

# People



**'Mama Hurricane' measures success by touching lives**



She has been serving the community for 30 years, 11 of them as a Rotarian. Geeta Manek, now the Country Chair of Rotary International-Kenya, spoke to SONI KANAKE about her passion for touching lives and making a difference in society

**H**er down to earth demeanour and humility belie her achievements. But Geeta Manek always hits the ground running and has an action-oriented style of dealing with emergencies that has earned her the nickname 'Mama Hurricane'.

Because of her personality, Rotary International-Kenya has headhunted her to work as Country Chair for two years, despite the fact that the position is usually filled by annual elections.

"My job entails coordinating all Rotary activities in Kenya. I help the District Governor, Dr Tadesse Alemu of Ethiopia, manage the organisation's affairs in this country," she says.

Alemu is the Governor of District 9,200 that comprises Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Geeta says she was moved to join the Rotary Club because success, to her, is about touching lives.

"Ideally, Rotarians are good, noble citizens whose main aim is to do good in the world. We care deeply about uplifting the lives of all those in the community who need basic survival skills," she says.

Rotarians feel strongly about enriching the community by empowerment rather than with handouts, thereby ensuring the

**MORE ABOUT GEETA**

Married with one son  
Husband a senior Rotarian  
Hobbies are swimming and reading  
Born in Nyahururu and considers herself every bit a villager  
Seventh born in a family of three children  
Attended Aga Khan schools, later an English Convent Grammar School and further for Business Education

dignity of every individual is upheld.

The Rotary Club spearheads various projects that help the disadvantaged members of our society. Some of the projects Geeta has helped crystallise include the building of sanitary facilities in Kibera and awarding scholarships to needy but bright students.

"I also helped set up mobile clinics with volunteer doctors at Tigonji in Limuru, Kisumu and Jamhuri Park, Nairobi, during the post-election violence," she says.

She also ensured Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) got preventive medicines and tents.

"Rotarians also educate farmers on the benefits of crop



**LEFT, ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT: Geeta and other Rotarians at various functions. Members join by invitation. (PHOTOS: MAXWELL AGWANDA AND COURTESY)**

rotation. We have the 'sow a seed' campaign through which we have dug wells in Mwingi, Garissa, Machakos and other arid and semi-arid parts of the country," she says.

The Rotary Club has a significant number of water projects all over the country. Geeta has also personally supervised a project that builds classrooms in Kamukunji, Nairobi.

Whenever there is a crisis, Rotarians are quick to respond.

"We are just a phone call away and always ready to help others. When we are called upon to assist, we show up and ask other Rotarians to do so too," Geeta says.

She is also in the process of building low cost apartments with the aim of moving slum dwellers into them.

So how does one woman oversee all these activities and still have time for herself and family?

"I set very high standards for myself and have a strict schedule," she says.

She wakes up at 5.30am, exercises and has breakfast with her family before leaving for her office at 9am where she works until 4.30pm. She takes up her community service work after 4.30pm before going home around 7.30pm to prepare dinner for her family.

Geeta feels community service organisations do not get enough publicity to highlighting on what they do in the society.

**RESOURCE CHALLENGES**

"Perhaps the media is too busy with scandals and negative areas of our lives. We do our service totally voluntarily although we face many resources and manpower challenges. However, when anyone seriously wants to do good in the world, these

challenges suddenly become surmountable and soon the end result is achieved," she says.

So, can anybody become a member?

"One has to be invited to become a member by another Rotarian," Geeta says.

"The likely candidate for this invitation would be a person who is a leader in his or her profession, a community service minded person and someone whose peers feel will pass the 'four-way test,'" she explains.

The test is a simple way of gauging an individual's character.

"Rotarians employ the four-way test to everything they think, say or do. It has four questions: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?" Geeta says.

This test, Geeta explains, is done to promote a transparent method of working in one's daily life and encourage one to do the right thing always.

**RETAIN INTEGRITY**

Her future plans as the Country Chair and as an individual are to empower people to retain their own integrity through acquiring life skills and education as opposed to handouts.

"I cannot change the world but my humble input can make a huge difference to an individual. A classic example is that to the world, you could be one person but to one person, you could mean the world," she says.

She advises people to realise their full potential and to always aim high.

"Life has taught me the value of humility and service to humanity which I treasure above all else," she says.



**Geeta with former Vice-President Moody Awori when they opened a school.**



**Geeta (second right) at a Rotarian meeting.**

## Rotary is the oldest service club organisation

Kenya boasts of 40 clubs with 14 of them being in Nairobi.

One of Rotary International's main goals is to kick polio out of the world. They have successfully managed to do this except in four countries — Nigeria, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Rotarians have many projects on their agenda including combating malaria and HIV/Aids, offering scholarships for peace and conflict resolution studies, career guidance for students and promoting lead-

ership qualities among the young members of society.

Rotary International was founded in 1904 in Chicago, Illinois, USA where its headquarters are.

There are 33,000 Rotary Clubs worldwide. They also partner with major corporations like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, WHO, UNICEF, CDC and many other strategic partners to help raise funds and implement projects.

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