18 April 2012 – Avoidable blindness is a major health problem in Somalia. The estimated blindness prevalence rate is 1.2%, and more than 100 000 people are blind. Cataract remains a major cause of blindness. Other major causes of blindness are corneal opacity, refractive errors and glaucoma.

In April 2008, a memorandum of understanding on prevention of blindness was signed between WHO and Manhal Specialty Hospital. It was approved by the local Ministries of Health and has had a dramatic impact on the prevention of blindness in Somalia. In 2010, a total of 10 014 visually impaired people regained their vision. This has dramatically raised the cataract surgical rate from 254 per million population in 2006 to 1001.4 per million population and has improved geographic equitable access of eye care services to more than 80% coverage.

WHO is supporting human resource development for eye care by facilitating the training of Somali doctors, providing cataract kits and diagnostic and surgical equipment. The control and prevention of blindness programme of the WHO Regional Office provides ongoing technical support that has considerably improved the efficiency and effectiveness of eye care service delivery.

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