



Increasing Gender Equity in Eye Care in Nepal

Cataract, the leading cause of vision loss globally, is a “women’s issue” as two out of three people blind from cataract are female. The gender inequity is 90 per cent due to social issues (under-utilization of services) and biological issues (women live longer than men and have a slightly higher incidence of cataract compared to men). Glaucoma, the second leading cause of global blindness, while affecting men and women equally, also receives disproportionately more surgical and medical treatment for men.

Gender inequity spans all age groups in the developing world. Girls, similarly to adult women, have less access to medical and surgical services compared to boys.

Gender equity is not a goal of most international eye care providers. Seva believes, however, that if we are going to succeed in eradicating preventable and treatable blindness, we must adopt a gender-sensitive approach to eye care service delivery. This means developing two gender-specific approaches, rather than one unified approach, to providing eye care programs.

Goal

The goal of the 3-year project is to increase gender equity in access to, and use of, eye care services for all ages and eye conditions in Nepal.

Objectives

- Promote sex-specific data gathering and analysis.
- Develop gender-sensitive strategies as part of national and district VISION 2020 plans.
- Have national prevention of blindness committees aware of the importance of gender in eye care.
- Establish a cadre of eye care personnel with skills in gender issues to help build capacity throughout Egypt.

Activities

- Establish an Nepali gender and blindness faculty position, with support staff to develop programs and conduct training.
- Establish an email network for communication and monitoring.
- Document and publish the challenges and successes in establishing and managing gender-sensitive programs.



ANNUAL BUDGET

Gender and Blindness Coordinator Salary	\$ 6,000
Supervision	\$ 4,500
Program implementation	\$ 1,300
TOTAL	\$11,800



Gender and Blindness



Two thirds of all blind people are women, primarily because they are treated less than half as often as men. This disparity is even more pronounced between girls and boys.

Seva Canada has taken explicit leadership in the gender and blindness global initiative. All Seva-led projects work towards achieving gender equity by focusing on overcoming traditional barriers to women's and girls' access. The barriers that prevent women and girls from receiving surgery vary locally. Studies show, however, that they can include:

- *Cost of surgery:* Women often have less access to family financial resources to pay for eye care or transportation to reach a hospital.
- *Inability to travel to a surgical facility:* Women often have fewer options for travel than men. Older women generally require assistance, which poor families cannot provide.
- *Differences in the perceived value of surgery:* Cataract is often viewed as an inevitable consequence of aging and women are less likely to have social support in a family to seek care.
- *Lack of access to information and resources:* Female literacy (especially among the elderly) is low and women are less likely to know about the possibility of surgery for cataract than men, and have limited access to time and money to seek eye care services.
- *Fear of a poor outcome:* Women are discouraged from wearing glasses in many societies; if cataract surgery does not have a good refractive outcome women are more likely to be functionally blind than men after surgery.

Awareness of the problem is not enough. Political will and social action are needed to address gender inequities in use of eye care services. At the local level, Seva's partners identify the barriers that prevent women and girls from receiving eye care services and design culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive programs to reduce these. Seva programs utilize advocacy, education tools and peer motivators (women talking to other women) to promote use of eye care services, including surgery. It is our belief that in order to achieve the goals of VISION 2020, gender inequities in eye care must be a priority for all organizations.