



# BASIC EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROJECT STRATEGIES

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# INTRODUCTION TO BASIC EDUCATION AND LITERACY

Basic education and literacy is one of Rotary's six areas of focus.

We know that basic education and literacy are essential for reducing poverty, improving health, encouraging community and economic development, and promoting peace. Consider these facts:

- ↪ If all women completed primary education, there would be 66% fewer maternal deaths.<sup>1</sup>
- ↪ A child born to a mother who can read is 50% more likely to survive past the age of five.<sup>2</sup>
- ↪ If all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty, which would be equivalent to a 12% cut in world poverty.<sup>3</sup>

The world is making good progress in this area. According to a 2014 United Nations Millennium Development Goals progress report, literacy rates among adults and youths are on the rise and the gender gap in literacy is narrowing. But pressing global needs remain:

- ↪ 58 million children worldwide are out of school.<sup>4</sup>
- ↪ Even after four years of primary schooling, as many as 250 million children cannot read and write.<sup>5</sup>
- ↪ 781 million adults are illiterate.<sup>6</sup>

Rotary clubs all over the world are taking action to enhance basic education and literacy in their communities. **Every community has different needs and different opportunities to serve.** This publication is intended to help you ask the right questions, identify real needs, and make the greatest possible impact with the time, energy, and resources you have at your disposal.

# ASSESSING THE COMMUNITY

Determining your community's needs and resources is an important starting point for any community project. Work with local stakeholders to complete a thorough community assessment. By including the community and local subject matter experts from the start, you will not only identify the most appropriate project but also ensure support and sustainability for your endeavors. Refer to the Rotary publication **Community Assessment Tools** for ideas on conducting community needs assessments.

Key stakeholders in a basic education and literacy project should include school administrators, teachers, school staff, parents of students, students, and local community members. Members of the ministry or department of education (local and national) are also key stakeholders.

When conducting an assessment, ask open-ended questions to invite answers beyond yes and no. Focus

**Avoid going into a community or school with an idea of what's needed. It's easy to look around and decide what you think a community needs, especially if you live in it or near it. Instead, listen to a variety of community stakeholders and hear their needs and concerns directly.**

on identifying opportunities for skill-building with the community, not just on materials that may be needed. For example, you might ask teachers "What skills you would like to develop?"

or "What are your goals for your students? How can we help you achieve them?" You might ask parents "What kind of job would you like your children to have as an adult? What skills or education will they need to achieve that goal?"

Don't forget about the students! Ask them questions like, "What do you like about your school?" or "Tell me about your dreams for your school." Students like being involved and meeting visitors. Most important, they're the ones who will benefit the most from a good project. Understanding what they like and don't like is essential to the success of your project.

Finally, remember to take stock of the community's assets, not just their needs. Communities are often able to meet their own needs without the help of outsiders. Sometimes all it takes is facilitating a discussion or bringing together different stakeholders to set things in motion. Ask community members if they know people with specific skill sets or other organizations that are working with the community to address the challenges they've identified. Knowing this can help you avoid duplicating efforts and allow you to focus on the issues they wouldn't be able to address without your help.

If this is your first literacy project, consider simple, short-term goals. Once you've achieved these goals, build on your success by expanding the scope of your efforts to ensure long-term sustainability.

# RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

Your community assessment may have revealed that the community doesn't have significant basic education and literacy needs to address. If that's the case, your efforts were not wasted — in fact, you may have saved a great deal of time, energy, and resources that might have been used on a project that really wasn't needed in the first place. And perhaps your assessment revealed some other needs that you can focus on.

If your assessment did reveal basic education and literacy needs, they likely fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Low adult literacy
- Youth not in school
- Youth underperforming in school
- Lack of resources in schools

We'll examine each of these broad areas of need and provide sustainable strategies and case studies to consider as you develop an intervention plan.

# LOW ADULT LITERACY

For most of us, reading and writing are as natural as breathing. But imagine if you didn't have the functional literacy skills needed to complete a job application, sign a check, understand a child's report card, or read a prescription.

While the overall number of illiterate persons has fallen since 2000, 781 million adults — 15 percent of the world's adult population — still lack basic reading and writing skills. Women account for nearly two-thirds of illiterate adults.<sup>7</sup>

## THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE PLANNING A PROJECT

-  What is the overall adult literacy rate in the community?
-  Are there gender, ethnic, economic, or other demographic disparities in the adult literacy rate? If so, what groups are most affected?
-  Talk with your prospective beneficiaries to learn what barriers, past or present, made it difficult for them to become literate.
-  What do your prospective beneficiaries want to gain by enhancing their literacy skills? Do they want to qualify for better jobs, acclimate to a non-native language, develop financial literacy, or simply help their children with schoolwork? Tailor your approach to meet their goals.
-  Adult literacy programs should consider the learner's needs and interests and prior learning, as well as how adults learn best. Highly standardized systems such as those used in schools, are generally not appropriate for adults.

## STRATEGY: TEACH ADULT LITERACY TO NON-NATIVE LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

In many communities, minority language groups have lower levels of literacy. Immigrants and indigenous people may be literate in their native language but struggle to achieve functional literacy in the language of their community of residence.

Rotary clubs in Taichung, Taiwan, are addressing this challenge by offering literacy classes to women from China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand who recently immigrated. Classes focus on developing functional abilities so they can communicate with their new friends and neighbors. After completing the program, the students participate in a speech tournament to hone their newly developed skills.

Research suggests that, in general, successful adult second-language literacy programs:

- Use materials from everyday life
- Use interactive methods that engage different ways of learning (e.g., oral communication)
- Use native languages to clarify and explain classroom tasks
- Integrate literacy instruction with functional training
- Schedule classes at times and locations that accommodate adults
- Collaborate with other cooperating organizations that serve the minority language community

## STRATEGY: FOCUS ON FUNCTIONAL LITERACY

An adult who's functionally literate is able to engage in activities that enable her to function effectively in society. Adults tend to be more motivated to learn when they understand the practical outcomes they can gain. Acquiring functional literacy skills fosters a sense of self-fulfillment, equips learners with the ability to improve their families' living standards, and may also encourage parents to play a more active role in their children's education.

## CASE STUDY:

# OPERATION UPGRADE, SOUTH AFRICA

In the province of KwaZulu-Natal, adult illiteracy is high and HIV/AIDS is prevalent. Operation Upgrade, a nongovernmental organization in South Africa, runs an adult literacy program that prepares learners for practical life skills such as opening a bank account, writing and posting a letter, managing finances, and developing a small business. The curriculum also includes information and supplemental projects related to HIV/AIDS and other health issues, nutrition, food security, and other community development concerns. The adult learners cover all these topics through lessons in Zulu literacy, English literacy, and numeracy.



Several Rotary clubs have partnered with Operation Upgrade to teach adult learners literacy, numeracy, and related practical skills. The curriculum includes a Zulu literacy component in which students are taught how to break sentences into words, words into phrases, and then into phonetic syllables, enabling them to build new words based on what they learned.

# YOUTH NOT IN SCHOOL

While the number of children not attending school dropped from 102 million to 58 million since 1990, progress has slowed in recent years.<sup>8</sup> Among the 137 million children who entered the first grade of primary school in 2011, 34 million – roughly 25 percent – are likely to leave their schools before the last grade. Poverty, gender, and place of residence are key factors keeping children out of school.<sup>9</sup>

## THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE PLANNING A PROJECT

-  You should determine the real barriers preventing children from attending school before deciding on appropriate interventions. Some common barriers and possible interventions are listed below.

Barrier	Possible interventions
Direct costs of schooling (e.g., school fees, uniforms, books, and supplies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocational training for parents and community members to generate income</li> </ul>
Lost income from children’s labor or activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child-care programs for siblings/children</li> <li>• Flexible school schedules</li> </ul>
Lack of cultural value for education in the community and/or lack of parental involvement in the education process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of education</li> <li>• Coordinated school enrollment events</li> <li>• Endorsement of education (particularly girls’ education) by religious and other leaders</li> <li>• Development/capacity-building of parent-teacher committees</li> </ul>
Health-related issues that keep children home sick or caring for sick family members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrating water and sanitation programs in school</li> <li>• Raising awareness about HIV/AIDS and other preventable diseases</li> </ul>

## **+** STRATEGY: FOCUS ON GETTING GIRLS INTO SCHOOL

While the gender gap in school enrollment is narrowing globally, major disparities remain in regions such as the Middle East, South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. The causes preventing girls in these regions from attending school include:

- Cultural attitudes toward girls' and women's place in society
- Economic barriers, including the cost of transportation, school fees, and the missed "opportunity cost" of income-generating activities that girls undertake when not in school

- Predominance of male teachers who lack gender-sensitivity training
- Long distances between home and school, which pose security concerns (especially the threat of sexual violence)
- Lack of sanitation facilities (especially separate latrines) at schools

Working to remove these barriers to girls' education can pay huge dividends in the overall development of a community: more educated women tend to be healthier, work and earn more income, have fewer children, and provide better health care and education to their children. It is estimated that some countries lose more than \$1 billion per year in missed economic production by failing to educate girls to the same standard as boys.

### CASE STUDY:

## WASH IN SCHOOLS, GUATEMALA

WASH (**W**ater, **S**anitation, and **H**ygien) interventions in schools have been an effective way to improve school attendance, as well as children's health and school performance. Providing clean drinking water, hygiene education (e.g., handwashing), and safe sanitation facilities creates a virtuous cycle in which children become less susceptible to waterborne illness and therefore miss school less frequently, attend school in a healthier state, and consequently perform better in school.

Through a global grant, Rotary clubs supported nine public elementary schools outside Guatemala City by laying new pipes for fresh water, improving quality of drinking water, and installing flush toilets and handwashing stations for improved sanitation.



A teacher dispenses soap to students during a lunch break at Rancho Alegre School in Guatemala. Washing hands with soap and water can do more to prevent diarrhea, death by malnutrition, and dehydration than any single vaccine or medical intervention, according to scientific studies.

# YOUTH UNDERPERFORMING IN SCHOOL

Reading skills build the foundation for all future learning. Yet, in some sub-Saharan African countries, children with five years of education still have a 40 percent chance of being illiterate.<sup>10</sup> If all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could break the cycle of poverty, which would be equivalent to a 12 percent cut in world poverty.

## THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE PLANNING A PROJECT

- ➞ What are the qualifications of teachers in the local schools? How many students are in each classroom?
- ➞ Do schools have a management committee made up of administrators, teachers, parents, and students?
- ➞ Is additional programming available to students after school?
- ➞ Teachers, students, and parents are often the best resources for finding out why students aren't performing well. Consider spending time talking with groups of people — administrators, students, teachers, and parents separately — to find out the goals they have for their school and whether they want to develop relevant skills.
- ➞ Teacher training often helps improve the performance of students. In some countries, teachers cannot teach without a degree or certificate from the ministry of education. In others, teachers may lack even a secondary level of education. And in the most complex settings, there is a mix of teachers with a wide range of educational backgrounds. Teachers want to provide high quality education to their students and generally welcome training opportunities. Make sure you ask them what training they're interested in.
- ➞ If your club or district doesn't have the expertise to train teachers, find out if organizations in the community provide teacher training, or if there are any highly regarded schools in the community with teachers who could share methodologies.

## STRATEGY: TRAINING TEACHERS

### Early childhood education

The number of children enrolled in preprimary education has increased by 60 million from 2000 to 2011.<sup>11</sup> Early childhood education research shows positive results for long-term learning in both developed and developing nations.

Although early childhood education enrollment is growing, many opportunities are available to achieve higher quality programming:

- Governments are not investing as much in early childhood education programming as in other levels of education. As a result, many developing countries lack a set curriculum or teaching requirements for early childhood teachers.
- Early childhood education is more than just learning the alphabet. Letter sounds, numeracy, life skills, and problem solving are important components.
- Proper early childhood education increases children's readiness for school.
- Teacher training and curriculum development are key components of a sustainable project.
- To be successful and sustainable, teacher training needs long-term follow through, not just a one-time training. Developing local leadership can continue the cycle of teacher training in the future.

### Primary and secondary education

The shortage of teachers, especially qualified teachers, is a huge hindrance in the performance of primary and secondary school students. Additionally, overcrowded classrooms, lack of regular training for teachers, and relying on rote memorization in classrooms can hamper critical learning and thinking.

The UN's proposed Sustainable Development Goal for education aims for children everywhere to be able to complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary schooling by 2030. In order to achieve universal primary education, 1.6 million new teaching positions are needed, one-third of them in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>12</sup> Investing in the teaching skills of current teachers is also crucial.

## CASE STUDY:

# PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER TRAINING FOR ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

A multilingual environment can be challenging for teachers, especially those who aren't equipped to address their students' language needs.

Rotary clubs in South Africa, Canada, and the United States used a global grant to support a vocational training team to provide training and curriculum development in South Africa. The training curriculum was eventually endorsed by the Ministry of Education in South Africa and has since been implemented throughout the country.



Teachers in South Africa gather for a teacher training by a vocational training team member. The visiting VTT established a teacher-training curriculum to help teachers in South Africa work with students who speak multiple mother tongue languages, a challenge that can often keep students from performing well academically.

# LACK OF RESOURCES IN SCHOOLS

Many schools don't have enough materials or the proper kinds of materials to facilitate teaching and learning. A study in Ethiopia found that having a textbook increased children's oral reading fluency by 9.6 words per minute.<sup>13</sup> While materials alone cannot produce quality education, materials can play an important role in enhancing the classroom environment.

## THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE PLANNING A PROJECT

➡ Let local demand — as identified by community stakeholders — dictate the materials your project will provide. Collecting and donating used books, for example, is a nice gesture, but if the books are for the wrong age or language or if they're culturally inappropriate for the students you aim to serve, they won't do much good.

- ➡ Ask yourself, "How will these materials lead to attaining desired educational outcomes?"
- ➡ Consider supplementing purchasing and distributing school materials with a training or capacity-building component on innovative strategies to teach with these materials.
- ➡ Although many schools struggle to obtain traditional learning materials, technological tools and nontraditional approaches to education are becoming more widely used in the developing world. If your club has purchased or distributed traditional materials over the years, consider how you can scale up that project to provide newer and more innovative resources. But keep in mind that new tools require new training and even in classrooms with computers, interaction between teachers and students is still vitally important in the learning process.

Traditional materials	Advanced resources
Chalkboards	Interactive white boards
Computers	Laptop computers
School books, story books, dictionaries	Electronic tablets
School desks	Tables and chairs, open spaces for students to work

**REMEMBER:** If your club wants to do a global grant, you will need to scale up your project beyond providing materials. Global grants do not support projects that consist exclusively of equipment purchases. Consider working with the community to identify other activities that will help to meet their educational goals in addition to providing resources.

## **+** STRATEGY: SCALING UP PROJECTS

Providing materials such as dictionaries, desks, and textbooks is certainly a great help to any school in need. Seeing a child who has never had these materials receive them for the first time is heartwarming and provides an overwhelming sense of fulfillment. But when does it become time to see if more can be done?

### Ways to scale up

- If your project gives a child a book each month, turn it into a family literacy initiative. Provide ideas and activities for families to read more together and increase the literacy skills of all involved.
- Expand a dictionary donation project into an after-school writing program. Have tutors teach

students how to use their dictionaries and write stories. At the end of the year, hold a community event where students can showcase their work.

- Local schools that have received school desks or benches may benefit from training teachers about using space to engage children. Not all children learn well while sitting in place all day. Many students benefit from movement and interactive learning. This form of classroom management training can enhance classroom learning for many students.
- Does your club donate computers to schools? Talk with teachers about how to use computers as effective teaching tools and gauge their interest in receiving training.

### CASE STUDY:

## GUATEMALA LITERACY PROJECT

Since 1998 more than 400 Rotary clubs in Guatemala and North America partnered with a nonprofit organization, the Cooperative for Education, to provide textbooks for children. Over the years, the program has been scaled up to provide textbook training for teachers, computer labs with training for a computer teacher, and additional training for primary and middle school teachers on engaging teaching methods. All training empowers teachers to explore new methodologies and deliver instruction that gets students involved with literacy and technology. Computer teachers participate in intensive training on maintenance, curriculum development, and the latest approaches to engage students.



As part of the Guatemala Literacy Project, schools receive the first set of textbooks from a Rotary grant. Over the course of five years, students pay a rental fee for textbooks, which is put into a revolving fund. After five years, the school can purchase a new set of textbooks with the rental money they have collected. Photo courtesy of Cooperative for Education

# ROTARY RESOURCES

Find information on these resources at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).

## **Cadre of Technical Advisers**

A group of volunteer Rotarians who provide technical expertise and advice to Rotary members planning and carrying out Rotary grant projects.

## **Lifecycle of a Project resources**

Find best practices on how to select a project, find resources, work with partners, implement, measure and evaluate activities, and more.

## **Rotarian Action Groups ([www.rotary.org/actiongroups](http://www.rotary.org/actiongroups))**

Autonomous groups of Rotary members and others who are experts in a particular field, such as water and sanitation, and share their expertise by collaborating with clubs and districts on projects.

## **Rotary Community Corps ([www.rotary.org/rcc](http://www.rotary.org/rcc))**

Groups of non-Rotarians who share our commitment to service by planning and carrying out projects in their communities and support local Rotary club projects.

## **Rotary Grants ([www.rotary.org/grants](http://www.rotary.org/grants))**

Funds awarded by The Rotary Foundation to Rotary clubs and districts that support a wide variety of humanitarian projects, scholarships, and training.

District grants fund small-scale, short-term activities. Global grants support large international activities within Rotary's areas of focus with sustainable, measurable outcomes.

## **Rotary Ideas ([ideas.rotary.org](http://ideas.rotary.org))**

Rotary's crowdsourcing tool, where clubs can share their project plans, find partners, and request volunteers, funding, and materials to support their projects. Visitors can browse projects in need of assistance, connect with project organizers, and make contributions.

## **Rotary Showcase ([www.rotary.org/showcase](http://www.rotary.org/showcase))**

Rotary's online social networking tool that enables clubs to share their projects and exchange ideas with people around the world.

## **Vocational training teams**

Groups of professionals who travel to another country to teach local professionals about a particular field or to learn more about their own.

# RECOMMENDED READING

Download these publications at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).

## **Rotary's Areas of Focus Guide**

An overview of Rotary's six areas of focus with project examples

## **Community Assessment Tools**

A compilation of eight tools to help Rotary clubs conduct community assessments

## **Six Steps to Sustainability**

A quick overview of planning sustainable projects

## **Manage Your Global Grant**

A guide for carrying out a global grant project from start to finish

# GLOSSARY

## Basic education

The range of educational activities taking place in formal and informal settings to meet basic learning needs until completion of secondary school or its equivalent.

## Community assessment

The process of examining a community's strengths, weaknesses, assets, gaps, and needs to determine which issues should be addressed, existing resources to address identified gaps, and the best course of action to address identified needs.

## Cooperating organization

Any reputable organization or academic institution that provides expertise, infrastructure, advocacy, training, education, or other support for a humanitarian initiative.

## Early childhood development

Educational theory related to teaching young children until the age of eight.

## Functional literacy

The ability to read and write for the purpose of managing daily living and employment tasks.

## Literacy

The ability to read, write, engage in critical thought, understand spoken and nonverbal communication, and use dominant symbols appropriately.

## Nongovernmental organization (NGO)

A not-for-profit group, principally independent from government, that is organized on a local, national or international level and addresses humanitarian service, and other issues in support of the common good.

## Numeracy

The ability to identify and apply simple numeric concepts, including comprehending fundamental mathematics (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division).

## Out-of-school children

Any children who:

- Do not have access to a school in their community
- Do not enroll despite the availability of a school
- Enroll but do not attend school
- Drop out of the education system

## Scaling up

The process of enhancing the coverage, impact, and sustainability of a project.

## Sustainability

The ability to operate a project or program on its own without support from Rotary. Sustainability is often used as a measure of a project's long-term effectiveness.

## CITATIONS

- 1 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2013/14
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- 8 The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014
- 9 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2013)
- 10 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2010
- 11 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2013/14
- 12 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2013/14
- 13 All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development



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