

# OPHTHALMIC PROJECT IN TURKANA

## RESULTS OF THE CAMPAIGN 2009

This year the group consisted of 16 people, 8 ophthalmologists, 4 nurses, an anesthetist, a technician and two opticians.

During the campaign have been seen at the hospital 1000 patients, of whom 150 were operated, most of them with bilateral cataracts. Once again, the influx of patients has been so massive, that we had to choose to operate only those with both eyes blind.

By means of the mobile clinics, we were able to meet about 3,000 patients. We visited new towns, with the purpose of expanding year after year the population served, knowing and meeting the needs of each area.

The aim of all these actions is to fight the causes of treatable blindness, being cataracts the most significant. Otherwise, our long-term objective is to combat preventable blindness. In this regard our work is focused against blindness in children due to lack of vitamin A, and against trachoma, infectious disease that affects mostly areas of the developing world, such as Turkana.



Blind girl due to lack o vitamin A

This year we have initiated conversations with the government and local NGOs to expand coverage of the administration of vitamin A. Dr Gilechrist, the new DMOH (District Medical Officer of Health), at the hospital of Lodwar, is an exceptional person devoted to improving the health of Turkana, with whom we have begun a collaborative program to cover children below 5 years. This population amounts to 121,000 children, and this April will be distributed the first 60,000 doses.

Trachoma is a leading cause of blindness in countries where the treatment is rarely available. The way to combat it is to treat everyone in populations where the disease is endemic, such as Turkana, with azithromycin. This is an extremely expensive medication, and these actions can only be considered in health programs such as the one performed by Pfizer, which distributes azithromycin for free. To join this programs, we have been invited by Dr Gichangi, head of kenyan ophthalmologists, to the second national meeting held in Nairobi in March. It was attended by members of the ministries involved, such as the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Water, and NGOs that are working in Kenya, such as UNICEF, WHO, World Vision and our group. Discussions were held to start the population study in Turkana, in collaboration with other NGOs, which is the first condition required by Pfizer to administer azithromycin for free.



Operating room during the campaign: 3 surgeries are done simultaneously.



Trachoma acute conjuntivitis

A new feature to be highlighted is the consolidation of the Optics unit. Last year was carried out the reform of the rooms within the hospital to house this unit and the installation of the equipment necessary to make the glasses. This year we have completed a course of optics, taught by two optometrists who have been with us. In addition, during the campaign 364 explorations have been made, and 265 patients have got glasses. Material has been left to continue with the production of glasses during rest of the year. We consider this a very important step, since refractive defects are the second leading cause of treatable vision loss after cataracts, and there is no possibility to obtain glasses throughout Turkana.



Making glasses in the optical workshop



Exploring refraction

Our actions are carried out in close collaboration with the Kenyan public health and the diocese of Lodwar, who covers a very important part of health in this area. Monsignor Patrick Harrington, bishop of Lodwar, has supported this initiative since its beginning, as well as sister Margaret, the medical responsible of the diocese. We have acquired the commitment to collaborate with them in the long-term for the benefit of the Turkana people.

All this would not have been possible without the Missionary Community of St. Paul, who asked us to go to Turkana for the first time. They have been working in Turkana over 20 years, and providing all necessary assistance to carry out not only the annual campaigns, but all the activities that are conducted throughout the year.

This project is financed with funds obtained by our group, mostly from private donors. These funds are managed by the NGO Nuevos Caminos, a Spanish association declared of public utility. We wanted to thank all the people from Spain that make this project possible, especially hospital Ramón y Cajal, who year after year supported this initiative. Thank you very much everybody.