



Community Eye Clinic (CEC) Programme: Supporting the Vulnerable in Sierra Leone

Introduction

The Sierra Leone Eye Health Systems Assessment (EHSA) has determined that funding for eye care is insufficient and low vision/refraction services (pertaining to eye exams and glasses/ corrective lenses) are quite limited due to lack of human resources and low affordability. The present ratio of eye health professionals to population is approximately 1 per 90,000. The key concern with vision problems is that prevention of diminished vision hinges upon improved detection and treatment, but these services are lacking in the Sierra Leonean context. The World Council of Optometry (WCO) estimates that 180 million individuals worldwide are severely visually impaired, with 60% of those living in India, China, and Sub-Saharan Africa—the region of which Sierra Leone is a part.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) utilises a measure called the **disability-adjusted life year (DALY)**, which takes into account the **years lived with disability (YLL)** to measure the burden of disease in populations. Through this framework, the WHO has identified uncorrected vision errors as a key cause of avoidable disability. In Sierra Leone, where eye care doctors and services are scarce, the simple absence of necessary glasses can result in disability—lost work hours, limited employment capability, and a barrier in effective education. While many efforts have been taken to address barriers to effective employment and education (such as scholarship and work programmes), very little is being done to address a problem that, although rather simple, is crucial to one’s daily ability. The U.S. National Institute of Health (NIH) has determined that, for children ages 12-19 years, a stunning 93.1% of visual impairments can be corrected with glasses/corrective lenses, and adults aged 20-50 years, this value is 91.2%. What this displays is the effectiveness of glasses as an appropriate and necessary intervention.



The Project

To address the aforementioned issue, ACIPP West Africa aims to implement a “Community Eye Clinic” (CEC) programme as an initial community-focused programme. This programme will be piloted in Freetown, Sierra Leone during a 3-week period (in the period of August - September). A clinic will be conducted in partnership with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCR) in Sierra Leone, providing free-of-charge optometric services to needy and vulnerable in the city of Freetown. These services will include eye exams and corrective lenses where necessary.

The immediate goal of this project is to provide quality eye care (and corrective lenses where necessary) to the needy and vulnerable in Freetown¹, which will increase their educational and occupational capacity. More long-term goals include the following the direction of local and national attention to the importance of eye care for a functioning and effective population (both young and old).

About ACIPP West Africa

ACIPP West Africa is an NGO aimed at the facilitation of internships and developing in West Africa. Based in the Netherlands, the focal locations are in Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Through multiple partnerships with other organisations and NGOs in these countries, we provide internships, trainings and other services for the facilitation of both local and national development.

Contact us for more information

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¹ More than 50% of Sierra Leone’s 5.5million population live in the capital Freetown