**Cataract Position Paper**

SightFirst Long Range Planning (SFLRP) Working Group

**Summary Version**

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**Introduction**

The mission of the Lions’ SightFirst program is to build comprehensive eye care systems to fight the major causes of blindness and care for the blind or visually impaired. The program funds high quality, sustainable projects that deliver eye care services, develop infrastructure, train personnel and/or provide rehabilitation & education in underserved communities.

Since its inception in 1990, SightFirst has played a key role in reducing blindness, especially blindness from cataract. The program has already provided support for more than 7 million sight restoring cataract surgeries. And today, as the Lions raise new funds for the program through Campaign SightFirst II, they have earmarked US$45 million of their US$150 million fundraising goal to continue cataract control initiatives.

This paper, prepared as part of a long range planning effort mandated by the SightFirst Advisory Committee (SAC), recommends strategies to guide future SightFirst cataract programming.

**Cataract**

Cataract is a clouding of the lens of the eye which impedes the passage of light. There is currently no way to prevent the commonest forms of the disease, but it can be treated through a cost-effective surgical intervention in which the affected lens is removed and replaced with an intraocular lens (IOL).

According to the World Health Organization, age related cataract is responsible for 39% of world blindness or about 18 million people. While cataract is found in all parts of the world, it remains a leading cause of blindness in developing countries where surgical services are inadequate and/or inaccessible as a result of social, economic or geographic barriers.

**SightFirst & Cataract**

SightFirst support for cataract control has traditionally been approved for one or a combination of the following project types:

- **Infrastructure Development** - Resources are provided to upgrade existing eye care facilities with new equipment and/or spatial improvements to increase both the quality and quantity of cataract surgeries. SightFirst previously provided funding for new construction; however, these types of projects are now only considered on a case-by-case basis.
Manpower Training – Resources are provided to train various levels of eye care personnel to perform cataract screening and surgery.

Screening & Surgery Campaigns – Resources are provided to perform large numbers of eye screenings and individual cataract surgeries over a specified period of time.

As of March 2008, the SightFirst program has awarded nearly US$99.9 million for 696 cataract related projects. This support has resulted in nearly 7.3 million cataract surgeries and 637 construction and equipment projects.

Lessons Learned

The SightFirst approach to cataract control has been largely successful. The projects have required relatively low-cost investments, but delivered immediate and substantial results. They have also garnered significant public recognition for LCIF and the local Lions. And, in some cases, the projects have even influenced government policy. In Brazil, India and Mexico, for example, SightFirst initiatives have been partially responsible for the development of government subsidized cataract surgery programs.

SightFirst funding has traditionally been approved for cataract projects taking place in areas where there is strong Lions presence and significant opportunity for Lions recognition. While this approach has been beneficial to the organization and certainly to those served, it has, in some cases, limited the value of the projects from a blindness prevention perspective. For example, SightFirst funding has been approved for cataract projects in areas where cataract surgical services are more accessible or alternative funding is available. In other instances, repeated funding of the same institutions may have fostered an ongoing dependency upon SightFirst support. Finally, there have been instances where those trained through a SightFirst project have not utilized their new skills as expected either because the training was not relevant to their local clinical environment or because they have immigrated and not returned home to serve the needy population.

As SightFirst continues its support of cataract control through infrastructure development, manpower training and screening & surgery campaigns, there are opportunities to further maximize the impact of these projects and make even better use of limited resources.

SFLRP Working Group Recommendations

Methodology

In August 2007, the SFLRP Working Group convened a meeting of blindness prevention experts to review global cataract statistics, conduct an informal analysis of SightFirst cataract efforts to date and recommend strategies for future SightFirst cataract programming.
Meeting participants included Dr. Serge Resnikoff, Dr. R. Pararajasegaram and Dr. Silvio Mariotti of the World Health Organization (WHO) and Dr. G.N. Rao, President of the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). Also present were Ed McManus and Phoebe Sebring, consultants for the SFLRP effort, and Phillip Albano, Joshua Friedman, Karim Bengraine, Kristen Eckert and Gina Prendki of the LCIF Sight Programs Department.

**Conclusions**

- Cataract should remain a priority for SightFirst.
- The current approach to SightFirst cataract programming remains viable, however, when aligned with specific strategies, project impact can be further maximized and used to support the development of comprehensive eye care systems. The strategies outlined below provide a framework for future efforts.
- In addition to the strategies included in this plan, it will be necessary to develop region and/or country specific guidelines for future SightFirst cataract programming.

**Recommended Strategies & Changes Moving Forward**

1. **Help develop comprehensive eye care systems**

   **Definition:** A comprehensive eye care system provides prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services for all eye diseases. Hospitals or clinical programs involved in SightFirst cataract projects will provide (or work towards the provision of) comprehensive care, or at least diagnosis of, all clinical eye problems and appropriate referrals.

   **What does this mean?:**

   - SightFirst may require additional reporting not included in past cataract projects.
   - SightFirst may provide funding for equipment or infrastructure improvements not supported in past SF cataract projects.

2. **Use and/or collect data to identify and evaluate projects**

   **Definition:** SightFirst cataract projects will take place in communities of greatest need as identified through existing or newly captured survey data. In addition, SightFirst cataract projects will be properly evaluated through the collection and analysis of both output and outcome data.

   **What does this mean?:**
✓ SightFirst may provide funding to conduct rapid assessment surveys to identify cataract-needy communities

✓ SightFirst may provide funding to aid with project evaluation

3. **Target underserved populations through equitable eye care services**

*Definition:* SightFirst cataract projects will provide services to those who cannot access care because of economic, social or geographic barriers.

*What does this mean?:*

✓ SightFirst will only provide funding for cataract projects where alternative funding is either limited or not available

✓ SightFirst will give priority to projects serving disadvantaged populations (like women in some societies)

✓ SightFirst surgical subsidies are to be used for bilateral cataract blind patients only

4. **Provide high-quality eye care services**

*Definition:* SightFirst cataract projects will provide eye care services of the highest quality

*What does this mean?:*

✓ SightFirst may now provide funding to aid with project monitoring & evaluation

✓ SightFirst will require reporting of both outputs and outcomes as a prerequisite for project approvals and disbursements. This may include indirect measures like the physical appearance of a facility.

5. **Help create sustainable eye care services**

*Definition:* SightFirst cataract projects will provide resources to establish sustainable eye care services through the training of local personnel, provision of appropriate equipment and facilities and development of locally appropriate cost recovery mechanisms.

*What does this mean?:*

✓ SightFirst may now limit the number of times that a facility receives subsidy support

6. **Engage Lions as advocates**
*Definition:* SightFirst cataract projects will include significant opportunities for Lions involvement and recognition.

*What does this mean?:*

- SightFirst may now provide funding to aid in the development of advocacy and public awareness type resources and training for Lions

*Next Steps*

Should the SAC approve the strategies outlined above, the SFLRP Working Group recommends the following next steps with regards to implementation:

- The SightFirst grant application, including funding criteria and guidelines, would need to be revised to better solicit projects that meet the new strategies.

- LCIF SightFirst staff should be provided with resources to train regional technical advisors and inform local Lions about the new strategies and grant application process.

- In addition, Lions leadership, LCIF SightFirst staff, and regional technical advisors might be empowered to seek out projects that readily meet the new strategies, especially in countries where cataract services are greatly lacking.