

A ROTARY PRIMER

GLOBAL OUTLOOK

A ROTARIAN'S GUIDE TO SUSTAINABILITY

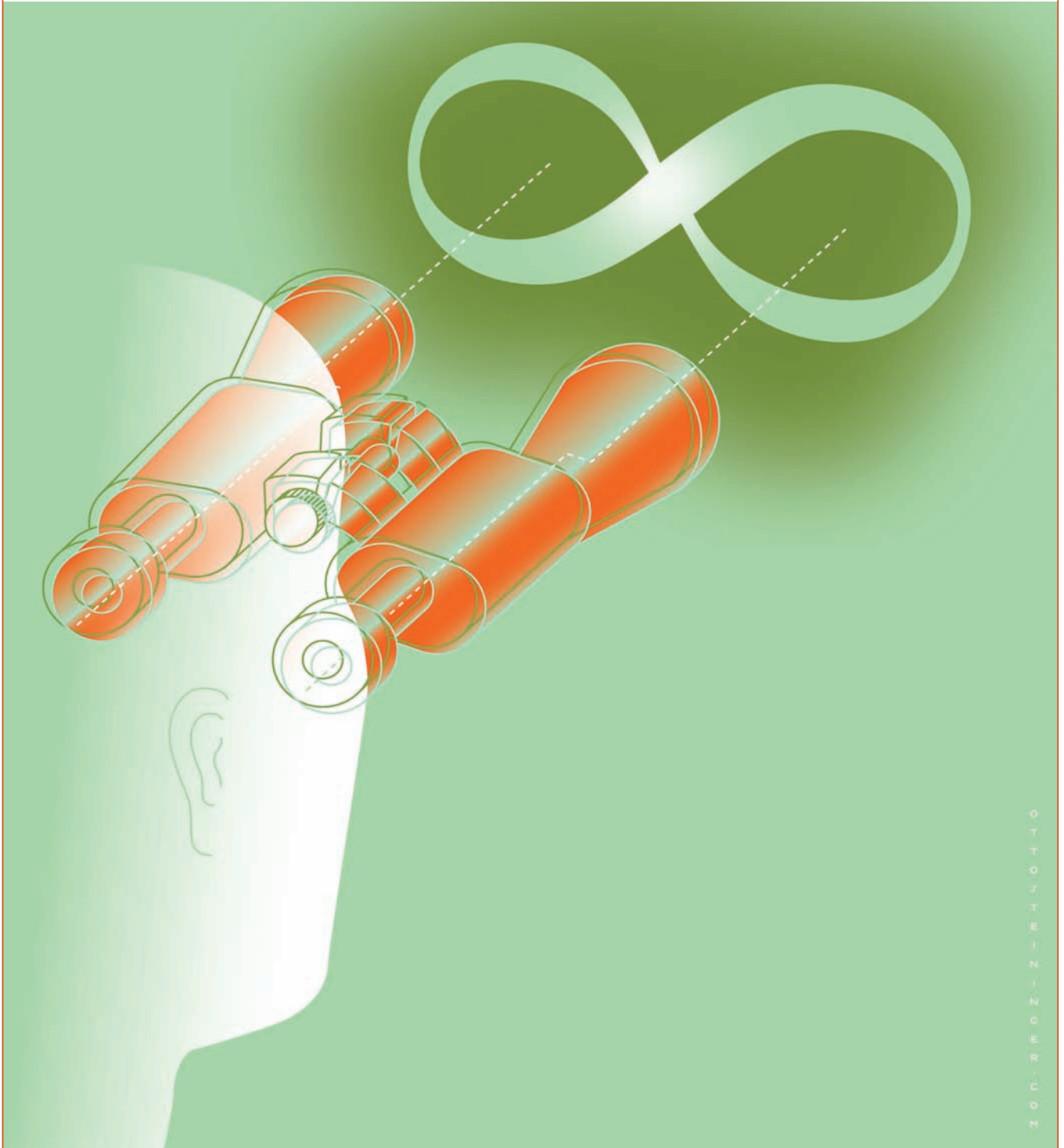


PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

A GLOBAL CONCEPT

The **United Nations** convened the World Commission on Environment and Development, commonly known as the **Brundtland Commission**, in 1983 to explore how environmental concerns influence social and economic development. The commission's **1987 report** would become one of the most important documents of the sustainability movement, providing the **oft-cited definition** of sustainable development: meeting the needs of the present **without compromising future** generations' ability to meet their own needs. Today, considerations about sustainability affect many of our daily activities. **Businesses** have learned that **sustainable practices** can increase profits, and **governments** have found that sustainable development can have environmental, economic, and social benefits. For an international organization like Rotary, using the **principles of sustainability** to **inform humanitarian work** helps extend the impact of Rotarians' global projects and ensure that communities **benefit** from their good works **for years** to come.

LEVELS OF SUSTAINABILITY

The word *sustainable* often describes something that is environmentally friendly. But environmental concerns are just one aspect of sustainability. Economic, cultural, and social factors are equally important. When a humanitarian project addresses all four levels of sustainability, it has a better chance of producing long-term benefits for the community it serves. Here are examples of ways to incorporate each level of sustainability into your next project.

ECONOMIC

- Create an ongoing funding source, such as fee-for-use.
- Ensure that funding will cover maintenance and improvements.
- Enlist volunteer experts, such as Rotary Community Corps members.

CULTURAL

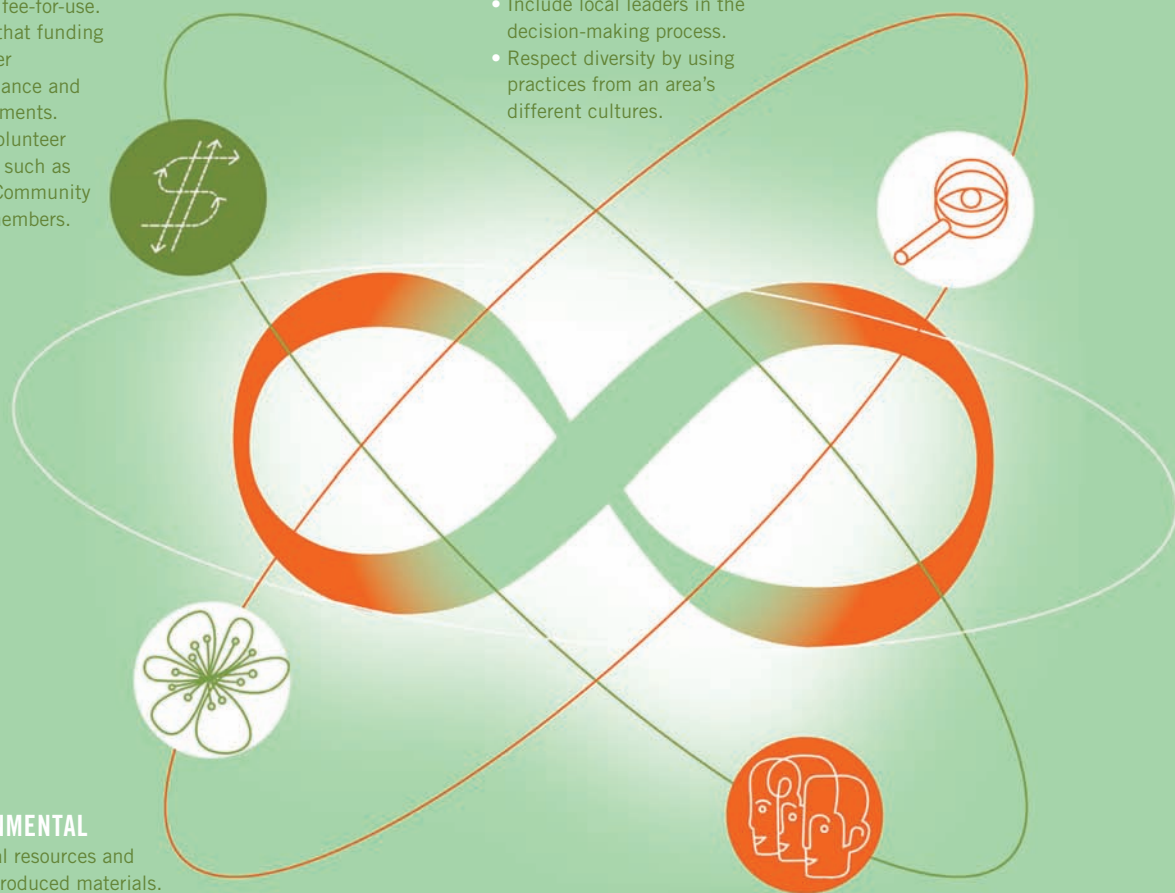
- Incorporate customary practices, such as traditional healing.
- Include local leaders in the decision-making process.
- Respect diversity by using practices from an area's different cultures.

ENVIRONMENTAL

- Use local resources and locally produced materials.
- Work with businesses that use sustainable practices.
- Ensure that the project will not generate pollution.

SOCIAL

- Create a training program to prepare workers and local instructors.
- Gain grassroots support for monitoring and evaluation.
- Consider how both men and women can participate in the project.



THE BUSINESS OF CARING

A conversation
with sustainability expert
William R. Blackburn

How did sustainability become a priority in the business community?

It began with businesses focusing on specific programs to manage, reduce, and control risks – for example, disposing of hazardous waste. Over time, these businesses began looking at the broader area of environment, health, and safety. Then stakeholders began to clamor for other things: responsibility to the community, diversity programs, and so forth. As social and environmental issues came together, it became clear that these efforts were meaningless unless they were integrated. In other words, sustainability wasn't just a collection of programs; it came to represent the totality of how organizations make decisions and manage their business.

What does sustainability look like today?

One recent trend is integrated reporting – for example, producing annual reports that include all aspects of the business, not just environmental and social reporting on one side and financial reporting on the other. Many companies do this voluntarily. Governments in South Africa and several European countries require it. The expectation is that more and more stock exchanges and regulatory authorities will demand it.

The BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is a case in point. If you just talk about finances, you're not necessarily going to identify the more serious business risks. If BP would have talked more about the environmental risk of drilling on the Gulf Coast and how that might play out in a worst-case scenario – economically, environmentally, socially – we might have seen a different outcome.

What factors are driving the sustainability trend?

Two themes have emerged. One is a demand for more transparency in talking about weaknesses and shortcomings with the public. The other is an expectation of stakeholder engagement. Organizations need to talk with communities, employees, governments, activists, suppliers, and customers. Dialogue allows businesses to learn what stakeholders' expectations are and how well those expectations are being met.

How does sustainability apply to nonprofit work?

Like businesses, nonprofits have stakeholders who expect them to behave in certain ways. These expectations extend not just to the values of the organization but also to its operations. The last thing

you want to do is have a social initiative that does some environmental harm or that makes no sense economically and can't be sustained. Sustainability is a way to ensure that you've got the right mix to perpetuate not only the organization itself but the well-being of society as a whole.

When people ask me, "What's the value of sustainability?" I tell them, "You're asking the wrong question. The question you should be asking is what's the reasoning behind your project – what are the key opportunities and threats?" Sustainability is not about just one thing; you have to look at global trends. If you're smart, you'll want to plan for the future.

How can Rotarians ensure that the organizations they work with use sustainable practices?

Ask organizations what their values are, and ask yourself: Do our values align? What structures do these organizations have in place to manage sustainability issues?

Do some investigating on the Internet. Sometimes you'll see that an organization publishes a nice sustainability report, but when you search for its name with the word *crisis*, *problem*, or *protest*, you may find some significant issues that aren't addressed in the report.

Ask questions of activist groups. They are businesses' harshest critics. If you're really serious about finding the best partners, create a website





that articulates your values. List the characteristics of organizations you're interested in working with. Training is key, whether online or on-site. Be proactive. If you want to be consistent with what progressive businesses are doing, zero in on the types of issues they are interested in: human rights, labor practices, environmental issues, fair operating practices (such as anticorruption), consumer issues, community involvement and development, economic viability, and governance.

Where can Rotarians learn more about sustainability?

The Internet is a great resource for free articles and presentations on the subject. There are also books for people who want to implement sustainable practices in their organizations. Local groups have done a great job of bringing together governments and businesses to talk regularly about sustainability in the community. Find out what sustainability initiatives are already underway near you and how you can get involved.

William R. Blackburn is the author of The Sustainability Handbook: The Complete Management Guide to Achieving Social, Economic, and Environmental Responsibility and president of a global consulting firm for sustainability and environment, health, and safety management. Sustainability resources and tools are available at www.wblackburnconsulting.com.

SUSTAINABILITY AND FUTURE VISION

Rotarians have already begun embracing sustainability through the new grant structure under The Rotary Foundation's Future Vision Plan. By working toward clear, measurable objectives using integrated strategies, the following projects are creating lasting solutions for communities in need.

Water and sanitation, Ghana

To improve health and sanitation in a primary school, Rotarians are providing a 12-unit toilet facility.

Sustainable components

- Supporting hygiene and sanitation training by local authorities
- Involving parent and teacher committees in project oversight and maintenance of toilets
- Establishing a fund to cover maintenance and routine cleaning

Peace and conflict prevention/resolution, Benin

To inform communities about child protection laws and improve care for young children, Rotarians are developing an awareness campaign focused on girls and child soldiers.

Sustainable components

- Training educators in pre-schools and day care facilities
- Involving local children in creating a comic book on children's rights
- Educating community members about child protection laws and abuse reporting

Basic education and literacy, Ecuador

To increase literacy rates among primary school students, Rotarians are providing educational materials and sponsoring teacher training.

Sustainable components

- Purchasing culturally appropriate materials from local sources
- Providing ongoing assistance to teachers through mentorship groups
- Partnering with the Ministry

of Education to increase participation

Maternal and child health, Kenya

To reduce the effects of malnutrition and increase access to child health care, Rotarians are equipping community health workers to serve children in rural areas.

Sustainable components

- Recruiting and training local workers
- Using established local health networks and clinics
- Purchasing mobile phones and solar chargers to increase communication among health workers and generate income for equipment maintenance

Disease prevention and treatment, Belize

To reduce transmission of dengue fever, Rotarians are building an open drainage system on a college campus that will prevent flooding during the rainy season.

Sustainable components

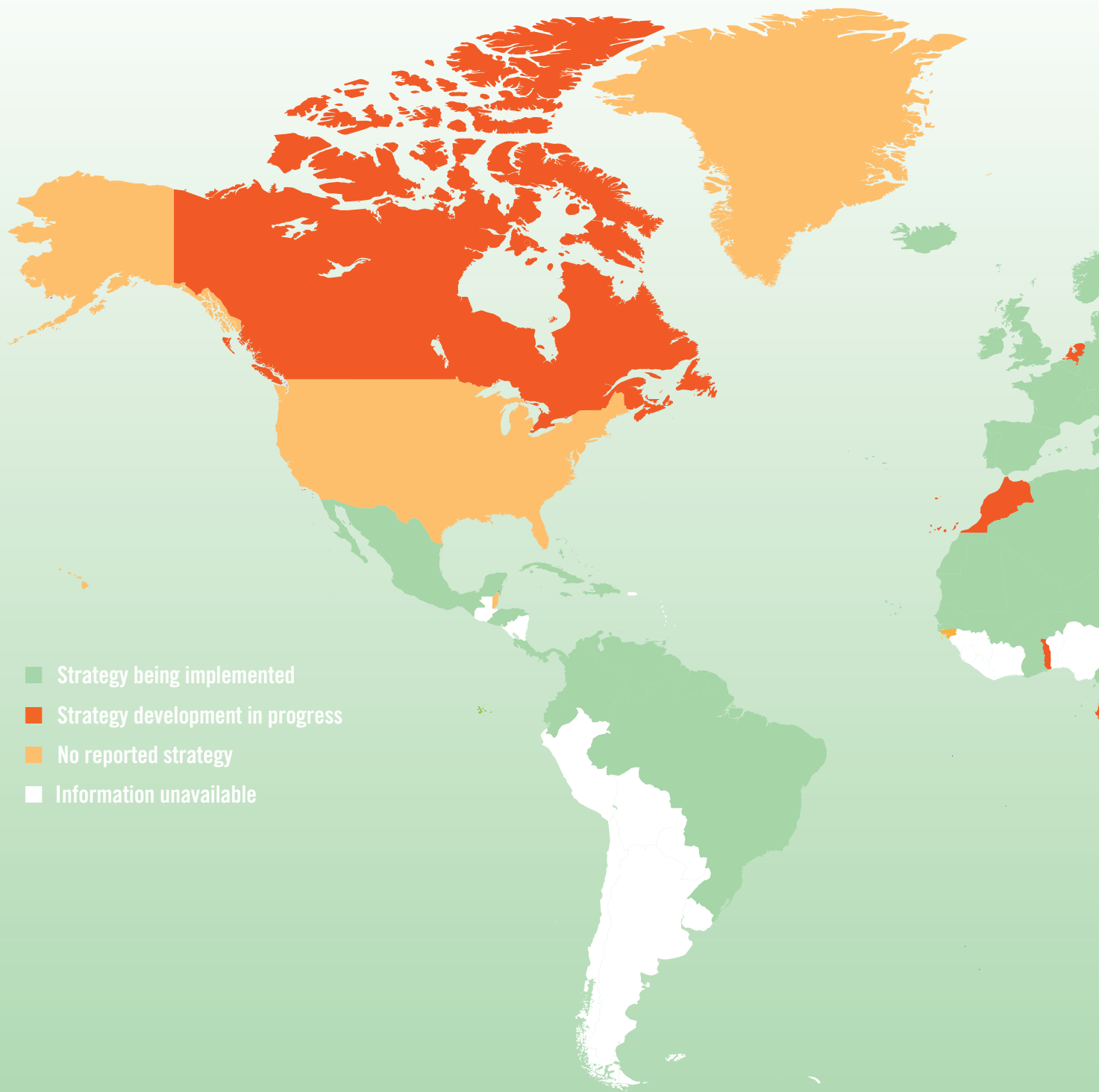
- Employing local labor and resources for construction
- Creating a health education campaign with multiple tools (print, television, Internet, community meetings)
- Partnering with local health authorities to monitor and evaluate the project

Economic and community development, Thailand

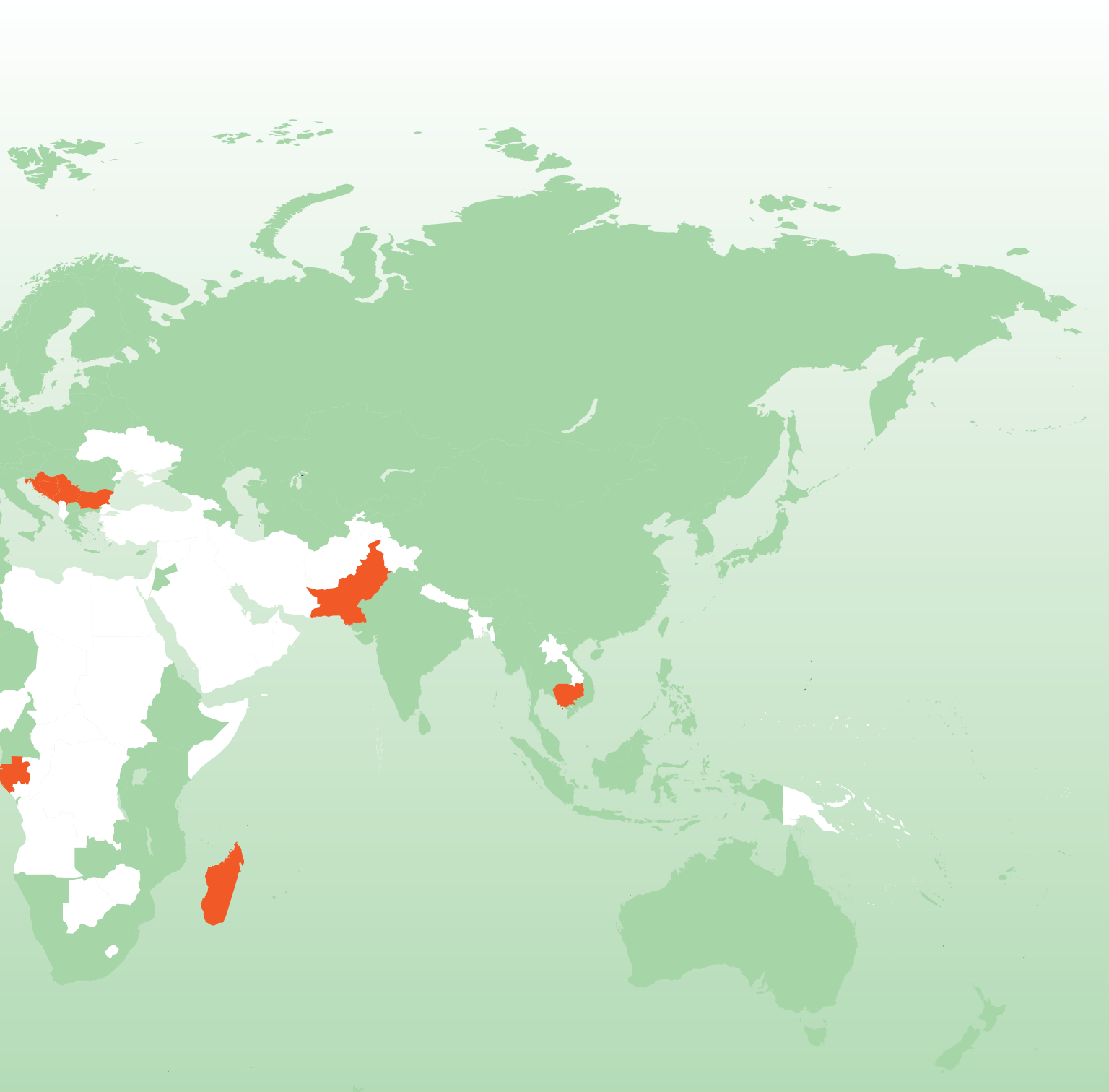
To improve the autonomy and mobility of workers with disabilities, Rotarians are organizing vocational training and employment services and addressing transportation issues.

Sustainable components

- Partnering with local health authorities to help identify jobs
- Hiring area businesses to build motorized vehicles for participants with disabilities
- Supporting a public awareness campaign to educate the community about safe driving



* The designations on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion of Rotary International concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area or its borders.



A GLOBAL EFFORT

National sustainable development strategies in 2010

Sustainability is a concern in all countries, not just developing ones. The United Nations has called on its member states to adopt comprehensive national sustainable development strategies to better integrate their economic, environmental, and social sustainability initiatives. According to Agenda 21, the UN action plan for addressing global, national, and local sustainability issues, national sustainable development strategies are key to alleviating global problems such as poverty, hunger, disease, and environmental degradation.



GET TO KNOW ECO-LABELS

When sourcing materials for a humanitarian project, it's helpful to know about international labels and standards for sustainability. Here is a selection of eco-labels from several areas.

Ecolabel (European Union)

The European Ecolabel was established in 1992 to encourage the proliferation of environmentally friendly products and services. Certification criteria are based on lifetime environmental impact, from preproduction to disposal. The label is part of a broader policy on sustainability adopted by the European Commission in 2008. Products include clothing and cleaning items.

Eco-Label (Korea)

The purpose of the Eco-Label program, established in 1992, is to reduce energy and resource consumption at each phase of the production process. The program also aims to reduce the production of pollutants. Companies are encouraged to provide information about Eco-Label to consumers by adding a brief description of the program to product labels. Products include batteries and wood commodities.

EcoLogo (Canada)

Founded in 1988 by the Canadian government, EcoLogo reviews products for 12 to 18 months. Under its standards, only the top 20 percent of items available on the market are certified. EcoLogo is a Type I eco-label, as defined by the International Organization for Standardization. This means that the performance of all EcoLogo-certified products is measured against that of other products and services in the same category. Products include coffee, flooring, and heating systems.

Energy Label (Taiwan)

More than 5,000 products from over 300 brands carry the Energy Label, a voluntary program started by Taiwan's Bureau of Energy in 1992. Energy Label does not certify companies; rather, certification is awarded to specific products. The program aims to analyze products based on efficiency, which it defines as using less energy, and thereby lowering operating costs.

Energy Star (United States)

In an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Environmental Protection Agency introduced Energy Star in 1992 as a voluntary labeling program that identifies and promotes energy-efficient products. The Energy Star label covers over 60 product categories and thousands of home and business products. It indicates that even if the product costs more than a similar, less-efficient model, consumers will recoup the difference through savings on energy bills.

Environmental Choice (New Zealand)

Although Environmental Choice operates independently from the New Zealand government, the government owns and endorses it, making it the country's official eco-labeling program. The certification criteria for products, services, and companies are based on life-cycle research and continue to develop as new specifications arise. The label applies to 22 categories, with products such as laundry detergent, carpeting, and paints.

Good Environmental Choice (Australia)

The nonprofit Good Environmental Choice Australia was created to ensure that the country's independent eco-labels conform to international standards. The organization designates its own environmental standards for evaluating products and services and provides expert advice on sustainability to consumer and commercial markets. Products include adhesives, shampoo, and outdoor furniture.

Green Label (Singapore)

Local and foreign companies can participate in the Green Label program, launched in 1992 by Singapore's Ministry of the Environment and monitored and administered by the Singapore Environment Council, a nongovernmental organization that seeks to boost environmental awareness and action. The Green Label applies to most products except food, beverages, and pharmaceuticals; it does not apply to services.

— KATHRYN HILLS