

## The Rotary Foundation Trustee David Morgan

# in Conversation

with  
**RID Ashok Mahajan**

**TRF is prospering because of the generosity of Rotarians and even non-Rotarians. What is the future of TRF?**

I foresee an extremely successful future for TRF. During the last Rotary year the contributions to the Annual Programmes Fund exceeded the US \$100 million threshold for the very first time and the latest figures indicate that this trend is continuing.

Furthermore the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has shown its confidence in the future of Rotary by granting TRF the largest sum in our 102 year existence while at the same time UN agencies and governments continue to show a readiness to partner with us.

I have no doubt that our future must be extremely bright.

**Once Polio is vanquished what appears to be the next target?**

The Board of Directors and the Trustees of the Rotary Foundation are adamant that no other corporate project will be introduced until polio eradication has been completed. This is now our number one priority and the Trustees are determined to ensure that nothing interferes with its successful conclusion.

**Even after spending many millions in eradicating Polio, we find that the going is not easy. There are some intrinsic pitfalls. Do you believe that Polio can be totally eradicated?**

I am not qualified to give a medical answer to this question but I can say that WHO and other experts are totally

convinced that eradication is possible and the enhanced funding which we have recently received from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Google will undoubtedly assist in bringing this campaign to a successful conclusion.

So yes, I believe that it is possible to totally eradicate the evil virus, Polio.

**Rotary is unable to utilise fully the talents of Rotary's Ambassadorial scholars and GSE team members in promoting Rotary. Any suggestions?**

You are absolutely right in suggesting that we could and should do more to ensure that those young people who have been exposed to Rotary through our Foundation Programmes are more fully involved in our current work.



I do not believe that it is a case of being unable to utilise Ambassadorial scholars and GSE members but rather that this is a matter which requires greater attention. Indeed it is for this reason that the Trustees have included “Reconnecting with the Rotary Foundation Alumni” as one of its four priorities for this Rotary year.

I therefore hope that we all take the trouble to identify such people and encourage them to attend the Alumni pre-convention event at Los Angeles in June of this year, that we involve them in district events, activities and projects, and that we ask them to sit on selection committees and involve them in orientation programmes in our districts.

By demonstrating how much Rotary values them, we will hopefully rejuvenate their interest in the organisation and possibly interest them in membership.

**Rotary Foundation spends millions on Peace scholars. Are Rotary's gains going to be commensurate with our efforts to promote peace?**

How can we evaluate the success of our measures to promote peace in the world? What is the value of conflict avoidance? From my observations at the Peace Symposium held at Salt Lake City last year, and at peace seminars attended subsequent to that event, I am convinced that the quality of our scholars is increasing annually.

Indeed I am an enthusiastic supporter of the programme and I believe that as Rotarians we all have a burden of responsibility, to not only “Share Rotary” with those in need, but also to bring about the changes necessary to make this a safer and more equitable world and to tackle as many of the causes of conflict as possible.

The Rotary Foundation is serious, very serious in its quest for peace and is in the process of setting up an endowment fund to provide adequate funding for peace fellows in the future.

Indeed, this programme is again one of the Trustees top four priorities for this current Rotary year, and there are now some 385 young people working to establish peace with the benefit of Rotary sponsored courses. There can be no doubt that advocacy and mediation are very important in bringing about the cessation of conflict because as a wise man once said “It is a better use of my time to talk to my enemies than to my friends.”

**Peace is elusive because interpersonal communications and dialogues are lacking. Does TRF have any programmes to promote a one-to-one exchange of ideas?**

Yes, it certainly does. The Rotary Foundations’ Programmes designed to promote peace and understanding through the interchange of people between countries include the Ambassadorial Scholarship Programme — the largest non-governmental scholarship programme in the world, which has sent some 38,000 students to countries other than their own to learn and understand the culture and thinking of the people of those countries. Our GSE Programme is another programme which permits young business and professional people to live in the homes of their foreign country hosts and learn through conversation the way they think.

And this is so important because peace is more than the mere absence of hostilities. It is a situation in which former enemies are able to sit down and talk to each other. It is a recognition of the fact that peace cannot be kept by force — it can only be achieved by understanding.

**After Polio Plus succeeds, what should be the Foundation's thrust area? Is illiteracy the biggest stumbling block to the paths of progress and prosperity?**

This is a question which the Trustees have not yet addressed because of the priority they presently give to the

elimination of polio. However, it will be interesting to see what areas of focus are decided upon by the Trustees for type ‘B’ grants at their April 2008 meeting.

**Will TRF popularise Matching Grants and other grants programmes? Clubs world-wide do great work because of finance available from TRF.**

The new programme structure which is presently being considered and refined by TRF will permit the distribution of funds raised annually through humanitarian, educational and Polio Plus Programmes designed to advance world understanding, goodwill and peace through the improvement of health, the support of education and the alleviation of poverty. Further details will be announced shortly.

However, as you know the demand for Matching Grants has never been higher with the same number being awarded between the years 2000 and 2005 as in the previous 35 years. This is one, if not the principal reason why a new grant structure is being introduced.

**Why is it that TRF does not collect a satisfactory amount from certain geographical areas? Any plans to popularise TRF in these areas?**

The Trustees and the RRFC’s are working hard to increase giving in all areas and there are encouraging signs. I live in a country which has not been placed near the top of tables indicating annual giving, yet members are generous in their support of people in need. We have a huge challenge to better inform clubs as to the wonderful life saving programmes which our Foundation is sponsoring around the world. The better informed members are concerning this work, the more likely they are to choose our Foundation rather than another organisation when considering the provision of support for worthy causes.

I think your terminology “popularise TRF” is very apt.

**Any new Programmes in the pipeline for conflict resolution? Can The Rotary Foundation establish a mechanism promoting better understanding?**

President Wilf has arranged a series of very successful Presidential Peace Forums/Summits around the world during this Rotary year and the last of these will be held at the end of April in Windsor, Ontario near Detroit,

This will be attended by our peace and conflict resolution scholars and eminent speakers on this subject will be present and make addresses. Also the Trustees have decided to hold another peace symposium at the Birmingham, England, convention in 2009, in addition to setting the target figure of \$95 million to fully endow the peace fellowship programme.

Furthermore, the Board of Directors is considering how best to advance peace in the Balkans and in various other parts of the world, and all these new initiatives will run parallel to Rotary's unobtrusive interpersonal peace initiatives, which we have just spoken about.

**Any ideas for a terrorism control programme?**

Whilst Rotary cannot take a front line position concerning terrorism, it can and is working wherever possible to eliminate the causes of terrorism and to deal with the aftermath of terrorist attacks.

**Any ideas on reducing GSE exchanges? It often seems those TRF alumni are not involved in peace programmes or exchange programmes that promote better understanding.**

The Group Study Exchange Programme together with other Rotary Programmes are presently being considered by the Future Vision Committee, and this committee's recommendations will be considered by the Trustees in the near future. Perhaps we need to find ways of promoting more exchanges between the developed and developing countries,

but I do not want to try and pre-empt any imminent Trustee decisions concerning this matter.

**There is a need to promote programmes that train or teach youth to undertake a vocation. This will reduce poverty and promote literacy. Will TRF enter into this area of great need?**

Many clubs and districts around the world are already involved in this work. Furthermore, Rotarian Action Groups are undertaking sterling work in the elimination of poverty and the promotion of literacy. As you know these subjects have been among the

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priorities of incoming presidents in recent years, and are again being promoted by incoming President D K Lee, but with more emphasis on children.

**Will TRF spend more than it gets to fulfil its programmes? The interest earned out of the contribution can, perhaps, support some projects of vital concern.**

Part of the interest earned on money deposited in the Permanent fund is transferred from time to time to the Annual Programmes Fund and of course money donated to our APF is invested for 3 years prior to it being used and accumulates interest during this period. However, although our administrative costs are kept to a minimum they cannot be avoided so that not all accrued interest is available for immediate use.

**Woman empowerment is the need of the decade and next. Will TRF enter into some programme promoting woman empowerment?**

One of our Humanitarian Programme divisions is presently achieving this objective through its Revolving Loan

activity, where money is loaned to groups of women for the purpose of them setting up small businesses. Furthermore, the provision of clean water and sanitation also assists in the emancipation of women by freeing them from the chores of walking long distances over rough terrain to provide what is often contaminated water.

I can best illustrate this by quoting the vivacious ten-year-old girl who said when a supply of mains water was brought to her village. — “I am so happy, because now, for the very first time, I can go to school.”

**Young men and women who go as Ambassadorial scholars or GSE team members are from a relatively affluent group and on their return are often a total loss to Rotary. Will TRF support local youth upliftment programmes for the poor youth?**

We have already talked about the need to better utilise Foundation alumni and as I mentioned earlier incoming President D. K. Lee wants us to prioritise youth through our programmes next year. TRF certainly supports youth upliftment programmes, many of which are initiated by clubs and one of the ways in which this is achieved is through matching grants.

**Your message to Rotarians?**

We have many challenges before us today but these also provide many opportunities for service. So I hope that whilst those of us who are privileged to be members of Rotary at this exciting time and enjoy the happiness that comes from helping others will also make this known to those who are not yet members so that they too can be part of Rotary's great future.