

Seva Foundation

Child Blindness Initiative



Every *minute*, a child goes blind.

Impact of Child Blindness:

In addition to preventing children from seeing the world around them, blindness causes significant challenges to a child's development. For example, over **75%** of a child's early learning comes through vision. Visual loss early in a child's life can have a major impact on that child's development, leading to delays in crawling, walking, and talking. In addition to development challenges, over **90%** of visually impaired children in low income countries are **deprived of education**. This lack of schooling largely diminishes career opportunities for the child's future. Child blindness also creates stress within families to support the needs of the blind child.

The Problem:

Combating childhood blindness has been identified by the World Bank as the **most cost-effective of health interventions**. However, children's eye care needs are different and often more urgent than those of adults. A general eye care center cannot meet children's eye care needs because their eyes require sub-specialty training, equipment, and infrastructure. It is only after an eye hospital attracts enough adult patients that it can then address children's needs. In addition, many eye hospitals lack the necessary equipment or infrastructure.

There are several reasons why providing eye care to children is particularly challenging:

- Children often do not recognize or complain about eye issues
- Children's bodies can react severely to sight-restoring surgery
- Children need rigorous follow-up after surgery or treatment to reduce inflammation and prevent conditions like lazy eye.
- Children's eye health relies upon their family members. Even after surgery or prescription of glasses, a family member must ensure follow-up appointments are met, eye drops and medication are utilized, and glasses are properly worn for a child's sight to be restored.
- Often, children's blindness is associated with other health issues

Preventing blindness in children is a **collective effort** that requires the collaboration of health workers, families, teachers, community members, policymakers, and counselors.

Through its programs, Seva is joining that collective effort.

Seva's Efforts:

Cambodia: Over **50%** of the patients examined each year are children

Tibet: Over **30%** of patients who receive vision screenings for glasses are children

Nepal: Nearly **100,000** children are annually screened for visual problems in schools

All Seva eye care partnerships around the world include a focus on improving and expanding child eye health services.

The Problem:

- 1.26 million blind children worldwide
- Up to 60% of blind children in developing countries are likely to die within **one year** of becoming blind

Seva's Goal:

Combat child blindness in developing countries

Seva's Strategies:

- Perform school screenings in local communities
- Operate eye camps in regions that lack access to eye care services
- Provide eye health education focusing on sanitation, nutrition, and safety measures
- Train local eye care workers in pediatric eye care
- Provide eye care centers with appropriate equipment, infrastructure, and supplies
- Engage primary care doctors because child blindness is often associated with other health problems
- Assess children with irreversible vision loss for low-vision services, early visual stimulation, rehabilitation, or special education

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Updated Dec 2011

