

## CHILDHOOD BLINDNESS PROJECT PHASE 2

BICO is this year running the second phase of Childhood blindness project termed as Global knowledge research project which is funded by USAID. This project is being conducted in collaboration with International Eye Foundation (IEF).

The project seeks to find community solutions to improve blind and visual impaired children's access and acceptance to surgery, optical corrections and follow up in Southern Malawi. The first phase of the Childhood blindness project identified children with cataract in three districts (Zomba, Mangochi and Balaka). Parents of these children were told to go with the children to Lions Sight First Eye hospital in Blantyre for surgery. The parents were also told to borrow money for transport to Blantyre and that the money will be refunded to them and they can give back to whoever lent them the money.

It was observed in the first phase of the Childhood blindness project that despite the arrangement that the transport money will be refunded to the parents, only a few children came and had surgery while others did not come. The second phase of the project will follow up both groups of children (those that went for surgery & those that did not go for surgery) and try to find out from their parents why they went and why some did not. It is expected that in such a way knowledge will be generated on how best to increase the uptake of children with visual problems to benefit from free health services in hospitals.

This is a qualitative research project and two Research Assistants have been recruited on a full-time basis and have undergone three days training (11<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of January, 2011) on how to collect qualitative data. The Research Assistants were trained by qualified expert staff from College of Medicine Research department.

The first training was conducted in the board room at Lions Sight First Eye hospital. The speaker on this day was John Barrows from the International Eye Foundation in the United States of America. The second training took place at Mount Pleasant Inn in Blantyre where the main speakers were the staff from College of Medicine (Mr. Francis Masiye and Mr. Vincent Jumbe).