

2012 OVERVIEW OF BICO PROJECTS CARRIED OUT IN 2011

In the year 2011, BICO successfully carried out a number of significant projects. This document is an overview of these projects.

GLOBAL BASE KNOWLEDGE PROJECT

This project started in the month of January, 2011. The project was a qualitative research project which fell under the second phase of the Childhood blindness project. The aim of the project was to find community solutions to improve blind and visual impaired children's access and acceptance to surgery, optical corrections and follow-up. The project was carried out in three districts; Zomba, Mangochi and Balaka which the Childhood Blindness covered. Two Research Assistants were recruited under the Global Base Knowledge project and underwent a three days training in qualitative research.

When the training and all preparations were completed, the project commenced with a pilot which was done in Thyolo district. After the pilot, major data collection started in Zomba and then in the other districts. The project was carried out for a period of six months and ended in July 2011.

The results of the project were presented by the Director of BICO in Washington in USA between 25th July and 2nd August 2011 at a meeting organised by A2Z where the final report was submitted.

AHSI TASKSHIFTING PROJECT

This project started in the year 2010 in Mulanje and Machinga districts and is still going on. The project aims at transferring skills regarding eye diseases to health workers in the health centres. At the beginning of the project, the health workers were briefed about eye diseases in both districts. After the briefings in both districts, enhanced supervision started in Mulanje district while in Machinga supervision has not been taking place because it was designed as a control.

The enhanced supervision of the health workers was going on well in Mulanje until towards the end of the year 2011 when the project met challenges in that the supervisions were

affected due to the fuel crisis which had affected the whole country. The District Eye Coordinator who conducts the supervision in Mulanje could not go to the health centres to supervise the health workers because of the fuel crisis. There was hope that the supervision would restart early in this year but the fuel crisis does not seem to end. The director had plans to accompany the District Eye Coordinator early March, 2012 to see how the supervision is conducted, but this trip too has been hampered by the fuel crisis.

HSA FOLLOW-UP STUDY

In the year 2011, BICO also conducted a follow-up of the 59 HSAs that were trained in Mulanje in the Childhood Blindness project in 2008. The objectives of the follow-up were three-fold.

The first objective was to trace the HSAs that were trained and find out where they are. The second objective was to list the number of the HSAs that admitted to still be involved in childhood blindness (enumerating children). The third objective was to interview the HSAs about knowledge and skills retention regarding childhood blindness activities that they were taught.

The study found out that out of the 59 HSAs that were trained in 2008, 54 could be traced. A phone interview was conducted with these HSAs.

CHILDREN EYE SCREENING

A number of eye screenings for children were conducted in southern Malawi in the districts of Phalombe, Mulanje and Zomba. The screenings were aimed at helping the children with visual problems by providing them with glasses. The screenings were in Phalombe and Mulanje were conducted by BICO in collaboration with Lions Club of Limbe. The screening activity in Phalombe and Mulanje was called Phalombe Children's project.

The glasses were provided to the children by the Lions Club of Limbe in collaboration with the Lions Club of Perugia in Italy. A total number of 47 children were provided with glasses under the Phalombe Children's project.

The screening in Zomba was conducted by BICO in collaboration with Rotary Club of Limbe which provided the glasses to the children. A total of 33 children were provided with glasses in Zomba.

CATARACT CHILDREN FOLLOW-UP

BICO also conducted a follow-up study of cataract children who were identified in a pilot study that was conducted in Chikwawa district in Ngabu in the year 2006 by Dr. Kalua. The main aim was to determine the productivity of Key Informants (KIs) in identifying blind children in the communities.

The pilot study identified 13 cataract children who were referred to the hospital to access the appropriate help. Because the pilot study that was conducted concentrated only on the productivity of KIs, nothing was done to see to it that the children access help. This prompted BICO to conduct a follow-up study of these children. As such a study was designed that started with phone calls to the HSAs who work in the villages where the children were identified to confirm the availability of the children in those villages. The result was that 11 children were verified to be available, 1 child died and one child could not be traced.

Upon verifying the availability of the children in the next stage is to plan to go and interview the children that are available and interview the parents of the child who died. This second stage is planned to take place in March, 2012 depending on the availability of fuel because there is a fuel crisis in Malawi which is refusing to end.

EXTERNSHIP TRAINING

BICO conducted six week training for four Canadian optometry students from August to October 2011. The students were trained by Dr. Kalua who is an Ophthalmologist based at Lions Sight First Eye Hospital. Dr. Kalua is also the director for BICO. The four students were also exposed to community work where they were involved in eye screening at Montfort Demonstration primary school in Chiradzulu district. They also did some eye screening in Mulanje district. The training falls under the externship programme link between BICO and the University of Waterloo in Canada.