Developing Low Vision Services in South Asia

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What is Low Vision?

- Bilateral impairment of vision that cannot be fully corrected with medical or surgical intervention or by refraction

- Present in children but is most common in older people.

- Social and economic consequences, can affect emotional wellbeing and restrict participation in everyday activities
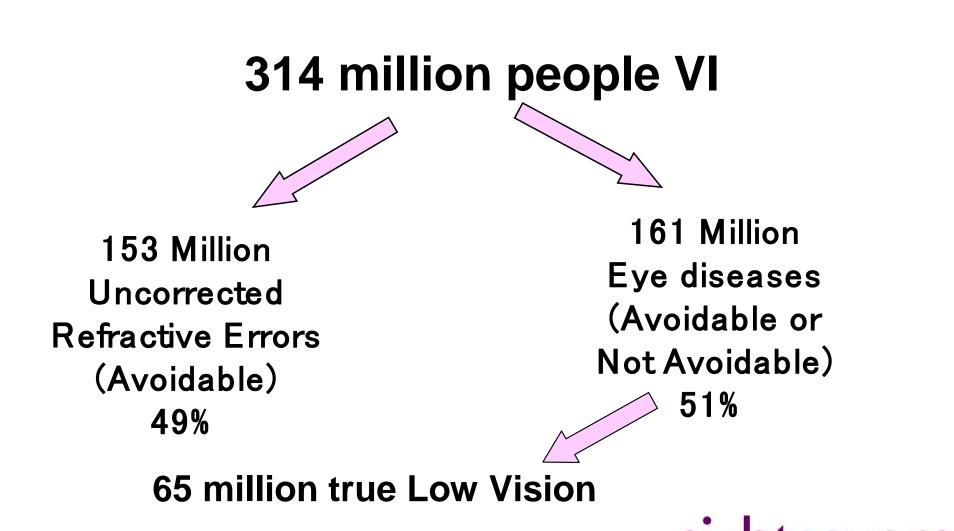
WHO Definition 0f LV

- **A person with low vision is one who has impairment of visual functioning even after treatment and/ or standard refractive correction, and has a visual acuity of less than 6/18 to light perception, or a visual field of less than 10° from the point of fixation, but who uses, or is potentially able to use, vision for the planning or execution of a task.**

Global Initiative

- To establish comprehensive low vision care for children and adults as an *integral* part of eye care within national VISION 2020 planning and programs.

Global Causes of Blindness and VI

314 million people VI

153 Million
Uncorrected
Refractive Errors
(Avoidable)
49%

161 Million
Eye diseases
(Avoidable or
Not Avoidable)
51%

65 million true Low Vision

Comprehensive Low Vision Care

- Tertiary services with team of eye care, education and rehabilitation workers
- Secondary: ophthalmologist/ optometrist and "multi-skilled" worker
- Primary: Teacher/ CBR/ PEC/PHC

Issues for Service Delivery

- Limited low vision services
- Only 5% of people with low vision access service
- LV service needs for children and adults not recognised
- Lack of awareness in community and health professionals
- Low vision services not a priority
- Lack of resources, training
- "Stand alone" services

Strategies Adapted

- **Service Delivery**
- **Human Resource Development**
- **Research and Development**
- **Advocacy**
- **Linkages and Networking**

Bangladesh

- Community workers trained in primary low vision to conduct functional assessment
- A toolkit provided to dispense preliminary services at community level and refer the complicated cases
- Local low vision production centre caters 60% of patients served by the project
- A resource centre in Dhaka University to access 55000 books/journals by low vision clients though ICT

Low Vision Toolkit

Pakistan

- 13 low vision clinics within government and non government hospitals in Pakistan linking with district CEC programmes.
- Four Text Accessibility and Legibility Centres (TALCs) established in Libraries
- Two special education centres supported to become resource centres for mainstream education
- LV module integrated in HRD programmes

Sri Lanka

- Three tertiary low vision clinics established in Sri Lanka
- One partner is supported to strengthen its library and resource centre for developing large print books and technologies
- National Focal Person trained

Optical
Low Vision Devices

Non Optical Approach

Assistive Technology

- "Any item, piece of equipment, product, system or software whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified or customised, that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of individual with sight loss".

Why is assistive technology important to Sightsavers?

- Crucial for accessing education
- Facilitates access to employment and enhances employability
- Facilitates personal empowerment
- A powerful advocacy tool
- Integral to community based rehabilitation

Where is assistive technology important?

- Schools
- Colleges and Universities
- Rural Communities
- Cities
- Leisure
- In the home
- In the workplace

Assistive Technology Continuum

Low tech simple devices

Medium tech assistive devices
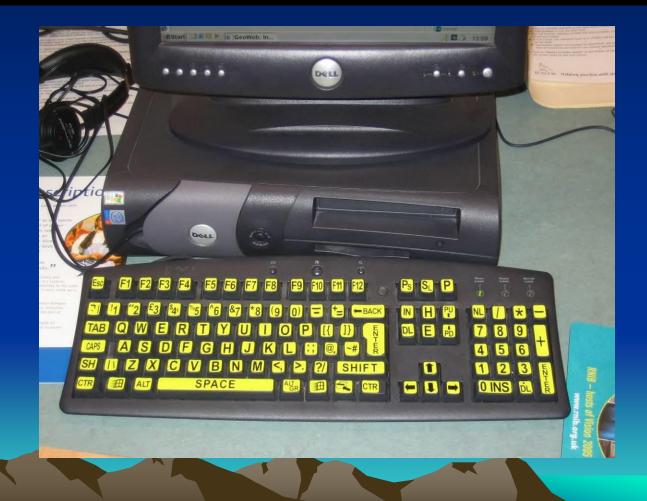
High tech complex solutions

Low Tech Devices

- Braille slate
- Writing frame
- White cane
- Simple hand lens
- Coloured overlay
- Gel ink or felt pens

Medium Tech Solutions

- Tape recorder
- Perkins Brailler
- Low cost CCTV
- Braille watch
- Talking clock
- High contrast USB keyboard

High contrast USB keyboard

High technology solutions

- Software based screen magnifiers
- Software based screen readers
- Refreshable Braille displays
- Portable electronic video magnifiers
- Electronic Braille note takers
- Speech output for mobile phone (TALKS)

Sightsavers Dolphin Pen

- Lunar screen magnifier
- Hal screen reader with ETI Eloquence
- Low cost for Sightsavers programmes
- USB based, portable and flexible
- Dolphin certification and training
- Launched in Africa in May 2007 and India in Feb 2008

Sightsavers Dolphin Pen

Learnings

- To reduce impact of low vision and develop sustainable services
  - Governance
    - To be supported by government and NGOs
  - Use of services
    - Affordable, acceptable and supportive services
    - Utilisation and access
    - Link with community-based organisations
  - Management processes
    - Efficient and competent leadership
    - Cost effective care and resource utilisation (link with RE activity)
  - People
    - Competent and appropriately trained workforce

Conclusion

- Blindness and low vision are not only major causes of morbidity, but also inhibit the mobility and economic well-being of individuals affected and their families.

- It is thus critical to take advantage of new technology and increase their availability in South Asia.

Thank You!