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Activities Report 1st quarter (January- March) 2009

VISION 2020 and sustainability planning in Mara and Singida

The Singida VISION 2020 programme annual review meeting was conducted on January 15-16, 2009. The objective of the meeting was to review the general trend of the programme in the region for the last year and to plan for the next coming year activities. Representatives from the four districts of Manyoni, Iramba, Singida Urban and Singida Rural prepared plans for their respective districts that were to be advocated for their inclusion in the Comprehensive Council Health Plans (CCHPs) for 2009-2010. Titus Nyange who did a presentation on sustainability issues for Singida V2020 programme represented KCCO. After several years of mentoring the Singida programme, KCCO is now leaving activities in the hands of the Ministry of Health in Singida Region and Helen Keller International (HKI) who will continue to support the program. This is an important step in sustainable development of the program.

The Mara VISION 2020 programmes, with support from ORBIS International screened and treated 2,022 people this quarter, providing 87 cataract surgeries. We learned in early April that, due to economic difficulties ORBIS is discontinuing supporting the Mara programme effective immediately. This will lead to cutbacks in service delivery in Mara, but it remains to be seen how severe these will be.

DRS- Direct Referral Site services in the community in Kilimanjaro & Arusha

Outreach activities in Kilimanjaro have been cut back in 2009, due to decreased funding for these. At the end of March two field staff had to be let go. However, although the number of visits may be less, we hope to see large numbers of patients at each outreach, and in the first quarter of 2009 this has proven to be the case. During the 10 DRS held, 1,995 people received examination and treatment and 77 people received cataract surgery.

Swiss Lions supported "Ten by Ten Initiative": rolling out VISION 2020 programmes in eastern Africa

KCCO launched the Lions SightFirst "Ten by Ten Initiative", which aims to develop 10 VISION 2020 programs. These will include 2-3 pediatric ophthalmology programmes, each serving around 10 million population, and 7-8 "District" programmes, each serving 1-2 million. The first of these is in Mbeya Region of Tanzania where Eye Care Foundation (Netherlands) will support 24 outreach visits in 2009. Mr. Titus Nyange, KCCO sustainability planner, and Dr Lewallen traveled to Mbeya to assist Dr Hemed Kilima and all stakeholders in the Region with the

planning there. The Ten by Ten Initiative and the Lavelle Fund for the Blind supported the planning activities. Later in 2009 the Ten by Ten Initiative will support expansion to other sites in Mbeya. The first outreach visits took place on March 26, when 108 patients were examined, 12 found with operable cataract and 6 transported back to hospital for surgery. We consider this a very good start! Meanwhile, plans are underway for a second site in Fort Portal Uganda, with planning to be done in April.

To take advantage of existing travel to Rwanda for the Fred Hollows Foundation a two day stop was made in Bujumbura, Burundi to work with the newly appointed National Prevention of Blindness Coordinator and Dr. Levi Kandeke to explore if and how the Western Province of Burundi could become a Ten by Ten “district” programme. All partners agreed that the Western Region would be a good site. A copy of the report from the trip is available, upon request.

A visit was made to two potential Ten by Ten sites in Ethiopia in February; followed by two one-day sessions with the Ethiopia National Prevention of Blindness Committee, the first on strategies to implement VISION 2020 at the “district” level and the second to discuss strategies to put in place a Child Eye Health Tertiary Facility (to cover a population of about 10 million). Following discussions with all partners the “district” of Debre Berhan was chosen as a Ten by Ten district and Gondar University Hospital was selected as a Ten by Ten Child Eye Health Tertiary Facility. Copies of reports are available, upon request.

Understanding glaucoma in a difficult setting

Dr Attas continued interviews with rural patients blind from glaucoma, seeking to understand their “journey of care” since they first recognized they had eye problems. This project was temporarily halted after a vehicle accident last year. Most patients have at some point visited an eye care health worker, but their understanding of glaucoma is terribly limited. It is also proving very difficult for these elderly people to trace the history of their visual symptoms and loss, which occur over many years. This is not a surprise and it’s one of the reasons glaucoma will be such a challenge to address in Africa.

Low vision and inclusive education throughout northern Tanzania

Ms. Fortunate Shija of KCCO (with support from Dark & Light Blind Care) worked with staff from Visio Sensis, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Health to conduct a series of training of teachers at Patandi Teachers College (special training centre for teachers of visually impaired children). Ms. Shija and Ms. Marianne Kooij (Visio Sensis) also continued their follow up visits to the annexes and schools for the blind in Singida Region. Two refresher training sessions (26 teachers) were held at Mwereni Primary annex for the blind; the itinerant teacher was trained to facilitate part of the training. Ms. Shija visited Irente School for the blind while student teachers from Patandi were being assessed by Ms Kooij during their BPT (block teaching practice).

KCCO, in collaboration with KCMC Eye Department and Mawenzi Regional Hospital, conducted a one-day low vision assessment at Mwereni annex for the blind; 22 children were assessed with 10 referred to KCMC for further investigation. All albino pupils received sunglasses, donated by Seva Canada.

With support from Dark & Light, counseling services for children with cataract and their parents at KCMC Eye Department are continuing. At the request of the Eye Department, the KCCO optometrist, Ms. Rose Kimaro joined the KCMC low vision specialist, Ms. Zeno Mkenda in the low vision clinic. Ms. Kimaro now spends three days per week assisting in the low vision clinic.

Trying different approaches to find and refer children with severe vision loss

KCCO's AED- supported project is aimed at finding children with visual loss through the key informant (KI) method. Village volunteers, who are respected and known members of the community, are trained to ask around and keep track of children who may have trouble seeing. Then they bring these children for proper examinations at convenient pre arranged times and locales. KIs are being trained in 3 Districts in Tanzania. This quarter the field assistant in Karatu facilitated a second training of KIs. The training was different from the previous ones in that the field assistant carried out the training in the selected villages, saving both time and money as the KIs did not need to travel. Training went well, 24 children were screened and 2 found with cataract. Ms Shirima traveled to Lushoto in February to facilitate the first training there; the training was well organized by the field assistant there and the KIs were active and engaged. The next trainings will all be done by the field assistants.

Training in Madagascar is also progressing but with the recent political coup we expect some delays in the training. The political instability there meant that the Malagasy ophthalmologist who was to come to CCBRT for training will have to be delayed until later in 2009.

We are in the process of finalizing a manual for using key informants as a method of reaching more children in communities; we hope to complete this by the time we hold the end of project review meeting in June.

Measuring the impact of surgery & low vision care

We recently completed the last data collection for the participant observation project (before and after surgery). Analysis of this along with studies of quality of life before and after surgery study is now underway. Dark & Light supported this work over the last three years.

Children receiving surgery for congenital & developmental cataract

During this quarter, KCMC Eye Department carried out 28 surgeries for congenital and developmental cataract. Through KCCO Light for the World supported the costs, when necessary, for the transport of parents and children for surgery as well as for follow up.

Visiting volunteer medical student, Craig Baden is reviewing long-term results of cataract surgery in children at KCMC, with the goal of documenting visual acuity outcomes and incidence of secondary glaucoma. Data analysis and reporting is currently underway.

Continuing activities on gender and blindness

Margaret Festo, the KCCO Gender Coordinator continued to meet with village “sentinel women” whose job it is to raise awareness among women about vision loss and refer them to the nearest outreach services (Direct Referral Sites) provided by KCCO, KCMC, MoH and Lions. Later this year we will compare utilization of eye care services in communities with trained women (intervention) and communities with no trained women (control). It’s still early but the CIHR and Dark & Light supported program appears to be making a difference.

Meanwhile, Margaret is starting work with Dr Amadou to understand how women, who rarely have spectacles for near work, deal with presbyopic needs. We know from a survey done last year that women are only about half as likely to have spectacles for near work as men.

Finally, in collaboration with the National Prevention of Blindness Coordinator, Ms. Kessy has prepared a training package on gender and blindness, which will be implemented at the upcoming National Prevention of Blindness Committee meeting.

KCCO has been collecting documentation from around the world to prepare the World Sight Day 2009 report, the theme being “Gender & Eye Health”. The draft of the report is nearing completion. We have also worked with colleagues at Helen Keller International, International Eye Foundation, and Seva Foundation to organize a two hour session at the National Press Club in Washington DC on April 30.

Launch of “Women & Trachoma” manual

In Atlanta in February the Women and Trachoma manual, a collaborative effort between the Carter Centre and KCCO, was launched at the Carter Centre Programme Review Meeting. The impressive photos provided by Carter Centre personnel make the manual attractive as well as timely. Hard copies of the 78-page manual can be obtained by writing Ms. Elizabeth Cromwell (ecromwe@emory.edu) at the Carter Centre. A pdf of the document is also available on the Carter Centre and KCCO websites. A joint Carter Centre/KCCO systematic review/meta-analysis study of gender and trichiasis was completed and is in press in Transactions of the Royal Society of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

Teaching and training at KCMC

Drs Godfrey Furahini, Jason Pithwa, and Emmanuel Byamukama are all continuing or finishing their master’s thesis work, supervised by KCCO. Topics include epidemiological studies of eye diseases in HIV/AIDS (squamous cell carcinoma of the conjunctiva and CMV retinitis) and the study of general primary health care workers’ knowledge of primary eye care.

Due to cut back in funding from CBM, KCCO had to discontinue instruction of the AMO-O (cataract surgeon) VISION 2020 course this year. Training of KCMC Occupational Therapy students was conducted by KCCO in January.

Assessing the impact of Primary Eye Care in Rwanda

Dr Courtright is helping the FHF to evaluate their primary eye care programme in Rubavu District, Rwanda to help FHF and the MoH make more informed decisions on how PEC activities will be the most effective. In January interviews were conducted at health centers, among MoH staff at the hospital, and among village health volunteers. Findings after two years of the project are being compiled. We were fortunate to have Dr. Andreas Mueller joining the KCCO team in early March to review the data and explore future collaboration on the issue of primary eye care.

Strengthening research capacity in eastern Africa

Supported by the Fred Hollows foundation (FHF), KCCO ran a 1-week course in research methodology—focused on writing a research proposal. Seven attendees from Tanzania, South Africa, Zambia, Kenya, Madagascar, Burundi, and Uganda participated. Each came with a research question that was developed into a proposal over the week. Drs Ciku Mathenge and Andreas Mueller served as external faculty for the course. All felt that learning research in the context of a specific question, with time allocated to drafting their proposal was probably the most meaningful way to develop these skills.

Predicting and modifying factors to encourage better utilization of eye care services in Kenya

The team in Kwale District, Kenya completed primary data collection and analysis of their project to understand the contribution of visual function (as opposed to visual acuity) to acceptance of cataract surgery. Dr. Sebastian Briessen, team leader, has drafted a manuscript for submission. In the coming months the team will explore, through additional fieldwork, some of the issues arising from the initial work.

Revitalizing planning and partnership for global trachoma control efforts

With the merger of ITI and the Task Force for Child Survival & Development, there is a new impetus for improved planning and partnership to address trachoma control globally. Dr. Courtright attended the strategic planning meeting held at the Task Force for Child Survival & Development in March in Atlanta.

VISION 2020 programmes in Uganda

With support from Wilde Ganzen, KCCO will continue to work with two regions in Uganda: Masaka and Lira, through 2009. Both programmes have had difficulty in increasing their surgical services due to unwillingness of patients to contribute to the cost of services. The government decrees that services are to be free, but both programs have tried to charge a modest fee so that they can continue to buy the consumables (not provided by the government) for surgery. The common practice of mid-level eye health staff to sell presbyopic spectacles, pocketing the profits, also limits the ability of these programmes to achieve significant cost recovery.

Human resource development for enhanced service delivery in Africa

KCCO, along with colleagues from FHF NZ and CBM has been working to develop an assessment of ophthalmic nurses and ophthalmic assistants throughout Africa. Although currently un-funded, the assessment is needed to assist with planning and strengthening of human resources throughout the continent.

After great difficulty we finally managed to get most of the names (and contact information) of ophthalmologists in Africa for the situation analysis being carried out with AFRO and WHO. We hope to wrap up this joint CBM and FHF supported work this year.

At the request of the IAPB EMR office, Dr. Courtright presented summaries on various issues relevant to strengthening planning, human resources, and sustainability at the MEACO meeting in Bahrain the end of March.

Services provided by ORCEA to be reduced

It was with dismay that we learned that due to the global economic crisis funding for ORCEA from SSI for 2009 was to be eliminated. We are grateful to the Seva Foundation for its willingness to contribute \$10,000 to keep personnel in place and continue to receive the medical journals. Distribution of the *Journal of Community Eye Health* in Tanzania, computer facilities, and some on-line services available to trainees at KCMC will have to be cut back.

KCCO visitors

A group of 13 including friends and board members of the International Eye Foundation (IEF) spent 2 days with KCCO in February, learning about our programmes. IEF was one of the original funders of KCCO activities and continues to provide technical and share in learning with the KCCO.

Mr. Craig Baden, a medical student and MPH candidate from the University of North Carolina spent time with KCCO

Dr Ken Bassett, BC Centre for Epidemiologic & International Ophthalmology, spent a week with KCCO reviewing results of the IDRC trachoma project, which drew to a close in December 2008.

Drs Ciku Mathenge and Andreas Mueller helped teach on the research course.

Dr Rick Weiss (One World Sight Project) spent several days with KCCO learning about our projects.

Dr Marius den Boon from Netherlands is spending several weeks as a clinical volunteer in the KCMC Eye Department. He is also on the board of Eye Care Foundation, one of KCCO's partners.

John Bickell and Colin Williams of W2 provided expert advice on consultation skills (see below).

Dr. Andrew Haines, CEO of the LSHTM, met briefly with the KCCO directors during his visit to KCMC.

Moon Hu-Jeong from Heart to Heart, a Korean NGO (based in Seoul) joined KCCO for discussion on possible collaboration for prevention of blindness activities in Tanzania.

Peter Ackland, Acting CEO IAPB and Rudolf von Buneau, Zeiss, spent two days with KCCO and KCMC Eye Department to review the Zeiss/IAPB grant to the Eye Department and to discuss potential future collaboration.

KCCO Development News

Senior KCCO staff were fortunate to be able to take advantage of a 3-day workshop on improving consulting skills. W2 (“W-squared”), a firm in England with a strong social conscience, whose director was heavily influenced by the Aravind leadership, volunteered to help with this essential skill through the Centres for Community Ophthalmology (CCO) network, supported by the Seva Foundation. Two staff from L.V. Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad joined the KCCO staff for the training. KCCO’s Titus Nyange and Fortunate Shija will be using these skills immediately as they consult with the Ten-by-Ten sites. Many thanks to the CCO network and to John Bickell and Colin Williams of W2.

Ms. Kessy (KCCO Gender and Blindness Coordinator) attended the February research capacity course and is now working with Dr. Amadou on measuring changes in visual function in women and men after provision of presbyopic spectacles.

We are also grateful for the hard work by Teri Powell, Boise, Idaho, a friend and volunteer, who put together the KCCO annual report 2008.