



A Clearer Future: John and Hellen's Journey with Vision Impact Program (VIP)

Introduction

In Meru County, the Vision Impact Program (VIP) is transforming the lives of many locals. Managed by AIC Health Ministries in partnership with the Meru County Government and various stakeholders, this program focuses on reducing eye infections and preventing avoidable blindness. The VIP is structured into two main components: school screenings and household screenings. These screenings encompass different stages of eye care, from primary to tertiary levels, ensuring comprehensive treatment. Patients with identified eye issues are referred from one level to another with the program adopting reverse referral system for the cases that cannot be managed at the secondary level for instance pediatric surgeries.

A Journey of Perseverance and Hope

In the peaceful village of Kiambogo, Nyaki West ward, Imenti North Sub-County, John Rukaria, 75, and his wife, Hellen John, 70, have experienced a life filled with both triumphs and trials. Despite their advancing age, the couple has always been hardworking, rearing goats, chickens, cows, and rabbits, alongside managing their farm. Their commitment to agriculture was their main source of income, as their four children—three daughters and one son—had their own families and couldn't always support them financially.

However, in 2022, their lives took a difficult turn. John began to lose vision in both eyes, while Hellen's vision in her left eye became blurred. This decline in their vision severely affected their ability to maintain their farm and livestock. Simple tasks like fetching grass for their animals became major challenges. John found it particularly hard to move around, leaving Hellen to handle most of the household responsibilities despite her own visual impairment.

Their attempts to seek medical help were hindered by financial constraints. The cost of eye surgeries at private hospitals was beyond their reach, with Hellen's procedure quoted at ten thousand Kenyan shillings and John's at seven thousand per eye. In their desperation, they considered using their grandson's university HELB funds to

pay for John’s surgery. Their plight left John isolated, unable to attend church, while Hellen struggled to manage their lives and household.

In 2023, hope arrived through the Vision Impact Program (VIP), implemented by AIC Health Ministries in collaboration with the Meru County Government and other stakeholders. This initiative aimed at reducing the prevalence of eye infections and preventing avoidable blindness in the region. The program's comprehensive approach included school and household screenings, utilizing Peek Technology to identify eye problems at various levels of care.

Overcoming Challenges and Restoring Vision

One day, Community Health Promoters (CHPs) visited John and Hellen’s household, informing them about the eye screenings. Both were tested, revealing severe visual impairment: John failed the visual acuity



test in both eyes, while Hellen’s left eye was diagnosed with cataracts. The couple was referred to Runogone Dispensary for further evaluation. They received a message from Peek reminding them to attend a treatment outreach at the dispensary.



At the outreach, Hellen's cataract in her left eye and John's cataracts in both eyes were confirmed. John also received treatment for itchy eyes. The ophthalmic team booked them for free surgeries at Igoki Health Center, providing a crucial lifeline.



A month later, they underwent successful surgeries, with John's eyes operated on consecutive days. The results were life-changing. John's first words after the surgery were a heartfelt prayer: *"Mungu awasaidie hawa madaktari wa macho na mungu awabariki sana,"* thanking the doctors and asking for blessings upon them.

Empowerment through sight

Upon returning home, the transformation was evident. John could walk independently and resume farming, while Hellen managed household chores and farming with renewed energy.

They reinstated their poultry and rabbit rearing, tending to their livestock without difficulty. John even started a kitchen garden, planting maize and beans.



Their story spread throughout the village, inspiring awe and gratitude. They expressed profound thanks to the VIP program, its stakeholders, donors, and the county government for bringing such a beneficial initiative to Meru County. John and

Hellen's experience stands as a testament to the program's impact, offering hope and a brighter future to many others in the region.



Recommendations

To ensure the continued success of the VIP program, it is recommended that the initiative be expanded to cover all sub-counties in Meru County. Increased funding and resources from donors and the county government respectively would enable the program to reach more people in need. Continuous training for Community Health Promoters and the integration of advanced technologies like Peek will further enhance the effectiveness of screenings and treatments. Additionally, fostering collaborations with eye care institutions can provide the necessary expertise and support to maintain and grow this life-changing initiative.