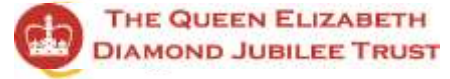




Irish Aid
Department of Foreign Affairs
An Roinn Gnóthai Eachtracha



International Eye Health Organisations, Government of Uganda's SAGE Programme partner to prevent blindness in older people in Uganda

Moroto-Uganda; May 23, 2018: International eye health organisations and the Government of Uganda's Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) Programme today announced an initiative under which opportunity for older people who receive a social pension to be tested and treated for eye disease, sight loss and blindness.

The innovative collaboration between Uganda's Ministry of Gender, Labour & Social Development and international eye health organisations means that when older people collect their monthly social pension they are also offered free eye examinations. If needed, they are given surgery and/or antibiotics for a range of conditions including cataracts and trachoma.

The service is provided through Trust Trachoma initiative, funded by The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust and Sightsavers' 'Coordinated Approach to Community Health' (CATCH) funded by DFID UK Aid Match.

Since 2010, the Government of Uganda through its Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, with support from UKAID and Irish Aid, has implemented the SAGE Programme. Under this scheme, government of Uganda provides a social grant (dubbed the Senior Citizens Grant) of Shs 25,000 -about £5 a month- to just over 150, 000 beneficiaries in 47 districts. The grant is paid every two months.

The Senior Citizens Grant is designed to reduce poverty related to aging by providing a minimum income to older people (65 years and above in the rest of the country, 60 years in the case of Karamoja region).

Johnson Ngorok, Sightsavers Uganda Country Director said, "Collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social development's SAGE programme provides a unique opportunity to reach the section of the population most at risk of eye problems. With support from The Queen Elizabeth Diamond

Jubilee Trust and UK aid thousands of people have accessed surgery and had their lives changed. We are delighted to work with SAGE.”

The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust’s Trachoma Initiative is working to make significant progress towards eliminating blinding trachoma in 12 Commonwealth countries by 2020, in honour of Her Majesty The Queen. Over the last four years, the Trust’s Trachoma Initiative - working with the Ministry of Health in Uganda and partners including The Carter Centre, Sightsavers, RTI, Water Missions Uganda, World Vision, the World Health Organisation and community volunteers - has worked in 33 Ugandan districts. Since 2014, the Trachoma Initiative has operated on over 24,000 people with advance trachoma known as Trachomatous Trichiasis (TT) since 2014 and helped a further 2,700 people manage their condition.

Stephen Kasaija, head of the Expanding Social Protection Programme, under which the SAGE schemes falls, said: “We recognise that various forms of disability impede access and full benefit from Programmes such as the Senior Citizens Grants. Our target population is highly vulnerable to effects of disability. That is why the SAGE Programme is exploring partnership and linking our beneficiaries to available services, that address challenges of disability. This way we not only improve their wellbeing and welfare, we also improve access and impacts of our grants.”

While running the trachoma screening programmes in Africa, **Sight savers** realised a large number of people coming to the camps had cataracts and other eye diseases. The **CATCH** programme was set up to ensure that these people were diagnosed, referred and given access to the treatment that they need.

Since 2015, the Catch eye care programmes have examined almost 86,000 people, treated 31,000 and carried out 7000 sight-saving cataract surgeries in Uganda.

Beulah Muchira, Team Lead, Programme Manager in DFID Rwanda and Claire McCrum, Social Development Adviser for the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) DFID Zambia who are on mission to Uganda welcomed the project after witnessing it first-hand in Moroto on Wednesday, 23 May.

Beulah Muchira said, “It was incredible to witness first-hand the positive results the projects are achieving to reduce poverty and prevent and cure blindness. I was inspired by the motivation and experience of the trained staff members and community volunteers I met who deliver this vital work.”

Trachoma starts as a bacterial infection a bit like conjunctivitis and can be easily treated. If it is not, over time it causes scarring to the eyelid that makes the eyelashes turn inward, so with every blink they scrape against the eye. Of the 229 million people living in trachoma endemic districts globally; about 10.8 million of them live in Uganda.

Cataract is clouding of the lens of the eye which can lead to blurred vision and eventual blindness. Most cataract cases are related to the ageing process or due to eye injuries, inflammation, and some other eye diseases. Cataract is the leading cause of blindness and is responsible for 51% of world blindness.

Notes to Editors

About SAGE/Expanding Social Protection Programme

- Since 2010, the Government of Uganda/Ministry of Gender, Labor & Social Development with support from DFID/UKAID and Irish Aid has implemented the Expanding Social Protection Programme which provides social grants (the Senior Citizens Grants) under the SAGE scheme
- Currently 150,000 older persons benefit from the Programme
- It is expected that when the current (second) Phase of the Programme ends in 2020 200,000 beneficiaries will have been reached
- Over the years the grants have demonstrated powerful impacts on the lives of the beneficiaries including Improved welfare of older people, increased productivity of beneficiary households, increased savings and investment and increased social inclusion and empowerment (especially older women), among others.

Trachoma Initiative goals in Uganda

By 2019, the programme will:

- Targeted up to 33 districts in all endemic regions.
- Managed up to 35,000 cases of people with advanced trachoma in order to achieve national elimination.
- Trained over 60 new surgeons.
- Improved community health messages on good hygiene and sanitation practices.

Lobbied at district, national and global level to improve access to safe water sources and supported sanitation in the programme areas.

About the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust

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About the International Coalition for Trachoma Control (ICTC)

The ICTC is highly committed and professional multi-stakeholder membership of non-governmental, donor, private sector and academic organizations working together to support the WHO Alliance for the Global Elimination of Trachoma by 2020 (GET2020 Alliance). It was established in 2004 to contribute to global efforts to eliminate trachoma by advocating for and supporting the implementation of the WHO-endorsed SAFE strategy.

Progress towards the elimination of blinding trachoma over the last decade demonstrates the incredible impact of increased partnership within the trachoma community: the number of surgeries undertaken has increased from 22,000 in 2004 to over 260,000 in 2016; drug distribution has rapidly expanded from about 4 million in 2004 to almost 86 million doses in 2016 and important gains have been made on both the facial cleanliness and environmental improvement components of the SAFE strategy, often in collaboration with other sector-wide programmes. Overall, more than 30 countries currently have elimination programmes underway.

For more information, please visit www.trachomacoalition.org

About Sightsavers

Sightsavers has been working in Uganda since 1954. Its focus is to deliver comprehensive eye care, tackle neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and promote social inclusion. In 2017 we distributed 275,000 treatments for NTDs and supported 5,000 sight -saving operations.

For more information, please visit www.sightsavers.org

About CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Community Health)

CATCH is a programme working in Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia with the aim of reducing avoidable blindness and enhancing access to eye health for people living in trachoma endemic areas.

By 2019 in Uganda the programme will have

- Screened 100,000 people for cataract and other eye problems
- Carried out 8000 cataract surgeries
- 10,000 people received glasses free of charge
- Trained over 200 health staff

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