

VISION 2020: The Right to Sight
The Added Value - Stakeholder Perceptions

The VISION 2020 Initiative grew out of the realisation in the late 1990s that the number of avoidably blind people in the world was set to increase dramatically over the next twenty years. This was despite the many years of cooperation between the World Health Organization Prevention of Blindness Programme and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness and its members. This was considered a totally unacceptable human tragedy as the interventions to deal with this were both available and among the most cost effective in the health sector. The response from the eye care community was to develop a twenty year framework to guide action which could lead to the elimination of avoidable blindness over that period – VISION 2020: The Right to Sight.

‘The State of the World’s Sight, 1999-2005’ report reviews the progress being made towards this ambitious objective by highlighting achievements against the key areas of disease control, human resource development and infrastructure. It also examines the progress towards the development and implementation of national VISION 2020 plans.

The impetus which lies behind the evolution and subsequent roll-out of VISION 2020 is partnership; this is the driving force of the initiative. It is a partnership between a wide range of organisations with a direct or indirect involvement in the prevention of blindness; national and international bodies; private and public sector bodies; professional organisations; academic and research bodies; NGOs and development organisations.

The success of VISION 2020 to date and its success in the future rests on the extent to which the different stakeholders can combine to deliver a world free of avoidable blindness.

This report complements the ‘State of the World’s Sight, 1999-2005’ report. It represents the views of a cross section of these stakeholders. They were asked to assess both the value added of the VISION 2020 initiative to date and to describe the challenges which still lie ahead. Their responses are given below together with examples of the impact which VISION 2020 has had at the country level, where ultimately VISION 2020 has to be delivered.

Added Value - A Country Perspective

The launch of VISION 2020 and the subsequent adoption by the World Health Assembly of the Resolution 56.26 urging governments to develop, implement and evaluate VISION 2020 national prevention of blindness plans has provided considerable momentum to the global fight against avoidable blindness. As described in the ‘State of the World’s Sight, 1999-2005’ report, nearly one-third of countries have drafted VISION 2020 national plans and many more are under preparation.

Below we highlight examples of the progress which has been made in a selection of countries where government commitment to VISION 2020 has resulted in substantially enhanced activity to fight avoidable blindness.

These are quotes from different stakeholders involved in the national level.

“The VISION 2020 identified need for equity has ensured that pro-poor programs are given priority, resulting in the provision of health services to even the most remote areas of the country. The concept of wider integration has necessitated more collaboration between stakeholders and district level authorities which ensures an increase in access to eye health service by the rural folk.”

“Its greatest achievement for Ghana is the development of a national plan for eye care. This plan has given the broad direction for eye care intervention from which other eye care providers can derive their strategy plans and programs.”

Ghana

“In West Africa, the launching of VISION 2020 provided the platform for institutionalising regular meetings of stakeholders in the prevention of blindness to discuss different aspects of the struggle to eliminate avoidable blindness and exchange experiences especially across linguistic zones. It has:

- stimulated the establishment of reinvigorated national prevention of blindness committees and the development of national VISION 2020 plans;
- increased coordination and collaboration of prevention of blindness activities, especially in human resources development; and
- enabled the adoption of sub-regional policies and guidelines in support of prevention of blindness activities e.g. the sub-region has adopted a list of essential drugs and consumables for various levels of eye care.”

West Africa

“VISION 2020 was launched in South Africa in April 2000, with the signing of a declaration of support by the Minister of Health.

A national committee was formed and each of the nine provinces formed their own provincial committee. The national committee provides guidance on programme implementation and each of the provinces is responsible for implementing their own provincial programmes.

Since the launch of VISION 2020, cataract surgery has been a presidential national priority programme. A Cataract Surgery Rate Trophy is awarded each year to the province with the most improvement in its CSR. The modest but steady increase in national cataract surgery rate over the last 5 years, from 700 in year 2000 to 1000 in year 2004, reflects VISION 2020 achievements in South Africa during this period.”

South Africa

“The challenge presented to VISION 2020 in Europe has always been the size and complexity of the region and, until recently, the lack of information on eye care services and prevention of blindness activities in Central and Eastern European countries.

VISION 2020, from its inception has acted as a catalyst to encourage NGOs with various programmes in Europe to expand their portfolios eastwards, and there are currently initiatives in 20 out of the 28 Comecon countries that became independent after the political changes in 1989.

Over the next 5 years it is intended that each of the 54 countries in Europe should have at least one ongoing VISION 2020 initiative relating to the major blinding diseases in the region and that through advocacy and education all European ophthalmologists should be familiar with the principles and practice of prevention of blindness.”

Europe

“By law, financing for eye diseases is guaranteed by the government and in order to help for better planning, the National Eye Health Plan was developed by the Chilean Society of Ophthalmology and presented to the Minister of Health in July 2004 and a census of the human and equipment resources as well as a situational analysis conducted between 2003 and 2004. The jewel of the crown, so to speak, was the establishment of a Prevention of Blindness VISION 2020 committee as a partnership between the Ministry of Health, the National Society of Ophthalmology, the President of the Senate and the Ministry of Education as well as representatives of other interested parties such as the Pan-American Association of Ophthalmology.

The three main lines of action defined by the committee are primary care attention, screening in children and finalising the evidence based protocols for cataract, ROP and diabetic retinopathy.”

Chile

The Constitution of the United Mexican States guarantees the right to health, including health promotion and prevention of communicable and non communicable diseases. With this in mind and the active support of the different actors in the country, including the Ministry of Health and the Society of Ophthalmology, on April 5th 2005, the Mexican President Vicente Fox, signed a decree for the formation of a National Committee of Prevention and Treatment of Eye Diseases. This committee has started an initiative called 'Volver a Ver' (To see again), which comprises a strategy concerning the fight against avoidable blindness in Mexico. The strategy operates within the priorities and framework set out by VISION 2020.

Mexico

“Getting involved with the VISION 2020 initiative made the already existing Prevention of Blindness activities and programs more organised and took them to the next level. Increased support of the ministry of health, commitment of the government and involvement of the community facilitated the completion of existing programmes.”

Bahrain

“Following the signing of the declaration the National Program for Prevention of Blindness (PNLC) organised a meeting of the National Committee for Prevention for Blindness to inform them of the initiative and validate the process for its implementation in The Kingdom of Morocco. The PNLC then proceeded with an analysis of the status of Morocco’s territories (region by region) along the following axes:

- fight against disease (disease prevention);
- development of human resources; and
- development of the infrastructure.

A workshop is now planned prior to the development of a national prevention of blindness plan for VISION 2020.”

Morocco

“The national government has fully endorsed VISION 2020 and approved over USD44.0 million for eye care in the next five years. This resulted from effective advocacy by the national eye care coordination and the national committee for the prevention of blindness. VISION 2020 facilitated the identification of appropriate structures based on the prioritisation of needs. A district focused strategy has been adopted and as a result over half of Pakistan’s 120 districts have been upgraded for eye care. This focuses the development of eye care services within the government structure, linking primary and secondary levels for improved referrals and uptake of services.”

Pakistan

“VISION 2020 has given a major impetus to eye care activities in the country. A national eye care plan has been formally endorsed by the government and other stakeholders and steps are now being taken to include this in the health sectional plan of the Ministry of Health. All the major NGO programmes are now aligning with the main strategies of VISION 2020 and are district focused. The government has made basic equipment available to almost all district hospitals. A district approach to the implementation of VISION 2020 in the government sector is now being piloted. Meanwhile the national cataract surgical rate has increased to 1000 per annum per million of population.”

Bangladesh

VISION 2020: The Right to Sight's aspiration that there should be a national entity in every country is realised in India in more ways than one -

1. VISION 2020: The Right to Sight has been adopted by the Government of India for the National Programme for Control of Blindness for a 5 year cycle. An Advisory Committee was formed, strategic plan developed and the Government of India has allocated nearly USD100.00 million over a 5 year period for its implementation.

The strategic plan has followed the template of the global VISION 2020: The Right to Sight in terms of disease control, human resource development and development of infrastructure and technology.

In all these, existing gaps were identified and the plan addresses the methodology to cover these.

2. All the Non-Governmental Organisations including INGOs, local NGOs and major training institutions together have established VISION 2020: The Right to Sight India Forum. All the INGOs active in India have pledged funding for the activities during the initial 3 years.

A number of workshops covering all the strategic priorities are being conducted alongside the Government.

There is significant awareness at all levels of the Government; **the President of India is very enthusiastic about the VISION 2020 programme** and has called for its integration into India's 'Vision 2020 — to evolve into a 'Developed Country' status by the year 2020. The Health Minister of India is very supportive of this programme and was the Honoured Guest at last year's World Sight Day Celebrations.

3. A unique feature of India is the evolution of state level VISION 2020 entities. Andhra Pradesh was the first state to launch the programme with the Government allocating USD19.0 million for a 5 year period. This has already had an impact by increasing the volume of cataract surgery by 60% in two years, significant increase in distribution of spectacles, grants for strengthening infrastructure, as well as human resources in medical

colleges and district hospitals.

Orissa, Karnataka and Gujarat States have launched programmes and other states are also working on launching their own state-level programmes.

India is marching ahead with progress in all the core components of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight.

India

“VISION 2020 further encouraged us in fighting against blindness in a coordinated manner. This also gave a feeling of togetherness and partnership to work for a global issue and promoted more collaborators. In Nepal, the campaign sensitised the stakeholders to the fact that there was more to blindness prevention than cataract surgery. It has provided high value to the community eye care services.”

Nepal

“The Australian Government has now drafted the National Eye Health Plan as a result of the World Health Assembly resolution on the ‘Elimination of Avoidable Blindness’.

It became clear, in the early stages of developing Vision 2020 Australia’s strategic framework, that only sector-wide ownership would achieve real progress toward eradication of avoidable blindness and vision loss. Therefore, achievement of these strategic goals will not solely be the responsibility of Vision 2020 Australia. Collaboration, through a new peak body model and through a wide plan will result in a comprehensive national approach to eradicating avoidable blindness by the year 2020.

This represents an acknowledgement that to be effective the sector must bank together and follow the examples of organisations such as the Australian Cancer Council and the National Heart Foundation who have demonstrated that ambitious goals can be realised when everyone works together to achieve them.

Vision 2020 Australia has worked closely with Australian Government representatives and met with national Plan representatives across all jurisdictions, often accompanied in these meetings by state based partner organisations. These meetings have generated genuine enthusiasm and interest in the Plan and also in The Vision Initiative, Australia’s first public eye health promotion programme.”

Australia

Fiji established a VISION 2020 national programme following a workshop held there in May 2002. By September that year the Fiji Government had allocated offices for a VISION 2020 Fiji Programme office which was formally opened and the Programme launched in October on World Sight Day. A National Committee was formed, headed by the Director of Public Health and the Chief Government Ophthalmologist and within nine months a situational analysis was carried out and a start was made on a National VISION 2020 Prevention of Blindness Plan which was officially launched in July 2005.

The VISION 2020 Fiji office coordinates the activities of the INGOs working in the area. The Ministry of Health has been supportive of all these activities, particularly with a very successful public awareness campaign through local radio in several local languages to reach indigent and Indo-Fijians. This has shown particularly encouraging results in promoting awareness of eye disease – especially diabetic eye disease which has become a major and increasing problem in the Pacific Islands.

Fiji

When VISION 2020 was launched, a group of government policy makers, doctors and local and international NGOs began to look at the blindness problem more seriously. Surveys and studies were undertaken to assess the situation, look for problems and set goals/targets to solve them.

Cataract surgeries increased from 2,702 operations per year in 1992 to 23,159 in 2002. The prevention of blindness program's ultimate success also depends on the outcome of surgeries. Monitoring and post-operative evaluation are being made routine, and the dramatic decrease in cost of surgery should lead to self sustainability.

The continuing work of addressing the problem of blindness is a partnership with the government of the Philippines, local and international NGOs and community organisations to relieve indigent Filipinos from reversible eye conditions paving the way to a better quality of life and poverty reduction, by their return to economic and social activities in their communities.

Philippines

A VISION 2020 National Prevention of Blindness Plan was developed and has been implemented with full support from the National Peoples' Committee of the Government of Vietnam. Workshops have been held regionally and locally – one of the few countries that have implemented the processes of VISION 2020 by the book!

Vietnam

“Between the INGDOs, there has been a marked increase in looking at ways they can work together to reduce duplication. ‘Turf protection’ has ceased to be a significant factor in the Western Pacific Region with far greater flexibility and preparedness to help each other.”

Western Pacific Region

Impressive progress has been made around the globe invigorating the fight against avoidable blindness at country level. This now needs to be extended to include all countries where this remains a major public health hazard and resources mobilised to support the implementation of VISION 2020 plans.

Added Value – A NGO Perspective

The international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) are one of the core groups driving the VISION 2020 initiative forward. They have been involved with it from the outset and have provided much of the resources to facilitate its implementation.

Their assessment of the impact and added value of VISION 2020 is overwhelmingly positive. In the selection of quotes shown here constant themes recur:

- collaboration and sharing;
- awareness, recognition and advocacy;
- consistency and coherence; and
- focus

Collaborative working around a common agenda is undoubtedly yielding substantial benefits.

“The global VISION 2020 initiative has brought recognition to a much needed area of health care, which has triggered government and community support for eye care and blindness prevention. **VISION 2020 has also provided an invaluable forum for collaboration and the sharing of information and expertise, enhancing the work of all organisations in the field.**”

“In working in the field of public health we have found that collaboration is the life blood of our projects. It is particularly essential for sustainability, which is the cornerstone for the work of both the ICEE and of VISION 2020. **We do not just want to restore someone’s sight today, but to help develop each country’s capacity to provide eye care to their communities for years to come.**”

International Centre for Eyecare Education

“The greatest added value has been the development of a new consistency and coherency amongst stakeholders. Although agencies and individuals buy into the initiative to a greater or lesser extent, at least no one is unaware that there is a global initiative to reduce avoidable blindness and that we should all be working together.”

“It has provided a sense of identity and of belonging to a movement which has inestimable benefits in terms of enhanced team work, the sharing of best practice and solidarity in the work we do.”

“VISION 2020 has given a clearer sense of direction to SSI. It has sharpened our

thinking through the development of new policies and procedures and as the initiative has evolved into new and exciting areas of work such as advocacy, impact and research. **VISION 2020 has helped SSI refresh its vision.**

Sight Savers International

“An increased awareness about the problem of blindness, that most of it is needless, the strategies to address it, and the understanding that it can be done. VISION 2020 has brought together all stakeholders around a common goal.”

International Eye Foundation

“The integrated focus on blindness issues under the auspices of the World Health Organization with the high level, sustained public visibility of VISION 2020, has helped those involved in the prevention of blindness to integrate their efforts and to present a consistent advocacy message to the development assistance community and the world at large.”

“We find that participation in VISION 2020 as a full member keeps HKI at the forefront of global blindness issues and in constant contact with the best efforts in the world to prevent and treat blindness. VISION 2020 provides a structured opportunity for networking and for the initiation of collaboration, both at the table as a formal part of the program agenda and through informal discussions that take place through various VISION 2020 forums.”

“VISION 2020 has helped focus public and private attention on the enormous global needs in blindness prevention and treatment. It has provided a stage and backdrop to promote the blindness prevention agenda, and to build faith that there are realistic, proven and cost effective solutions.

The WHA resolution was a great achievement and fosters the development of so many national VISION 2020 plans.

Another major achievement is bringing so many NGOs together and fostering collaborative approaches to blindness prevention and treatment. Many partnerships exist today that would not have without VISION 2020.”

Helen Keller International

“It has focused attention on the issue of global blindness, i.e. magnitude of the problem; the need to mobilise and coordinate resources to eliminate avoidable blindness; the human and economic impact; and raised the awareness with developed and developing countries.

Participation in VISION 2020 has increasingly resulted in an examination and reorganisation of Operation Eyesight Universal’s partners and programmes to ensure that they are meeting the objectives of VISION 2020. Information shared and the opportunity to meet with other INGOs has supported the reorganisation of efforts to ensure that partners are improving the quality of outcomes, using resources more effectively and developing workable plans to achieve self-sufficiency”.

Operation Eyesight Universal

“The 260 fulltime staff and 500 volunteer doctors that serve ORBIS in its work to prevent blindness are proud to have been involved at the inception of VISION 2020. To come together with all the other NGOs with the same objective - to prevent blindness worldwide - was an obvious and bold move. How else could we as single NGOs really hope for a world where no one is unnecessarily blind? **By working together there was hope, and that hope has now become a REALITY as we see a major impact taking place.** Avoidable world blindness has dropped dramatically – beyond our wildest individual dreams. VISION 2020 is a world changer.”

ORBIS

“The main advantage of VISION 2020 is that all relevant groups dealing with prevention of blindness in the developing world, including WHO, found a consensus to concentrate on priorities in the fight against blindness and to follow the same strategies for intervention.”

“A global campaign and program like VISION 2020 opens possibilities to approach new target groups for fundraising such as major donors, foundations and corporate sponsors. In addition to that, examples do already exist for successful fundraising activities of IAPB members as a consortium and it is likely that IAPB as a group of NGDO’s in collaboration with WHO will have better chances to attract big donors, specifically in the corporate world.”

Christoffel-Blindenmission / Christian Blind Mission (CBM)

Added value - The Perspective of Other Stakeholders

One of the undoubted benefits of VISION 2020 has been the reinforcement of relations between the different organisations involved with eye care and the establishment of new relationships. The widening of the supporter base and the active buy-in to the VISION 2020 agenda has been an essential ingredient in driving it forward. Below are comments from a selection of such stakeholders.

“The advent of VISION 2020 has resulted in a considerable strengthening of the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). Historically, there has been good collaboration between IAPB member organisations and the World Health Organization (WHO). This was undertaken through various coordinating groups such as the Partnership Committee and the Task Force. With the renewed commitment of WHO and IAPB to eliminating avoidable blindness through the launch of VISION 2020 in 1999 the organisational framework for coordination has been considerably strengthened.

In IAPB, the main change has been to move from an unincorporated body operating with limited financial resources to being a charitable organisation limited by guarantee (registered in the UK) with much enhanced membership and resources. There is no question that VISION 2020 has acted as a catalyst in attracting many more organisations to come together to collectively implement a common agenda. There are now over 50 members who meet once a year in Council and they in turn provide representatives to serve as the Board of Trustees. The Board in turn is supported by committees, covering resource mobilisation, advocacy, public relations, human resources, finance etc. In addition there are a range of working groups for the key disease areas and technology. All these activities involve the active participation of the WHO.

With the organisational strengthening, and stronger strategic focus resulting from VISION 2020, IAPB has been able to build up / develop both its regional structure and provide additional funding for technical support in WHO. It has also supported around 100 workshops to assist national governments in planning their country programmes.

As a result of the higher profile that has been achieved for VISION 2020 and the demonstrable benefits of organisations from around the globe working collaboratively together, support has been attracted from new funders. In particular, an increasing number of corporations have demonstrated commitment to VISION 2020 by becoming either patrons or sponsors. And discussions are currently underway to form a corporate group within IAPB to provide a wider range of support enabling VISION 2020 to benefit from expertise within that sector.

The widening reach of VISION 2020 is further demonstrated by the Optometry Giving Sight fund raising initiative. This is a partnership between IAPB, the World Council of Optometry and the International Centre for Eye Care Education to mobilise funds from optometrists, opticians and related trades for VISION 2020 low vision and refractive

error projects.”

International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness

WHO (content yet to be received)

“As one of VISION 2020’s supporting members, the American Academy of Ophthalmology and its foundation, have contributed to VISION 2020’s collaborative approach which enables member organisations to work in a focused and coordinated way to achieve the common goal of eliminating preventable and treatable blindness. The Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology utilises the AAOs strength in education to contribute to VISION 2020’s task of training ophthalmologists to provide medical and surgical eye care services.”

American Academy of Ophthalmology

“Standard Chartered Bank is honoured and privileged to be part of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight. Through VISION 2020 and five of it’s largest NGO members we are implementing the ‘Seeing is Believing’ programme – a unique collaboration to complete one million sight restorations by 2007, for which SCB is raising USD6.0 million.

As a bank, we are committed to making a difference in the communities where we operate. As 90% of the cases of avoidable blindness are in developing countries, this is an excellent fit with our prime markets. It appeals both to our staff and stakeholders and demonstrates an excellent link between corporate social responsibility and our business. The passion and commitment of our staff around the world has been the single most important factor in the campaign’s success to date.

The collaborative approach, working with VISION 2020 and its members, is particularly appealing to us. **It is a true partnership working towards the common goal of eliminating avoidable blindness: a win-win situation.”**

Standard Chartered Bank

“WBU is the first in line to express its interest in blindness related policies and action towards prevention of blindness. Our saying is: “Nothing about us – without us!” This saying is proven successful for the VISION 2020 initiative, since WBU and VISION 2020 work closely together both nationally and internationally, to reach our common goal, that all preventable blindness should be eradicated before year 2020.

WBU and VISION 2020 activities have found a common time for celebration and joint action. On 15th October each year, WBU celebrates White Cane Day and on the second Thursday in October VISION 2020 celebrates World Sight Day. WBU and VISION 2020 take this opportunity to celebrate the common goal with a week of activities, media coverage and public events including lectures, flyers, exhibitions, practical instructions and other kinds of awareness raising information.”

World Blind Union (WBU)

“Since the inception of VISION 2020, the International Centre for Eye Health (ICEH) has orientated its teaching, research and information services to support the VISION 2020 agenda. A new short introductory course has been introduced for the VISION 2020 program and over 20 workshops were conducted last year alone in different countries to support the introduction of VISION 2020 country eye care plans. **Research at ICEH is now focused on childhood blindness, cataract and trachoma, priority disease areas of VISION 2020.** Similarly the Community Eye Health Journal, which reaches more than 15000 eye health workers in 176 countries, has the same focus.”

International Centre for Eye Health

"VISION 2020: The Right to Sight represents a unique model of partnership to tackle a major health-problem: the elimination of avoidable blindness around the world by the year 2020. This partnership consists of NGOs, the WHO, IAPB and the IFOS/ICO representing the ‘ophthalmologists of the world’ as well as Optometrists participating in the care of the millions of people requiring correction of refractive errors.

It illustrates to others in medicine that a conscious combined effort and reasonable division of labour by experts in various fields is necessary to achieve an ambitious goal. Ophthalmologists by their training obviously must shoulder a leadership-role in this partnership recognising the utmost importance of forming appropriate teams for teaching, applied research and patient care.

The 37 million people with avoidable blindness depend on us - and the ophthalmologists around the world understand that they are expected to look beyond their own horizon!"

The International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO) / International Federation of Ophthalmological Societies (IFOS)

“Elimination of blindness in a world pre-occupied with more fatal condition requires enormous coordination, collaboration and sharing of resources. This is what VISION 2020 provides and in so doing, gives every man, woman and child, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, the right to sight.”

West African Health Organisation

“In five years, VISION 2020 Australia has built a spirit of collaboration among Australia’s eye health sector. The sector now has an opportunity to work together and respond collectively to issues of importance; this action includes advocacy approaches to government, public and professional awareness programs and collaborative projects. VISION 2020 Australia provides the Australian government with a central point of contact and plays a major role in raising the profile of eye health.”

VISION 2020 Australia

“VISION 2020 has had a great impact on eye care and the prevention of blindness through increased awareness, the formation of strategic partnerships and alliances between organisations striving to prevent blindness, and new program initiatives. VISION 2020 has had an enormous impact on public health by combining our resources with those of other agencies. VISION 2020 has also led to Optometry Giving Sight (OGS), which raises funds directed towards the elimination of uncorrected refractive error and helping those with permanent low vision.”

“VISION 2020 has encouraged ministries of health to examine their policies on vision care and make the necessary amendments to better serve their population.”

“VISION 2020 offers the profession of optometry the opportunity to become a full partner in the global effort to prevent blindness. VISION 2020 has been the catalyst for optometry to join with other non-governmental organisations in an unprecedented effort to eliminate avoidable blindness worldwide. Over 200,000 optometrists worldwide are prepared to expand this commitment in the years ahead.”

The World Council of Optometry (WCO)

VISION 2020's Future Challenges

Despite the success of VISION 2020 in mobilising the eye care community to tackle avoidable blindness in a focused and coordinated way, many challenges remain.

Below are quotes from various stakeholders on the key challenges as they see them.

“Improving management and financial sustainability are key challenges to increase services to all economic strata and reduce the cost of eye care services — thus allowing more people to be serviced.”

“The key challenge will lie in our ability to bridge the gap between governments and NGO Partners based on mutual respects and understanding. We will also need to meet the challenge of building the primary eye care component of VISION 2020 so that in due course people will start demanding their right to sight.”

“The challenge for both VISION 2020 and organisations working in the field is to maintain the momentum of change and the interest of governments and communities in building sustainable eye care systems; to develop regional structures and communications; and to help partners mobilise resources.”

“VISION 2020 is perceived by many as a kind of God sent miracle intervention that will descend onto the people and manifest itself in the solution of all eye care related problems. More effort should be placed on advocacy to instil a sense of ownership in the government and the entire populace.”

“It is vital that a cogent case is developed to demonstrate the link between visual impairment and poverty. If advocacy and resource mobilisation are to succeed then the contribution of VISION 2020 to the Millennium Developments goals must be established.”

“VISION 2020 needs to be aware of, and sensitive to, the potential for internal competition – both within the blindness agencies themselves and between the blindness NGOs and VISION 2020 itself – that can detract from how we are seen by the outside world, governments, donor agencies and populations in general. We need to focus our message and present ourselves as a cohesive unit devoted first and foremost to reducing blindness.”

“VISION 2020 needs to find a way to position itself vis à vis other competing interests for donor funds, both in and beyond the health sector. Competing with HIV / AIDS and other infectious diseases is a difficult struggle, and we must continually find ways to communicate the importance and relevance of our work. VISION 2020’s work on the economic consequences of blindness is a key tool. Other work to be done includes strongly linking blindness prevention and sight restoration to the Millennium Development Goals, although we must be careful to address concerns that have been raised recently in the press (at least in the USA) about the lack of effectiveness of development assistance.”

“VISION 2020 and its member agencies need to forge effective collaborations with NGOs in other sectors. The most effective solutions are multi-sectoral, and we need to be careful not to work in silos.”

“The scarcity of in country resources represents a major constraint. This is particularly true in Sub Saharan Africa, which is confronting so many major public health challenges (malnutrition and food insecurity, HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, etc.). More external resources to support VISION 2020 programs are desperately needed, as national public health resources are already so over stretched. By resources, we refer not only to financial resources, but to human resources as well. The latter is huge challenge to our efforts.”

“We believe there is an expectation that the next five years should demonstrate significant progress on the VISION 2020 objectives. Unless there is greater commitment between INGOs and participation with governments the objectives will not be achieved.”

“The competition for funding and particularly the focus on HIV/AIDS will continue to challenge resource mobilisation. Blindness prevention needs to be integrated into national health policy or it will continue to be considered a marginal issue and addressed accordingly.”

“The challenges for the future as we see them are:

- Getting WHO to be a useful and participatory partner at country level.
- Making VISION 2020 in Africa a reality, especially in francophone Africa.
- Maintaining the momentum – great progress to date but need for new successes over the next five years. If we achieve the VISION 2020 advocacy and resource mobilisation strategies that would be fantastic, but not if what else will VISION 2020 have added between 2005 and 2009?
- Securing funding in the face of the preference of the big donors for the killer diseases.

Nurturing the next generation who will take VISION 2020 forward between 2010 and 2020.”

While clearly the challenges will vary by geographical region and by country, there are a number of recurring themes reflected in the above comments:

- The need for increased and effective advocacy to push avoidable blindness up international and national health agendas
- To generate additional resources to support the implementation of national programmes
- To demonstrate the potential contribution of VISION 2020 to the Millennium Development Goals.
- To obtain increased ownership by governments for the eye care of their people
- To prioritise the training of eye care personnel
- To ensure eye care services are embedded in the community and are affordable and sustainable
- To improve still further the coordination between the VISION 2020 partners

The challenges remain formidable. The issues identified above are being given priority in the key strategies now being pursued by VISION 2020. It is recognised that it is crucial to build on the promising start which has been made and establish avoidable blindness as a humanitarian cause that demands to be supported. The momentum which has been generated by the excellent collaboration among a wide range of different players now needs to be raised a further gear. This will then ensure that the goal of VISION 2020 - the elimination of avoidable blindness - will be achieved.