



**SHE SEES**

EQUAL RIGHT TO SIGHT

Photo: Michael Amendolia

# Restoring Women's Sight



The Fred Hollows  
Foundation



PHOTO: THE BOTTOM LINE/NINE NETWORK

## There is no doubt, blindness discriminates.

We know at least 55% of the world's blind are women – and that most of them live in low and middle income countries. Most significantly, four out of five of them don't need to be blind.

The Fred Hollows Foundation has the evidence and is doing something about it.

The Foundation is launching a landmark report from the Economist Intelligence Unit "Restoring Women's Sight" which looks at the relationships between vision impairment and blindness, empowerment and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The report is a flagship study into why women are more likely to be blind or vision impaired and the impacts of women being disproportionately represented in the statistics.

The findings show us a way forward for closing the gender gap and ensuring women have better access to services.

We know that vision impairment and blindness have far-reaching implications not just for the women affected, but also for their families, and for progress towards many of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as Gender Equality, and Decent Work and Economic Growth.

The Economist Intelligence Unit report looks at the social implications, on psychological wellbeing, on income earning potential, on women's capacity to participate actively in society. It identifies the key ways blindness and visual impairment affects women's health, functioning, quality of life and looks at the costs to the wider family both in social and economic terms.

We know that when The Fred Hollows Foundation restores sight to women and girls, trains female health workers, nurses and doctors and empowers families we transform lives.

We have the evidence and we're taking action.

To help us close the gender gap The Fred Hollows Foundation is launching a new campaign called **She Sees. She Sees** is a campaign to raise \$25 million over the next five years to help us ensure more women get access to eye health services. Women are 1.3 times more likely to be blind than men. **She Sees** wants to narrow that gap.

I encourage you to join us to ensure **She Sees**.

Gabi Hollows AO  
Founding Director, The Fred Hollows Foundation

## GENDER KEY FACTS



**55%**  
of the world's  
blind are women

**x 1.3**

Women are  
1.3 times more  
likely to be blind  
than men



More than 20  
million women  
in the world  
are blind and a  
further 120 million  
women are  
visually impaired.



Women are  
twice as likely  
as men to be  
blinded by  
trachoma and  
are up to four  
times more  
likely to need  
eye surgery for  
trachoma.



**4 out of 5**  
of people who  
are blind don't  
need to be

## WHY ARE WOMEN MORE LIKELY TO BE BLIND?

A new report from the Economist Intelligence Unit "Restoring Women's Sight" looks at the relationships between vision impairment and blindness, empowerment and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The study involved both a comprehensive review of the existing research into gender and blindness as well as bringing together a global panel of experts to provide insights into factors affecting women and blindness.

### Why are women more likely to be blind:

1. Biological reasons – higher life expectancy in women means they are more likely to experience some eye diseases (eg cataract).
2. Women do not experience the same level of access to eye care as men.
3. Costs – treatment is prioritised in men because women often lack a stable source of income and have limited decision-making power.

4. Transport costs to access care can be a limiting factor, particularly for women.
5. The need for someone to accompany a woman with visual impairment and blindness to receive care.
6. Opportunity cost of forgone household and employment related duties.

Studies show that the incidence of cataract blindness could be reduced by up to 12.5% if women had the same cataract surgical coverage as men in low and middle income countries in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

# WHAT IMPACTS DOES BLINDNESS AND VISUAL IMPAIRMENT HAVE ON WOMEN IN LOW AND MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES?

Four key themes emerged which show the negative impacts of blindness and visual impairment in women in low and middle income countries:



Photo: Daniel Jesus Vignoli

**She**  
...is confident that she can and does control her own choices and future

## CASE STUDY

### SHASHETU

Shashetu needs her sight for her kids, her livelihood and a better life. Trachoma, the agonising blinding eye disease, was threatening to take this away from her.

Shashetu, a 25-year-old mother of two, makes a living weaving baskets and selling them at local markets. As the sole provider for her young family, she knows if she can't see, she can't work, and can't feed her children.

Blinding trachoma had caused the inner surface of Shashetu's eyelids to scar, turning her eyelashes inwards to painfully scratch the front of her eye. If left untreated, Shashetu's eye would be so damaged, she'd be irreversibly blind. Many trachoma sufferers are mothers and children who unknowingly pass infection to each other with every hug or touch.

Trachoma is at crisis levels in Ethiopia and women bear the burden. It is estimated up to 75% of those with advanced trachoma, needing surgery, are women.

With the help of our supporters, Shashetu had the operation she so desperately needed. We also gave her children antibiotics to break the vicious cycle of reinfection between mother and child. Three months later, Shashetu was transformed. The piercing pain that plagued her had gone, and she was able to work and care for her family.

## 1 Individual choice autonomy and self-efficacy

### Blindness impacts women's:

- Access to education
- Employability and employment opportunities
- Health seeking behaviour
- Ability to start a family and plan for the future



Photo: Michael Amendolia

**She**  
...can provide financially for her needs and she brings into the family are used

## CASE STUDY

### THOL

Thol had been completely blind for the last year and a half. She lives in rural Cambodia with her four children. Her abusive, alcoholic husband abandoned her and their family when Thol went blind, taking all of their money.

Because of her cataracts, the single mother of four spent her days sitting in her family home with her youngest child, 12-month-old baby boy, Cheat. The family home is nothing but a small three metre square, raised wooden platform with a leaking tin roof and partial walls made out of straw. Thol has never seen Cheat's face.

Her elder three children, aged 17, 8 and 4 are responsible for providing for their family. None of Thol's children go to school. The burden of Thol's blindness thrust her and her children deeper into poverty every day.

Eye care in Oddar Meanchey Province, where Thol lives, is extremely scarce. There are no ophthalmologists and it wasn't until 2011 when The Foundation renovated the local hospital, donated some equipment and began outreach eye camps that the minimal eye care services even existed. In all of Cambodia, there are fewer than 30 – one ophthalmologist per 500,000 people.

When Thol's patches are removed she instantly bursts into smile and comes to life. She points to each of her children, counting them out one by one and then touches baby Cheat's face, seeing it for the first time.

Restoring sight to Thol has liberated her and her family. She is now working at the markets selling fish and frogs and the children have returned to school.

## 2 Economic security and independence

### Blindness impacts women's:

- Ability to generate income
- Gender-wage equality
- Carers' independence

Blindness is both a cause and effect of decreased financial independence.

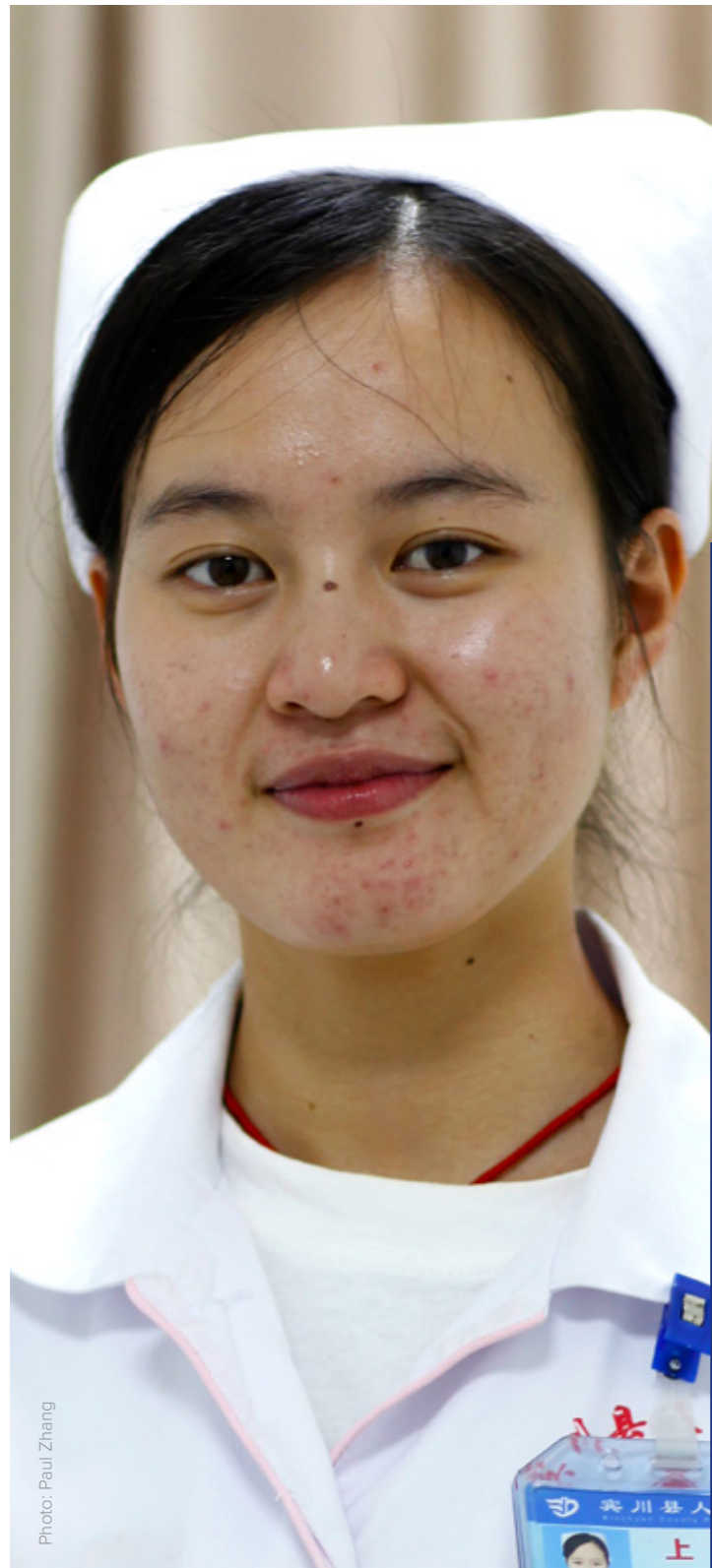


Photo: Paul Zhang

**She**  
*...has the ability, opportunity and dignity to choose to engage in social, cultural and political life*

### CASE STUDY

#### JIE-QIN

Women who are blind and visually impaired have limited opportunities to participate in the community and take a leadership role.

From an early age it was clear 26-year-old Jie-qin from China was destined to be a leader.

"I wish I could change the out-dated ideas of people," she said.

But when Jie-qin was at secondary school, short-sightedness left her unable to see the blackboard clearly and threatened to derail her education. She wanted to have a pair of glasses, but her parents said no.

"They thought once I started wearing glasses, I would have to wear them for the rest of my life," Jie-qin explained.

"But I could not see ABC on the blackboard clearly and I didn't want my English to be game over! I had a hunger strike for a day for the glasses. My parents surrendered in the end," laughed Jie-qin.

"When I wore the glasses to visit my grandmother in a very old village, people looked at me as if I was a monster and gossiped about my glasses." But Jie-qin believed changing how people think would also save their sight.

Now Jie-qin is an optometry nurse at the Binchuan People's Hospital and the only person responsible for checking patients' eyes. The Fred Hollows Foundation provided a three month optometry training course for her.

Now she visits schools with other staff at the hospital to conduct screenings for students.

Jie-qin also visit elderly patients in remote villages. She knows of the importance of services especially for women.

"If she cannot see then an extra person is needed to take care of her. If her eyes are good, she can take care of herself, cook, and take off the burden from her son and daughters in law.

"Eyes are thus very important to a family," Jie-qin said.

## 3 Social inclusion, participation and voice

### Blindness impacts women's:

- Exposure to social discrimination and avoidance
- Access to justice systems and legal services
- Representation in decision-making fora
- Collective action to garner support



Photo: Michael Amendollla

**She**  
*...feels physically, mentally and emotionally able to carry out day to day activities to her full potential*

### CASE STUDY

#### FRANCINE

Francine, 76, from the Eastern Province of Rwanda had been a widow for 30 years and had been totally blind for more than three years. She had no proper kitchen or toilet in her modest home, and after some time she was abandoned by her grandson who found it too hard to look after her,

To get by, Francine needed daily help from kindly neighbours like Specise, who would come as often as they could to cook for her and take her to the toilet – a pit about 100 metres from her home.

Depressed and reliant, she suffered multiple fractures due to frequent falls, and would often go hungry because she feared burning herself if she tried to cook.

When her patches came off, Francine's exuberance was infectious. She couldn't sit still, reaching out to hug the doctors and wandering round the hospital.

When she went back to her home she exclaimed: "What will I do now? I can't find words to explain all of this. I will be able to cook again - I am happy to work."

From a depressed and quiet woman her whole life was transformed. "This is so overwhelming, I am overjoyed!"

## 4 Psychological and physical health, and wellbeing

### Blindness impacts women's:

- Ability to perform day-to-day activities
- Vulnerability to violence
- Risk of depression
- Risk of injury

# OUR APPROACH TO GENDER EQUITY

The Fred Hollows Foundation believes that, to achieve the UN Sustainable Development and VISION 2020 goals, eye care programs must eliminate all forms of inequity in access to eye care for women and girls.

This is why The Foundation adopts a gender mainstreaming approach which helps us translate our social mission into practice.

Our strategy goes beyond equality and recognises that women and girls have different needs, preferences and constraints. We are therefore placing women and girls firmly at the centre of our programming, service delivery, partnerships and global advocacy work.

We are working closely with the local communities in each country to understand the pathways women follow in accessing eye care.

## TARGETED PROGRAMS

As well as placing women and girls firmly at the centre of our programming, service delivery, partnerships and global advocacy work, The Fred Hollows Foundation is also pioneering innovative projects that close the gender gap in eye health outcomes around the world.

In Bangladesh and Vietnam we are improving eye health for female factory workers, while in Pakistan we are addressing eye health for female agriculture and cottage industry workers. In China we have a rural eye care project with gender sensitive approaches and in Nepal we have a new project trialling different approaches to address barriers facing women.

Photo: Sam Phelps

# INNOVATIVE EYE CARE FOR WOMEN IN GARMENT FACTORIES IN BANGLADESH

The garment factory industry in Bangladesh employs almost 3.6 million people, more than 80% of whom are women. The small detailed work in the factories can lead to vision problems, yet most of these workers do not have easy access to basic eye health services. Working the industry's standard six days a week can mean it is impossible to make time to go for a check-up. If vision problems are left untreated these workers risk losing their jobs, leaving them unable to support their families.

After conducting extensive research The Fred Hollows Foundation identified an opportunity to trial a pilot project, where visual detection corners are set up within in garment factories in Bangladesh, to empower female workers to access eye care right in their work place.

A visual detection corner is an area in the factory where there is an eye chart for workers to test their own vision and instructions on how to use the chart. Orientation and training is also provided to managers and supervisors so they are able to refer workers with vision problems to their local hospital for treatment.

The visual detection corners have now been set up in 10 factories in three districts of Dhaka and Chittagong. More than 8000 garment workers and 200 supervisors were oriented on basic eye care within the 3 month trial period.

The Foundation has been monitoring the use of the vision corners and early indications are that they are making a significant impact.

# DOORSTEP DIAGNOSIS

Fatima, a 38-year-old Lady Health Worker from Hyderabad Sindh District, is one of the many quiet success stories of The Fred Hollows Foundation's work improving access to eye health for women.

Every morning, six days a week, Fatima visits dozens of families, knocking on their door and helping women who are often unable to leave their homes without being escorted by a male relative.

Fatima has been trained by The Foundation in basic eye care and is able to diagnose cataract, squint and glaucoma among other eye diseases. She then refers women and children to local eye units or hospitals for further screening and treatment.

She is grateful for the training she has received from The Foundation as she used to see many families with eye conditions but did not have the knowledge to diagnose them.

Since her training she has referred more than 500 patients for treatment and is proud that she has helped prevent them from going blind.

"I have been working as a Lady Health Worker for the last 18 years and I really enjoy being able to help people, especially vulnerable women and children. I feel a sense of satisfaction in serving my community", she says.

Along with increasing awareness for eye diseases, Fatima advocates for family planning and vaccinations for children.

She is always well received by the families she visits. "They consider me a good friend and feel very comfortable sharing their health problems openly with me", she says.

The Lady Health Workers are a role model of leadership for women in Pakistan and have made a significant impact on the eye health of women and children across the country.



Photo: Shehais Ali

# WE BELIEVE IN EQUAL RIGHT TO SIGHT

The Fred Hollows Foundation is launching a global initiative to become a leader in affordable, accessible eye care. We want to end gendered inequity in eye health and to empower women with sight.

We call this, **She Sees**.

**She Sees** is The Fred Hollows Foundation's public commitment to address gender disparity in blindness as a key global health issue.

**She Sees** will elevate and advance our gender-focused work globally and support the delivery of high quality programs which work to close the gender gap in blindness around the world.

Through **She Sees**, The Fred Hollows Foundation is committed to placing women and girls firmly at the centre of our programming, service delivery, partnerships, and global advocacy work.

The Foundation is committed to reducing the gender imbalance in avoidable blindness around the world in five key ways:



## FOCUSED PROGRAMMING

We are providing eye health services in garment factories in Bangladesh and Vietnam, and for female agriculture and cottage industry workers in Pakistan. These targeted projects are bringing quality eye care to tens of thousands of women, allowing them to continue working and supporting their families and communities.



## TRAINING

We are training women to become eye doctors, health workers and eye health professionals. One of the best long term ways to encourage women to visit hospitals and eye clinics is for there to be more female faces working in the health system.



## ACCESS

We are ensuring more women are having the eye surgeries they so desperately need by providing free transport to eye health facilities to reduce geographical barriers and out-of-pocket expenses.



## OUTREACH

Our community based outreach services are reaching out to women in remote and rural villages where eye disease remains largely undiagnosed and untreated.



## MOTHERS

We are integrating eye health services in maternal and reproductive health facilities to give pregnant women access to eye health screening that is not provided routinely.

# SHE SEES

EQUAL RIGHT TO SIGHT

Fred Hollows believed that everyone's sight was worth saving. His commitment to ending avoidable blindness continues today through the work of The Foundation, by bringing affordable eye care to those who need it most.

While we've made incredible progress, our job is far from over.

**SHE SEES** carries on Fred's legacy to ensure that every woman has equal access to high-quality and affordable eye care.

# 2018

# THANK YOU



Photo: Michael Amendolia

we're for  
*Australian Aid*



The **Fred Hollows**  
Foundation