



Quality Education Nepal

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Board: Peter Hall
Michael Dillon AM

Ronda Hall
George Hillary

Simon Cowen
Gordon Nightingale

Web site: www.nepalaid.org.au

Email: nepalaid@gmail.com

Phone: +61 3 5424 1453

Loss of Rotary Foundation Support

As noted in the Funding Overview, applications for further Global Grant funding from The Rotary Foundation were rejected. This page explains the rejection from our perspective for the benefit of Rotarians including those of clubs that had offered sponsorship. Unfortunately no satisfactory explanations have been forthcoming from the Foundation, despite repeated requests.

How I became involved

I met Gyan Bahadur Pun, Principal of Paudwar Secondary School, at the popular vantage point of Khopra Danda on a trek to Annapurna, Nepal in 1993. On a second trek in 1998 we persuaded our guide to take us to his village which was away from trekking routes. In 2001 my wife and I returned, keen to support Gyan in his efforts to develop his school. We took second-hand computers which enabled him to introduce IT as a subject, leading to increased enrolments in the school as the only one in the vicinity to do so.

After a lapse to avoid Maoist guerilla warfare we returned in 2008. Krishna Pun had replaced Gyan as Principal but then had to leave his village as the guerillas threatened his family. However, as we walked up to the village Krishna shared his dreams. By that time his children were enjoying private schooling in Kathmandu. He dreamt of giving the children of his village the benefits of similar education including English medium teaching.

And so I joined Rotary

Back home a friend persuaded me to join Rotary as a way of sourcing further computers for the school, which we delivered in 2009. That trip allowed us to sit with Krishna and plan possibilities. I took him to a couple of Rotary meetings, and we secured their club support for my club's registration of a RAWCS project.

By that time I was aware of the Australian Himalayan Foundation's sponsorship of teacher training, which I persuaded Krishna to investigate. Along with NZ and UK Himalayan Trusts, AHF had sponsored the establishment of "Rural Education and Environment Development" (REED) as an NGO to deliver training in Eastern Nepal. Krishna immediately saw the potential, so we initiated a project to engage REED, with Rotary Foundation support in the form of a District grant.

Three year later, with REED otherwise committed, we established LEARN ("Lifting Education, Advancing Rural Nepal") as a new NGO. We attracted funding from various sources, and initiated

new projects. I developed a Global Grant application, for which another club accepted the role of international Sponsor as mine had other priorities. That three-year project commenced in 2017.

The need for teacher training in Nepal

Nepal is among the poorest nations outside Africa. It is hard to believe that when South Korea was established after the 2nd World War, its economy was on a par with Nepal. Why has Nepal been left so far behind? The reasons are manifold, not least being the diversity of its people, with more than 120 ethnic groups with different languages (a reflection of its mountainous country limiting travel and communications). More than a decade of internal guerilla warfare did not help, but progress since that came to an end in 2007 has been slow, with continuing party clashes.

The impact of aid efforts from outside the country has been limited despite considerable amounts spent, due to lack of effective coordination of aid to need, amplified

Rotary rejection

Alas, that was a turning point, as The Rotary Foundation rejected the applications. Despite emails to five trustees (two of whom I had met) requesting explanation, the total advice received amounted to less than 150 words. Reasons initially given were implausible, while the clearest explanation came from the Director of Grants: *"I believe that one of the issues with the latest application was the appearance that QEN was running the project, not the sponsor clubs. While QEN may do much good work, global grants are reserved for Rotary clubs and districts to carry out their projects, not the work of other organizations"*. In other words Rotary bureaucracy outweighed human needs - the Foundation would not support projects initiated by a project of Rotary Australia World Community Service, despite Rotary Clubs having signed Memoranda of Understanding accepting the roles of Host and International Sponsors in accordance with Foundation rules. At no stage did the Foundation challenge the worthiness of the cause.

So what went wrong? I felt proud of the way I had been able to act in a facilitating role, initiating projects that could operate under Foundation rules, managed by different clubs. We had built relationships and capabilities in Nepal that would enable us to initiate more projects than we could sponsor directly. This struck me as a very good mechanism, one which I believed the Foundation could adopt for wider use. The facilitating role could be adopted Rotary clubs, action groups or other Rotary entities.

As noted, TRF's rejection had nothing to do with the merits of the project - simply the fact that it didn't, in their opinion, fit the Global Grants model. I had worked to ensure that no change to the model was needed, though formal recognition of the role of Facilitating Organisation would help. However, my suggestions to that effect were not considered.

Was I too presumptuous to think the model might be adjusted in this way? I think not. Rather, I think the problem was one of culture. The Foundation is very highly regarded within Rotary, and justifiably so - not just for the good work that it achieves, but by its rating among the best administered charities in the world. However, this high regard has led to many seeing it as beyond criticism. This attitude pervades Rotary from club level through Districts and Foundation staff to the Trustees. Suggestions of change are seen as threats to a wonderful achievement. My efforts to interest the trustees in a cause of what I deemed major potential were peremptorily dismissed, and an opportunity was lost. Needless to say I was very disappointed.

A project audit that went astray

Relationships with Rotary were further damaged when a random audit was conducted of our one Global grant project. The auditor wrote *"I congratulate all the concerned for correctly assessing the need of the society and completing the project as envisaged in the grant"*. An audit summary noted:

- *" An effective community assessment was conducted by the cooperating organization, "LEARN". In addition, they also carried out appropriate teachers training in remote areas.*
- *The beneficiary teachers were satisfied with the training/learning.*
- *this project was well implemented and managed efficiently by the cooperating organization, LEARN"*

However, the audit also determined that LEARN should not be paid in accordance its fixed price contract, but on a cost-reimbursement basis which excluded a major component, namely that of staff time delivering the training. QEN was forced to make up the resulting shortfall of US\$10,000.

Was Rotary too inflexible?

I attribute our experience with the project audit to the same Rotary culture that had rejected our applications. Global Grant projects generally operate on a cost reimbursement basis. We figured that this process could be simplified by the NGO that we had established offering fixed price contracts. Sponsor clubs signed an MoU (approved by TRF in their acceptance of the Grant application) stating that LEARN would deliver "at the costs defined in the Budget". The International Sponsor was strongly supportive of this approach, but at no stage did the auditor communicate with that sponsor during the course of the audit. After it was concluded, their project manager sent a three-page objection to the findings. Its receipt was acknowledged by TRF with a promise to respond, but that response was never received. Once again, I felt it was a case of TRF being so committed to its accepted practices it could not so much as contemplate other possibilities.

Programs such as Polio Plus and Rotarians against Malaria have not suffered such strictures. Why should Education Nepal?

I invite clubs that offered sponsorship to respond to this. Could we have found a different path to gaining Foundation support? Does an opportunity still remain for that to be achieved? Is anyone prepared to join an initiative in bringing it about?