



GROWING SOLUTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

ESRAG supports adding the Environment as a separate and unique Area of Focus

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POSITION: The Environmental Sustainability Rotarian Action Group (ESRAG) supports the addition of “Ensuring Environmental Sustainability” as a unique and separate Rotary Area of Focus (AOF). The environment sustains all life on Earth and Rotary cannot effectively or sustainably serve humanity if Rotary does not focus on supporting the wellbeing of planet Earth. Adding the Environment as a unique AOF will maximize Rotary’s potential to develop, fund and implement projects to sustain the environment wherein humanity lives. As citizens throughout the world rally to protect the environment and preserve the planet and all of its species, Rotary risks compromising both its well-deserved reputation as a premier global humanitarian organization and its relevance to current and future generations if it fails to focus on the Environment. Adding Environment as a unique AOF will enhance the effectiveness and progress in all the other areas, enhance Rotary’s reputation as an environmental champion on the global stage, empower the development and implementation of humanitarian projects that resonate with the next generation of Rotarians, and attract new members, new funding sources and partners.

BACKGROUND: From a humanitarian perspective, “**Environmental sustainability** is the rates of renewable resource harvest, pollution creation, and non-renewable resource depletion that can be continued indefinitely. If they cannot be continued indefinitely then they are not **sustainable**.”ⁱ On the other hand, TRF defines sustainability of a project more narrowly as “the capacity for maintaining long-term outcomes that continue to serve the ongoing needs of a community after grant funds have been expended.”ⁱⁱ This narrower definition, limited to only economic and social/cultural sustainability, does not adequately consider environmental sustainability.

Under the leadership of Rotary International (RI) President Paulo Costa, in 1990 the RI Board created a three-year pilot program: “Preserve Planet Earth” (PPE). Clubs, inspired by RI President Costa’s “Green Marathon” challenge, completed over 1,000 Rotary environmental projects worldwide by 1996, funded in part by TRF. Though the Board did not make PPE a permanent program of the Board, Rotary continued its commitment to environmental protection by requesting that District Governors establish PPE Committees at the District level.

In 1992, the RI Board of Directors adopted Resolution 92-287 that charged both clubs and individual Rotarians with Protecting the Environment:

"As they are in a unique position to bring these facts to the attention of government leaders, communities and industries, **clubs shall** be encouraged to help create better and necessary living conditions, make it possible for our earth to survive as a good place for mankind, and **give**

emphasis to the protection and improvement of the environment in their community and World Community Service projects.

It is the responsibility of every Rotarian to support action directed at improving the environment and protecting animals and plants from extinction."

This language was carried forward in the RI Code of Policies until removed by the RI Board in 2010 in conjunction with formalizing the Future Vision plan that introduced the Six Areas of Focus (AOF). Thus, adding Environment as an AOF is a restoration, not a revolution. ⁱⁱⁱ

ESRAG, recognized by RI in 2015, was formed to help develop, implement and evaluate service projects, and to build awareness, and inspire action around projects that promote environmental sustainability, and provide solutions to climate change.

ARGUMENT

Out of necessity, because the environment was not an AOF, ESRAG has emphasized how environmental sustainability relates to each of the six AOF and why the environment must be integral to all current AOF. Even if the environment is an AOF, considerations of environmental sustainability must be integral to the development and implementation of all Rotary projects, programs and operations.

When Rotary adopted Future Vision to reorganize, consolidate and simplify grant programs, fundable projects were reduced to only six AOF. The AOF structure created funding "silos" so that, if a project did not fall within or was peripheral to any AOF, it could not receive funding or other support from TRF. The environment as a fundamental part of Rotary's service mission had been essentially omitted.

The United Nations (UN) in September 2015 adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Six key SDGs, all of which relate to the environment, essentially have no counterpart in RI's current AOF, namely:

Affordable and Clean Energy; Sustainable Cities and Communities; Responsible Consumption and Production; Climate Action; Life Below the Water; and Life on Land.

Under the TRF definition of humanitarian projects funded within the AOF, about one third of the UN's SDGs are excluded from TRF Global Grant funding. By neglecting these six significant SDGs, Rotary has closed off opportunities for Rotarians to offer Service above Self to protect the environment and solve climate change.

Without an AOF for the environment:

- TRF does not fund and the Cadre of Technical Advisors does not support worthy environmental projects.
- It is much more difficult for Peace Fellows and Global Grant Scholars to focus on the environment.

- Arch Klumph Society Members are not able to dedicate their gifts to the environment.
- Staff members feel constrained to support initiatives relating to environmental projects, and
- Rotary will not budget to expand staff expertise, e.g. an Environmental Sustainability officer.

Given the limitations inherent in the AOF construct, ESRAG is now convinced that the best way forward is to establish a separate and unique AOF for the environment, not combined with any other AOF. This will empower Rotary to develop projects that support all seventeen of the SDGs. Adding the environment as an AOF opens many opportunities to fund worthy projects to protect our planet, including reforestation land to help clean the air and water and provide carbon sinks. Rotary currently misses the opportunity to reduce energy poverty with renewable resources and to work upstream of disasters to mitigate their causes. Climate change will have the biggest impact on, and most harm the poorest people in the world, the very people Rotary is dedicated to serving.

If Rotary is to remain relevant to the Rotaractors and young Rotarians who are its future, the environment must regain its previous position as a focus of Rotary’s humanitarian endeavors. As Rotarians consider their legacy, the ability to dedicate their gifts to the environment will empower significant additional contributions to TRF. Adding an AOF dedicated to the environment will inspire Rotarians to be even more generous with their time, treasures and talents. ESRAG appreciates the work of RI Presidents Ian Riseley, Barry Rassin, Mark Maloney and Holger Knaack who are again championing the importance of the environment and its positive impact on the world, the future of Rotary and individual Rotarians.

RECOMMENDATIONS: ESRAG recommends the following actions:

- Add the Environment as a separate Area of Focus in its own right, and not combined with any other Area of Focus.
- Name the new Area of Focus and Cause “Ensuring Environmental Sustainability”
- Place Environmental projects on an equal footing with all other projects in every other Area of Focus.
- Revise the Mission Statement of the Rotary Foundation to include preserving the environment.

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ⁱ *Thwink.org (Accessed i.2020)*

ⁱⁱ *TRF Code of Policies 33.080. 2016 (Accessed i.2020)*

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: COL 92-287, Adopted by the RI Board in 1992, and codified in the Rotary of Code of policies, **Article 42 Community Service, 42.020. Environmental Protection, 42.020.1. Protecting the Environment** (*Jun. 1998 Mtg., Bd. Dec. 348 ____*); ultimately deleted from the RI Code of Policies, by RI Board decision 146, January 2010.