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Microfinance and Eye Health

Improving eye care service utilization in Africa through microfinance programmes

Report: January to July 2013

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Mara, Tanzania: On-going Progress and Supplementary Needs

The microfinance programme in Mara has been going well. The MF members still refer patients to both the regional hospital and to the outreach clinics. Between January and July 2011, the microfinance groups have referred 756 (252 male, 514 females) patients to the hospital and the outreach clinics. Some MF members have taken it upon themselves to personally bring the cataract patients to the hospital.

The members continue to request financial support for their groups. This could be a one-time assistance to help them cover the cost of transport, communication, and meals when they facilitate promotion and/or bring patients to the outreach clinics or hospital. Once received, it is projected that they will be able to reproduce the funds through their income-generating activities. This means: if the women are provided with a one-time financial support they can incorporate it into their income generating activities to make more profit. The group will be in charge of how they spend the funds in eye advocacy work and in their group's activities – to make more.

Ms. Fortunate Shija will visit the program early next quarter for a six-month evaluation. She will meet with the groups to discuss the progress of the project, explore how to realistically fund support, and to address other concerns.

Ngorongoro, Tanzania: Microfinance and Trichiasis Work

In March of this year, I visited the Ngorongoro District of the Arusha Region to identify as well as train microfinance members on trachoma and trichiasis. Twenty participants, including group leaders, a community development officer, and a religious minister, received the training. The MF leaders then passed on the education to their group members and have been actively involved in advocacy work. With Mr. Nkambi currently conducting surgical intervention in the district, the groups have been working tirelessly to direct TT patients to his care. The women referred a total of 420 patients with various eye problems. Mr Nkambi referred most of the cataract patients and patients with more complicated conditions to Seliam Hospital in Arusha, and for the days he was in the field he managed to conduct 86 trichiasis surgeries. Some women also assisted Mr Nkambi in surgery, working as assistants. Mr. Nkambi is planning another outreach at the end of September as he was unable to attend to all the trichiasis patients this round.

Luapula, Zambia: Plans for New Initiative Underway

Ms. Shija is planning a visit to the Luapula Province in Zambia to help start a microfinance programme similar to the one in Tanzania. The visit will be geared specifically toward helping boost the eye outreach turnout, focusing on the sites with the lowest turnout. The eye care manager at the Mansa General Hospital is working on identifying MF groups close these sites so we can coordinate our approach accordingly.