



## **A Joint Commitment to Strengthening the Eye Health Training Institutions in Africa**

### **Preamble.**

Africa is facing a crisis in its health work force and the eye health work force is no exception to this fact. Gaps exist at all levels - from ophthalmologists to community eye health workers. A central challenge is that virtually all health professionals confront issues in nine core areas, recently identified by the USAID Capacity+ programme and where bottlenecks may be encountered when considering scaling up production. These include: The capacity of educators, students and management; infrastructure; materials and equipment; curriculum; clinical practice; quality assurance; partnerships and exchanges. To this we can add research, monitoring and evaluation and financing. According to informal surveys over the last few years, the total number of eye health training schools in Africa, by cadre, is as follows.

	Anglophone	Francophone	Horn of Africa	Lusophone	Training Institutions
Population (million) in 2012	433	263	101	46	842
Ophthalmologists	19	9	3	2	33
Optometrists	19	4	3	1	27
Cataract Surgeons	4	2	2	1	9
Allied Eye Health Professionals	16	11	6	3	36
Total	58	26	14	7	105

Many initiatives to address the crisis already exist and a number of INGOs have traditionally supported many of the training institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), both financially and technically. We are also now seeing the increasing development of new South-South partnerships with India, Brazil and the Middle East to complement existing North-South links. Finally, there are a range of mainstream health and education interventions, often supported by bilateral donors, trusts and foundations, which we must consider in terms of integrating our work in eye health into existing capacity building for the health training institutions in general. However, the fact is that many of these important initiatives remain largely uncoordinated, partial and under-resourced given the scale of the challenge. This is the reality we now need to address if we are to overcome a critical bottleneck in addressing the wider eye health work force crisis.

### **Consequently:**

A meeting of eye health agencies currently involved in strengthening eye health training programmes and training institutions in SSA was held in Dar es Salaam in March 2013 with the aim of developing a comprehensive regional response to the current crisis and aspiring to meet global standards of best practice for training eye health professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The workshop confirmed that much is already happening in many critical areas and it was agreed that, not only is more needed, but that the Group as a whole could do more with existing commitments by working more collaboratively and enhancing our collective response to the crisis. The agencies whose logos are attached below have committed themselves to the following principles to guide future partnerships and interventions.

*We commit our agencies to:*

- 1. Work collaboratively to share planning information.*
- 2. Jointly develop comprehensive planning and evaluation tools.*
- 3. Work together to harmonise competency based curricula.*
- 4. Examine options for joint funding opportunities*
- 5. Sustain and expand existing support through increased commitment*
- 6. Work together to become an integral part of existing capacity building for the health training institutions in Africa*



