

Millennium Cities Initiative

EARTH INSTITUTE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

MILLENNIUM CITY STORY: SUCCESS IN HEALTH

Mekelle, Ethiopia: Hundreds Receive Sight-Restoring Surgery



HCP arrives in Mekelle.



Patients await screenings.



Dr. Oliva & Dr. Meshesha prepare for examinations.



Surgical patients await care



Dr. Oliva examines a patient.

OVERVIEW

Imagine having sight-restoring surgery after spending much of your life blind. That amazing, life-changing dream became a reality for hundreds of people in the Millennium City of Mekelle, Ethiopia in November 2009. The Himalayan Cataract Project (HCP), which works to eradicate preventable and curable blindness through eye care and education globally, conducted 598 cataract repair surgeries in the span of five days. HCP provided hands-on ophthalmology training for local Mekelle doctors in addition to the sight-restoring surgery they provided for those suffering from corneal and other eye health problems.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

The prevalence of blindness is 10 to 20 times greater in developing countries than in the rest of the world.¹ In fact, cataracts are one of the leading causes of avoidable blindness in sub-Saharan Africa.² While the majority of blindness is either preventable or curable, often countries face limited resources, inadequate infrastructure and a lack of qualified eye care specialists. In an effort to make eye care more accessible, HCP has partnered with the Millennium Cities Initiative (MCI) and the Millennium Villages Project (MVP) to provide eye care and training to local physicians in Ethiopia. MCI and the MVP are focused on helping sub-Saharan Africa achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 by encouraging investment and facilitating the delivery of critical social services that address health care.

ACTIONS TAKEN

From November 4-9, 2009, HCP Board Member Dr. Matthew Oliva and HCP Fellow Dr. Tilahun Kiros Meshesha oversaw a cataract workshop at Mekelle's Quiha Hospital, which often serves as a referral hospital for ophthalmic services in the region. The training of local doctors is part of a longer-term initiative on the part of the HCP, MVP and MCI to address health needs in Ethiopia and in all other Millennium Villages and City sites.

After screening took place throughout the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia, patients were brought to Quiha for eye surgery. Drs. Oliva and Meshesha, along with local Mekelle doctors, performed corneal transplants on bilaterally blind patients and cataract surgeries on hundreds more.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

With the 598 cataract repair surgeries and 10 corneal transplants, it is estimated that more than 1,200 Ethiopian citizens from the Tigray region were able to benefit from this program.

In the months to come, MCI will facilitate further screenings, surgeries and treatment in Mekelle, as well as Kumasi, Ghana; Kisumu, Kenya; and Blantyre, Malawi, in order to help restore and save eye sight among this underserved population.