Eye care services for refugee populations
Thai-Burma Border

Findings from 2009 Documentation Activities

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IRC Border Eye Program

• **Aim**
  - Restore sight for vulnerable refugees, migrants and IDPs from Burma

• **Key Activities**
  • Training of refugee health staff
  • School children vision screening
  • Eye care services in camps and Mae Tao Clinic
    • Providing eyeglasses and facilitate eye surgery
Beneficiary Population

- Estimated 135,000 people in nine refugee camps

- Estimated 200,000 Burmese migrants in Mae Sot area, and internally displaced persons from eastern Burma

- Push factors - internal political instability, ethnic conflicts, and poor socioeconomic situation

- Border Eye Program is the only source of eye care services for refugees and migrants along Thai Burma border
Background & Context
Conflict in the Ethnic States
History – IRC Thai–Burma Border Eye Program

• 1976 - The IRC started assistance to refugees in Thailand
• 1990 - Working with refugees and displaced persons from Burma
• 1997 - IRC Border Eye Program began
• 1998 to 2001 - Eye clinics established in each camp
to address preventable forms of blindness
• 1998 - Distribution of eyeglasses began
• 1999 - Focus shifted towards restoring sight, including pilot testing provision of services to children
• 2008 (Jan) - Border Eye Program services ceased due to funding constraints
• 2008 (August) – AED grant commenced – school vision screening initiated
Eyeglasses Dispensed in Border Eye Program
Vision screening for School Children
Program Effects

• Eye conditions of refugee children being identified through screening and addressed as appropriate
• Eye clinics resourced and functioning smoothly
• Staff trained in basic refraction and primary eye care
• Sight restored through eye surgery, in collaboration with KarenAid
Beneficiary Experience 1

Yosheeya, 7, Mae La camp, received eyeglasses

“the glasses make me see what the teacher wrote on the board. I am really happy to learn in class now.”
Beneficiary Experience 2

Tin Ngwe, 67, Tham Hin camp, had cataract surgery

“I had to stay at home inside the whole day and depended on my family to accompany me if I wanted to go outside”
Beneficiary Experience 3

Than Tun, 27, Tham Hin camp, had cataract surgery

“I was afraid but told myself I have to be brave for my eyesight.”
Volunteer Eye Surgeon Experience

Dr. Frank Green, has been visiting the Thai-Burma border region for almost 20 years, says

"without the training the Border Eye Program provides to the many medics and clinics they run, there would be no system for detecting the eye diseases we can surgically treat."

“I regard this work as a great privilege and a blessing in my life.”
THANK YOU