

# *Rotary Club of New York*

## *International Service Division*

*Sylvan Barnet, Chairman*

*“Sustainable Development, Poverty and the World’s 50 Poorest Nations”*

*By Anne Kerr*

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*The following remarks are part of the discussion that took place at the monthly breakfast meeting of the International Service Division of the Rotary Club of New York. The meeting was held on March 17, 2004 at the German Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York City. Present at the meeting were Sylvan Barnet, Giorgio Balestrieri, Sekou Conde, Bill Delong, Eric Enroth, Bernhard Fabricius, John German, Hugh G. Hamilton, Josef Klee, Tom McConnon, Klaus-Heinrich Standke, David Stillman, Mikio Tajima, Vektor Unit, and our speaker Anne Kerr. This is a condensed and edited transcript that is made available as a resource for Rotarians to remain well-informed on current issues facing the International Development community. The meeting was opened and moderated by Mr. Barnet.*

*Sylvan Barnet:* Clean water is the world’s most precious resource. However, UNICEF reports that 30% of childhood diseases in developing regions are attributable to contaminated water. Therefore, for our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Rotarians have formulated a major program that is geared toward developing clean water resources around the world.

Our emphasis is concentrated on the following:

- ÿ Promote conservation of water resources.
- ÿ Assist communities in cleaning up lakes, rivers, streams and other water resources.
- ÿ Provide water wells, and other sources of water, to low-income communities.
- ÿ Demonstrate effective partnerships with local organizations, Ministries of Health and other organizations that provide water resource management.
- ÿ Provide assistance to farmers regarding water use.

We will also address the U.N. program known as “W.A.S.H.,” which is an acronym for the Water, And Sanitation, and Hygiene program.

On November 6, 2004 we will have United Nation’s Day for Rotary. Our organization’s president will be there as well as past-presidents and our board of directors. The main

subjects for discussion will be water and sanitation. The other areas of discussion at the U.N. Day will be Polio and HIV /AIDs. We will continue our work on guinea worm, measles, and especially dysentery, which is caused by dirty water and sanitation. We now have a letter exchange with UNESCO that was signed in December, 2003 to promote joint projects.

Regarding Polio Plus, we hope to be finished by the end of this year. We are now down to about 300 cases world-wide. These cases are in West Africa, Nigeria and India. It should be pointed out that India is an incredible story: Despite two years ago there was a sudden outbreak of about 1000 cases in India. Right now the count is down to less than 100 cases. Now we will demonstrate the same efforts to provide safe drinking water. So that is where we are.

And now it is my pleasure to introduce Anne Kerr. A Canadian national, Anne is the Chief of Program Coordination, Major Groups and Partnerships Branch, Division for Sustainable Development at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). She earned a Bachelors degree in Geography from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver and a Master's degree in Regional Planning and Resource Development from the University of Waterloo, in Ontario.

Anne joined the United Nations in November 2001 as Chief, National Information, Strategies and Institutions Branch, Division of Sustainable Development (CSD) Secretariat, and was involved in tracking the substantive sessions of the preparatory meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) as well as the World Summit on Sustainable Development itself, held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002.

For over 25 years, Anne worked with the Canadian government and managed Canada's National Environmental Indicators Program from 1990 to 2001, and represented Canada internationally in the field. Please welcome Anne Kerr.

*Anne Kerr:* First of all, I would like to thank the Rotary Club of New York for inviting me to this morning's meeting. I am indeed honored to be here during your organization's 100<sup>th</sup> year. I also bring greetings from Ms. Joanne DiSano, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development.

I was asked to lead a discussion related to sustainable development and poverty eradication in least developed countries. I am going to focus my remarks on review of progress toward 3 key targets related to poverty eradication that are the themes for the 12<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) taking place on April this year, while also making references to the least developed countries (LDCs).

First let me start with a quote from the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development about the challenges we face:

ÿ “We recognize that poverty eradication, changing consumption and

production patterns, and protecting and managing the natural resource base for economic and social development are over-arching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustained development.”

Eradicating poverty has been called the greatest global challenge facing the world today, and for the 600 million people living in the 50 least developed countries, the special support and initiatives for poverty eradication called for in the Brussels Program of Action for LDCs cannot come too soon.

The main focus of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is the implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI)  
- A plan that covers all aspects of the Brussels Program of Action.

At its 11<sup>th</sup> session in 2003, CSD set out a program of work to the year 2017 to make progress towards the implementation of targets, commitments and goals made in Agenda 21, and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) - the latter agreed to the World Summit on Sustainable development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002. The work program comprises 2-year action-oriented implementation cycles - a review year and a policy year. The review year is to evaluate the progress, obstacles, constraints successes and lessons learned. The policy year is to determine further actions required to accelerate and enhance implementation and overcome obstacles.

The upcoming 12<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Sustainable Development will review sustainable development commitments in the area of water, sanitation and human settlements.

Drawing from the Secretary-General's reports prepared for CSD-12 just released, which review progress in meeting goals, targets, and commitments of Agenda 21, program for Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, I am going to focus on three targets which relate particularly to LDCs:

First, to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water; second, to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation. The third is to achieve by the year 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Let me start with the last one, first. Slums are characterized by substandard housing, overcrowding, insecure tenure and lack of basic services such as safe water, improved sanitation, transportation, and electricity. They exist in run-down inner city neighborhoods, urban-fringe squatter areas or shanty towns.

According to U.N. Habitat, slum populations make up 6% of urban populations in developed countries, 43% of the population in the developing countries and a whopping 78% of the population in least developing countries. If the current trend continues, the

number of slum dwellers world wide is projected to rise from the current 924 million to about 2 billion over the next 30 years. Basic services and infrastructure must be provided if the crushing impact of poverty, social exclusion and unhealthy living conditions in slums are to be mitigated. It should be pointed out that developed countries spend on average, 32 times more per person on infrastructure and urban services than cities in LDCs.

The second target is access to safe drinking water. I know that this is an area of great concern to Rotarians. Contaminated drinking water is a major source of illness and death in developing countries. During the 1990s, the number of people with access to improved drinking water supply increased from 70% of the global population to 82% in 2000. This represents significant progress but is well below the rate required to meet the 2015 target. The greatest gains were in South Asia which is on track to meet the target. However, sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania have the lowest access rates - 58% and 48% respectively. The challenge in sub-Saharan Africa is more complex due to large displaced and refugee populations, countries in conflict or reconstruction, and HIV / AIDs pandemics.

There are wide disparities in access for safe drinking water between urban and rural populations. In the least developed countries, 38% of the population is without access to improved drinking water. This is segmented in 18% urban areas and 45% in rural areas. Based on current urban and rural access rates and using projected population figures, an additional 358 million people in LDCs will need access to improved drinking water to meet the 2015 target.

So what needs to be done? In terms of slums, pro-active shelter provision policies and programs that seek to avert further slum growth and encourage expansion of low-cost housing stock and associated infrastructure need to be implemented locally. Slum upgrading and integration, rather than eradication of slums and relocation of slum dwellers will be more effective since it must be noted that past eradication of slums has destroyed large stocks of affordable housing and simply displaced slum dwellers from one informal settlement to another.

Access to credit markets and job creations programs will also be helpful.

Regarding safe drinking water: contaminated water sources, inadequate maintenance of pumps and distribution systems and leakage of water from pipes are the main problems that need to be overcome. Due to the increasing financial and environmental costs of developing new sources of water, it is generally more cost effective to increase the effective water supply by reducing leakage and water losses.

Improved sanitation is essential to increasing the availability of safe drinking water and improving living conditions in human settlements. However, very few countries have incorporated sanitation programs explicitly in their national development and poverty reduction strategies.

The recent Secretary-General's report for CSD-12 reviewed progress in providing access to

improved sanitation in dispersed rural settlements, medium-density communities and high-density urban communities. Among other things, education and awareness-raising programs have to build demand for sanitation technologies appropriate to the conditions. Many NGOs and community organizations have mobilized substantial resources for sanitation for both facilities and awareness-raising. Rotary International is an example of an organization with tremendous ability to mobilize resources in this area.

I would like to conclude with another quote from the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development regarding our commitment to sustainable development:

Y “We recognize the reality that a global society has the means, and is endowed with, the resources to address the challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development confronting all humanity. Together, we will take extra steps to ensure that these available resources are used to the benefit of humanity.”

We salute Rotary International’s 100 years of efforts on taking those extra steps to confront the challenge. And I would recommend for Rotarians to log on to our website at [www.un.org/esa/sustdev/](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/) and click on to the “Partnership” section. There you will find a data base of more that 260 “Partnership Initiatives” that your respective clubs may find useful. In addition, the upcoming “Partnership Fair” at CSD-12 will offer a number of booths and videos that will help identify potential projects.

*This transcript was produced and edited by Tom McConnon. We welcome your questions and comments.*

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