

## Overview – Ending Ultra-Poverty Retreat – Toronto 28-29 June 2018

*Look at a stone cutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred-and-first blow it will split in two, and I know it was not the last blow that did it, but all that had gone before. [Jacob Riis](#)*

### Background:

On June 29, 2018, 43 participants from the Americas, Asia and Africa met in Toronto to reflect on the actions they will take to end ultra-poverty. They included members of Rotary, RESULTS, BRAC-USA, CARE, FINCA, Grameen Foundation, Opportunity International, Partners in Health, and World Vision as well as other practitioners and thought leaders involved in evidence-based approaches to reducing ultra-poverty. They all brought a strong personal commitment to ending extreme poverty, including in many cases a financial contribution to defray to the costs of the retreat.

The previous day the same group took part in the Ending Ultra-Poverty Summit hosted by Rotary where they became more familiar with challenges faced by people in ultra-poverty, and the solutions/tools available to address their issues. The Summit and the Retreat came on the heels of the Rotary International Conference held in Toronto earlier in the week.

The Retreat was in large part in response to the call to address these issues as reflected in the [Global State of Ultra-Poverty 2017](#) report (released by Uplift and RESULTS). Ultra-poverty is technical measure designed to benchmark the deprivations endured by a household in the areas of health, education and living conditions. One woman living in ultra-poverty describes ultra poverty as “having enough not to die but not having enough to live.” Or in the words of a Malian woman: “A poor person goes hungry, has no animals, cultivates with a hoe and sleeps on the ground.”

### Why focus on ultra-poverty?

Extreme poverty has decreased from 35% in 1960 to 9% in 2017. At current rates extreme poverty can be expected decrease to 6% by 2030 but this is double the 3% rate that the World Bank is aiming for in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. More to the point, the majority of those who live in ultra poverty will be those who continue to live at a fraction of the \$1.90/day income defined as extreme poverty by the World Bank. Today nearly half of the 800 million extreme poor are ultra poor. 14 countries account for 80% of the ultra poor but there are 54 countries with at least 1% of their population living in ultra poverty.

Simply put, if we do not take special measures to assist this sub-group of the extreme poor, we will not be able to rid the world of extreme poverty. Retreat participants focused on these “special measures.”

### The Retreat

The Retreat started with presentations on five projects that are likely to have a positive impact on ultra-poverty including:

- Adopt a Village (multi sector, Honduras, Care with Rotary)
- Healing Fields (health, Bihar, Opportunity International Australia)
- Bright Life (solar lighting, Uganda, John Hatch with support from FINCA)
- Handicapped Youth Graduation Program (graduation, Uganda, BRAC)
- Incorporating the ultra poor into Nirdhan, Nepal’s largest microfinance institution.

The purpose was to understand the challenges in building these initiatives to scale, as well as to examine how the Rotary network could support their implementation and expansion.

The five spotlight projects along with others including cash transfers, savings groups, microfinance and social capital – provide a testing ground to examine how to engage the ultra-poor, how to build partnerships to fight ultra-poverty and how to organize replication/adapting and scaling up projects that fight ultra-poverty.

In the afternoon, participants broke into groups that looked at what it will take to accelerate the fight against extreme poverty including:

- Building Rotary Partnerships
- Exploring Major Funding Sources
- Shaping External Communications
- Building the Ending Ultra-Poverty Coalition
- Launching and documenting specific projects.

At the end of the Retreat many of the participants signed on to move the agenda forward in each of these five areas building on the momentum from the Summit and Retreat.

The Retreat highlighted:

- **The scale of the problem:** 400 million people (80 million families) living in ultra poverty.
- **The cost:** Although Rotary can fund and document promising ground breaking approaches to ending ultra poverty, only governments, bilateral, and international aid agencies have the necessary resources, estimated to be in the tens of billions of dollars. Engaging them must be at the top of any ending ultra-poverty strategy.
- **The role of Rotary:** Rotary played a central role in organizing the Summit and the Retreat. How can Rotary use its leverage to best influence the larger dialogue on ending ultra poverty and be an incubator for innovation?

### ***Conclusion and Next Steps***

There was consensus among participants that action is needed to accelerate of the current trend so that ultra-poverty is completely eliminated by 2030. If achieved, this would avoid untold human suffering and related social ills that impact entire societies, not simply the ultra-poor.

A general consensus was also reached on the importance of an inclusive platform to aggregate and unite diverse demonstrated solutions for reducing ultra-poverty that are adapted to local realities, in order to create grounded enthusiasm, tangible momentum, shared and applied learnings, and unstoppable political will to get the job done.

Many possible courses of action were debated and discussed. Participants recognized the importance of, and attempted to study and learn from, other social and environment movements addressing critical issues, and will continue to do so.

We now seek additional input from other civil society groups, anti-poverty practitioners, academics, governmental and intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, and others. We recognize that there are many organizations and networks already providing leadership to the emerging movement to end ultra-poverty that we can join forces with. We welcome advice, support, and participation from any and all

individuals, organizations and networks who share our vision of a world free from ultra-poverty as we look at next steps.

*“Only action will remove the doubt that theory cannot solve” (Tehyi Hsieh)*

**Note: For detailed agenda and proceedings of the Retreat, please contact: [bbsample@ix.netcom.com](mailto:bbsample@ix.netcom.com)**