

BICO END OF YEAR (2012) REPORT

Thank God 2012 has been a successful year for BICO. BICO is an eye research unit within the University of Malawi, College of Medicine Teaching Eye Hospital (Lions Sight First Eye Hospital, Blantyre) that focuses on Public Health research on community eye Health (Ophthalmology). It was founded in 2008.

BICO implemented four main projects in 2012: The Task Shifting Project, The Low Vision Project, The Trachoma Project and the EFINTD fellowship. In addition, BICO implemented other ad hoc activities. This report presents a summary of the activities.

Task-shifting Project

The Task-shifting Project ran for 3 years and was concluded in December 2012. It was funded by the African Health Systems Initiative (AHSI). The project was being coordinated by Kilimanjaro Centre for Community Ophthalmology (KCCO) and conducted in Tanzania, Kenya and Malawi. The study was a randomised community study that tested the effect of enhanced supervision of health workers in providing eye care services in health centres in different countries. Further to that, the study also looked at Cataract and Trichiasis surgeons, and assessed their productivity and attrition rates. In December 2012 a team of researchers met in Cape-Town at KCCO International and they analysed results from the 3 countries. This was followed by a dissemination conference meeting in Kenya (14-16th December) where all eye stakeholders and major NGO's were represented. Although the project has been concluded, part of the Primary Eye care research work continues in Malawi, Rwanda and Madagascar. The full report of the task shifting work will be made available in 2013.

The Low Vision Project

BICO was awarded a grant in 2012 from Wilde Ganzen and Lions of Netherlands to implement a LOW VISION research project in 3 pilot resource centres (Montfort in southern Malawi, Nsialudzu in Central Malawi and Ekwendeni in Northern Malawi). The project is also being partly funded by KCCO. The goal of the project is to assess all children with low vision in pilot centres and establish resources needed (Human and Financial). The project is expected to scale up in the entire country. In August 2012, a Christoffel Blindness Mission (CBM) low vision consultant visited Malawi and trained 8 ophthalmic clinical officers and 4 doctors in assessing low vision in children. Children screening in Montfort in Chirazulu, Nsialudzu in Ntcheu and Ekwendeni in Mzuzu then followed. A team of four Optometrists

from University of Waterloo Canada joined the screening session and validated all the children prescriptions. During the project team visit in Mzuzu, meetings were held with faculty of the school of Optometry, Mzuzu University and the newly established low vision centre, at Mzuzu Central Hospital.

In 2013, the team will be going back to the schools to dispense the prescribed spectacles and devices. Further to that the team will train the teachers of schools in mention. A low vision teacher trainer from KCCO Tanzania will join the team from 2nd February 2013.

The Trachoma Project

In April 2012, BICO assisted the trachoma survey in Salima. The project was funded by World Health Organisation (WHO) Malawi office. An External Trachoma expert, Prof Robin Bailey, joined the team in Salima and helped in conducting the training. In August to September 2012 BICO coordinated the Sight Savers funded survey in Nsanje and Mwanza districts. A UK Sight Savers epidemiologist, Dr Laura Glover, joined the field team.

The EFINTD project

The European Foundation of Neglected Tropical Diseases (EFINTD) is a fellowship that is awarded to researchers in Africa whose main area of research focus is on neglected tropical diseases. BICO has been spearheading the mapping of Trachoma in Malawi which is one of the neglected tropical diseases. Award for the EFINTD are to individuals within research institutions that have the capacity to develop to full researchers in NTDs. The Director of BICO attended interviews for the EFINTD in Maputo in January 2012, and got an award for the project in May 2012. Preparation for the research started in July 2012. The goals of this fellowship are to monitor the Trachoma Mass drug administration (MDAs) with Azithromycin within 2 districts (Chikwawa and Nsanje) and also to establish within Nsanje district the extent of coexistence between Trachoma and another common NTD (Schistosomiasis).

The research team comprised staff from Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, London School of Tropical medicine and Kenya Medical research Institute (KEMRI). Activities completed so far include the monitoring of the MDA's. In Chikwawa specifically, the activities included the documentation of the Serious Adverse Effects that occurred after the MDAs. More field work is expected in 2013.

Other activities

Follow up work in Malawi of children that were identified by key informants in Chikwawa district in 2006

The main objective of the trip was to interview the 13 children which were identified and assess their eye conditions. However, one of the 13 children died and one could not be traced. The full report of the findings will be out in 2013.

Donation of mattresses and mosquito nets to Nsiyaludzu resource centre in Ntcheu district

On the 25th of May, 2012, BICO in conjunction with its partners (Lions Club of Limbe, Robray Malawi and Viki Mak including a doctor from New Zealand) donated 15 Mattress, 5 mosquito nets and educational materials to children at the Resource centre at Nsiyaludzu LEA primary school in Ntcheu district. The materials were delivered to the Resource centre at Nsiyaludzu primary by the director of BICO on behalf of the above mentioned BICO partners.

Eye camp

BICO supported two days eye operations in Mulanje District hospital on 20th and 21st April 2012. Operations were funded by the Rotary Club of Limbe. During the exercise 22 cataract surgeries were performed.

Website facelift

Our website www.bicomalawi.org was redone in November 2012.

Conclusion

In conclusion, BICO successfully implemented a number of projects in 2012. This would not have been possible if it was not for the good support from the head of Eye Unit staff at Lions Sight First Eye Hospital, staff at College of Medicine Department of Ophthalmology, and staff in all the districts where BICO implemented the projects. BICO continues to grow and as it marks its 5 years anniversary in 2013, the research centre expects to increase its research capacity and to strengthen its collaboration with KCCO, London School of Tropical Medicine and other international Partners.