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## **“We need to help community growth”**

During some of my visits to the Clubs in our District it has been a pleasure to see the projects being undertaken this year within those Clubs and discuss the impact on community. These projects provide significant contributions to the various communities within our District.

A noteworthy point is the number of these projects which relate to the health sector. Health and Disease Prevention is one of the most important of the six areas of focus of the Rotary Foundation and with the high percentage of Rotarians in our Clubs that form a part of the wider medical profession, it is not a surprise to see this emphasis.

However the important point about the areas of focus is that we have six. We are not a mono-thematic organisation but see a holistic approach to improving our communities with health, particularly maternal and child health education, water, economic development and peace all being addressed to improve the lives of citizens while respecting our environment. In fact those service projects which address more than one of these areas at the same time provide significant additional value.

October is the month dedicated to Economic and Community Development. While this area of focus may sometimes be seen as being incongruous to the work of Rotary, which after all Rotary is not a Chamber of Commerce, the health of a community, in the wide sense of the word, cannot be addressed without addressing the wealth of that community. The availability of work and the stimulation of economic development within communities itself underpins the sustainability of that community.

The reduction in the economic levels of our communities resulting from the years of recession following the financial crisis that started in 2008, including higher levels of unemployment, both internationally but also within our own District, has clearly lead to a degradation of the health of our communities. Not only do lower levels of disposable income lead to a reduction in the quality and type of food and access to healthcare but also to the physiological effects such as reductions in self-worth which can also have significant damaging effects. They also lead to the movement of people, particularly our youth, to the cities and often beyond our District, stripping our towns and villages of current and future economic generators in a spiral of degradation.

As Rotarians we cannot stand by idle when faced with this problem. We need to address the economic health of our communities and help stimulate growth. While Rotary cannot become a bank or a venture capital company, we have one resource that few others have: Rotarians, with their skills, professions and networks within the community and beyond. That is our main differentiator which we need to bring down to bear on this problem, assisting our communities, particularly our youths, by mentoring them, nurturing their growth, facilitating apprenticeships, providing training etc.



It is a known fact that economic growth springs from small and micro enterprises rather than large enterprises and we need to assist those struggling to create and sustain such businesses. As our District is doing placing the professional skills of our medical and legal Rotarians to assist immigrant minors, we also have our District project on entrepreneurship which aims to provide this mentorship. Work with your communities. Provide the experience of business, legal, accounting practitioners etc. to those start-up or struggling businesses in your communities. We need to be the beacon of experience for our communities. The human element.

Through this we will retain our youth in our communities, help them grow and drive a higher standard of economic health and all the other positive aspects that this would development related to crime and environmental wellbeing. The time is right. The economic situation is slowly starting to turn more positive after years of negative performance. As Rotarians let us work together to serve our communities even in this way.

*John*