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SUPPORTING VISION 2020: THE RIGHT TO SIGHT

NATIONAL PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS PROGRAMMES AND VISION 2020

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The goal of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight can be achieved only through action at the national level, in accordance with the dictum, 'Planglobally, Actlocally'.

One of the critical functions of the World Health Organization's Programme for the Prevention of Blindness, under its mandate of providing technical cooperation to Member countries, has been assisting the establishment of national programmes and committees for the prevention of blindness. To date there are over 100 such national programmes/committees/focal points in countries where blindness is a public health problem. These are in various stages of development and activity. While political will and the commitment of ministries of health is an important determinant of how well these function, professional groups and



Waiting for an eye examination at the health centre. Somalia, in former years

Photo: Murray McGavin

non-governmental organisations can also play a major role, as demonstrated by the importance of advocacy.

Despite varying efforts, often hampered also by resource constraints, there has been

a deterioration in the blindness situation in some countries, because of population growth and ageing and the paucity of eye care services where they are needed most.

VISION 2020 represents an unique opportunity to revitalise and strengthen existing programmes/committees and to create new ones where they are lacking.

There is a need to translate global and regional strategies into nationally applicable activities through defining national plans of action, focusing preferably on the most peripheral level possible, perhaps the district level. Such plans of action should fit the situation in which activities would be implemented.

Prior to planning, a situation analysis would be necessary, as well as a detailed needs assessment, taking into account:

- the epidemiological situation, ideally through population-based surveys or

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