

## **BICO'S CHILD BLINDNESS PROJECT (CBP) – NORTHERN REGION - MALAWI**

The northern part of Malawi is very large in terms of both land, mass and population, and it is very different from the central and southern parts of the country where there are a lot of eye health hospitals, but in the north, there are fewer. This means there can be challenges in terms of eye health care.

In the north, many people live in villages and towns far away from the state capital, so they don't have easy access to eye health hospitals. The distance and the travel adds to the problems. Then there's the financing, the average cost of eye health, when you include the cost of transportation and other indirect costs –a lot of people cannot afford.

In Mzuzu, there is only one hospital (**MZUZU CENTRAL HOSPITAL**) equipped to treat children with eye problems. Due to congestion, some patients are referred to Kamuzu and Queen Elizabeth Central Hospitals which are very far from the northern region.



*Doctor conducting eye screening to a girl child- mzuzu*

This affects both the guardians and the children, it can be particularly hard for children. If a child has untreated cataract, it has an intense impact: it affects their emotional state, their social interactions. In the long-term it affects the economy and productivity of these children and their families since the guardians lose a lot of money to save their sight.

To address these issues, **BICO** is helping to do free eye surgeries to children in the Northern part of Malawi through its which is mainly targeting children under 16 years to provide access to good and quality eye health.

BICO, provides eye screenings for school going children, and trains school teachers to carry out the screenings. Any child who fails the test is referred to the district hospital for treatment.

BICO, also equips and trains primary healthcare workers with appropriate technology, to identify children in their community with eye problems so they can be referred to hospital. The trainings are conducted by BICO eye specialists who work hand in hand with the responsible eye officers from the District hospitals. In this year 2020, we have been able to screen more than 2000 children for vision impairments and other eye conditions. BICO has also dispensed glasses and other low vision devices to over 400 children to help them in school, and we've also done cataract surgeries to 28 children.



*children after surgeries- mzuzu*

Before Child Blindness project was introduced in the northern region, there was very little awareness of some eye conditions such as cataract, people would think that, their child has been bewitched and thought that they will never be treated and be sighted again. A lot of people in these areas attributed cataract to a spiritual problem as spiritual curse.



*"am happy I got my sight back, Thanks to BICO"*

Now, because **BICO** has created a lot of awareness through posters, trainings, flyers, radio programmes and jingles, more people are becoming aware of the causes of other eye problems and the fact that it is not the child's fault or the parents' fault. It's something that could happen to any child at any time. And it is very treatable, especially if it's detected early.

All this is made possible with the generous support from the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)