

Eyes on Ethiopia



There are approximately 75 million people in Ethiopia and only 80 ophthalmologists serving the entire country

ORBIS is working in Ethiopia to address the country's high rate of avoidable blindness. Key strategies include strengthening existing national institutions, establishing eye banking, addressing the acute ophthalmic needs of the rural population, training local eye care providers and aggressively tackling the country's troubles with trachoma.

Ten million Ethiopians have a blinding condition known as trachoma

Central to ORBIS's work in Ethiopia has been the prevention and treatment of trachoma. This disease is easily transmitted between infected and healthy eyes by flies, fingers or clothing. Children and women are most susceptible to the infection. Untreated and repeated infection can lead to a condition called trichiasis, in which the infected eyelid turns inward, causing the eyelashes to "rake" across the eye, scarring the cornea and eventually leading to blindness.



Ethiopia has one of the highest blindness rates in the world – but there is hope.

Trachoma can be prevented and cured

ORBIS implements the World Health Organization's (WHO's) SAFE strategy, an acronym for surgery, antibiotics, face washing and environmental change. This strategy includes a national effort to build latrines – a method proven to reduce the breeding of disease-carrying flies.

The antibiotic Zithromax® has had marked success at controlling trachoma infection rates. To address the need nationwide, it is estimated that 86% of Ethiopia's population should receive antibiotics. Through the International Trachoma Initiative, Pfizer Inc. has donated more than \$17 million-worth of the trachoma-fighting drug to ORBIS.

Trichiasis can be remedied through a simple and inexpensive surgery to repair the infected eyelids. ORBIS has performed more than 30,000 trichiasis surgeries in Ethiopia, at an average cost of just \$10 per operation. An estimated one million more Ethiopians currently await the corrective procedure.

Because of a shortage of doctors, ORBIS is training nurses to perform trichiasis surgery. Following the WHO guidelines to ensure quality, they can be trained in one month, at a cost of about \$300 per nurse.

Although surgery and antibiotics help ease pain and prevent recurrence of trichiasis, these interventions cannot undo the damage already done to corneas. With ORBIS's help, an eye bank has been opened in Ethiopia and more doctors are being trained to perform corneal transplants.

Trachoma can be prevented. Trichiasis can be cured. Sight can be restored through corneal transplants. If available solutions reach at-risk communities in Ethiopia, tens of millions of people will be free of the threat of blindness. Please help ORBIS give the precious gift of sight. To learn how, visit www.orbis.org.

