

**November, 2023**

**Volume 8, Issue 5**

## **From classrooms to COP, Rotarians take action**

As Rotarians from many nations prepare to advocate at COP 28, we thank the writers of articles in this issue for sending a wealth of resources and news to inspire Rotary climate action. From children to environmental professionals, the people writing or covered here are working for legal breakthroughs, informing and mobilizing their communities, and advocating for regional and multinational partnerships.

Here's our November lineup:

### **Preparing for COP 28**

- How Rotary will connect at COP 28
- People of Action at Africa Climate Summit

### **Youth-led solutions**

- Youth defend climate in court
- Students and schools: sign up to create climate solutions

### **Educating and empowering Rotarians**

- Climate Fresk inspires insight, action
- ESRAG's eco-friendly contributions to Rotary International conventions
- Eat plants and plant trees
- With gratitude for John Mathers

### **Good news:**

- Planting hope in Lebanon
- Indian women prosper as e-Taxi drivers



## And: share your skills and projects!

- Call for volunteers: ESRAG G-Drive Management Working Group
- Next up: circular economy and pollution. Send us your news!

*Photo: Kenyan students from CAVU's Climate Innovation Challenge (CIC) enjoying the Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi. Photo provided by environmental educator and ESRAG member Mercy Wambui, CAVU's Africa liaison.*

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## Connect with us on social media



## How Rotary will connect at COP 28

**By Rtn. Dr. Mina Venkataraman, ESRAG Director**



Rotary and UAE Rotaractors will anchor two pavilions at COP 28 in Dubai, one in the Blue Zone and one in the Green Zone. Top Rotary leaders including RI President Gordon McInally, Rotary Foundation Chair Barry Rassin, and Rotary General Secretary and Chief Executive Officer John Hewko will lead the Rotary delegation. This represents a major advance in Rotary's visibility as a potential partner in climate solutions. But whether we live into that potential or not will depend on really stepping up our action in proving our effectiveness.

Rotarians are people of action and we have brought about tremendous changes. What we lack is effective project impact reporting. Without data, we are losing out on a lot of funding that could come our way to implement solutions. This article will outline some of the reasons Rotarians are well-positioned to accelerate climate action. But unless we provide a track record to show our impact, we won't be credible to funders or partners. Read on to see how you can help.

*Rotary action bearing fruit: Rotarians and representatives of the National River Conservation Directorate of India's Ministry of Water signing a Memorandum of Understanding for the conservation of the River Cooum in India. ESRAG Director Dr. Mina Venkataraman (in rose) and RID 3232 DG Ravi (in yellow shirt) signed on behalf of Rotary. The project team, which included RID 3232 Rotarians Dr. Irulandi and Radhakrishnan, worked more than 40 months to bring this agreement together.*

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## People of Action at Africa Climate Summit

**By Eng. Felix Kimani Kariuki, ESRAG Director**

The inaugural Africa Climate Summit 23 was held in Nairobi, Kenya September 4-6, 2023 during the Kenya Climate Week, with the



Kenya National Government as the host and the Africa Union as the convenor. The theme was **Driving Green Growth and Climate Finance Solutions for Africa and the World**.

Approximately 30,000 delegates participated. This included 18 Heads of African States, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and European Union President Ursula von der Leyen. The summit was also attended by other global leaders,

intergovernmental organizations, regional economic communities, United Nations agencies, the private sector, civil society organizations, indigenous peoples, local communities, farmer organizations, children, youth, women, and academic to discuss Africa's climate change challenges and formulate sustainable solutions.

ESRAG Africa Chapter, led by its Co-Chair Eng. Felix Kariuki, took part in two main side events, **Climate Action Zone** and the Kenya House Pavilion KEPSA panel on **Leveraging Carbon Markets and Tools for Decentralized Climate Action**. The Climate Action Zone dramatized the urgency of more action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, with the deadline to reach them just seven years away.

*Photo: the SDG Super Heroes ready to come to the planet's rescue at the Climate Action Zone.*

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## Youth defend climate in court

*By Robert Altenburg, JD*



On August 14, 2023, District Court Judge Kathy Seeley of Montana handed down a historic decision in *Held v State of Montana* that state laws that promote fossil fuels and prohibit the state from considering climate change in its policymaking violate the constitutional rights of Montana citizens to a clean and healthful environment. The decision is [important for many reasons](#), including its grounding in scientific data on the impact of fossil fuel use on climate, and the disproportionate harm to children. The plaintiffs were sixteen children, aged 2 to 18 when they filed the case in 2020.

News of their victory made worldwide headlines. Other climate cases by youthful plaintiffs are underway, including one brought in September, 2023 in the European Court of Human Rights by six people aged 11 to 24. This article provides an overview of the history of constitutional environmental rights in the United States, showing that litigation alone is not sufficient to stop the harm. Rotarians can help by advocating for legislation and investment to decarbonize our economy.

*Photo of the Montana youth plaintiffs heading into court June 13, by Robin Loznak, courtesy of Our Children's Trust.*

## Students and schools: sign up to create climate solutions!

**By Staci Stevens, Director of Development and Special Projects, CAVU**

The Climate Innovation Challenge (CIC), created by the nonprofit organization [CAVU](#), educates students about climate change through a solutions-oriented lens. The [Climate Innovation Challenge](#) is a free international STEAM program for grades 3-12. You can join us in bringing education, hope and resilience to students around the world! Teachers, schools, and individual students are invited to [register for free](#) now through January 26, 2024.



The program consists of 6 lessons and a contest designed to encourage student leaders to think innovatively and communicate effectively about adapting to our changing climate.

CIC significantly expanded its reach this last year, in part because of our partnership with ESRAG. Several of the CIC videos that won awards in May came from schools recruited by ESRAG member Mercy Wambui, an environmental educator in Kenya who serves as CAVU's African Education Liaison and as Environment Chair for Rotary District 9212.

One achievement we are most proud of happened this past summer. CAVU, in partnership with Mercy Wambui, sponsored eight learners and five educators to attend the Africa Climate Summit 2023 at the First Lady Learners' Pavilion in Nairobi, Kenya. Students had an opportunity to lead an engaging session and showcase their youth-created solutions to local climate change issues. Kenya's First Lady assured learners of her commitment to involve them in climate change action through government initiatives. This is just one of many inspiring stories of how CIC is elevating youth voices and fostering leadership in students around the world.

We encourage students to "think globally and adapt locally," when addressing climate change. CAVU does so by fostering youth-led, solutions-driven thinking and implementation in students' communities. At the culmination of the Challenge, we showcase [outstanding student videos](#) and award scholarships and cash prizes for top entries.

*Photo: an 8-year old student at the First Lady's Pavilion at the Africa Climate Summit describing his school's project, "[Wild Our World](#)," which won the CIC 2022-23 Most Creative/Engaging Project award for elementary schools. ESRAG member Mercy Wambui is on the left.*

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## Climate Fresk inspires insight, action

**By Barbara Zitzmann-Tengelmann, ESRAG Europe**

In February, 2023, I participated in a conference on business ethics in Switzerland which presented the [European Union's ongoing research project](#) to develop lifestyles consistent with keeping global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius. At the conference we used puzzle cards for developing our CO2 budget.

After returning home, I looked up other climate-related serious games





of life who are coming together to combat climate change. It offers a variety of workshops, discussions, and hands-on activities aimed at equipping people with the knowledge and tools to make a difference.

Available already in several languages, with workshops offered in 45 countries as well as online, Climate Fresk is a wonderful way for participants to deepen their understanding of the factors in climate change and discover how they can collaborate on solutions.

By the end of October, 2023, I had done three workshops in Munich as a pilot to see how effective this type of climate education would be for Rotarians. So far it has been a complete success, drawing members - including past, current, and future District Governors - from more than ten clubs and four districts.

In this article, I'll explain what an opportunity this presents to the Rotary family. ESRAG Europe's "Every Club a Climate Fresk" aims to bring this resource to Rotary and Rotaract Clubs, and to train workshop leaders, as well as to offer workshops in districts throughout the world.

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## Reflecting on ESRAG's eco-friendly contributions to Rotary

**By Deniz Vural, ESRAG Director**

The ESRAG Rotary International Convention (RICON) Working Group (WG) is on a mission to make Rotary events more sustainable and eco-friendly. We want to encourage Rotary Family members from all around the world to get involved in making our environment healthier and combating climate change. For integrity, we need to walk the talk by reducing the adverse environmental impact of Rotary meetings.

In four years of work culminating in the Sustainable RICON at Melbourne, ESRAG's team focused on six areas: Education, Awareness Building, Venue Management, Food and Services, Transportation, Accommodation, and RICON Logistics. We built a massive resource library over these years, full of ideas to make future RI conventions and regional events more sustainable.

One of the critical factors contributing to our success in making RICON more sustainable was our commitment to collaboration. It's essential to partner with the Host Organizing Committee (HOC) who are responsible for the Rotary event you aim to make eco-friendly. Engage with the ESRAG Board, regional ESRAG chapters, and the hosting clubs. Collectively, scrutinize every facet of the event to ensure its environmental friendliness.

**Kitchen tips: how to plan and prepare a Sustainable RICON**



For the Melbourne RICON, we started by creating a sustainability matrix. It's our master plan, showing what projects we want to do, how much they'll cost, how big an impact they'll have, how long they'll take, and who's in charge of them.

We follow a step-by-step process with five phases: planning, implementation, measuring, offsetting, and reflection. In the planning phase, we look at things like making sure everyone has a great time, using the latest tech, managing the event smoothly, taking care of the House of Friendship, spreading the word, helping our volunteers, and being inclusive.

Communicating and building trust and friendship with the Host Organizing Committee is crucial. For the Melbourne RI Convention, most of the Host Organizing Committee really cared about the environment and tried to follow our recommendations, even when the budget was tight.

[Read More](#)

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## Eat Plants and Plant Trees

**By Doug White, Plant-Rich Diet Task Force**

I wanted to make you all aware that the ESRAG Plant Rich Diet Task Force has produced a new video,

**[Eating For Tomorrow: Restore the Environment and Feed the World](#)**, by Australian climate scientist Gerald Wedderborn-Bisshop, former Principal Scientist for the state of Queensland.

Gerard explains, in layman's terms, why it is critically important to significantly reduce emissions from the agriculture / food systems sectors, especially emissions from industrial-scale animal agriculture, to maintain global temperatures below 2 degrees C by 2100.

The UN IPCC-AR6 Report (September 2022) states that unless greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are brought in line with a 43% reduction by 2030 and a 60% reduction by 2035, limiting temperatures to 1.5 degree Celsius, will "probably" not be possible after 2035.

Scientific studies including [Clark et al 2020](#) have shown that even if fossil fuel GHG emissions are brought to ZERO, we cannot maintain temperatures at 1.5 degrees C and will have difficulty maintaining temperatures at 2 degrees C by 2100, without significant reductions in food systems/agricultural emissions.

The video is divided into three stand-alone sections:

- Industrialized Deforestation
- Eating for Tomorrow, and
- New Research on IPCC GHG Emissions Accounting Inconsistencies

These can be shown at Rotary Club and ESRAG meetings to educate Rotarians about this important topic.

*Doug White, a member of St. Thomas East Eco Rotary Club in the US Virgin Islands, is ESRAG's Interim Task Force Coordinator. The graphic is the concluding slide from Gerald Wedderborn-Bisshop's talk for ESRAG.*

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**With gratitude for John Mathers**

**By Ariel Miller, ESRAG Newsletter Editor**

Rewilding grazing lands  
and ending deforestation

will reverse global warming





San Francisco Rotary member John Mathers died Aug. 6, leaving a tremendous legacy as co-founder of the Rotary Climate Action Team Network, or [RCAT Now](#), which has grown to over 900 clubs worldwide pledging climate action. He was working to launch a Climate Change Youth Program for Rotary International when he died untimely. Mathers is mourned by countless people who delighted in his friendship and zest.

John Mathers served as President of the Rotary Club of San Francisco in 2017-18, the year RI President Ian Riseley challenged all 1.2 million Rotarians to plant a tree in honor of environmental sustainability. Mathers worked tirelessly to equip people of all ages with the knowledge and courage to take on the challenge of slowing climate change.

“John believed we needed to start working with youth everywhere, particularly in Rotary, through Rotaract,” says ESRAG member and RCAT leader Alan Anderson, who teamed up with John Mathers to grow the RCAT Network.

RCAT is developing training courses for youth on climate change and climate activism.

Throughout the pandemic, Mathers organized regular webinars featuring eminent speakers on an array of fields relevant to climate solutions. The RCAT’s three-step Climate Challenge includes a Global Climate Pledge for individuals and clubs, a commitment to take climate action (plus resources on how to implement it), and a commitment to reporting results to inspire clubs worldwide.

*Photo: John Mathers speaking at the international Climate Symposium in Assisi in 2022.*

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## Planting hope in Lebanon

**By Ariel Miller**

Undaunted by hyperinflation, last year’s wildfires, and the horror of widening war in the Middle East, the Rotary Club of Beirut Cadmos has succeeded in planting 2,000 cedar seedlings this year on deforested slopes of Mt. Lebanon. Through their project [Arztak Hawyatak](#) (“Your Cedar, Your Stamp”), they are working to restore the biodiversity and beauty that have made the mountain town of Ehden a beloved resort for generations of families from Lebanon and abroad.

Samar Salman, District 2452 Environmental Chair, is leading the project for her club, RC Beirut Cadmos. Their original goal – now on pause because of the war - was to plant 4,000 seedlings. The reforestation provides income to local nurseries in the short run and will draw more tourism, reviving the battered economy. Part of the funds they raise will also go into environmental education for children and the community, to build an understanding of environmental sustainability which is missing from the regular curriculum.

As a marketing consultant, Salman works to help companies build sustainability into their business plans. She sees a huge opportunity for Lebanon to make the transition to solar power, both for environmental stewardship and to overcome the unreliability of the country’s current electric generation, where most households only have power an hour a day.

ESRAG [reported on this reforestation project in May](#), when the Rotary Club of Beirut Cadmos was striving to raise the funds needed to win a global grant in time for the optimal tree-planting season, November. Worried after the start of the war between Israel and Hamas, I wrote to Samar Salman to find out how the project is faring. In reply, she sent jubilant snapshots of Rotarians from many clubs





planting seedlings.

*Photo: RC Beirut Cadmos President Gulshan Saglam and RC Ecco Lebanon President Rana Hindi planting a cedar on Mt. Lebanon.*

[Read More](#)

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## Indian women prosper as e-Taxi drivers

**By Jaideep Malaviya**



The city of Indore in the state of Madhya Pradesh has ranked as [India's cleanest city](#) for six consecutive years. Keeping in tune, I came across a lady driver who has been operating an electric 3-wheeler for the last three years. After the death of her brother, she undertook the responsibility of supporting her parents and her brother's two children through her taxi business, becoming one of the first female taxi-drivers to invest in one and taking out a bank loan to finance it. She told me she has already repaid the loan, as more and more local people prefer to use her electric taxi instead of a gasoline-powered 3-wheeler. This is a success that needs to be highlighted as a case study of how eco-friendly electric mobility can transform living.

I also had the privilege to visit the city of Ekta Nagar, home to the [Statue of Unity](#), the largest statue in the world. The 5 km<sup>2</sup> radius around the statue enjoys virtually fossil fuel-free transport with over 100 lady 3-wheeler drivers trained to carry passengers to the site of the statue and other attractive sight-seeing in the vicinity. Another success from empowering women!

*Photo: Jaideep Malaviya with the electric taxi driver in Indore. Rtn. Jaideep is a solar engineer, Board member of the International Solar Energy Society (ISES), Secretary-General of the Solar-Thermal Federation of India, and a member of ESRAG's Renewable Energy Task Force.*

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## Call for volunteers: ESRAG G-Drive Management Working Group

**By Deniz Vural, ESRAG Director**

Dear ESRAG Colleagues,

Are you passionate about efficient organization and digital collaboration? Do you thrive in a structured and systematic work environment? If so, we invite you to join the ESRAG G-Drive Management Working Group! We are looking for people with backgrounds in library, records, or archive management.

Our primary goal is to establish an efficient and systematic folder management system using Google Shared Drives. By fostering a culture of structured data organization, we aim to streamline access to essential documents, enhance productivity, and promote a more organized and efficient work environment. Our work will be driven by understanding user requirements:

1. Who are the users, the various groups of people we want to help to have better, more user-friendly access to ESRAG-generated documents?
2. What are these users trying to do? Specifically, in their different situations, what do they need: in other words, what are their 'Use Cases'?

Thus, our efforts will focus on developing better solutions for people, as well as the technology that will meet the user needs that we have identified.





We're seeking active members for this dynamic team, and we will offer opportunities to take on roles in implementing our roadmap including project kick-off meetings, needs and use case assessments, folder structure design, guidance document creation, training sessions, and many more projects throughout our first 12 months' journey together.

Your valuable feedback and expertise will help shape a well-organized and productive digital workspace. If you're ready to make a difference and improve our document management and user access, please respond to this invitation at [deniz@esrag.org](mailto:deniz@esrag.org). We look forward to collaborating with you!

## Next up: circular economy and pollution. Send us your news!

*By Ariel Miller, ESRAG Newsletter Editor*

In December, ESRAG's newsletter and social media will highlight circular economy projects. The focus for January, 2024 will be pollution solutions. We'd love to showcase your work, and welcome articles on:

- The factors and scope of the problem, or
- Effective projects you and Rotary colleagues are carrying out at any level, from local to multinational.

Please email me immediately if you'd like to be interviewed on either topic, or with questions about how to prepare an article yourself for ESRAG. We publish articles in the newsletter and on ESRAG's blog and website, where they are archived on the relevant ESRAG theme pages. ESRAG's

communications team works to expand the reach of your story through our social media accounts. Please send links and tags for the social media of clubs and partners in your project so we can help it go viral!

The deadline for articles for December, 2023 is November 21. The deadline for January articles is Dec. 21. Please email your article or proposal to [arielmillerwriter@gmail.com](mailto:arielmillerwriter@gmail.com). We also love to publish short videos and photographs. We'll send you the links for media creators and people who are portrayed to consent to the use of these images in ESRAG publications.

It is fascinating to hear from ESRAG members and readers around the world about what you're doing, and a privilege to share your inspiring work with fellow Rotarians who are striving to repair and protect our planetary home.

*Graphic: a flyer for one of the lithium-ion battery recycling events organized by Endwell Rotary Club in New York State. [Learn more here](#) about how clubs can join ESRAG's lithium-battery recycling initiative.*



## The Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group

operates in accordance with Rotary International policy, but is not an agency of, or controlled by, Rotary International.