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Rotary's Vocational Service month must make us step into India's Skill Crisis

India's biggest strength — its youth — is also its biggest risk. Over **65% of India's population is under 35**, according to the National Skill Development Corporation. Yet multiple employability studies show that less than half of Indian graduates are job-ready without additional training. Every year, nearly **12 million youth** enter the workforce — but industry continues to report a deep skill mismatch. This is not a minor gap. It is a structural national challenge.

Despite flagship initiatives like Skill India Mission and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, employers across MSMEs, healthcare, construction, and emerging tech sectors struggle to find trained manpower. Meanwhile, youth unemployment and underemployment remain persistent concerns, as flagged by the International Labour Organization.

This is where Rotary's Vocational Service must evolve.

India has over **4,000 Rotary clubs and 150,000+ professionals**. If even 30,000 Rotarians mentor or skill-train just 10 youths annually, Rotary could impact **3 lakh young Indians every year** — without creating a new institution, without waiting for policy reform.

Vocational Service cannot remain confined to felicitation ceremonies. It must translate into:

Structured mentorship, Apprenticeship pipelines, ITI and polytechnic adoption. Women and rural entrepreneurship support, Industry-aligned skill certification. India's demographic dividend has a time window. Idle youth is not just an economic loss — it is a social risk. Vocational Service Month should therefore not be symbolic. It should be measurable.

The real question is simple: Will Rotary celebrate professions — or will it actively shape India's future workforce?

Subhojit Roy

Presidential Message - January 2026



In a garage outside Salinas, California, young people who are learning to restore classic cars are doing more than developing a skill — they are reclaiming their futures. This training program provides mentorship and, for some, a path away from gang involvement toward meaningful employment. Graduates leave with certifications, practical experience, and hope.

This is what Rotary's Vocational Service Month celebrates each January — the power of bringing together people with unique skills to do good in the world. It reminds us that integrity isn't just about our actions matching our words. Integrity is in everything we do. The California automotive program has been such a success because it was built on integrity. Members of the Rotary Club of Carmel-by-the-Sea didn't assume they knew what the community needed. They listened. They learned there was a shortage of skilled mechanics as well as a large number of young people lacking job training. They recognized that technical skills alone wouldn't be enough, so they partnered with Rancho

Cielo, a nonprofit offering counseling and support services alongside vocational training.

That is The Four-Way Test in action. Those four simple questions help us not judge others but guide us toward genuine, effective service.

Consider our commitment to ending polio. For nearly 40 years, we have promised the world's children we will eliminate this disease. Despite obstacles, we persist, and today we are closer to defeating the virus. Keeping this promise is the very definition of integrity.

The same integrity must drive our vocational service. With 1.2 billion young people in emerging economies reaching working age in the next decade and only 420 million jobs projected, we face a critical gap. Communities long excluded from economic opportunities need our support.

But support doesn't mean imposing our will. It means listening to local needs, building partnerships, and designing projects that communities can sustain themselves.

You have knowledge that can transform lives. Whatever your profession, your expertise combined with Rotary's values creates lasting change. The question isn't whether you have something to offer, it's how you'll use your skills to serve.

This January, I encourage you to ask how your club can address vocational needs in your community. What skills do your members have that could change someone's life? How can your networks open doors for young people? What partnerships can create sustainable jobs?

Let integrity guide you. Let The Four-Way Test light your path. And let the young people in California and the multitudes worldwide who need job skills remind you why vocational service matters.

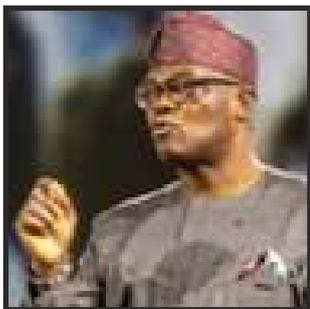
Let us celebrate putting our professional skills to work for humanity with integrity at the heart of everything we do.

Francesco Arezzo
President 2025-26

Olayinka H. Babalola urges members of Rotary to *Create Lasting Impact*

Rotary International president-elect emphasizes effective action and 'embracing the world with open arms'

By Etelka Lehoczky



2026-27 Rotary International President Olayinka H. Babalola speaks at the opening general session of Rotary's International Assembly, 12 January 2026. He introduced the 2026-27 presidential message, *Create Lasting Impact*. "As members of Rotary, we share a vision of a better future," he said. "To make this vision a reality, we must acknowledge and unleash the change within ourselves."

Photo by Monika Lozinska. © Rotary International

Rotary International President-elect Olayinka H. Babalola called on members to *Create Lasting Impact* by making their clubs more welcoming, carrying out impactful projects, and allowing their Rotary experiences to transform them personally.

"Rotary has changed us. It has shaped who we are and made us better people," Babalola said at Rotary's International Assembly in Orlando, Florida, USA, on 12 January. "We often talk about changing the world. We talk about ending polio, about building peace. We do not think enough about how Rotary transforms us."

Rotary International President-elect Olayinka Babalola's 2026-27 Presidential Message - YouTube

Babalola, a member of the Rotary Club of Trans Amadi, Nigeria, described how joining a Rotaract club as a teenager enlarged his perspective beyond the limited, privileged outlook he'd once had. That change in awareness came from observing the lasting impact his club had in the community, particularly from teaching people to read and write.

"As members of Rotary, we share a vision of a better future," he said. "To make this vision a reality, we must acknowledge and unleash the change within ourselves. We must focus not only on outcomes, but on impact."

Change and impact are not the same, he added: "Change is only the beginning. Impact is what endures."

Understanding impact

Rotary members have made an impact by expanding early childhood education in Knysna, South Africa, and increasing access to prenatal care in Nigeria, Babalola said. The Rotary Club of Knysna empowered local women to open and manage early childhood education centers.

"The project has reached thousands of children and families, and it will continue to provide education in those communities for generations," Babalola said. "We can recreate this kind of impact in other parts of the world, and in doing so we can earn the trust and recognition of our neighbors in the communities we serve. And when more communities trust Rotary, more people want to join."

Babalola also described the wide-ranging impact of Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria. The initiative to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality rates received a US\$2 million Rotary Programs of Scale grant in 2022.

"Before Rotary's intervention, many women avoided prenatal care, which is essential to ensuring a safe birth for both mother and child," he said. "After working with Rotary, systems were put in place to help expecting mothers receive prenatal care. The community was involved. Attendance went up. Mortality went down. That project [will] transform lives across Nigeria for decades."

Extending a welcome

Babalola urged members to take a more open, welcoming attitude toward newcomers to their clubs. He described how, when he was a Rotaract club member eager to join a Rotary club, the president of the Rotary club treated him with scorn.

"He said, 'What audacity! You cannot just join. You need an invitation,'" Babalola recalled. "I could have walked away. Instead, I said, 'I didn't know a child needed an invitation to enter his parents' home.'"

While things have changed since that time, Babalola said, they haven't changed enough. Some clubs close themselves off instead of "embracing the world with open arms," he said. Young people aren't necessarily treated with respect, he added, and people with different ideas and backgrounds aren't always made to feel welcome. He urged members to think about how they could better welcome others.

"You never know whose Rotary story might begin — or end — based on the way you make them feel at a meeting or service project," he said.

Another way members can focus on personal change, he said, is to aim to do better than their best. He urged district leaders to examine their past successes in raising funds, planning projects, and recruiting members. Then, he said, they should challenge themselves to surpass their past triumphs.

"When we change ourselves, we change our clubs and districts," he concluded. "When we change our districts, we change the communities we serve. And when we change our communities, we create lasting impact across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves."

Rotary Projects around the Globe- January 2026

By Brad Webber



United States

prodded the state Legislature to grant an extra day of license-free fishing for those outings, dubbed Fishing with Rebecca.

For more than two decades, young anglers across Nevada have gotten hooked on fishing during a statewide free fishing day. In the city of Sparks, the event tips the scales: On a Saturday last June, more than 2,000 people lined the banks of a marina for the event sponsored by the Rotary Club of Sparks. Rotarians, joined by community volunteers, provided free use of 1,200 poles and offered fishing tips, hot dogs, ice cream, and beverages. The club has sponsored its city's Kids Free Fishing Day since 2002. One of the event's founders, club member Don Welsh, organized an extra day for anglers with disabilities, including his daughter, Rebecca, who had trouble navigating the burgeoning crowds at the main event. Club member Ed Lawson, now the mayor in Sparks,



Mexico

A Mexico City Metro train station pays homage to St. Martha with signs depicting the patron saint of cooks with a water pitcher. Yet for many families in Santa Martha Acatitla, a namesake settlement on the capital's outskirts, potable water is in short supply, a problem exacerbated by an aging water system and prolonged drought. In October, members of the Rotary Club of Ciudad de México distributed water filters to 110 families in the community. Funded at a cost of \$50 each by the Rotary Club of Lenexa in Kansas and a private benefactor, the filter distribution was coordinated by Woodland Public Charity, based near the U.S. club. Mexican Rotarians laud the partnership, which blossomed during relief work from the 2017 earthquake that devastated their country's center. "By providing clean water to families in need, we are not only improving health but also building lasting relationships between our clubs and the communities we serve," says Oscar Rivera Rodríguez, a past president of the Mexico City club and governor-elect of District 4170. "This project reflects the heart of Rotary: partnership, sustainability, and service with tangible impact."

- 19%- Share of Americans who went fishing in 2024
- 74 million- People in Mexico who lack household access to safe water



China

The Rotary Club of Beijing is focusing attention on a condition at birth called hypospadias, in which the opening for urination is lower in boys. In rural China, the need for specialized medical training, financial hardship, and social stigma pose challenges to identifying and treating the condition, which can cause serious health problems if left unaddressed. The club has funded more than 160 corrective surgeries since 2016 at a cost of about \$1,400 each using proceeds from its annual ball, a Rotary Foundation global grant, and other sources. In April the club sent a vocational training team of two Rotarians and two urology surgeons from the Children's Hospital of Hebei Province to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia in the U.S. for three weeks of specialized instruction. Another 50 surgeries are expected in the near term, says club member Gilbert Van Kerckhove.



Philippines

An auto repair program that trains electric vehicle technicians at a Philippine university is getting a boost from the Rotary Club of Iloilo. With the support of a \$32,000 Rotary Foundation global grant, the club provided equipment that is benefiting more than 300 students and faculty members, says Herman Lagon, a club member and college spokesperson. The university also plans to offer community-based training for youths and adults, with a goal of reaching 120 trainees annually through 2028, he says. The club partnered with the Rotary Club of Namweon Central in Korea. "The grant is of great help for the studies of the poor but deserving students, as well as a genuine service to the community," Lagon says.

- 1 in 1,000 Boys born with hypospadias in China
- 20,000+ Philippine EV sales in 2025



Australia

Melbourne Rotarians made use of a long-standing partnership with Somali expatriates in the community to improve health care in the African country. With no in-country club to work with, the participation of the Somali diaspora in Melbourne was integral to the project's success. Abdiwahid Hassan, a member of the Rotary Club of Flemington Kensington, collaborated with fellow Rotarians, Somalia's Health Ministry, and a university in Somalia to fulfill a list of the most-needed items, some of which were donated by hospitals. Funds from the club and District 9800 helped cover the \$18,000 cost of shipping. Nearly \$100,000 worth of medical equipment arrived in Jariban in central Somalia in March, expected to help 40,000 people.

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

Indian Developer Donates US\$50 Million to The Rotary Foundation

By *Etelka Lehoczky*



Ravishankar and Paola Dakoju stand onstage at Rotary's 2026 International Assembly in Orlando, Florida, USA, 13 January 2026. Ravishankar announced he and Paola would donate approximately US\$50 million (4.5 billion Indian rupees) to The Rotary Foundation.

Photo by Monika Lozinska. Credit/Copyright: Rotary International.

Declaring that "giving is a duty," longtime Rotary member Ravishankar Dakoju pledged that he and his wife and fellow club member, Paola Dakoju, would donate approximately US\$50 million (4.5 billion Indian rupees) to **The Rotary Foundation**. Dakoju announced the gift at Rotary's International Assembly in Orlando, Florida, USA, on 13 January.

"Years ago, Paola and I shared a dream: that one day, when we had enough to live with dignity, we would return 85% of our wealth back to society," said Dakoju, a member of the Rotary Club of Bangalore, Karnataka, India. "My friends, that day has arrived."

Dakoju, who serves as The Rotary Foundation Arch Klumph Society ambassador for Asia, spoke about his belief that philanthropy is a personal responsibility and explained his and Paola's determination to give away their surplus wealth.

"What we keep may serve only our family, nothing beyond that. What we give The Rotary Foundation will serve humanity," he said.

Dakoju told assembly attendees how his life experiences led him to commit to philanthropy. He described how his father, who had donated all of the family's land to poor farmers, died suddenly when Dakoju was age 10. Dakoju recalled how he, his mother, and his six siblings were left with less than US\$2 in the bank. He said he failed in school and misbehaved, even leading a street gang, before he earned a college degree and eventually co-founded Hara Housing & Land Development Ltd. Now it's one of the leading land developers in Bangalore.

Dakoju also found Rotary. He was impressed by Rotary's values of fellowship and service, and as his business grew, they supported The Rotary Foundation. In 2018, they committed to donating approximately US\$14.7 million (1.3 billion Indian rupees) to the Foundation. It was one of the largest contributions in the Foundation's history.

"Whatever I have achieved so far came from the kindness of people, the grace of life, and the opportunities Rotary brought into my world," Dakoju said at the assembly.

Dakoju has funded global grants and other programs in his district and worked on numerous service projects. In August, he pledged to match donations of up to US\$50,000 (4,500,000 Indian rupees) for each district in India that created pooled endowed funds to support environmental and education-oriented initiatives. He also participated in a five-year project to plant 10 million saplings in Karnataka state.

At the assembly, Dakoju emphasized the connection between his commitment to Rotary and his philosophy of giving.

"Rotary gave me new life, new purpose, new friendship, new meaning, and a global family," he said. "And life has taught me this beautiful truth: When you give more than you think you can, life returns to you more than you can ever imagine."

District News

Congratulations

Rtn Brotindro Mullick has been Elected as the District Governor for 2028-29 of RJD 3291!

Club News



Members enjoying the District Conference RAMDHANU



Club Exhibit at RAMDHANU

Greetings

Happy Birthday

PP Rtn Abhoy K Mitra for 1st January!!

Rtn Arpan Mitra for 27th January!!

Wedding Anniversary

PDG Shyamashree & President Rtn Sunando Sen for 18th January!

Rtn Dipanwita & Rajarshi Banerjee for 30th January!

PP Rtn Sunetra & Rtn Tilak Dasgupta for 31st January!

Tanusri & Rtn Arpan Mitra for 5th February

UNITE FOR GOOD

