

Mapping UNSW Impact Global Development

Primary SDG	4: QUALITY EDUCATION
Broad theme	Eye care in Uganda
Research	Developing optometry as a profession in Uganda
Impact region	Uganda
Faculty	Science
School/Institute	Brien Holden Vision Institute
Academic	Professor Kovin Naidoo
Project partners	Ugandan Government, ANCP (DFAT), Light for the World, Optometry Giving Sight; funding of USD 500,000 finishes December 2018
Related SDGs	4: Good Health and Wellbeing
	5: Gender Equality

Elevator pitch

Brien Holden and partners are establishing and running optometry courses in Uganda to cement the profession in the country, providing a long term solution to treat the over-represented number of people with vision problems and the lack of optometrists in the country to help them.

The Challenge: How can we improve vision care in Uganda?

In Africa, a variety of eye disorders contribute to visual impairment, including cataract, glaucoma, trachoma and refractive error. Nearly 80% of impairments are preventable or treatable. An ageing population and the lack of national plans to address the effect of visual impairment on people's productivity and quality of life is quietly increasing the burden on many of these countries.

In Uganda it is estimated that over 1.5 million people have vision impairment and lack access to basic eye care services. The standard World Health Organization (WHO) ratio of optometrists to patients is 1:50,000 yet in Uganda the scale is 1:250,000. There is an urgent need for more skilled eye care practitioners and accessible services in the country.

UNSW's solution: Foster higher education courses, build up the optometry workforce

Brien Holden and partners are working with universities around the world to develop optometry as a tertiary course in places where the profession is non-existent or in a nascent stage. This includes advising on curriculum, working to enhance infrastructure, and providing educational resources. They also provide support to faculties on staffing, campaign local government for more eye care personnel, and help setup educational and professional regulatory bodies. Their efforts see 730 optometry students enrolled worldwide and 466 graduates servicing the eye care needs of 782,880 people every year.

Brien Holden has run eye care programs with local partners and government in Uganda since 2008. Together with Makerere University (MU, UNSW and Light for the World (NGO) they opened the Academic Vision Centre at MU in 2016. The Vision Centre provides eye care services to the public with professional optometrists supervising first and second year students from MU in the provision of care. The Centre is supporting 11 undergraduates and four postgraduates, with 24 students starting in 2017. The first graduates are expected in 2018. With further funding, the Centre can support graduates in setting up their own optometry businesses and deepen levels of student support, particularly among females who are underrepresented in the workforce.

The Impact: Improve vision care in Uganda for the long term

The Academic Vision Centre is performing a key role in growing the nascent profession of optometry in Uganda. It is estimated the 11 students being trained and educated at the Centre will end up servicing over 35,000 Ugandans annually in five to ten years, helping these Ugandans to better vision and quality of life, and aiding their ability to contribute to local and national economies. This flow on effect is supported by 2014 WHO research that says investment in eye care services has a benefit-to-cost ratio of more than two to one.

Researcher

Professor Kovin Naidoo is the CEO of the Brien Holden Vision Institute and Chairperson of the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (Africa), Associate Professor of Optometry at University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Visiting Fellow at University of NSW, and Adjunct Faculty at Salus University. Inspired to help the visually impaired in countries where optometry is not a priority, Kovin was a key player in getting the WHO to view optometry as a major public health challenge and include it on its agenda.

Ben Falkenmire 05.10.17