

**ARTICLE ABOUT MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
IN ROTARY THROUGH EYECARE SERVICE
IN GAMBIA: **ROTARY** + (JUNE 2019)**

Membership Development through Service Projects - Gambia Surgical Mission 2019



Geoffrey Hunwicks (Geoff), 68 years old British living in Gambia, the smallest nation in the continental mainland of Africa since 2002 has been working with differently challenged children. For over two years Geoff has been suffering from a peculiar eye problem, lower lid Spastic entropion of left eye. The eye-lash was growing inward and this was irritating the eye. On the advice of Sanyi Sergio, Regional Eye-care Coordinator for One Sight, the Gambia, he visited the only major eye hospital in Gambia, Shiekh Zayed Regional Eye Care Centre (SZRECC) at Kalifung. They could only trim the eye-lashes as immediate solution, which was done on regular basis for nearly two years. Geoff was operated

on 11th April by Dr. Milind Bhide, a senior Ophthalmologist from Hyderabad who volunteered his services to be part of the Gambia Surgical Mission 2019.

Rtn. Dr. K. V. Ravishankar, who led the Gambia Surgical Mission 2019, is a Vitreous-Retina Specialist having over 30 years of experience. He is a member of Rotary Bangalore D 3190 E Club and has visited on 21 occasions several African countries and Bangladesh on such surgical missions mainly to prevent poor children becoming blind, apart from operating adults. The Gambia with a population of over two million has just three Ophthalmologists, two of them being Nigerians.

The Gambia Surgical Mission 2019 team consisting of two senior Ophthalmologists, Dr. Ravishankar, Mysore and Dr. Milind Bhide, Hyderabad, an anaesthetist Prof. Dr. K. R. Vasantha Kumar Mysore and Rtn. Dr. M. V. Ravikumar, Rotary Volunteer who has been spearheading Avoidable Blindness Projects in D 3190 landed at Banjul, capital of the Gambia on 6th April afternoon.

During the short stay of six days, the team could perform *thirty nine* surgeries for *thirty six* patients, out of which *twenty nine* were children. Two children and an adult were operated for both the eyes. A sum of US\$ 20,000 was raised to meet the cost of travel of the team, hotel stay, food, local conveyance, cost of surgical consumables, IOLs and other miscellaneous expenses incurred during transit. Main contributors were Rotary clubs of Ivory City Mysuru, Mysuru Central and Mysuru Mid-town of D 3181, Bangalore D 3190 E Club, Cubbonpark and Koramangala of D 3190, India, Rotary Senhora-da-hora, D 1970, Portugal and three clubs of Banjul, D 9101, West Africa. *Combat Blindness International*, USA based NGO has been a constant supporter of eye-care projects in Africa. While Rtn. Dr. Ravikumar coordinated with clubs in Bangalore for raising funds, Rtn. Sunil Baliga, Assistant Governor, D 3181, Mysore motivated clubs of his Zone to actively participate in the project by hosting it on Crowd Platform. *Seventy five* people across India and USA contributed for the project to the extent of USD 8,500 in a span of *three* weeks. This has not only enhanced Public image of Rotary, but many have evinced interest in joining Rotary. While clubs in Banjul not only raised funds to the extent of USD 3,000, President of Rotary club of Fajara hosted the team members in his boutique hotel. Hon. Consul General of India in the Gambia Mr. Ram Mohan ensured that the Indian Business persons actively participated in this Mission to help poor Gambian children.

During the first visit of Indian Rotary Medical Team in Gambia during September 2017, the three Rotary clubs in Gambia put together had 76 members. Having seen the effect of Indian Medical team performing surgeries for the poor Gambian children to get back their sights, during this visit not only more Rotarians contributed and participated, the number of Rotarians have gone up to 120 with the addition of two more clubs!

In the words of Mr. Ram Mohan, the Indian medical team brought *brightness* not only to the young patients but also to their families and to the people of the Gambia, more particularly to the Indian community and Gambian Rotary. Light has little use if one does not have the ability to see it.



Rtn. Dr. Ravikumar exchanging flag with Rtn. Manneh, President Rotary Club of Fajara, D 9101 in the presence of Hon. Consul General of India to the Gambia Mr. Ram Mohan



Dr. Ravishankar and Dr. Vasantha Kumar performing surgery to a child under General Anaesthesia



Indian Medical Team with SZRECC Staff and few of the post-operated children with their parent

With Best Regards: PP Rtn. Dr. M. V. Ravikumar, Rotary Bangalore Koramangala, D 3190