

# **Rotary, Inner Wheel, and Lions: A Look at the American Service Model in India**

Author: Shohini Banerjee

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## *Abstract*

The philanthropic architecture in India is varied and includes participation from civil society organisations, corporates, donors, and volunteers. A less researched component of this architecture are social service organisations. Started by business professionals with the intention of giving back to the community while engaging in professional networking, these organisations have significant resources in terms of funds raised and the time devoted to charitable work by its members. Rotary, Lions, and Inner Wheel are three such organisations in India, comprising a total of about 4.5 lakh members who provide their time, money, and network to various social causes. This paper examines the members' understanding of service organisations and defines the structural components to present a model that speaks to the longevity of these organisations.

**Keywords:** service organisation; voluntary associations; volunteers; organisational model

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## 1. Introduction

Throughout history, groups of people have come together, formally and informally, to take measures for the betterment of their community. This has often been termed as 'social good'.<sup>1</sup> Philosophies and models have differed on ways to achieve this. Many of these models have remained relevant; some evolved over time, while others have been rendered ineffective.<sup>2</sup> One model that has retained its importance for over a century is the 'service organisation'<sup>3</sup>, defined in *A Dictionary of Civil Society* as a:

...generic term used to refer to membership organizations that are organized as federations of local chapters for individuals who seek to combine sociability and public benefit. Regular membership meetings, dinners and other social functions are combined with fundraising events and charitable work. Mostly American in origin, and in the past, local in orientation and membership, many service clubs have spread to other countries, and some are active internationally as well.<sup>4</sup>

These organisations were founded on the dual purpose of 'service' and 'fellowship' by networks of working men in America. They believed that along with building professional fortitude, businessmen should also voluntarily contribute their skills towards society. Started in mid-West America in the late 1910s, these organisations expanded internationally soon after. Today in India, Rotary, Lions, and Inner Wheel are some of the most prominent service organisations comprising a total of 4 to 5 lakh members. Each organisation has an average of 1,200–6,000 clubs, with individual clubs raising amounts such as INR 12 lakh per year for one project. Their members also volunteer their time, giving an average of 10–12 hours per month. Despite their potential impact in India's philanthropic architecture, there is little literature which explores the effectiveness of these organisations.

This exploratory study intends to describe the service organisation model and the factors that contribute to its longevity and effectiveness in India. This is done through exploring the existing research on service organisations and, more broadly, voluntary associations. Office-bearers and people in leadership were interviewed on their organisation's governance, finance, objectives, and projects to understand the model. Surveys were conducted to ask members about their motivation to join and stay within these organisations, which helped extrapolate the model's important components. Initial findings disprove the hypothesis that the social component is a primary driver for club members; service is the main motivator for them. Furthermore, while the overall structure contributes to the service organisation model's longevity, it is its members in positions of leadership that primarily determine its success.

1 Barak, 'The Practice and Science of Social Good: Emerging Paths to Positive Social Impact', 139–50.

2 Willis, *Theories and Practices of Development*.

3 While 'service club' is the more commonly used nomenclature to discuss this model, this paper will use the term 'service organisation' in an effort to distinguish between the workings and findings of individual clubs versus the larger organisations.

4 Anheier and List, *A Dictionary of Civil Society, Philanthropy and the Non-Profit Sector*, 231.

## 2. Literature Review

The concept of forming a social, political, cultural, or economic association that also engages in service is not novel. However, the 'service organisation' model discussed in this paper is unique due to its longevity and global presence, with a growing membership in India.

Rotary was the first to be established by local businessmen in America to socialise and build networks as well as to engage in service projects and philanthropy.<sup>5</sup> Following this, Lions was founded.<sup>6</sup> With the growth of American cultural and political influence in the world between 1945 and 1967, there was also an expansion of service organisations globally.<sup>7</sup> The first Rotary club in India was established in the 1920s with only one Indian member.<sup>8</sup> This pattern to include more non-Indian members remained till India's independence. While Rotary has a colonial history, Lions and Inner Wheel came to India after independence, in the 1950s, with mostly Indian members. Lions and Rotary became the foremost models of what are today known as 'service organisations'—the American associational model. These organisations embodied the 'male homosociality' of the eighteenth century mixed with the 'self-consciously "modern"' ideals of civic engagement.<sup>9</sup> They were spaces to meet 'like-minded' individuals and develop business, moving away from the previous century's fraternal organisations such as the Masons, which had religious and ritualistic connotations.<sup>10</sup>

The organisations underwent several changes in their areas of focus due to the criticism they received. For example, due to complaints that the organisations were 'constraining members' economic potential', they started prioritising *service* more.<sup>11</sup> They also faced criticism about the social structure in the first two decades; however, it was only effectively addressed in the 1980s.<sup>12</sup> While in the 1920s, Rotary explicitly stated that exclusion of membership based on race would not be accepted, many clubs remained all-white within the United States. However, gender as a point of inclusion was not discussed at that time. The clubs were strictly meant only for men till the 1980s, when the US Supreme Court ruled that members could not be excluded on the basis of gender.<sup>13</sup> Before women were allowed to be members of the Rotary and Lions, the wives of Rotarians and Lions, called Rotary Anns and Lionesses respectively, also conducted projects, but worked within informal structures. However, a separate entity was born in 1956 when the wife of a Rotarian established Inner Wheel, which is now the largest women's service club organisation.<sup>14</sup> Clubs such as Inner Wheel and Ladies' Circle (the all-women counterpart to UK's Round Table) played secondary roles to the male counterpart clubs. The latter set the overall strategy of the type of work that is to be done and the former followed them, till quite recently.<sup>15</sup> Their gendered experiences of family and work also led to differences in the understanding of *service* and, consequently, in the type of projects they implemented.<sup>16</sup>

5 Wikle, 'International Expansion of the American-Style Service Club'.

6 Wikle, 'International Expansion of the American-Style Service Club'.

7 Wikle, 'International Expansion of the American-Style Service Club'.

8 Pillai, 'Rotary in India: History of Rotary in India'.

9 McCarthy, 'Service Clubs, Citizenship and Equality', 535–6.

10 Tadjewski, 'The Rotary Club and the Promotion of the Social Responsibilities of Business in the Early 20th Century', 975–1003, 8.

11 Farkas, 'Service Club Membership and Forms of Social Capital among Swedish Community Elites', 63–90, 66.

12 Goff, 'The Heartland Abroad: The Rotary Club's Mission of Civic Internationalism', 23–4.

13 Kou et al., 'The Global Dynamics of Gender and Philanthropy in Membership Associations: A Study of Charitable Giving by Lions Clubs International Members'.

14 Inner Wheel and Rotary, 'Rotary and Inner Wheel—A Creation Story', 1923–5.

15 McCarthy, 'Service Clubs, Citizenship and Equality'.

16 McCarthy, 'Service Clubs, Citizenship and Equality'.

While the objective of the women's organisations was less about business development and more about fellowship and the social component, it was part of the same movement which combined social bonding with service.

Participation in service clubs is through volunteering one's time for service, meetings, or other social activities. Several theoretical lenses explain why people volunteer through associations, including sociological, economic, psychological, and organisational. However, the organisational and sociological perspectives best speak to the volunteer's motivation in a service organisation. Redmond shares, through an organisational lens, that there are three potential reasons for which people join these organisations: increasing the impact of volunteering through working with a group, forging relationships with other members as a way of regularising social contact, and increasing the network of impact as an institution is most likely to be connected to other institutions.<sup>17</sup> From a sociological perspective, Gray and Stevenson conclude that motivations for volunteers are also linked to the feeling of shared identity for the volunteers.<sup>18</sup> Since the social component as well as the institutional structure of service organisations are often emphasised in the literature created by the organisations themselves, the sociological and organisational lens can explain the motivations of volunteers of service organisations. However, there have not been any studies that looked at the applicability of these theories in service organisations.

While there is limited literature on service organisations, they have focused on the type of organisation like a professional association,<sup>19</sup> how gender is treated,<sup>20</sup> the social<sup>21</sup> or business<sup>22</sup> capital due to which people join, looking either at the organisation<sup>23-24</sup> – or the members<sup>25-26</sup> – but not both. This study aims to look at the service organisation holistically: both the organisation itself as well as the influences of its members.

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<sup>17</sup> Redmond, 'Voluntary Ceding of Control: Why Do People Join?'

<sup>18</sup> Gray and Stevenson, 'How Can "We" Help?'

<sup>19</sup> Fyall and Gazley, 'Applying Social Role Theory to Gender and Volunteering in Professional Associations', 288–314.

<sup>20</sup> Farkas, 'Service Club Membership and Forms of Social Capital among Swedish Community Elites'.

<sup>21</sup> Tadjewski, 'The Rotary Club and the Promotion of the Social Responsibilities of Business in the Early 20th Century'.

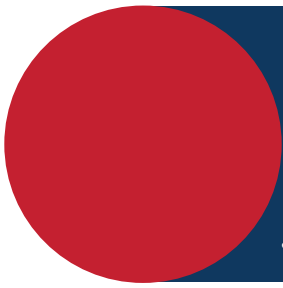
<sup>22</sup> Wickle, 'International Expansion of the American-Style Service Club'.

<sup>23</sup> Kou et al., 'The Global Dynamics of Gender and Philanthropy in Membership Associations', 18–38.

<sup>24</sup> Schneider and George, 'Servant Leadership versus Transformational Leadership in Voluntary Service Organizations', 60–77.

<sup>25</sup> Kou et al., 'The Global Dynamics of Gender and Philanthropy in Membership Associations', 18–38.

<sup>26</sup> Schneider and George, 'Servant Leadership versus Transformational Leadership in Voluntary Service Organizations', 60–77.



### 3. Methodology

Due to their shared history, structure, and presence in India, Lions, Rotary, and Inner Wheel were the three organisations chosen for the study. Office-bearers and members were identified as the two primary sources of data. Communication materials created by individual clubs, and national and international bodies of the organisations were reviewed, to place the collected data within the larger context of the international organisations.

Based on the initial review of service organisations' literature, it was assumed that those in positions of leadership had considerable amount of experience and, therefore, understood the functioning of the organisation in more detail than the average service club member. Therefore, it was decided that in-depth interviews would be conducted with them to understand the functioning of service organisations, their overall structure as well as the underlying principles of such organisations. The members would then be surveyed to understand why individuals join such organisations as well as what they perceived to be the objective and model of their club.

#### Methodology Tools

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to answer the research questions with input from a service club member. It was informed by the human rights-based approach of social impact to understand the objective and impact of service implementation.<sup>27</sup> There were questions related to the sustainability and impact of a project as well as questions around inclusivity within the organisations. To understand the model itself, service organisations were categorised as 'social organisations' whose definition calls to examine different components on an entity separately.<sup>28</sup> The guide was modified after the first few interviews to make it more responsive to what interviewees were willing to share and included questions specific to the interviewees' organisation.

The survey was developed after the research questions were narrowed and more than 50 per cent of the interviews were completed. The Volunteer Motivation Inventory, developed by McEwin and D'Arcy, informed the questions on motivation. The inventory looked at six factors that motivate people: value, personal development, feeling better about oneself, career development, influence within society and community, and protective escape.

#### Setting and Sample

Sampling was non-probabilistic and intended to represent geographical and gender diversity. While the final sample is not sufficiently representative, it was inclusive to rule out geographic differences as the reason for any divergence in the understanding of the model. The data collected has been anonymised and includes only the following information: affiliated service organisation, region of India to which the member belongs (north, south, east, or west), gender, and their position in the club

<sup>27</sup> This approach is based on the concept of international human rights. It assumes that the lack of social, political, and economic development is due to the underlying inequality in society which can be redressed by focusing on ensuring that the human rights of all individuals are realised. Therefore, inclusivity, addressing discrimination and other systematic solutions are encouraged over charity and temporary relief.

<sup>28</sup> Modern theories look at the organisation as a system where individual components interact with each to fulfil an overall objective. A social organisation is characterised by the complexity of its components, degrees of inter-dependence among the components, openness of governance structures, balance in its systems, communication style, and decision-making methods.



(member, current or former office-bearer, and current or former district office-bearer).<sup>29</sup>

Data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews as well as through surveys (which were conducted both telephonically and online). Interviews lasted on average for 45–50 minutes and ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. All sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed. One of the interviews was conducted through an email exchange.

*Table 1: Summary of Respondents<sup>30</sup>*

Service Club	Interview or Survey	Number	Regions	Genders	Median Years of Service
Lions	Interview	4	East, Northeast	2 Females 2 Males	10-20
	Survey	8	North, East, South, West	3 Females 5 Males	5-10
Rotary	Interview	4	East, West	1 Females 3 Males	20+
	Survey	12	North, East, West	12 Males	10-20
Inner Wheel	Interview	4	East, North, West	4 Females	20+
	Survey		North, South	10 Females	20+

District officer-bearers were primarily identified for in-depth interviews; fourteen were interviewed and two were removed from the final dataset.<sup>31</sup> All four regions were represented in the interviews although not for every organisation. Gender was more evenly represented: two women and two male officer-bearers were interviewed from Lions and one woman and three male officer-bearers were interviewed from Rotary.<sup>32</sup> All four interviewees from Inner Wheel were women.

In the first round of the survey, nine key stakeholders committed to circulating the survey to members from their clubs and districts. Only two surveys were completed through this method. The survey was also shared on various social media platforms but due to the lack of response, cold calls and personal networks were used to identify people to be surveyed. This snowballing limited the geographic reach. Less than 10 per cent of the final surveyors were found through cold calls. The deci-

<sup>29</sup> Other data collected but not included in the analysis were the profession and age of the interviewees. Since initial analysis showed that professional networking was not considered an important objective by the interviewees, this information was eliminated from the survey questionnaire.

<sup>30</sup> Complete table of interviewees can be found in 'Appendix 1'.

<sup>31</sup> One interviewee did not provide sufficient information and another interviewee was a club-level officer-bearer from a region that was already represented.

<sup>32</sup> It was a bigger challenge to get female interviewees for Rotary as compared to Lions.



sion to not include current or former office-bearers was taken to get better response rates. In the second round, fifty-six people were identified out of which contact was made with forty-six. Out of those, five people explicitly stated they were not interested and two had left the organisation they were associated with. Twenty-two people completed the survey telephonically and eight filled it out independently using the link shared with them. The purpose of the study was shared with all respondents and consent was taken telephonically and recorded on the questionnaire. A large percentage of the surveyed were from the north (40 per cent; n=12) followed by west (33 per cent; n=10), then east (20 per cent; n=6), and only seven per cent (n=2) from south. While thirteen women filled out the survey, ten of them belonged a women's organisation. The gender representation was, therefore, low.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analysed using the content analysis method. Codes and sub-codes were developed in accordance with the research questions for the in-depth interviews. Survey responses were grouped into three categories: motivation of members, their roles within their club, and members' understanding of the objectives of the organisation.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations exist in this study. Due to Covid, data collection was challenging as individuals were often busy with service projects related to Covid or with personal issues. Furthermore, all data was collected online and most individuals were not willing to spend a lot of time online. Lastly, the time during which data was collected coincided with the end of one tenure of leadership and the start of another.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it was difficult to get referrals for the respondents of the survey.

There is also a limitation in the survey as self-reporting is biased and, therefore, implicit or subconscious motivations were harder to find.<sup>34</sup> Lastly, as this was an exploratory study to gain a basic understanding of the service organisation model, the limited sample means that data is not sufficiently saturated due to the lack of varied representation in terms of gender, religion, and geography.

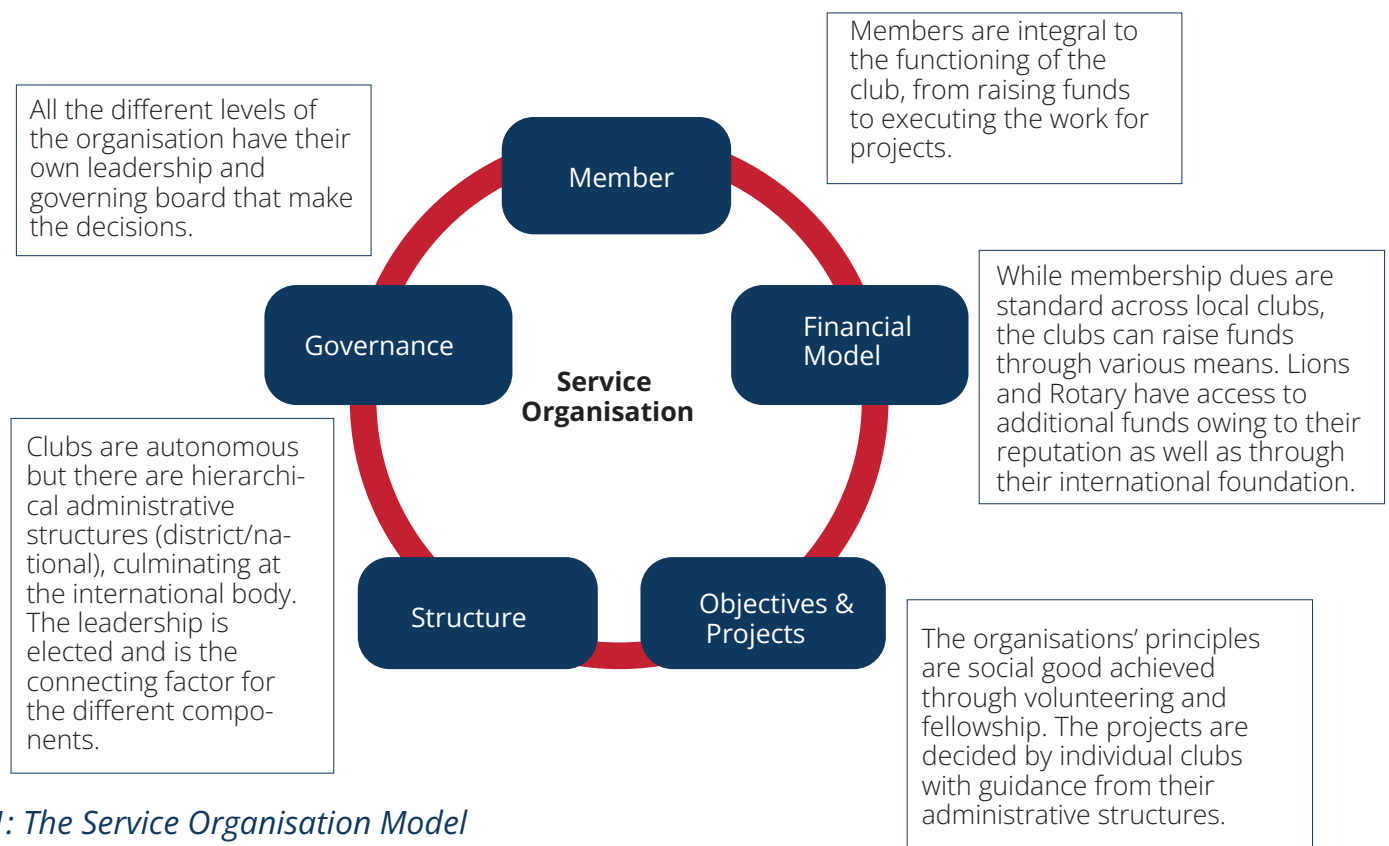
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<sup>33</sup> Tenure of leadership is usually from July of one year to June of the next year.

<sup>34</sup> Paulhus, 'Measurement and Control of Response Bias', 17–59.

## 4. Findings of the Study

The general history, structure and governance system, the main objectives, and the basic financial model are the four common characteristics among all the three organisations. Lions and Rotary were started by businessmen who wanted to contribute to society, while Inner Wheel was started by the wives of the professionals. All three organisations have a similar structure. They work towards social good and are primarily funded by the members themselves.



*Figure 1: The Service Organisation Model*

*Source: Author.*

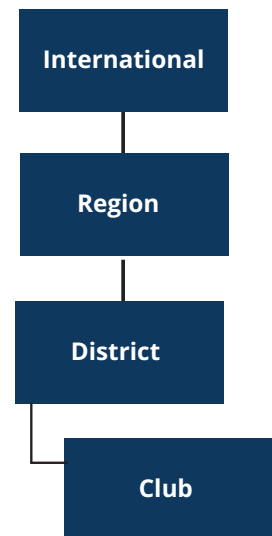
### The Basic Model

The service organisation model comprises five components: the structure, governance, financial model, members, and the objective of social good. Service organisations are structured with separate units, ranging from the local to the international level, with a common set of values (such as service and fellowship) and protocols that create a sense of unity and semblance of a single organisation with autonomous parts. Members pay dues for administrative support and are also responsible for raising funds (often from within the organisation) to implement service projects. Accountability of ensuring sufficient finances rests with each individual club. There are a variety of causes that each club engages in; broadly, they all fall under the category of 'service' or 'social good'. Due to the broad nature of the objective, the type of projects can vary significantly but they are primarily charitable in nature.<sup>35</sup> All these components interact with each other to make the service organisation model; however, their

<sup>35</sup> Rather than focused on 'human rights' which many social good projects are.

'members', especially those in governance, are the primary drivers of the projects and, therefore, of the organisation.

*Structure and Governance:* Service organisations have three to four levels of governing bodies. The basic unit is the 'club' at the local level. It functions autonomously, electing its own officers and executing service projects. It is where the implementation of the service organisation objectives and principles are enacted. Each city or area may have one or multiple clubs. For example, in a metropolitan city, there may exist ten or twenty clubs whereas the entire country of Bhutan only has one club. A minimum number of clubs (like four in Lions) make up a district. Above the district is the international organisation. Often, there may be a national-level structure<sup>36</sup> that oversees the work of the district. The district, national, and international bodies provide administrative, rather than legislative, support. Other autonomous but interconnected units include the youth wings for Lions and Rotary. Rotary and Lions also have a foundation that provides grants to individual clubs.



*Figure 2: Structure of a Service Organisation*  
*Source: Author.*

Each club has to follow some basic rules and laws to be registered with their international counterpart. These may include a minimum number of active members, the structure of the meetings, membership dues, expectations of members, protocols for leadership, and reporting and general administrative functions of a club. In addition to the international guidelines, the district and regional bodies may also add by-laws, guidelines, rules, and expectations. Basic guidelines have to be followed, which at the club-level, hold the president and governing body accountable. However, respondents shared that since clubs are autonomous bodies, they can selectively abide by any additional rules and expectations.<sup>37</sup> Despite this autonomy, respondents identify as part of the international structure rather than with solely of the club. When asked to clarify what connects a club to the larger international body, the district-level body and its governance structure were identified as the connecting factor. One respondent from Inner Wheel also said that the common protocols across clubs built a sense of cohesiveness.

*Leadership:* At each level, there are governing bodies with designated leaders (president) at the helm. While the governing bodies usually vote to pass a resolution for any action, the final decision is often determined by the leader. This is especially visible when determining projects.<sup>38</sup> One district-level office-bearer mentioned that a service club 'is a president-centric club' when referring to who decides what projects to undertake.

The governing body comprises elected positions within a ladder system. This means that once elected to a position, considered the first step of the ladder, one would move up the leadership hierarchy within the club. Therefore, one would have been a vice-president, treasurer, secretary, and occupied several other positions before becoming president. Thereafter, at the district level, to enter another

<sup>36</sup> They may be termed as 'region', 'association', or 'zone', and this differs from organisation to organisation.

<sup>37</sup> Respondents did not share which guidelines were mandatory and which were optional.

<sup>38</sup> Survey shows that 'leadership' was the second most important factor in determining the needs for a project.

round of the ladder system, there may be elections. For example, in Inner Wheel, the election commission officers scrutinise nominations and send the election letters to clubs informing them of the candidates. However, if there is more than one nomination to the election committee, only then would there be voting through secret ballots. While most respondents said they elect their leaders, actual voting to elect one of several candidates seemed rare.

*Objective:* Rotary, Lions and Inner Wheel have an overall objective to benefit the community around them. While Rotary and Lions lay emphasis on socialisation and networking for business, Inner Wheel gives importance to fellowship of its members. The following table includes the current mission, vision, and mottos of the three organisations:

*Table 2: Mission, Vision and Motto of Service Organisations*

	Rotary <sup>39</sup>	Lions <sup>40</sup>	Inner Wheel <sup>41</sup>
Vision	Together, we see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.	To be the global leader in community and humanitarian service	The Inner Wheel Vision aims for a modern, active and dynamic Association for Women; a global network of committed members, who voluntarily, give time and love for others
Mission	To provide service to others, promote integrity, and advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through our fellowship of business, professional, and community leaders	To empower volunteers to serve their communities, meet humanitarian needs, encourage peace and promote international understanding through Lions clubs	The Inner Wheel Mission is to promote action, service and good practice, intended to improve the lives of women and children in the world.
Motto	Service Above self <sup>42</sup> ; One Profits Most Who Serves Best	We Serve	Friendship and Service <sup>43</sup>

This focus on service is reflective of the responses in the findings. Findings from the survey show that most respondents identified service (n=16) as the main objective of the organisation, followed by social (n=4) and financial support (n=3). Some respondents also highlighted that there were actually two areas of focus for these organisations: 'service' and 'fellowship'. 'Finance' played an important role to help achieve these two goals. Most respondents shared that the success of the organisation was determined by a combination of all three factors.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.rotary.org/en/about-rotary/history>.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.lionsclubs.org/en/v2/resource/download/79862731%20>.

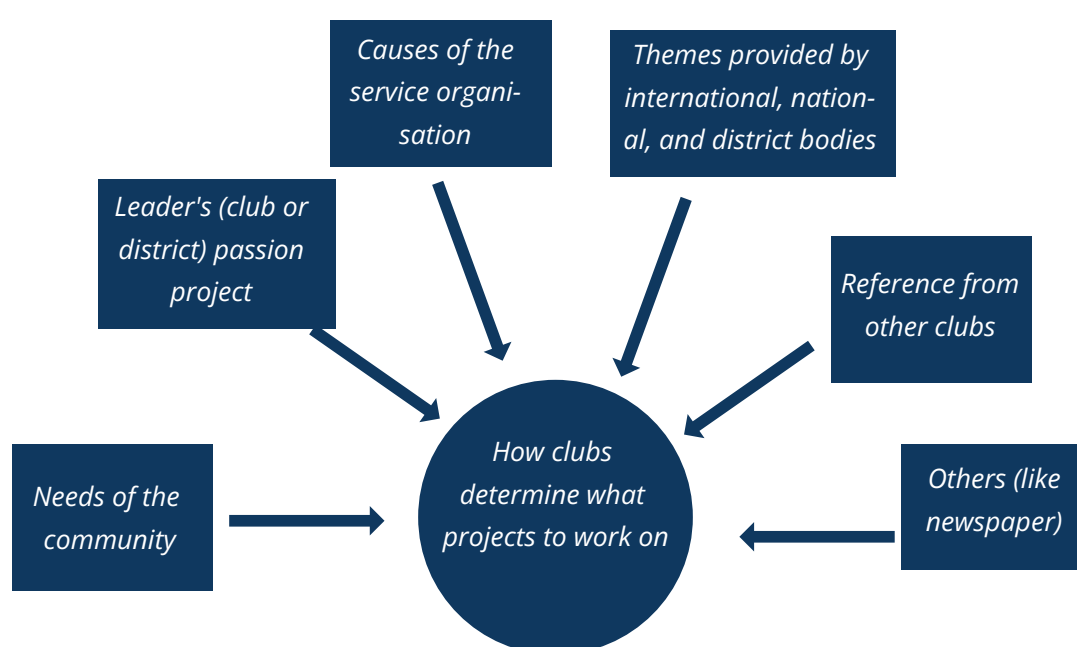
<sup>41</sup> <https://innerwheelusa.com/about/>.

<sup>42</sup> Rotary has two mottoes as highlighted on their website: <https://www.rotary.org/en/rotary-mottoes>.

<sup>43</sup> While not an official motto, one of the respondents stated this which aligns with the objectives outlined in one of the national bodies'.

*Projects:* ‘Service’ in the context of these organisations means the conceptualisation and implementation of projects broadly relating to ‘social good’. The types of projects range from providing financial support (n=8) and training (n=12) to donating an item or a facility (n=19), providing relief (n=17) or setting up temporary medical clinics (n=19). Some examples of projects include the building of a hospital wing, providing eye surgery to children, distributing blankets, raising awareness about various issues through car rallies, and providing oxygen cylinders during COVID-19. While there are thematic areas that Rotary, Lions, and Inner Wheel are engaged in from a global level,<sup>44</sup> the projects conducted in the interviewees’ clubs and districts were mostly related to health and education. This was reflected in the responses from the survey where more than 60 per cent (n=19) responded that their current or last project was related to the fields mentioned above. There were a few environmental projects and Inner Wheel focused more on women- and children-related projects.

The decision regarding what projects to work on is based on a number of factors including with the thematic areas provided by the international, regional, and district level-bodies, what the clubs want to do, and what the community needs.<sup>4</sup> The international, regional, and district-level structures provide themes every year or every two years in addition to the permanent mission-related causes. Clubs are supposed to do projects on these themes; however, they have the authority (in varying degrees) to decide which factor(s) contributes to the final decision of initiating a project. With Lions and Inner Wheel, the interviewees commented that the needs of the community were valued as much as the direction provided by the leadership. Rotary interviewees shared that the club had a lot more autonomy on project-related decision-making. Survey responses did not reflect this; findings showed that ‘community’ (n=25) was the primary determinant of projects and not leadership as the post-holder level interviewees had shared. The availability of funds also played a nominal role.



*Figure 3: Determinants of Project Need*  
Source: Author.

<sup>44</sup> Internationally, Rotary’s website states that its areas of focus are peace, health, water and sanitation, economic support, education, and women and children. For Lions’, areas of focus are diabetes, vision, hunger, childhood cancer, and environment. For Inner Wheel, areas of focus include women’s rights, children, peace, poverty, education, and disease.

<sup>45</sup> It not only varies from one service organisation to another but also from club to club.

All three organisations have a reporting system on membership participation and project implementation. Indicators for member-related reporting included the amount of time given and funds raised for a project whereas project-related indicators included the purpose of the project as well as the number of people impacted by it. When asked to define what 'impact on society or the community' meant, the answers varied. Some examples were 'positive response from the community' whereas others said that coverage in media showed impact.

None of the responses spoke about long-term impact, sustainability, or the changes that it created within the community. When asked about this, respondents shared that sustainability is usually considered when identifying and executing projects. For example, in Rotary, the board consists of the immediate past-president, president, president-elect and president-nominee who decide on projects together ensuring that each one is continued throughout the tenure of all the presidents. They also prefer projects that are beneficial for a community rather than an individual. In Inner Wheel, before starting a project, they are expected to look at its viability, especially ensuring that in remote areas they work with a local partner to ensure sustainability. While none of the Lions' respondents explicitly spoke about sustainability, one of the respondents mentioned that clubs have long-term projects.

*Financial Model:* Service organisations require members to give a standard fee to the international body for the administrative work. Clubs, as well as districts and regions, can charge an additional fee to the members to cover any other costs. While there is some support from the organisation itself exists like providing office staff, it is unclear whether this cost is covered by the international organisation or by dues collected by the district. Any additional fee varies club to club within an organisation. For example, some Rotary clubs had a membership fee (in addition to international fee) of INR 25,000 to 30,000 even 25 years ago whereas others have only recently raised their fee to more than INR15,000. The fee remains the same regardless of one's position in the organisation and to be a member, one has to pay all the fees outlined by the local club. However, members are also expected to donate for individual projects in addition to that, with leadership expected to give more financially. While there is no explicit expectation of higher contribution from the leadership, the patterns show that the higher the position occupied by a member, the greater is their financial contribution. One respondent explicitly stated this expectation while others alluded to it by giving examples of personal contributions which was more than the average club member's. For example a Rotary respondent contributed INR 1.87 crore<sup>46</sup> during their entire membership while a Lions' respondent shared that they contributed INR 12 lakhs during, and leading up to, their tenure (excluding any donation provided previously as a member). While the average contribution of the members was not studied, looking at the cost of the projects, it can be extrapolated that the abovementioned figures are significantly higher than the average member's contribution.

As implementers of service projects, clubs have the responsibility of sustaining them financially. They raise funds from their members and their social networks, through individual and corporate sponsorships, fundraising events, and, to a lesser degree, even from sale of some items. They also accept resources in kind. More than 50 per cent (n=16) of those who were surveyed shared that they contributed funds to the last project conducted by their club. When asked about some members' limited financial capability, interviewees shared that members are advised to donate as per their capacity.

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<sup>46</sup> Respondent shared that they contributed USD 250,000 which has been converted to rupees for the benefit of the reader.



However, one respondent also distinguished themselves from 'social workers' alluding that members of service organisations are expected to provide financial support as well as devote time to the projects; whereas social workers only do the latter.

In addition to receive funding from members, Lions and Rotary have access to both district and foundation grants.<sup>47</sup> For example, Rotary Foundation provides matching grants which can be up to nine times the amount a club sponsors.<sup>48</sup> While none of the Lions' respondents spoke about the use of matching grants in their districts, it was mentioned that Lions has a foundation where clubs can apply for grants. The foundations are partially funded by donations from the members themselves. As one of the respondents said about the grants, 'Give a little more each year and so you will be in a position to get money back'. In comparison, Inner Wheel only has access to limited district funding.

Clubs are expected to maintain two separate accounts for administrative and project-related costs. It is expected that 100 per cent of the money collected for projects will be used for its implementation. Administrative costs can include events, publications, costs of travel to visit other clubs etc. No member, however, can be provided even a stipend. Strict audits are in place for all the three organisations to assess how much money was raised and where it was spent. In fact, in Rotary, as mentioned by one of the respondents, conflict of interest is also verified as part of the audit check.<sup>49</sup>

Despite these basic similarities, the amount that is raised by the organisations vastly differs, especially between Inner Wheel and the other two. For example, one Inner Wheel district spent INR 12 lakhs for a project whereas a Rotary district spent INR 16 crores for their signature project. This could be due to a regional difference. One Rotary respondent from the eastern region gave an example of a project where they spent INR 4 lakhs, significantly lower than the other Rotary club. In the same region, a Lions' respondent cited raising INR 12 lakhs for a project. While the fact that geographical differences impact funding cannot be determined conclusively, there is certainly a difference in access to funding between Lions, Rotary, and Inner Wheel. One Inner Wheel respondent candidly shared that, unlike Rotary, they had difficulty accessing funding, especially corporate sponsorship and therefore had smaller projects.

### Service Club Members and Motivations

The activities carried out by Rotary, Inner Wheel, and Lions are dependent on the voluntary work of its members, the smallest yet pivotal unit in the service club organisational structure. Members are expected to give 'time, talent, and treasure', as mentioned by respondents from both Rotary and Lions.

*Contribution of the Members:* It is important to assess the 'time, talent, and treasure'<sup>50</sup> contributed by the members. Survey findings show that more than 50 per cent of the respondents said they contribute more than 12 hours per month (n=17) and over one-third said they give more than 20 hours a month. Yet, less than 50 per cent of the respondents said they contribute more time than others (n=13), of which all were either club or district office-bearers and not members.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Both these organisations have a foundation as part of the international organisation which provides grants to individual clubs.

<sup>48</sup> Most matching grants have a minimum amount clubs must sponsor such as the 3H grant in Rotary where clubs must contribute 10 per cent of the total amount required.

<sup>49</sup> An example of conflict of interest could be if a governor funds a hospital that is run by a family member.

<sup>50</sup> A commonly used phrase by respondents across service organisation.

<sup>51</sup> There were three categories of survey respondents: current or past district officer-bearers, current or past club officer-bearers, and club members.



All the members interviewed said either they do not contribute more time than others (n=2) or they contribute as much time (n=3).

In-depth interviewees, all except one respondent, shared that district-level office-bearers are expected to give more time than the other members; similar to their financial contribution expectation. Estimates ranged from three to five times as much as other members. The expectation of time commitment seems to increase exponentially as one moves up the ladder, both at the club-level and district-level for all three organisations. One such example is a respondent who shared that prior to his tenure as district governor, he had to inform the hospital where he was working as a doctor that he would not be able to commit to his work full-time; he would have to give a significant amount of time to his service organisation during his tenure. A Lions' respondent shared that the position requires one to spend almost 'twenty-four hours a day' on work related to the organisation. Therefore, it appears that officer-bearers, especially at the district level, provide significantly more time and money than other members. While the tenure of leadership positions ensures the cyclical nature of distributing responsibility among the members, it is only when members are office-bearers do they become the core driver of the model.

Along with higher resource contribution, leaders also dispense guidance on the nature of projects the organisation works on and sources of funding, one of which is through increasing membership. Often this is done through recruitment drives, which are common across all three organisations; respondents from Lions and Rotary spent a significant amount of time discussing this. One respondent shared that only 10 per cent of members focus on recruitment and it can be assumed that since leaders are responsible for membership growth, they are the primary drivers.

Despite the recruitment drives, people can join these organisations only through formal invitation. On occasion, people have directly reached out to the organisation expressing their interest to join but they too have to eventually be 'invited'. Most of the respondents (survey and interviewees) joined because someone in their social network asked them to join; none of them reached out to these organisations, wanting to join. The actual process of being accepted within the organisation is dependent on the protocol of the individual club. Some examples include having to attend three meetings or projects, while others require the approval of the club president. A few of the respondents shared that the drawback of recruitment drives is that it leads to as many people dropping out because potential members do not adequately understand the investment required. In fact, one respondent shared that almost half of the people recruited through these drives leave.

*Member Motivation:* Members' primary motivation to join (n=25) and stay (n=26) was 'service' or 'to help people'. This was followed by social interaction (meet new people and be part of an organisation; n=23), and self-esteem (feeling good about helping others; n=18). While one interviewee said that over 75 per cent of people join for fellowship and then get interested in service, survey showed that less than 17 per cent (n=5) of the respondents expressed that their primary reason for working with the organisation was 'social'. The fact that over 80 per cent (n=25) of those surveyed give their time, money, or resources to other organisations shows the general interest of individuals towards service. Several interviewees also shared that the reputation of the organisation might also be a reason why people joined it. While this was not included in the section on motivation in the survey, respondents

mentioned that one of the reasons to continue remaining with the organisation was the reputation of the organisation (n=19).

*Representation:* Diversity and inclusion was peripherally looked at during this study. All the respondents stated that they do not exclude on the basis of race, class, religion, or caste (and for Lions and Rotary, gender). Rotary International has an explicit statement on diversity, equity, and inclusion.<sup>52</sup> While Lions and Inner Wheel have not issued an official statement, their leadership has highlighted 'diversity' as an important goal. For example, the current president of Lions International emphasised the importance of diversity in a speech.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Inner Wheel Great Britain has a diversity and equality policy.<sup>54</sup> In terms of actual diversity in membership in India, the respondents spoke about professional, age-based, and geographic diversity. Respondents from Inner Wheel and Lions explicitly shared about trying to get younger members to join the club. All the organisations shared that there are clubs in various states and both in rural and urban areas, though the number is higher in the latter. However, none of the respondents spoke about religious, ethnic, or caste diversity.

In terms of gender diversity, Lions Club and Rotary International were all-men clubs till the late 1980s. Many of the respondents remarked on this exclusion in the discussion about diversity. Membership for women is still low in India. In recent years, there have been several initiatives to include more women in positions of leadership. For example, in Rotary, one of the respondents shared that they are trying to ensure that at least 25 per cent of their members are women while a Lions' member shared that in their district, they are trying to get at least one woman in the top three leadership positions. Internationally, gender diversity is also a goal and not the norm. Lions had their first female international president a few years ago whereas Rotary will be getting their first female president in 2022–3. All the Inner Wheel respondents emphasised the importance of the organisation being a space specifically for women. Many of the Inner Wheel respondents had husbands in Rotary but still chose to join Inner Wheel.

In addition to the aforementioned history and current approach to gender within these service organisations, there were also a few patterns that were observed during the interviews that spoke to the gender dynamics. Some of the leaders in Inner Wheel were keen to have the questions ahead of the interview and were more relaxed after the recording of the interview was concluded. This may reflect the lack of exposure of Inner Wheel as an organisation compared to Rotary and Lions. In addition to this, many women, across the service organisations, spoke about the need to balance their duties in the clubs with household expectations, whereas none of the male respondents spoke about this; highlighting the double burden that women have to deal with. Lastly, the women district leaders in Rotary,



<sup>52</sup> 'Rotary's Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion'. Rotary. <https://www.rotary.org/en/about-rotary/diversity-equity-and-inclusion>.

<sup>53</sup> Choi, '2021–21 Lions International President Message: United in Kindness and Diversity'.

<sup>54</sup> 'Equality and Diversity Policy.' October 2018. The Association of Inner Wheel Clubs in Great Britain and Ireland. <https://www.innerwheel.co.uk/assets/libraries/IW%20Equality%20%20Diversity%20policy.docx>.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

In its broadest definition, civil society is ‘the sum total of all individual and collective initiatives for common public good’.<sup>55</sup> This definition aligns with the foundation of a service organisation’s work: service. Yet, their model is unlike any other civil society or philanthropic organisation. For example, compared to non-profit organisations, their financial model comprises members funding both administrative and project costs. Furthermore, ‘fellowship’, while not an integral part of the model, still functions as a benefit and, for some, a motivator to join and stay, unlike in other civil society models. However, its structure and members are the two interconnected keys to the functioning and uniqueness of this model.

### Deconstructing the Service Organisation Model

Service organisations are member-centric organisations that cater to two populations: club members and community members. Club members are supported through the organisational structure while community members are those who are ‘served’ by club members. Although ‘service’ is highlighted, a look at the reporting indicators shows that member-related indicators were more well-defined than project-related indicators. This demonstrates that club members are given more credence within the organisational structure. Units in service organisations are created around the concept of members whether it is a minimum number of members to create a club or the existence of district and regional level bodies to provide support to the club. As a respondent shared, the district is strong only if the club (and its work through its members) is strong. Members provide their resources (such as time and money) to both run the organisation and implement projects.<sup>56</sup> In other civil society models, such as volunteering organisations, the volunteers are expected to provide only time. Furthermore, there are usually employed staff whose time is compensated. Therefore, members are integral to the service organisation model.

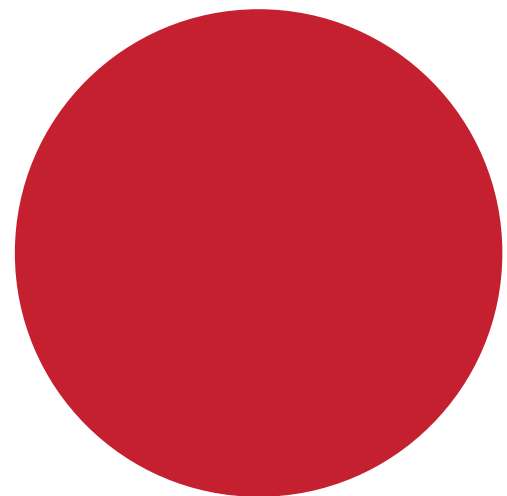
However, it can also be argued that it is the decentralised structure of the service organisation that leads to its success. Clubs are largely autonomous and can choose their work as well as administrative functioning. This can be context-specific and respond to the needs of the members rather than a larger global structure. Concurrently, the overall structure allows members to feel connected to the larger entity. The existing ladder system of governance and youth wings that funnel young volunteers into these organisations ensure that the organisation functions regardless of who the member is and ensures a consistent supply of people to provide resources.

This member–organisation relationship raises a chicken-and-egg problem: is it the work of the members or the reputation of the organisation that has led to the large contribution of these organisations in the present day and its century-long endurance? While survey results show that the motivation behind seeking membership is the reputation of the organisation, it is equally true that without the members, specifically the members in positions of leadership and governance, the organisations would not function. This is not to say that members do not contribute time and resources; however,

<sup>55</sup> Tandon, ‘Civil Society in India: An Exercise in Mapping’

<sup>56</sup> Members give time to inception projects, raise money, and coordinate with the community and other stakeholders and are also accountable to the larger organisation through reporting

the findings from both interviews and surveys imply that those in leadership are expected to provide a significantly higher quantum of resources. Furthermore, the ladder system implies that there is an inherent hierarchy in such organisations, with the presidents driving the values, nature of projects, targets of fundraising, membership, and recruitment. Therefore, it is the vision of the top leadership, whether at the club or district level, that drives the day-to-day activities of a service organisation. While protocols dictate that members of a club have to pass resolutions,<sup>57</sup> it seems that these are passed keeping in mind the leader's and board's decision.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, while leaders are technically meant to be elected, as several of the respondents pointed out, most of the times the candidate remains uncontested. This cyclical nature of governance is also distinctly different from other civil society models. Those in positions of leadership have one year to execute their vision and if any issues arise due to the change of tenure, they can also be addressed. Initial findings show that it is interconnected component of the service organisation structure and more importantly its reliance of the members in positions of leadership that contribute to the uniqueness and perseverance of the model.



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<sup>57</sup> Actionable item whether decision to do a project or vote someone.

<sup>58</sup> Except for Inner Wheel where members can vote at the tri-annual conference on the laws and by-laws.

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## 6. Conclusion

With a public image that shows high access to both human resources and, with their help, financial resources, service organisations are an important actor in the arena of philanthropy and civil society. This paper embarked to understand the service organisation model by looking at the three most prominent organisations in India: Lions, Inner Wheel, and Rotary. The paper proposes that while social interaction was the most influential factor in the longevity of this model, members of service organisations place higher importance on 'service'. Furthermore, while the various components of the model, including its autonomous structure with various levels of decentralised governance, are crucial to its functioning, its members, especially those in leadership positions, are the drivers of the model. In more than its 100 years of existence, while there have been significant changes, the integral components of members and structure remain unchanged.

### Future Research

There are several potential areas of further research. Each organisation can be studied individually with its unique sub-models. There are also gendered dynamics of service organisations whether cross-sectionally or within the organisation itself. Most importantly, there could be a larger study that looks at the diversity and inclusivity of the service organisation. One can look at whether socio-economic and demographic factors influence the involvement or even access to service organisations. Lastly, the projects of service organisations and the overall impact is crucial to understanding whether this is an effective model in terms of the social impact on society and should be replicated within the philanthropic architecture.

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# Appendix 1

Table 1.1: List of Respondents Included in the Study

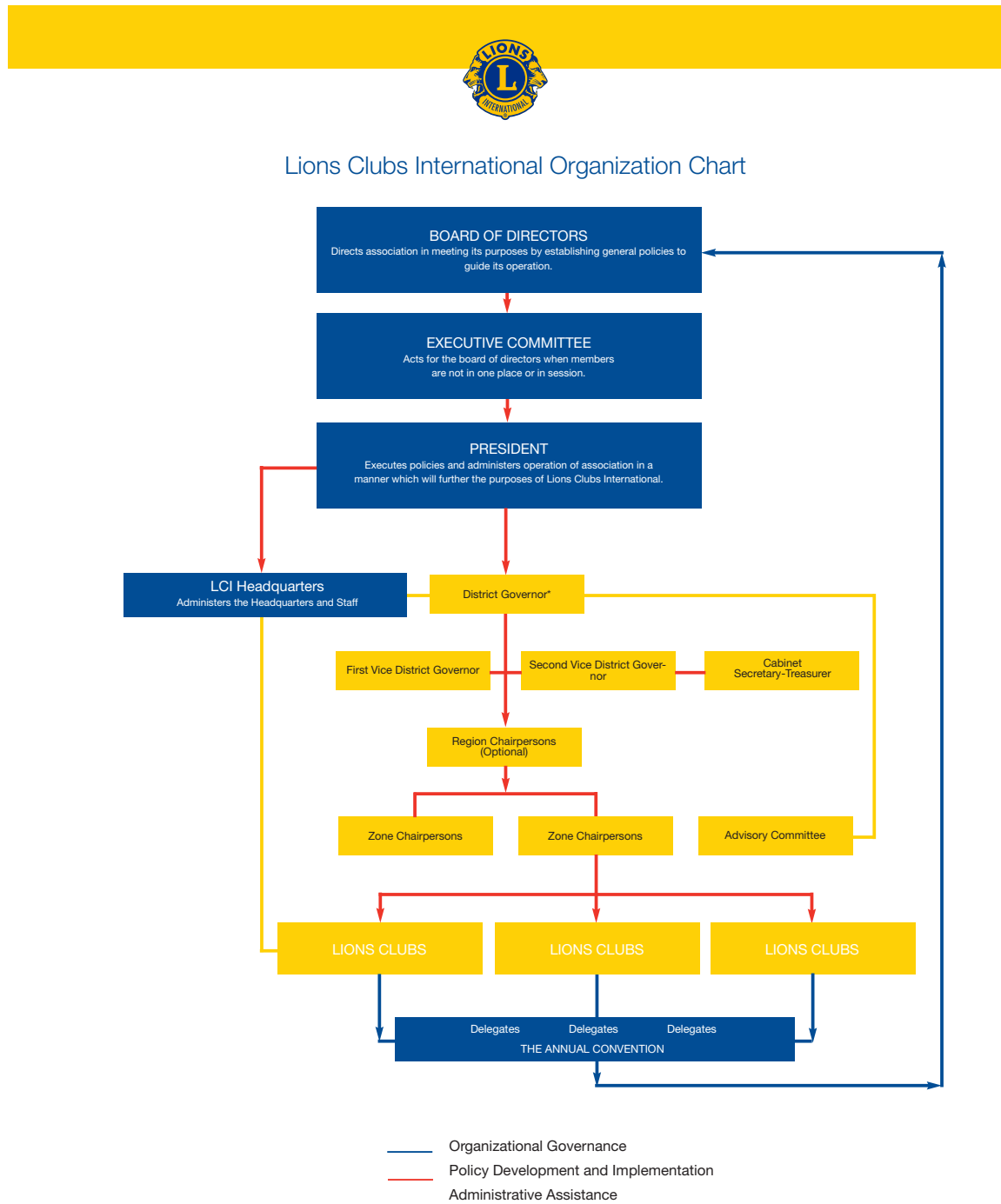
Service Club	S. No.	Region	Gender	Position	Interview or Survey	Years of Service
Lions	1	East	F	District-level	Interview	10-20 years
	2	Northeast	F	District-level	Interview	10-20 years
	3	East	M	District-level	Interview	10-20 years
	4	East	M	District-level	Interview	20+ years
	5	North	M	District-level	Survey	10-20 years
	6	West	M	Club-level	Survey	5-10 years
	7	West	M	Member	Survey	5-10 years
	8	West	M	Member	Survey	5-10 years
	9	East	F	District-level	Survey	5-10 years
	10	East	M	District-level	Survey	5-10 years
	11	East	F	District-level	Survey	10-20 years
	12	South	F	District-level	Survey	10-20 years
Rotary	1	West	M	Former District-level	Interview	20+ years
	2	West	M	Former Club-level	Interview	10-20 years
	3	West	F	District-level	Survey	20+ years
	4	East	M	Former District-level	Survey	20+ years
	5	East	M	District-level	Survey	20+ years
	6	East	M	Club-level	Survey	5-10 years
	7	North	M	Member	Survey	1-5 years
	8	West	M	Club-level	Survey	20+ years
	9	North	M	Club-level	Survey	20+ years
	10	West	M	Club-level	Survey	10-20 years
	11	West	M	Club-level	Survey	20+ years
	12	West	M	District-level	Survey	5-10 years
	13	West	M	Club-level	Survey	10-20 years
	14	North	M	Club-level	Survey	10-20 years
	15	West	M	Member	Survey	10-20 years
	16	East	M	Member	Interview	20+ years
Inner Wheel	1	East	F	National-level	Interview	20+ years
	2	North	F	National-level	Interview	10-20 years
	3	West	F	District-level	Interview	20+ years
	4	West	F	District-level	Survey	10-20 years
	5	West	F	Club-level	Survey	10-20 years
	6	North	F	Club-level	Survey	20+ years
	7	North	F	Club-level	Survey	5-10 years
	8	North	F	Club-level	Survey	20+ years
	9	North	F	Club-level	Survey	20+ years
	10	North	F	Club-level	Survey	5-10 years
	11	North	F	Club-level	Survey	20+ years
	12	North	F	District-level	Survey	20+ years
	13	North	F	Club-level	Survey	5-10 years
	14	South	F	District-level	Survey	20+ years

Source: Author

## Appendix 2

### Structure of Service Organisations

Figure 2.1: Structure of Lions Club International

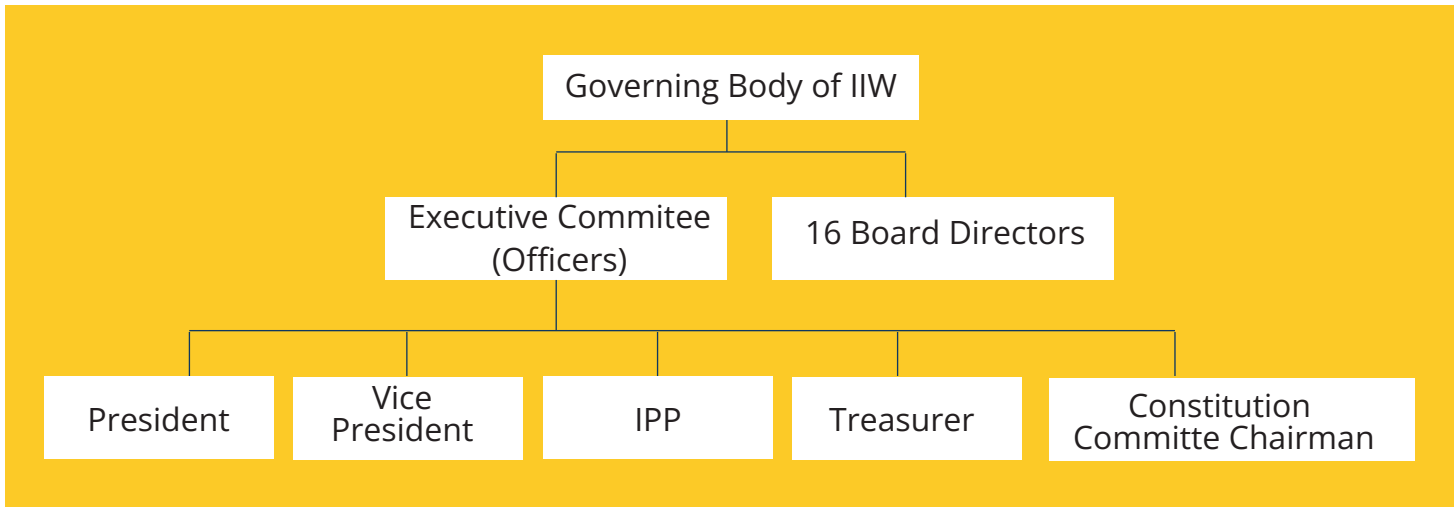


NM9A EN

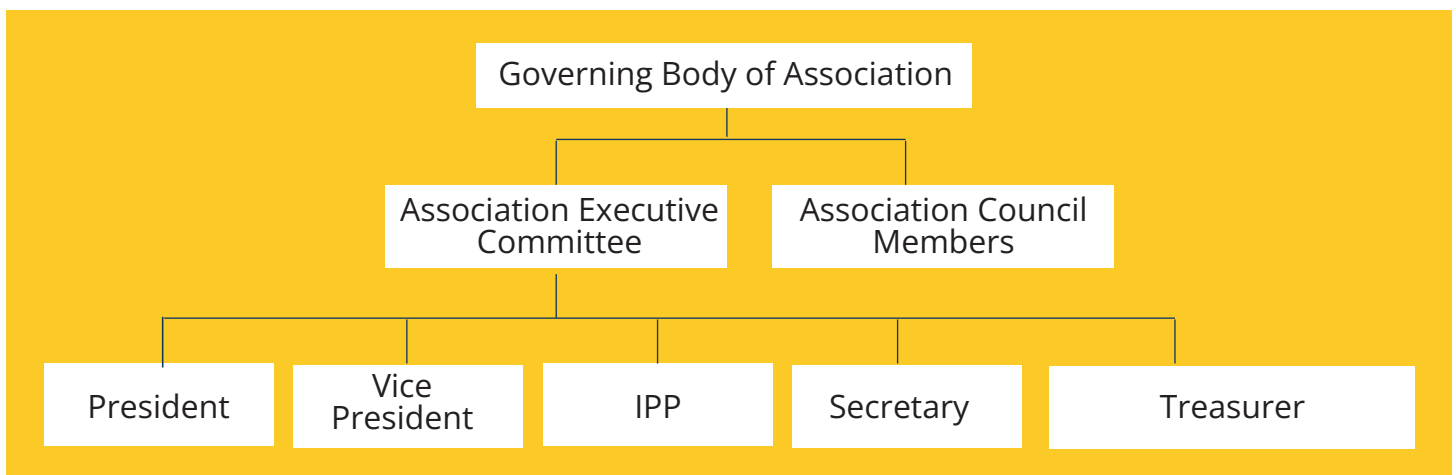
<https://temp.lionsclubs.org/EN/pdfs/IntlAssocLionsClubs.pdf>

Figure 2.2: Structure of International Inner Wheel

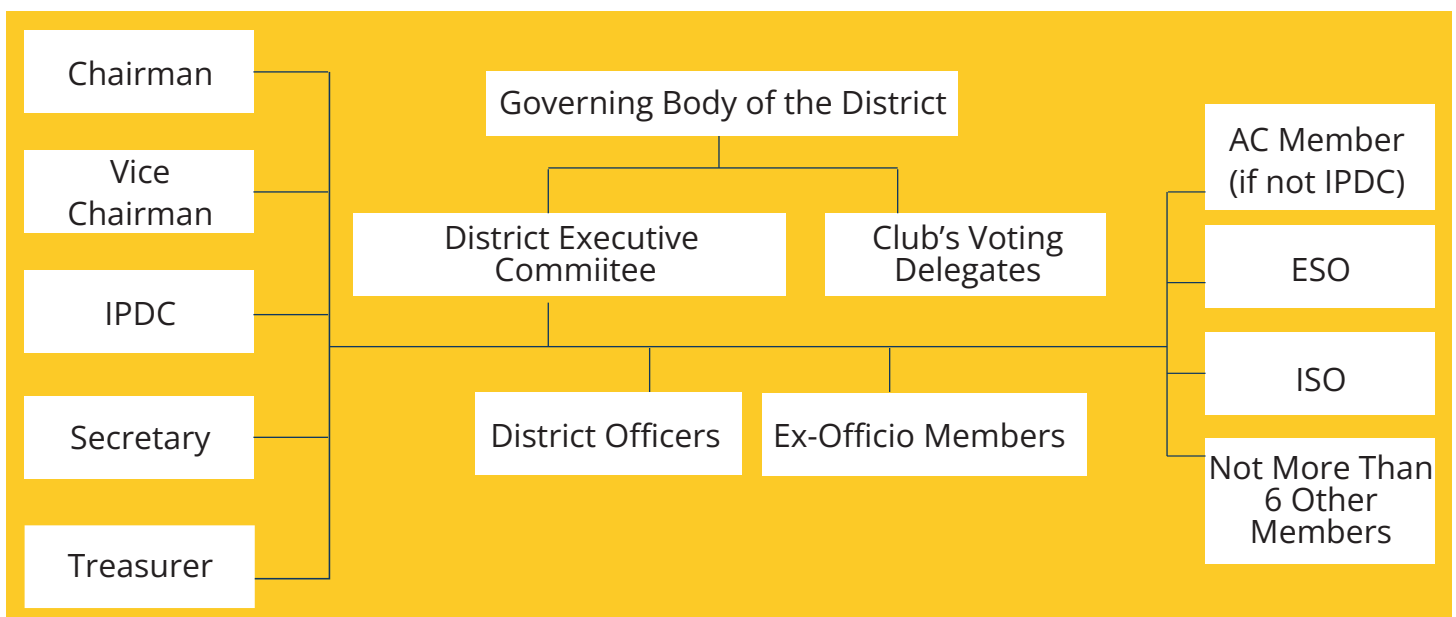
### At IIW Level



### At Association Level



### At District Level



## At Club Level

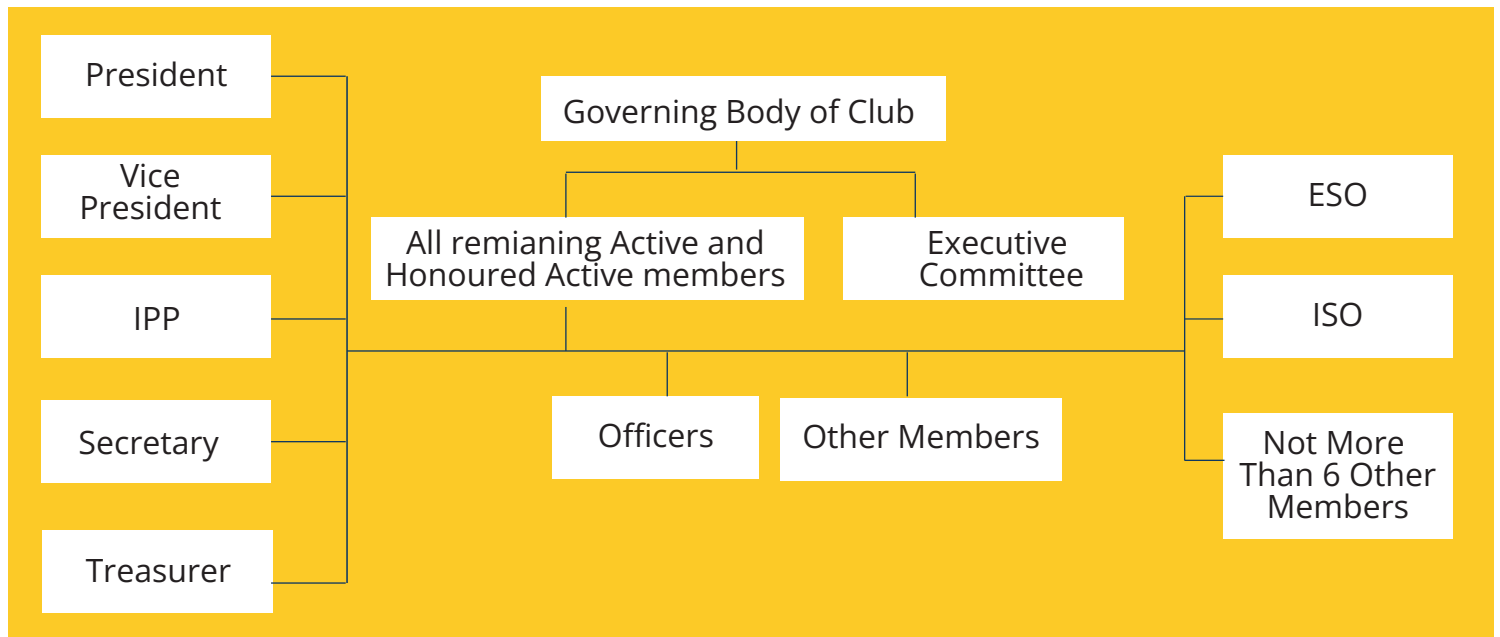
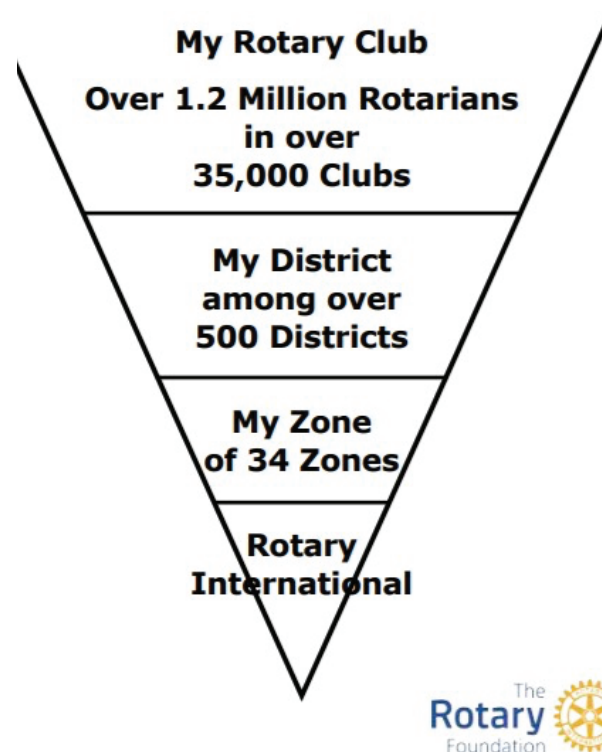


Figure 2.3: Structure of Rotary International



Source: Rotary Leadership Institute, 'My Rotary World: Faculty Guide', in RLI Curriculum—Part I, 2021 The Rotary Leadership Institute Available at <https://rlifiles.com/files/en/2021-1F-p6.pdf>

## Research Tools

### In-Depth Interview Guide

*Script:* Hello. My name is Shohini. As you may know, I am an independent researcher and a Research Fellow at Centre for Social Impact at Ashoka University and am conducting a research on the service club model.

1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and providing your valuable insights.
2. I would like to record the interview to smoothen note taking for analysis - can we proceed?
3. I just want to share that strict confidentiality will be maintained and what you say will not be attributed to you in the research.
4. I also wanted to share that you may refuse to answer all or part of the interview questions and if you would like to stop the interview and/or withdraw at any point, please do let me know.
5. Do you have any questions for me?

### About You

1. Please share a little about yourself and your position. What are your main responsibilities?
2. How many years have you been with the club? What made you join? What are the factors that made you continue with the organisation as long as you have?
3. How much time and resources do you give to the organisation? Do you think office-bearers give more time/resource to the organisation?

### Understanding the Model

1. What does the organisation do?
  - a. What causes do you work on?
  - b. How do you decide what communities to work with?
  - c. What are the factors that distinguish giving to one community/project over another?
2. How would you describe the model of the club/ (Is it volunteer-focused, service-oriented or a fun raising organisation)?
3. What are the underlying values of the organisation?
4. What is the financial model of implementing programs?
5. What is the structure of the organisation? How are decisions made? What is the Governance structure?
6. How do you gauge impact of the work that you do? What are the indicators of measurement? Is there a reporting mechanism?
7. What is the dynamic between the International and the clubs in India? What are the similarities of how they work and are there differences?

### Club Members

1. How do people join? What are the methods of recruitment?
2. Why do you think others join? What makes them stay?
3. How does diversity and inclusion factor into who you recruit as members?
4. Do you think Innerwheel/Rotary/Lions members are different from the average Indian philanthro-



py/social good giver? If so, how do you think they are different?

### *Other Information*

1. How do you think Innerwheel/Rotary/Lions fits into the larger civil society architecture? What are the characteristics that make it different from other social or social impact clubs?

### *Survey Questionnaire*

Dear Participant,

This survey is part of a research project titled 'Service Clubs as a form of Philanthropy' conducted by Shohini Banerjee, Research Fellow at Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy, at Ashoka University. Click here to find out more about the fellowship:

<https://csip.ashoka.edu.in/research-fellowship-2020/>

This study aims to understand the service club model of three clubs (Lions Club, InnerWheel and Rotary) and place it within the larger philanthropic architecture. As a member of these organisations, your participation is invaluable to understanding the model and more importantly, the members who constituted these clubs.

Participation in this survey is voluntary. Your data will be anonymised and no identifying information will be collected. You may refuse to take part in the research or ask to withdraw your data any time before August 7, 2021.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below which indicates that

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

## Survey Questionnaire

### Member Information

4. Which of the following club are you associated with?

- a. ☐ Lions Club
- b. ☐ Rotary
- c. ☐ Innerwheel

5. What gender do you identify with?

- a. ☐ Male
- b. ☐ Female
- c. ☐ Other

6. In which region of India is your club located?

- a. ☐ North
- b. ☐ South
- c. ☐ East
- d. ☐ West

7. What is your designation in the club?

- a. ☐ Member
- b. ☐ Club office-bearer
- c. ☐ District level office-bearer
- d. ☐ Past Club office-bearer
- e. ☐ Past District level office-bearer
- f. ☐ Other

8. How long have you been with the club?

- a. ☐ Less than a year
- b. ☐ 1-5 years
- c. ☐ 5-10 years
- d. ☐ 10-20 years
- e. ☐ 20+ years

9. How many hours a month do you contribute towards club activities?

- a. ☐ Less than 6 hours
- b. ☐ 6-12 hours
- c. ☐ 12-20 hours
- d. ☐ more than 20 hours

10. Out of the time provided, where do you enjoy giving the most of your time?

- a. ☐ Interacting with other members
- b. ☐ Planning and executing projects
- c. ☐ Raising Funds
- d. ☐ Other

11. Do you think that you contribute more time than other members?

- a. ☐ Yes
- b. ☐ No
- c. ☐ About the same as others
- d. ☐ Other

### About Your Club

12. If you could describe the objective of the service club in any ONE of the following ways, what would it be?

- a. ☐ Ensure that the club members grow
- b. ☐ Provide service to the community
- c. ☐ Raise funds to implement project
- d. ☐ Other

13. What is the most common method through which the club extends support or service?

- a. ☐ Financial Support
- b. ☐ Purchase an item or build a facility
- c. ☐ Volunteer skills (including getting others, like doctors, to volunteer their skill/time)
- d. ☐ Other

14. What kind of project you are currently involved in or last involved in? (select all that apply)

- a. ☐ Fundraising
- b. ☐ Relief
- c. ☐ Training/skilling
- d. ☐ Donation of item/facility
- e. ☐ Medical Camp
- f. ☐ Other

15. How are you providing support in the present project or have provided support in the last project of your club? (Select all that apply)

- a. ☐ I identified the need
- b. ☐ I provided funds
- c. ☐ I raised funds
- d. ☐ I spoke to vendors and suppliers
- e. ☐ I purchased needed items
- f. ☐ I coordinated with service providers
- g. ☐ I coordinated with the community point-person for the project
- h. ☐ I attended the project implementation
- i. ☐ I was not directly involved
- j. ☐ Other

16. How does the club decide what projects to undertake or extend help to? Click or tap here to enter text.

17.What is the main method through which the club identifies the need of a project?

- a. ☐ Need is shared by a member
- b. ☐ Need is shared by the Club President or other office bearers
- c. ☐ Need is shared by another club
- d. ☐ Need is highlighted in the news
- e. ☐ Need is shared by the community
- f. ☐ Other

18.Do you feel that the success of your club is due to the reputation of the service club or because of the work of the members?

- a. ☐ Reputation of the service club
- b. ☐ Work of the members
- c. ☐ Other

### Member Motivation

19.What was your main motivation(s) to join? (Please select all that apply)

- a. ☐ I wanted to help people
- b. ☐ I wanted to learn skills that would help me professionally
- c. ☐ I wanted to be part of an organisation or team
- d. ☐ I wanted to meet new people
- e. ☐ I wanted to feel good about helping others
- f. ☐ I wanted to be part of a prestigious club
- g. ☐ I wanted to be recognised
- h.Other

20.What is your main motivation to continue? (Please select all that apply)

- a. ☐ I am helping people
- b. ☐ I am learning new skills
- c. ☐ I have the opportunity to pursue leadership positions
- d. ☐ I like the way the club functions
- e. ☐ I like the people I work with
- f. ☐ I feel that people recognise my work
- g. ☐ I feel people respected me more because I was part of the club
- h.Other

21.What have you found to be the most rewarding part of the club?

22.What have you found to be the most challenging part of the club?

23.What was the main reason you chose to be involved with this club over others?

24.Do you donate your time, money or resources to any other club?

- a. ☐ Yes
  - i.If yes, please select the answers that best represent your giving:
    - 1. ☐ I donate time
    - 2. ☐ I donate money

3. ☐ I donate resource/in-kind materials

b. ☐ No

25. Any last thoughts you would like to share which you think is important and have not been covered in the survey?