

Vision 2020: The Right to Sight

Malla OK¹

¹Prof. Dept. of Ophthalmology, KMCTH

Today, there are 45 million blind people in the world, and cataract, which is one of the most important causes of blindness, accounts for half of the blindness. Moreover, trachoma and childhood blindness are responsible for 15% and 4% of all blindness respectively. Besides, other important causes of blindness in our region are uncorrected refractive error, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and age related macular degeneration. Among all the blindness, 80% are avoidable which means it is either preventable or curable. An innumerable number of blind people reside in this region, and a study found that about one third of the world's blind and half of the world's 1.5 million blind children live in this region alone. It is quite disheartening to know the fact that among 12 people who go blind every minute in the world, 4 are from South East Asia.

Avoidable blindness accounts for 90% of the blindness in the region. Exophthalmia and Trachoma are preventable, if proper food or the balanced diet and clean and healthy environment are provided to the children. Similarly, Cataract can be cured with simple surgery. In order to provide solution for loss in productivity, a huge budget has to be separated for proper education and rehabilitation for visually handicapped. According to a study it is found that blindness is accounted for annual loss of 5.6 billions in US dollars in this region.

Nepal Blindness Survey conducted in 1981 revealed that 0.8% of the Nepali populations are blind and 1.7 % has unilateral blindness. Besides, 90% of the blinds reside in rural areas therefore blindness is really a serious public health imposing a social as well as economic burden to our country.

In order to reduce the global burden of blindness, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and a broad coalition of international, nongovernmental and private organizations launched, a global initiative "Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, in Geneva on 18th February 1999. Similarly, the South East Asia Region (SEARO) declared on 30th September 1999 for member countries to come forward with strategies and guidelines for the elimination of avoidable blindness from the region by 2020. They also decided to commemorate 2nd Tuesday of October as the "World Sight Day" to make people around the world, be aware of the importance of vision and share ideas in eliminating the blindness.

In addition, an "Apex Body for Eye Health" was established on 6th October 1999 under the aegis of the Ministry of health in our country. This body will formulate National Eye Care Policy in the prevention and Control of Blindness and work in coordination with WHO, NGO, INGO and other institutions working in this field

There has been a lot of progress in regard to implementing actions fighting against the blindness in our country. Hence, Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, program has been declared at the VI Ophthalmological Congress of SAARC countries, held in November 1999 at Kathmandu. Similarly, the Apex Body for Eye Health in September 2001 launched National Plans of Action for Eye Care Services in Nepal (Strategic plans for 2002-2019) to be implemented from January 2002. The objectives of this plan are to eliminate avoidable blindness by 2020, by developing an integrated approach to disease control, human resource development as well as infrastructure and technology development at various levels of the health system.