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Rotary International's relevance for Gen Z must be evaluated against shifting patterns of youth engagement. Globally, Gen Z (born ~ 1997–2012) now constitutes over 30% of the population, and studies by Deloitte and McKinsey & Company consistently show that over 70% of Gen Z prioritise purpose-driven work and social impact. In that context, Rotary International—with 1.4 million members across 200+ countries—offers unmatched scale, credibility, and structured leadership pathways through programs like Interact and Rotaract.

Yet, data also highlights the gaps. According to reports from Pew Research Center, Gen Z prefers flexible, short-term engagement and digital-first communities. Traditional Rotary models—weekly meetings, hierarchical processes—can deter participation. Meanwhile, competing ecosystems such as UN Volunteers, Ashoka, and platforms like LinkedIn enable faster visibility, cause-based alignment, and personal branding.

The opportunity for Rotary lies in adaptation. Hybrid engagement models, micro-volunteering, and digital storytelling can align with Gen Z expectations. Empowering Rotaract with greater autonomy and leadership visibility is crucial. Data suggests that organisations that prioritise youth voice see up to 25–30% higher retention among young members.

For Gen Z, Rotary remains a high-value platform—if leveraged strategically. For Rotary, the message is clear: evolve from tradition-bound structures to agile, impact-driven ecosystems. Only then can it truly harness the demographic dividend of the next generation.

Subhojit Roy

Rotary Peace Fellow Employs AI for a Better World

By Amy Hoak



Branka Panic founded AI for Peace to help stop conflicts before they start.

Image credit: Bénédicte Desrus

During her Rotary Peace Fellowship, Branka Panic worked as a short-term consultant at the World Bank, joining a team that was building a model to predict the probability of famine.

The benefits of such a tool were obvious: "If a certain area will be in need of food in six months, in 12 months, we can prepare humanitarian aid more efficiently," Panic says.

But unintended consequences of making that information available also became clear. "Our intention was to make humanitarian agencies ready," Panic says. "But what if, by providing this signal as an open source, we were actually informing the government or any warring party out there to intentionally attack this population because they see there is a vulnerability?"

The exercise illustrated both the power and the danger of using such technologies. It surfaced ethical questions to be mindful of and the sensitivities of parsing data and sharing it widely.

It also motivated Panic, 42, to found AI for Peace, a think tank dedicated to issues like these, as well as how artificial intelligence has the potential to benefit peace, security, and sustainable development. She co-authored a book of the same name.

The organization's focus areas include humanitarian action (using AI to save lives by anticipating and targeting response efforts); human rights and democracy (using AI to identify human rights abuses and protect defenders of human rights); and human security (using AI to protect people, as well as researching potential security threats). Positive use of AI technology can strengthen societies and prevent conflict in the first place, Panic says.

AI is already being used in peace negotiations. Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders have used AI to facilitate large-scale dialogues aimed at ending the conflict in Gaza, she says. In some conflict areas, AI is breaking down language and dialect barriers. "We are using AI to say, 'Wait a minute, we actually have quite an easy way to let people's voices be heard in this peace process.'"

AI for Peace works with peacebuilders to build their knowledge and familiarity with artificial intelligence to become an active voice in designing, developing, and implementing new applications, she says. "We also work with data scientists, who quite often never thought about peacebuilding before, and we want them to become a little bit of peacebuilders themselves," she adds.

Branka Panic

- **Rotary Fellowship, Duke University/University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2017-19**
- **Founding director, AI for Peace, 2019-present**
- **Charter member, Rotary Club of Global Partners in Peace, 2022-present**

Born in Belgrade, Serbia, Panic lived through conflicts in the Balkans, an experience that shaped her worldview and motivated her to become a peacebuilder. She recalls the NATO bombing of her country, when school stopped and people had to live in basements and shelters. "These things tend to leave a mark," she says. For her, it set her on a mission: to do all she could to prevent people from having to live through similar conflicts.

Panic became an activist while in high school, joining the Otpor ("Resistance") movement against the authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milošević, former president of Serbia and Yugoslavia. The group organized daily peaceful walks in resistance of Milošević, who eventually resigned and was charged with war crimes committed during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

Protesting in 1999 and 2000, however, was done without much technology, she points out. In contrast, subsequent grassroots movements, such as the Arab Spring in the early 2010s, were able to benefit from social media tools to coordinate. "At the very beginning of my interest in technology, we started seeing how social media has been used to actually strengthen that type of activism," she adds. "This was super empowering."

During her Rotary Peace Fellowship, Branka Panic joined her host club from North Carolina in helping introduce electricity to schools in Nicaragua and volunteered with Habitat for Humanity for the International Day of Peace.

With her Rotary Peace Fellowship, she was able to delve deeper into technology and AI to enrich her peacebuilding background. Rotary District 2483 in Serbia and Montenegro supported her fellowship, and the connection changed her life, she says.

Panic is now a Rotarian herself and is a charter member of the Rotary Club of Global Partners in Peace, an e-club for peace fellows and peace activists. The club hosts speakers who talk about their peacebuilding, humanitarian, and

development work, and members live all around the world, from Mexico (where she lives, in San Miguel de Allende) to Chile, Nepal, and the Philippines.

With her husband, Panic opened a “peace house,” which she describes as “a place where artists, thinkers, neighbors, diplomats, technologists, travelers, and unexpected guests can meet around one table.” Gatherings spark conversations among people of different backgrounds, an effort to turn “everyday encounters into small acts of peace,” she says.

The house is part of Panic’s ethos of stopping conflicts before they start. AI for Peace intentionally focuses on prevention of conflict and building resilience; it doesn’t focus on the ethics of AI in weapons of war but rather how to address root causes of human suffering and vulnerability.

“This is the niche that we decided to cover,” Panic says. “There are a lot of things to do in building peace or sustaining peace or making sure that wars don’t happen at all.”

This story originally appeared in the March 2026 issue of Rotary magazine.

Six Young Leaders Named Rotary’s ‘Champions of Tomorrow’ for Empowering Youth Across the Globe



Rotary is recognizing six of its members and program participants age 30 and under as Rotary People of Action: ‘Champions of Tomorrow’ for their leadership in advancing impactful, youth-centered initiatives that are helping to create the foundations for brighter futures, today.

As a global membership organization that unites people across cultures and continents in humanitarian service, Rotary empowers its members to create lasting solutions alongside the communities they serve. Through its programs, Rotary fosters intercultural understanding, develops emerging leaders, elevates youth voices, and advances peace.

“Improving society begins at the local level by addressing the issues communities face,” said Francesco Arezzo, Rotary International President. “By leading projects that provide educational resources to those in need, foster personal development, support mental health, and champion conflict resolution, these honorees are creating more peaceful and resilient communities today, and unlocking their own potential to become the next generation of service-minded leaders.”

For more than 120 years, Rotary has addressed the needs of communities across the globe. To recognize these efforts, Rotary honors six sustainable and scalable initiatives annually through the People of Action Honors program. This year’s ‘Champions of Tomorrow’ include:

Maria Grazia Rava (Italy) – A member of Rotaract—Rotary’s global network of young adults ages 18 and older committed to community service and leadership development—Rava created How to Save a Life, a first-aid training program for teens in Northern Italy and San Marino. The scalable program has trained more than 1,000 students in essential emergency response skills, including CPR, and prepared them to take more active roles during school emergency drills.

Vansh Saini (India) – A Rotaract member who leads the Empowerment Academy, Saini has turned a basic life skills program into a comprehensive initiative to support multiple facets of learning and development for underprivileged students ages six to 15 in Delhi. The Academy offers educational resources, health and hygiene workshops, mentorship, career training, and more.

Raymond “Arky” Manning (Philippines) – A Rotary member, law student, and local elected official in the Rizal province, Manning has transformed his community’s justice system to be more innovative, economical, and inclusive

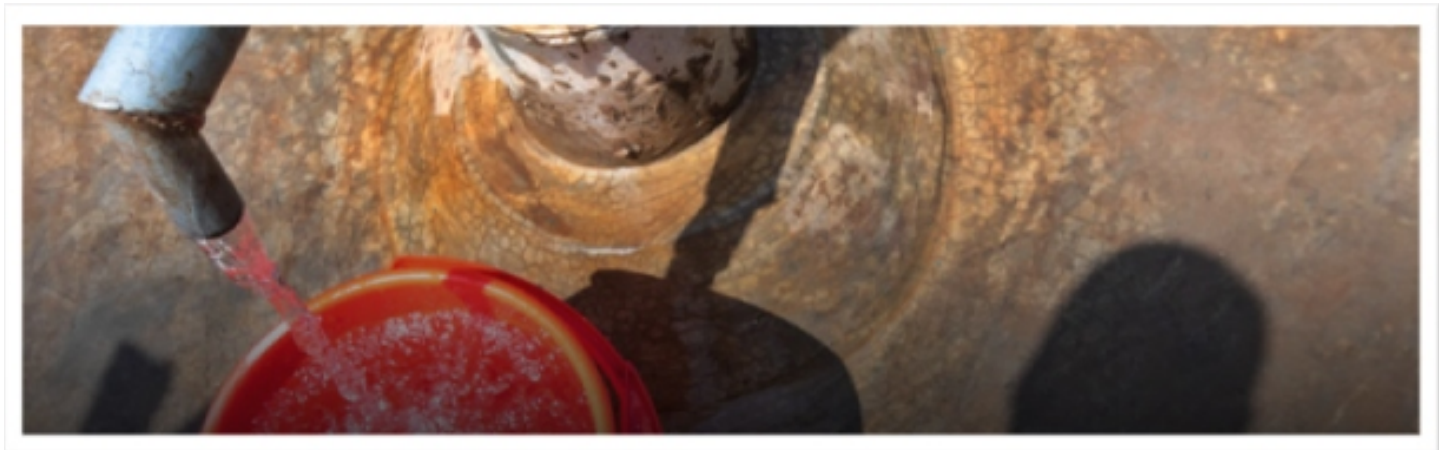
through leadership of a reform initiative, System for Amicable Grievance and Inclusive Peacebuilding (SAGIP) Barangay. By facilitating the training of peer mediators, creating spaces for mediation, fostering mental health awareness, and supporting anti-violence campaigns, SAGIP Barangay is reshaping the system into a body where youth are valued stakeholders in conflict resolution.

Maria Manuela Córdoba Aguirre (Colombia) – A Rotary member and founder of Rotary enSeñas (Rotary in Sign Language), Córdoba Aguirre’s initiative brings young Rotary members and deaf youth together to develop communication and leadership skills through workshops and regular activities. Deaf participants become program facilitators and leaders while hearing volunteers gain proficiency in sign language and collaboration.

Olivia Raley (USA) – A Rotary member and recent Rotary Youth Leadership Awards participant, Raley’s work with the Nelson County Yellow Tulip Project—an initiative supported by multiple local organizations—has helped combat the stigma around mental health in a rural community in Kentucky. Raley has empowered youth participants to drive education and awareness around the topic and maintain Hope Gardens as visual symbols of the community’s commitment to creating a culture of optimism and mental health wellness.

Derrick Kabuye (Uganda) – A Rotaract member in Kampala, Kabuye and his club have turned a rural school facing multiple challenges into a thriving educational facility through the Educate a Community Project. Under his leadership, the school’s footprint has expanded to serve more students, resolve sanitation issues, provide menstrual hygiene education, and offer job skills training.

Water Beyond Wells



With dams, rainwater collection, and purification systems, Rotary and Rotaract clubs help people access clean water

By Etelka Lehoczky

Access to clean water and sanitation can determine whether a child gets an education. That’s what Rotaract club members in the Ashanti region of Ghana learned when they explored ways to improve schools in their area.

The schools the club members visited faced water shortages and relied on contaminated water, resulting in high levels of diarrhea, dysentery, and other illnesses. There were no modern toilets, and girls didn’t have private spaces for menstrual hygiene. The lack of water affected every aspect of the students’ lives. The wide-ranging impact of water access is highlighted on the United Nations’ World Water Day, observed on 22 March.

“Water bankruptcy is becoming a driver of fragility, displacement, and conflict,” Tshilidzi Marwala, undersecretary-general of the UN, said in January. “Managing [water] fairly — ensuring that vulnerable communities are protected and that unavoidable losses are shared equitably — is now central to maintaining peace, stability, and social cohesion,” Marwala said.

More than 2 billion people around the globe lack clean, safe drinking water. Helping people gain access to clean water and sanitation is a top priority for Rotary, which includes the issue among its seven main causes.

With a US\$57,000 global grant from The Rotary Foundation, members of the Rotaract clubs of Kumasi and Obuasi in Ghana brought clean water and sanitation facilities to eight schools in the Ashanti region. Their project installed around 80 micro flush toilets and 10 urinals, constructed changing rooms for girls, and drilled borehole wells at two schools. Ghanaian Rotary and Rotaract clubs and Rotaract clubs in Turkey and the U.S. supported the initiative. It benefited more than 6,000 people.

Other recent Rotary projects in Mexico, Kenya, and the Dominican Republic highlight the far-reaching impact of water accessibility.

Clean water for the Rarámuri-Mexico

The Indigenous Rarámuri people live in isolated mountain villages in Mexico’s Chihuahua state. They face high rates of infectious diseases, malnutrition, and infant mortality due to a lack of clean water. The villages are out of reach of existing water networks, and the terrain makes it virtually impossible to drill wells.

A global grant-funded project led by the Rotary Club of Chihuahua Campestre, Chihuahua, Mexico, installed rainwater collection and purification systems in two villages, bringing water to 54 families.

The project included masonry classes for residents, who took part in the construction. Women and girls no longer need to travel long distances to collect water. Partner organizations provided food and nutritional supplements for children, pregnant women, and older residents.

Sand dams for farmers - Kenya

Residents of southeastern Kenya experience poverty and famine due to climate extremes and frequent, severe droughts. The Rotary Club of Embakasi, Kenya, led a global grant-funded project to construct sand dams, wells, and hand pumps for two subsistence farming communities.

The US\$88,000 project created sustainable water sources for around 3,000 people. It also trained farmers in crop diversification and rotation, tree nurturing and management, beekeeping, soil and water conservation, and livestock production. The initiative distributed drought-tolerant crop seeds, tree seedlings, and food preservation chemicals.

Providing for the House of Light-Dominican Republic

Casa De Luz (“House of Light”) provides care for 40 orphaned and abandoned children with severe disabilities in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. The residence hospital relies on a well for water, but it’s not clean.

With a US\$117,000 global grant, the Rotary Club of Santo Domingo Bella Vista, Dominican Republic, installed a water purification plant at the hospital. The plant provides enough water for the hospital’s needs and a surplus that it can sell. In addition to training hospital employees to operate the system, the project established a distribution route for trucks to sell water throughout the community. Around 4,500 people benefited from the project.

District News



Forthcoming Programs



WAAD- 2nd April'26-5pm, Kolkata Centre for Creativity

Club News

Laptop Donation



On 24th March 2026, our club members, PP Rtn Abhoy Krishna Mitra and Rtn Arpan Mitra, donated a Lenovo laptop to Miss Sayantika Bar, a student of class VII, to help her with

her school computer studies.

Miss Sayantika Bar is from an unprivileged family and her father had made an appeal to Rtn Abhoy Mitra. The cost of the laptop was ₹12,000 and was fully borne by Rtn Abhoy Mitra.

(Reported Club President Rtn. Sunando Sen)

