivity and sustainability for farmers who cultivate less than 2 hectares (about 5 acres) of crops, based on the belief that creating economic stability for small farmers will help cultivate peace.

Leung knew that in many parts of the world, small farmers lack the technical knowledge to connect with the global market for organics. So the team at Go Organics is working on initiatives to improve the marketplace for small farmers and to provide simple and cost-effective technologies that will help them improve operations, such as labels with digitally encoded data including production and expiration dates. The labels will make the supply chain more transparent, Leung says; consumers will be able to scan them with their phones to receive detailed information about the food that they are buying and the farmers who grew it.

"We want to bring customers closer to the producer," Leung says. "We want them to know and appreciate where the food comes from and to support the hard work of the farmers."



These labels show icons to identify duck and chicken eggs. The QR code tracks the eggs from farm to consumer.

Go Organics also offers farmers an affordable cold storage unit that will keep crops fresh up to 10 days longer, opening up more market opportunities. The farmers can use micro-financing to purchase the unit, and Go Organics guarantees the sale of a certain amount of produce.

Go Organics has been working with the University of California, Davis, to introduce technologies to dry produce, such as a chimney solar dryer that is constructed from locally available items. A table covered in black cloth and a chimney wrapped in plastic create an air tunnel that can be used to dry agricultural products including fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, and coffee beans.

Another innovation is an inexpensive test called a DryCard that farmers can use to check moisture levels in their products. Knowing those levels can help the farmers prevent the growth of mold.

"There's a big issue with food safety and food security, and reports say up to one-third of food produced is wasted," says Anthony Phan, a project analyst at the Horticulture Innovation Lab at UC Davis.

At the same time, global food production needs to increase dramatically to feed a growing population. Go Organics' projects are supporting the "dry chain," ensuring that foods can be dried properly and packaged safely.

"What Spencer is doing is really important, because these farmers don't have the support, education, or even awareness of this problem," Phan says. "Go Organics provides the expertise, technologies, and supplies needed to support that process."

The DryCards are credit card-size laminated papers with cobalt chloride humidity indicator strips to measure moisture in products. The farmer puts the card, along with the produce, in a sealed storage container such as a jar or plastic bag; an hour later, the indicator strip will have changed color to indicate the moisture level. Pink means the product is too wet, while blue means it is safe to package.

"Right now, the way most farmers test for dryness is to either bite their product or squeeze it in their hands and listen to it," Phan says. "And that's not an accurate way to determine whether your foods are safe enough to store."

The traditional alternative to the DryCard is a digital moisture meter, but that requires electricity or batteries, which are not always available to small farmers. The cards can be manufactured for 10 to 25 cents, Phan says, and can be reused many times. In addition to testing produce and other foods, they can also be used to monitor the moisture level of seeds in storage to ensure healthy germination, improving yields.



Small farms produce about 80 percent of the world's food

To manufacture the cards, Go Organics is working with St. James' Settlement, a nonprofit for people with disabilities. "I could make the card in China or have a factory make it for a lower cost," Leung says. "Our job is to channel the work to those who are in need and to bring these people into the workforce."

It's a challenging effort, he notes, made more challenging by larger competitors with more resources. "But we want to do something different. We want a distribution network that lets local people eat local food that they can get directly from the farms nearby."

Small farms produce around 80 percent of the world's food and make up 90 percent of the world's 570 million farms.

"If we can raise this group of people's standard of living sustainably, we're going to make a lot of changes to the whole world," Leung says. "It's going to be amazing."

Continued from the previous issue of Spectrum

Ordinary Rotarians can find themselves in extraordinary circumstances. Source: January issue of the Rotarian
Illustrations by Aad Goudappel

Build a hockey rink in Afghanistan by Zarmina Nekzai
Rotary Club of North York, Ontario

In 2016, I was visiting a girls school in northern Afghanistan, in the Mir Bacha Kot region. Some students had taken a few balls outside and were running around the schoolyard, playing and laughing. They reminded me of kids like my son playing hockey back in Canada. He was born there just after we arrived as refugees.



In Afghanistan, I had been an adult literacy teacher and a supervisor of an adult education program. In 1981, while traveling by bus from Kabul, I was taken hostage by Hezb-e Islami terrorists. There were 19 of us, all teachers, all women. Three of us were killed before we were rescued by the army the next day.

In 1984, a rocket hit our house. My father was killed, and my mother and three of my siblings were severely injured. My heart was broken. I knew we couldn't stay in Afghanistan. My husband and I left with our three-month-old daughter. We went to Pakistan, and I lost all contact with my family. After three years, I discovered my aunt had emigrated to Canada; we moved there in December 1988. Four days after we arrived, our son was born.

I had never heard of hockey before I came to Canada. When I was in high school, I played volleyball. But hockey is our national sport in Canada, and I wanted to bring it to Afghanistan.

I also wanted to provide a safe place for girls to participate in sports. At Mir Bacha Kot Girls School there was a huge yard, and this seemed like an opportunity to have a hockey rink. In Afghanistan, the north of the country is cold, but most of the kids had never heard of hockey or seen it played.

We started building the rink in 2017 with support from the Rotary Club of North York. We made it with a drain in the middle, so that in the warm season it could be used for floor hockey, basketball, volleyball, and in-line skating.

Construction was finished in early 2018, and I went to Afghanistan to get the equipment out of customs. When I opened the registration, 500 children showed up, but I only had uniforms and equipment for 50. I began teaching the sports lessons in the classroom. The students were very excited. Then they practiced in-line skating and tried on the gear. We have two teams with about 25 students each. The Mir Bacha Kot region most certainly has the highest percentage of female hockey players in Afghanistan. But their enthusiasm has prompted me to think bigger. My dream is for Afghanistan to play hockey in the Olympics. I want to sponsor a team of girls to come to Canada from Afghanistan. They could be trained, and then they could return to Afghanistan and teach another group, and they would teach another group, and so on, until hockey spreads across the country.

As told to Frank Bures

To be continued...

Upcoming anniversaries in January, 2019

Sp Papia & PDG Debashis Mitra on January 26, 2019

Sp Dr Nandita & President Dr Ankush Bansal on Jan, 28, 2019

January is Vocational Service Month

Upcoming club's community service programs

- **On Sunday, February 3, 2019:** Distribution of 20 Cycle Vans, 2 hand paddled tri-cycles and 100 Geometry boxes at Meena Khan, South 24 Parganas District
- **On Sunday, February 17, 2019:** Distribution of 25 Cycle Vans at Amta, Howrah District