



**September, 2023**

**Volume 8, Issue 3**

## **Rotarians Tackling Plastic Pollution**

This month we're thrilled to share news of Rotary President-Elect Stephanie Urchick's speech to the Become Climate Friendly and Sustainable webinar hosted by Synergy Europe on Aug. 26, and the resources ESRAG leaders are offering to help Rotary scale up effective action on this growing global crisis.

Jane Maonga's story "Building a Green Culture for Rotary," shows how transformative it can be when Rotarians embrace this challenge.

Our focus for September is showcasing ways to reduce plastic pollution. Here are this month's pollution solution stories:

- Citizen Science Defends the Baltic
- Tools to Tackle Plastic Pollution
- Saving a River in Nairobi
- Circular Economy Will Flourish in France
- How YOU Can Reduce Plastic Pollution
- How Our Diet Feeds Pollution



We also invite you to tell us about your projects and practices in upcoming issues: Food Systems in October and Climate Action in October. Most of our stories this month came from readers: thank you!

Now, brew a mug of tea or coffee, settle in, and enjoy reading news of wonderful work Rotarians are doing round the world.

*Featured here : Students of Kawangware Primary School are becoming wise stewards of their planetary home. Above them is a mural, commissioned by Rotary Club of Lavinton Eco, of Prof. Wangari Maathai, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for her grassroots mobilization to protect and conserve the environment. Photo by Brian Munene, Rotaract Club of Eco Warriors, Nairobi.*

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## Ramping Up Rotary's Climate Action

**By Yasar Atacik, PhD, ESRAG Chair**



As massively destructive wildfires and record-shattering heat dominated news around the world, ESRAG welcomed Rotary International President-Elect Stephanie Urchick for the Aug. 26 forum graciously hosted by Urs Herzog of Synergy Europe. Our President-Elect affirmed that it's vital for Rotary to act on the climate crisis.



"We only have one Earth," she said. The peril posed by climate change "isn't a mystery: it's all around us." In short presentations before and after her speech, ESRAG leaders from five continents laid out a roadmap to scale up Rotary's climate action, using the knowledge and tools we already have at hand. These resources include the Four Way Test, Rotary's Strategic Goals, scientific data

on the highest-impact solutions, and the eighteen months of research and consultation that we've put into creating ESRAG's Climate Action Roadmap.

In this article, I'm summarizing ESRAG's recommendations on how Rotary can rapidly ramp up our impact in striving to prevent humanitarian catastrophe.

*Photo: screenshot of Rotary President-Elect Stephanie Urchick and Rotary Director Ludwig Kalthoff, MD, conversing during the Aug. 26 webinar.*

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## Citizen Science Defends the Baltic

**By Ariel Miller, ESRAG Newsletter Editor**

Through hands-on service and irresistible special events, Finnish Rotarians are expanding the ability of scientists to protect the Baltic Sea. Their work includes measuring and categorizing marine trash, monitoring blue algae blooms, and bringing a traditional Helsinki festival into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by adding environmental education and fundraising for environmental research.



ESRAG's Finland Country Coordinator Liisa Stjernberg opened a window on this vital work by sending us a letter on the adventure three Finnish clubs are sharing by embracing citizen science. Stjernberg, who served as District Governor in 2017-18, has long wanted to take action to protect the Baltic, and was overjoyed to find support from local clubs to launch this work in 2022.

Three times a year, a small team of Rotarians embark by boat to reach the narrow coastline under the Suomenlinna Fortress, a UNESCO World Heritage Site near Helsinki to collect, measure, and categorize marine trash, providing their observations to the Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE). The impact goes far beyond a morning's clean-up.

*Photos: PDG Liisa Stjernberg*

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# Tools to Tackle Plastic Pollution

**By Karen Kendrick-Hands, ESRAG Partnerships Envoy and Training Coordinator**

The enormous proliferation of plastic waste has created one of the world's worst environmental challenges. ESRAG's [Plastic Solutions Taskforce](#) is equipping a growing worldwide Rotary audience to reduce plastic pollution by offering multiple forms of online and face-to-face education. Here's why it's urgent that we implement solutions worldwide.

"Since the 1950's, plastic has exploded into our life, changing it in ways that are big and small. From entire beaches and rivers covered with plastic, to the tiniest airborne microfibers, plastics are filling our lives — outside and in," ESRAG's Plastic Solutions Taskforce explains on its home page.

"Dealing with the discarded plastic we already have is a daunting project, but the amount we create each year is rising. We created half of the plastic in the world in the last 15 years, and will continue to increase the world's plastic output for years to come. There is a mountain of plastic coming our way, disguised as fabric, hiding in food, holding our stuff, being our stuff.

"Plastic Solutions wants to reduce the threat caused by plastic waste by understanding its root causes, and promoting the best solutions. From emerging technologies to simple reduction; from individual behavior change to systemic global change, some solutions are out there, and some are being invented. Rotarians can use their enormous networking power to influence how we create, use and dispose of plastic."

ESRAG's Plastics Solutions website offers a growing library of projects in several categories.

*Shown here: ESRAG's Plastics Solutions communicator extraordinaire Lori Cloutier teaming up with Madelon Schaap of End Plastic Soup at the Rotary International Convention in Houston. Photo by Ariel Miller.*

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## Saving a River in Nairobi

**By Ariel Miller**



The Lavington Eco Rotary Club is teaming up with the residents of an impoverished Nairobi settlement to fight the scourge of water pollution in the river they depend on. This [powerful video](#) illustrates the situation this community faces, their outrage, and the work Lavington Eco is carrying out in partnership with children and adults to restore clean water and verdant riverbanks in the informal settlement of Kawangware in Nairobi, where most people live on less than US \$1 a day and an estimated 65% of the residents are children and youth who are struggling to carry out their lives surrounded by untreated sewage, urban trash, and industrial waste.

The video explains the bleak social and economic

conditions exacerbated by the horrible environmental conditions that reinforce this community's experience of neglect and disregard. Through community consultations, residents and the Club



worked together to choose actions they could implement, including river clean-up, waste audits to identify types and sources of pollution, and tree planting. Schoolchildren are learning how to restore and protect a healthy ecosystem and clean water. The video shows the determination and ardor of one little girl who uses her break time to nurture and defend the tree she planted.



This initiative is a pilot project of the Adopt-a-River partnership between Rotary and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). Lavington Eco's achievements led to its project winning an award at District Conference and being showcased in a celebratory site visit by UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed in 2022.

Lavington Eco Club is now raising funds to scale up the project in partnership with the Kawangware community. Phase II goals include improving communal sanitation infrastructure, adding waste management facilities, teaching students eco-literacy and environmental responsibility, greening the riverbank, and helping youth groups launch water recycling as a source of income.

*Credits for the Adopt-A-River video: Yvonne Toywa, Jane Maonga, and Tabitha Njoki. The still images in this story are screenshots from the video.*

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## Circular Economy Will Flourish in France

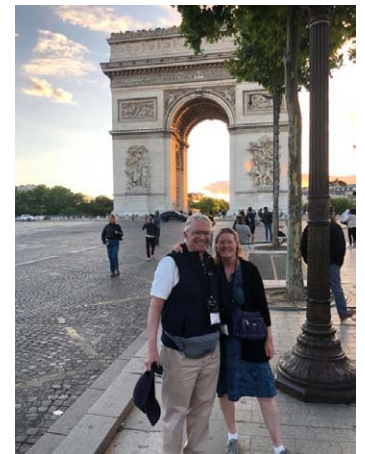
ESRAG Chair Yasar Atacik was delighted to find a [news story by columnist George Monbiot](#) in *The Guardian* on France's commitment to reduce waste and pollution, including passing a circular economy law. Here are some of the policies Monbiot lauded in his article:

- Single-use plastics are prohibited in public procurement
- Shops must allow people to bring refillable containers, charging lower prices when they do
- Manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers may not throw away unsold items: they must be donated or recycled.
- Policies designed to eliminate planned obsolescence

The policies to deter planned obsolescence include requiring several major consumer goods sectors - from electronics to toys - to provide spare parts and repair instructions, to pay into a repair fund. Also included: a ban on restricting the repair or durability of their products.

France is also beginning to make manufacturers pay for the costs of disposing of their products once they're no longer usable, as well as developing plans to cut resource use in manufacturing their products and making them more recyclable.

"By 2025," the article reports, "single-use plastic packaging will be reduced by 20%, all new washing machines will have filters to catch plastic microfibres, and supermarkets and caterers will have to reduce food waste by 50%."



If you are an ESRAG member in France, it would be great to hear any stories you can share about how these policies became law. Do you have suggestions on how Rotarians can make the case for circular economy as beneficial for all concerned? Send me your thoughts at [arielmillerwriter@gmail.com](mailto:arielmillerwriter@gmail.com).

*Photo: ESRAG members Huxley and Ariel Miller (from Cincinnati Rotary Club, Ohio, USA) appreciating Paris in 2022, even before they knew about France's policies promoting circular economy.*

## How YOU Can Reduce Plastic Pollution

**By Franz Müller, Co-Chair, ESRAG Plastic Solutions Task Force**



Plastic waste is a big problem: it is considered the second biggest hazard after climate change for humanity. Plastics left in the environment will persist for tens or hundreds of years. Especially if they reach rivers, lakes, seas, and oceans, they will be harmful to fishes, marine animals, birds, and more, and become more and more difficult to recover.

Microplastics, which come from the degradation of bigger pieces of plastics, but also from fillers and other small

products, have been found in the human placenta and in our bloodstreams, since we absorb them through the alimentary chain. Every one of us can be sure we already have plastic in our body.

Did you know that plastic additives leach into food and water, and are tied to fetal development issues, early-onset puberty, and reproductive disorders? Research under way in universities and other laboratories keeps finding harmful consequences due to the presence of plastics in the environment and consequently in our bodies. Since this is an urgent and growing problem, what can we do?

You can make difference by adopting these simple actions:

1. **Carry reusable shopping bags.** Plastic bags are accumulating on streets and on the soil. If not “compostable,” they will contribute to the widespread pollution.
2. **Use a re-usable mug or carry a water bottle** whenever possible. Most of the plastic waste found in waterways consists of bottles and other liquid containers
3. **Bring your own reusable containers to restaurants** for leftovers. This achieves two goals: preventing plastic waste and preventing food waste.
4. **Keep a cutlery set handy** and use it instead of packaged plastic cutlery.
5. **Take the [Plastic Solutions Pledge](#).** If you agree on the importance of mitigating the plastic waste problem, you can commit to help the planet with simple actions.
6. **Subscribe to the ESRAG [Plastic Solutions free monthly newsletter](#)** (just scroll down to sign up) and follow our posts on IFacebook, or Twitter so that you will be updated and be able to participate in our events.
7. **Join the Plastic Solutions Task Force** to learn, plan, and act to eliminate plastic waste. Send us a note via the “Get in Touch” box at the bottom of [our home page](#). This is a great way for you to contribute directly to help others to understand the problem and run the solutions.

Remember the African proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." As a Rotarian, the first group to take on board is your Rotary Club. Ask them to try one or more of these actions.

- For your club's regular meals, replace single-use plastic with reusable plates, cups, and utensils.



- Same for club events: replace single-use plastic event items with reusable items, and tell your audience about your goal to reduce pollution. This a great way to raise public awareness and set a good example to the community. See ESRAG's [Green Event Handbook](#) to get help.
- Invite a local expert to talk to your club about plastic waste in your community.
- Invite a Plastic Solution Task Force member to speak to your club. You can send a request via the Get in Touch tool at the bottom of the ESRAG [Plastics Solutions home page](#).

*ESRAG Director Franz Müller is co-founder of the Rotary Eco Club Milano. His many Rotary leadership roles include serving as District Governor, on the Environment Cadre of The Rotary Foundation, and Assistant Rotary Public Image Coordinator for Zone 14.*

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## Building a Green Culture in Rotary

### Our Journey as the First Eco Cause-Based Club in Africa

**By Jane Maonga, Founder and Charter Member, Rotary Club of Lavington Eco**

The Rotary Club of Lavington Eco - the first eco cause-based Rotary club in Africa - was conceptualized in November 2019 following a moment of profound personal loss, which led to a path of introspection, soul-searching, and a quest for solace and healing from nature.

**Seeding the Idea:** Inspired by the successful model of the Twin Cities Rotary Club in the US - which was one of a handful of single-cause focused Rotary clubs globally at the time, the idea of setting up an eco-cause based club was presented to the Rotary Club of Lavington (mother club). Less than a month later, in January 2020, a written concept was submitted to District 9212's membership committee for consideration. This then followed a rigorous process of consultations as the district had not had any cause-based Rotary club until then, and this was a learning process for everyone involved.



**Weathering the Storm:** Even though our first meeting in February 2020, attracted 15 potential members, membership growth was slow initially, as only a few of these people proceeded to join the club. However, fate had its own plans as the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world. Ironically, this was an unexpected silver lining as it accelerated our growth from six to forty-two members by the time the club was chartered in June 2020. In a time when virtual interactions were a lifeline, the online gathering of like-minded eco-enthusiasts became a haven for those seeking an escape from the uncertainties of a Covid-ridden world, and a deeper connection with nature.

There was a lot of necessary conversation happening in the digital space at the time, linking Covid and other health issues to environmental degradation, so the idea of an eco-cause based Rotary club was one that appealed to many. To date, the club continues to attract dynamic individuals who share a passion for the environment and a commitment to service.

**People of Eco Action:** This endeavor has not been without its challenges, and while we can acknowledge that we have had numerous hiccups during the formative years of the club's existence - including leadership transition gaps and membership engagement issues, our journey as a club over the last three years has registered more wins than downs. Read more to find out how.

## How Our Diet Feeds Pollution

**By Kris Cameron, ESRAG Plant-Rich Diet Task Force**

**Did you know?** Run-off of [contaminants like manure](#) from Concentrated Animal Feed Operations (CAFOs), as well as pesticides and fertilizers used to grow animal feed around the U.S. have contaminated [34,000 miles of U.S. rivers](#) and contaminated groundwater in 17 states. This toxic runoff also causes eutrophication (growth of algae and oxygen depletion) and has resulted in [fouled beaches](#) and dead zones along coastlines. Commercial fishing is a major contributor to ocean pollution. According to [UNEP](#) “Abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear is the deadliest form of marine plastic, experts say, threatening 66 percent of marine animals, including all sea turtle species and 50 percent of seabirds.”

For more information about how what we eat impacts climate, the environment, and health, visit ESRAG's [Plant-Rich Diet Task Force webpage](#).

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## Share News of Your Food Systems or Climate Stories



We're eager to share your news and advice about the topics being featured in our next two monthly newsletters and blogs:

**October: Food Systems**  
**November: Climate Action**

If you are a technical expert on either of these fields, we'd love to hear your thoughts on the environmental challenges and how you think Rotarians can catalyze solutions.

If you're involved in implementing a solution that other Rotary clubs or

districts could replicate, let us know what you're doing and its impact, both for the community and for fellow Rotarians.

We are delighted if you want to submit an article, and glad to interview you if you would prefer. Although we publish the stories in English in our newsletter, they also appear during the same month in our blog, where readers can translate them into twelve other languages (including simplified or traditional Chinese) using the widget at the top of our website.

**If you or someone you know is planning to attend COP 28 in Abu Dhabi**, please let us know if you're willing to send commentary or photos for ESRAG's blog and social media.

Thank you to every reader who has sent stories or leads in response to our requests in previous issues. Your work is inspiring! In addition to expanding the diversity of projects that we're able to share on our website, hearing from so many more perspectives makes our reporting vastly more representative and useful across the Rotary family.

If you love to write and would like to volunteer as a reporter covering your part of the world or a particular ESRAG theme (there are six – check them out under “Our Work” at the top of our home

page), send me an email at [arielmillerwriter@gmail.com](mailto:arielmillerwriter@gmail.com) and we will talk!

*Photo: Watch for news next month about the just-completed global grant project through which St. Thomas East Eco Rotary Club has provided solar power to a farmer's market in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This project combines food systems and two climate solutions: clean energy and reducing food waste. The solar array powers a walk-in cooler to prevent produce from spoiling, increasing farmers' income and reducing their energy bills. The solar power will have a huge impact in reducing carbon emissions and protecting the vendors from the frequent power outages suffered by the island's fragile power grid.*

## **The Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group**

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

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