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RI President 2025-26



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Secretary Rtn (Dr.) AK Das and Rtn. Kailsh Verma at Laban Assamese Higher Secondary School and Shillong Vidyalya where Clean Drinking Water Projects have been executed by RC Shillong.

## DGE Dakoju & Paola create history by donating Rs.500 crore to TRF

I am 71 years old. My life was a journey that began in weakness but blossomed into strength. I was born sickly; asthma and eczema kept me in bed for months while other children were at school or playing outdoors. I lost my father at ten. My father had donated every piece of our family land to poor landless farmers as part of a movement in India that encouraged landowners to share their land with the landless.”

With these simple and heartfelt words RI District 3192 DGE Ravishankar Dakoju grabbed the attention and captivated the hearts of the delegates at the recent International Assembly in Orlando. But it hardly prepared them for the spectacular announcement that this unassuming Rotarian, known for his spontaneity and unconventional acts, accompanied by his wife Paola, was about to make. Without any hesitation and discomfort, he traced his life’s journey. And that story was a typical, textbook rags-to-riches story.

But what was far from textbook or typical was the magnanimity the couple displayed — Dakoju announced that he and his wife had decided to donate about 85 per cent of their wealth — around \$50–60 million — ₹450–550 crore — to The Rotary Foundation. He made this staggering pledge saying: “Years ago, Paola and I shared a dream — that one day, when we have enough to live with dignity, we would return 85 per cent of our wealth back to society. My friends, that day has arrived... and Paola and I are ready to walk that talk.”

While this announcement got a standing ovation, what really made the couple the toast of the Assembly hall, if not the whole event, was the brutal honesty and humility with which Dakoju told his life’s story. He related the sudden death of his father at only 53, leaving behind “seven children, four dogs, and only ₹100 in the bank.” His two brothers had to discontinue their education and take up small jobs. His mother, “less educated and unprepared for the shock, raised us with great difficulty, helped only by the government’s pension, free-schooling, my brothers’ meagre salaries and her extraordinary courage.”

Without any qualms Dakoju related how this tragedy quickly transformed him into a vagabond.... “I drifted... became the leader of a street gang. My friends were jailed, murdered, or lost to alcohol. I sold black market movie tickets; and shoplifted to feed my gang members and failed my school exams three times.”

With neighbours ensuring their children kept away from this youngster, he developed an inferiority complex. But then something extraordinary happened. The local community “punished me, only with love. Hungry, I would go to their homes, and not once did

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President Rtn. Chandana Das and members of RC Shillong at the Road Sign Board unveiling ceremony at the District Transport office premises in Shillong

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

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 microflush 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. (Source: By Etelka Lehoczky-rotary.org)

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those mothers and sisters turn me away. Their kindness became my lifeline."

By sheer "luck and grace," he got a decent education — a degree and a diploma in marketing. For his first job, for which he commuted taking three different buses, he got a salary of just \$2 a month. But suddenly his life changed when he met B S N Hari, who went on to become "more than a family member." Together they built a thriving real estate business — Hara Housing.

On Dakoju and Paola's stunning gift to TRF, RI President Francesco Arrezzo posted on Facebook, "This remarkable commitment reflects their deep belief in Rotary's mission and in the power of people coming together to Unite for Good. Their generosity will strengthen our global efforts and expand what Rotary can achieve in communities around the world. I am deeply inspired by Ravishankar's leadership and the shared values he and Paola embody!" (Source: Rotary News)

## GREETINGS

Rtn. Kiron Joshi and Anne Shyama celebrate their anniversary on 29th April. Rtn. Rohit Bajoria and Anne Pallavi celebrate their anniversary on 29th April.

Members of RC Shillong wish you many happy returns of the day.