

**“VISION 2020 in Africa – The Next 10 Years”**  
**Middle East African Council of Ophthalmology**  
**Bahrain, 27-28 March 2009**

**REPORT**

**Background:**

The Middle East African Council of Ophthalmology (MEACO) is dedicated to promoting African ophthalmologists and enhancing ophthalmic services in Africa utilizing the strengths of MEACO and the Prevention of Blindness Union (PBU). PBU is a coalition of Eastern Mediterranean NGOs and organizations involved in eye care activities in Middle East and Africa. As an initial step, the President of MEACO, Dr. Abdulaziz AlRajhi, included a two-day symposium within the 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of MEACO held from 26-30 March 2009 in Bahrain. Dr. AlRajhi invited Victoria M. Sheffield/USA, Dr. M. Babar Qureshi/Pakistan, and Dr. Mansur Rabiu/Nigeria to organize and moderate the symposium. HRH Prince Abdulaziz Ahmed Al Saud, Chairman of MEACO, was scheduled to Chair the symposium, but was unable due to illness. We were privileged to have Prof. Mohammad Daud Khan of Pakistan chair the symposium in the Prince’s absence. The moderators are honoured to have been invited and appreciate the guidance and support provided by Dr. AlRajhi and his team.

**Purpose:**

Recognizing the significant strengths and resources of MEACO and the PBU, participants were charged with making 3-5 recommendations in 6 critical areas to guide MEACO and PBU to accelerate achievements in blindness prevention and strengthen eye health in Africa in the next 10 years.

**Objectives:**

1. Review accomplishments, failures, and lessons learned in the first decade.
2. Analyze barriers and trends in the region – SWOT.
3. Highlight key challenges for the next decade.
4. Develop goals for the next 10 years and beyond 2020.
5. Develop specific priorities and targets for resource use to achieve goals.

**Presentations:**

Presenters represented Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean Region (working in sub-Saharan Africa), the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Six presenters highlighted achievements and failures of VISION 2020 in Africa over the last 10 years. Dr. Kovin Naidoo, IAPB Chair for the Africa Region, presented the Africa Business Plan which has been prepared by key stakeholders in Africa. Five presenters then highlighted trends and challenges facing Africa over the next 10 years. Mr. Ahmed BERTHE from the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) discussed IDB’s support for blindness prevention in Africa and asked participants to meet with him and his colleague Mr. Moncef Soudani as the IDB plans to expand its activities in the region. Symposium Agenda: **Appendix A.**

**Working Groups:**

Six working groups were charged with making 3-5 recommendations each for which MEACO and PBU can determine how to provide support. The six groups focused on:

1. Clinical Goals
2. Human Resource Development
3. Systems and Sustainability
4. Management and Quality Assurance
5. Advocacy

6. Resource Mobilization

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

<b>Working Group #1: Clinical Goals</b>
<b>Assumptions:</b> MEACO and PBU are supporting all recommendations through existing National Societies in Africa and/or local human resources and existing systems.
<b>Goals:</b> The group felt that the following exist today and are a growing threat that will need to be addressed over the next 10 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Glaucoma</li><li>• Diabetic Retinopathy</li><li>• Low Vision</li></ul>
<b>Recommendations to MEACO/PBU:</b>
1. Establish 10 model centres that cater to glaucoma, low vision, and posterior segment disorders such as diabetic retinopathy.
2. Develop a package of public education materials to cover glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and low vision.
3. Establish model programmes on refractive error for school eye health and people 40 years of age and older (10 underserved districts in 10 underserved countries).
4. Establish 10 model programmes on cataract in 10 underserved districts in 10 of underserved countries. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Model programmes include doubling cataract surgical rates and coverage in 5 years and improve quality to 80%, i.e. visual acuity &gt; 6/18.</li><li>• MEACO to handle cataract campaigns.</li></ul>

### **Working Group #2: Human Resource Development**

#### **Priorities and Targets:**

These recommendations have been made in the context of what the Vision 2020 District should attain within the next 10 years. The Vision 2020 District Team should comprise the following staff as a minimum requirement:

- a. Comprehensive Ophthalmologist
- b. Mid-level Eye Health Personnel [Ophthalmic Clinical Officers]
- c. Optometrist/Refractionist – who should also have Low Vision Management Skills
- d. Manager

Provide enabling environment to encourage retention of these staff by addressing the 4 Ss [Salary, Security, job Satisfaction, career Structure]

#### **Recommendations to MEACO/PBU:**

1. The group recommended that MEACO and PBU actively work with the ICO to strengthen ICO regional centres in Africa and consider supporting development of others, e.g. the proposed NICE.
2. Support the training and retraining of ophthalmologists in high standard cataract and glaucoma surgery by organizing specific regional and in-country training programmes. (Consider the 5 model centres). Training may include aspects of improving productivity for the eye care team and clinical audit.
  - a. Refresher courses for existing staff to meet the present challenges and the emerging threats.
  - b. Support existing training institutions and colleges to meet the staffing needs of all the vision 2020 districts.
    - Proper curriculums
    - Adequate number of trainees
  - c. Offer subspecialty training to ophthalmologists working in Training Institutions and Referral Hospitals
    - Include Glaucoma in the Vision 2020 plans for Sub-Saharan Africa.
    - The group recommended that MEACO assist in putting together a group of experts to define guidelines and strategies for glaucoma control in Sub-Saharan Africa and disseminate resolutions accordingly.
3. Leadership training
  - a. The group recommended that MEACO continue to support the ICO/MEACO ALG programme for potential leaders in Africa, especially in the leadership training aspects.
  - b. The group also recommended that MEACO develop training courses for all members of the eye care team and not just the heads of programmes.
  - c. The group recommended that MEACO use its influence to help increase the capacity of the National Coordinators
    - Full time position
    - Proper criteria for appointment
    - Specific Job Description
    - Level of influence, knowledge and skills to influence policy
4. Twinning programmes  
The group recommended that MEACO and PBU establish modalities to encourage and support subspecialty training through twinning and sandwich programmes. Twinning can be established between Sub-Saharan African eye departments and the advanced eye units in the Middle East and North Africa. Support would also include the provision of equipment after training. Twinning opportunities could be flexible configuring North-South, South-South, Private-Public, Intra-country, etc.

<b>Working Group #3: Systems and Sustainability</b>	
<b>Recommendations to MEACO/PBU:</b>	
1.	Organize workshops to discuss workable sustainable models for Africa, looking at the how, where and when. These would include those that already exist in Africa, especially in the government sector.  Objective: undertake 5 workshops in each of the 5 sub-regions in Africa over the next 2 years. These should align with the centres recommended by Group #1.
2.	Support the development of sustainable models in government eye units and showcase the model for replication by government.  Objective: At least one model developed in each of the 5 African sub-regions by 2012.
3.	Encourage NGOs and organizations to reorient their philosophy towards a.) development of local human, material and financial resources and systems, and b.) develop fee structures and other revenue generating services that will financially support their eye care services.  Objective: NGDO's in PBU to report their local resource development activities to PBU and IAPB offices by the end of 2010.
<b>Joint Review Forum</b>	
The group highlighted the need for a focused consultation process between MEACO, PBU and IAPB Africa to plan and coordinate activities.	

<b>Working Group #4: Management and Quality Assurance</b>	
The group recommended that MEACO work with IAPB/Africa on the advocacy component of the Africa Business Plan in general and the following in particular:	
<b>Recommendations to MEACO/PBU:</b>	
1.	Build capacity of the residency programme directors in clinical audit so that quality assurance becomes a built-in part of residency training programmes.
2.	Assist in developing best practices in total quality management in 5 sub-regional centres so that they become demonstration centres cascading best practises to the surrounding service centres.
3.	Assist National Coordinators to get their rightful positions in the MOH. MEACO might provide an advocacy professional with advocacy, leadership and negotiating skills to assist National Coordinators. Provide sponsorship for National Coordinators to attend management and leadership courses specifically designed for their role. Negotiate with local NGO's to financially support the management teams.
4.	MEACO could significantly contribute to strengthening national ophthalmology societies by establishing a Prevention of Blindness Team or group that will offer assistance and courses that teach management skills to practicing ophthalmologists. Course details should be made available.

<b>Working Group #5: Advocacy</b>
<b>Recommendations to MEACO/PBU:</b>
1. MEACO and PBU along with IAPB/Africa work together to support the proposed Advocacy component of the Africa Business Plan.
2. MEACO and PBU assist in operational research resulting in evidence that will help develop advocacy tools and materials that will be effective in Africa.
3. MEACO and PBU utilize their advocacy skills to encourage and stimulate WHO offices, ministries of health, and IAPB regional coordinators to work together towards V2020.

<b>Working Group #6: Resource Mobilization</b>
The group reviewed the budget portion of the Africa Business Plan and felt that MEACO and PBU had specific strengths to support HRC and Advocacy.
<b>Recommendations to MEACO/PBU:</b>
1. Provide financial support for the Africa Business Plan prioritizing the HRD and Advocacy needs.
2. Provide technical and financial support for the recommendations made in Groups 1 through 5.
3. Develop strategies to assist IAPB Africa and national societies in Africa to mobilize resources locally and internationally by linking them to potential donors.