

Additional eye care treatment has improved eye care health seeking behavior in rural Tanzania

IMA World Health is the lead ‘SAFE’ implementing partner in the Mtwara Region of southwestern Tanzania. With funding support from the UKAID, IMA implements the SAFE project in Mtwara through trachomatous trichiasis (TT) outreach surgery camps. Trachomatous trichiasis is a neglected tropical disease which can cause irreversible sight loss from the in-turned eyelashes constantly scratching the cornea.

At project inception in 2015 IMA, in consultation with government officials at the ministry of health, began training program surgeons, screeners and community case finders to successfully implement the SAFE project in Mtwara endemic areas and elsewhere in Tanzania by performing TT surgeries free of charge. Since then IMA has organized multiple outreach surgery camps and prevented sight loss from TT to about 7,000 individuals in Mtwara.

The outreach surgery camp is organized by respective district lead surgeons and is held close to community centers to allow a large majority of infected community members to access treatment. Though the program focuses mainly on TT surgery, the outreach surgery team (surgeons & assistant surgeons) do screen and document patients with other eye conditions of public health importance including cataract, myopia, presbyopia, eye infections, glaucoma and allergic conjunctivitis. For a patient who suffered non-TT eye conditions, the project did diagnose, counsel and provide referral note requesting the patient to seek medical attention at nearby public health facility. However, most were unable to travel to the closest public health center.

With support from Week of Compassion (WoC) funding, IMA recruited one additional eye care personnel in each district to diagnose, document and dispense eye drop medications to non-TT patients alongside SAFE outreach surgery activity happening in the same outreach camps. This additional treatment



Crowd of community members waiting for eye drop medication.

package to the SAFE project has significantly improved patient satisfaction and eye care health seeking behavior among communities in the SAFE implementing rural areas of Tanzania as narrated by one of the beneficiaries.....



..... "My daughter had long standing itchy eyes and redness; this eye problem has progressed badly and affected her school concentration and performances.....luckily, she has just received eye drop medication which I believe it will soothe the itchy eyes and make it possible to resume studies, thanks to IMA for the medication you have given".....

Eye screening for non-TT case at village office.