



## Seva Eye Camps in Tibet

Tibet has one of the highest rates of blindness in the world. Most of this blindness is due to cataract. Cataracts can be removed and sight restored with a relatively simple and highly cost-effective operation, yet most Tibetans blinded by cataracts never regain their sight because they cannot access the limited eye care services available.

Seva has been working in Tibet since 1995 and is the leading eye care provider in Tibet, responsible for two-thirds of the cataract surgeries in both the Tibetan Autonomous Region and in Tibetan areas outside the TAR.

The huge land area of Tibet, the dispersed nature of the population, the inaccessibility of much of the terrain, the lack of public transport, and the poverty of the majority of the population add to the challenge of delivering adequate eye care in the region. Mobile eye camps are part of the solution.

Each year Seva runs up to 25 mobile eye camps and each camp serves about 300 or 400 people and does up to 300 sight-restoring cataract surgeries. Here are some stories from recent camps:

*"When I was blind, life became dreadfully difficult and suicide was the only thing on my mind. I thought that my death might ease my husband's burden of supporting the family. There were a couple of nights when I intended to bump my head very hard against the wall to end my life. However, I considered that my death would leave a tragedy for my four children, ranging in age from 11 years old to 2 months."*

Renzen, a middle-aged mother of 4 who received cataract surgery at a Seva eye camp in Tibet, August 2008

When Shi Dok (right), a blind Tibetan woman had her eye surgery, she wept. *"My husband died this winter without waiting for this moment. He left without me having a good look at his face."*

Datso, a blind 12-year-old girl, before surgery in Aug 2008 (right): *"I am blind and don't deserve any friends. I am not capable of doing anything but sitting in my home with my grandparents all the time. Nobody is willing to play with me. I can't see now and I am afraid that I won't see ever again in my life."*

... and after her surgery: *"I feel like doing everything now, but first of all I need to see my one-month old brother at home!"*

Deyang, a blind Tibetan nun was taken in by a monastery because she couldn't survive alone. They fed and housed her, but she was often alone. *"There were times when I had to relieve myself in my room because I didn't even know where my door was. Once I bumped my head so hard that my hat didn't fit for a month."*

