

Launching a Vision 2020 Project by Networking



Editors Note: The following paper was provided to our Action Group Chairman, Dr. Ken D. Tuck, by our Action Group member Gabriel Minder, our representative in Geneva at the World Health Organization. We hope your will find it of interest and value.

A hundred years ago, the Paris-based "Les Ballets Russes" fascinated the world by combining artistic talents as diverse as those of Nijinsky, Picasso, and Stravinsky. With no pretension to equal fame, *Vision 2020* could also be credited with effective synergies in the field of Community Eye-Care and the "best practice" example provided below could inspire other initiatives to be based on international networking and partnerships.

In the April 2006 issue of IAPB News, Marijs Carrin, *Vision 2020's* Programme Resources Officer, highlighted synergies by partnerships as advocated by the UN's Millennium Development Goal Number 8 (MDG 8). That very approach is being already followed by Rotary Clubs in their efforts against Avoidable Blindness (AB), as already indicated in IAPB News of July 2004 and April 2005.

The present example of the *Dindigul Community Eye-Care* in Tamil Nadu, Southern India has been chosen from 24 projects supported in the last couple of years by Rotary Club Ferney-Voltaire, France (near Geneva), because it considers the diverse needs of a poor Community and could not have taken place without the *Vision 2020* approach.

In 2004, the Dindigul Society for Social Service and Child Care Trust (*SOSSACC*) had tried to present a Community Eye-Care project to local Health Authorities and to Rotary Clubs. These however could not be convinced to grant their support, although *SOSSACC* was already most credibly engaged in an important 2002-2005 project supported by Andheri Hilfe, Germany, for Community Based Services to Mentally Handicapped Children.

Meanwhile in Switzerland, after speaking before a Lions Club, Dr. Anita Eggmann, a Swiss ophthalmologist with previous experience at Aravind, Madurai, personally pledged about 840 USD to help such a Project. This news was relayed by Swiss Rotarians to the Rotary facilitator in Geneva. He asked WHO-Consultant Dr. R. Pararajasegram, the Father of *Vision 2020* (in 1999) and a honorary Member of the above Rotary Club Ferney-Voltaire for advice how to lead Indian Rotarians into reconsidering their position towards the *SOSSACC* request. He suggested to the Lions Aravind Institute of

Community Ophthalmology (LAICO) that they might want to help *SOSSACC* make their project more attractive by embedding eye-care professionally into the other Community needs. Thus, the ambitious aim to enable a population of 130,000 to benefit at low cost from quality eye-care services made the subsequent follow-up appear as both credible and very challenging.

The comprehensive plan was then submitted for ca. 1.26 million Rupees \$29,390 (US\$) jointly by *SOS-SACC* and Aravind to the regional Rotary Governor in Tamil Nadu. Together with his own Club Tiruchirapalli Rockcity, he could pledge \$1,200 (US\$) This prompted the French Club to justify raising \$8,300 (US\$) (28% of the total needed) and to obtain moreover another \$7,200 (US\$)(25%) from Rotary Club Gent, Belgium, which thus became the Principal International Partner in submitting the matching application to the US-based Rotary Foundation (TRF). The two Clubs had already cooperated previously against AB in Mexico with good results. Therefore TRF in Illinois, USA, as well as its specific California-managed AB Sub-Fund, found that its matching rules now permitted to pledge the last and most important \$11,850 (US\$) (40%). These amounts do not include most valuable Aravind medical contributions, nor the personal expenses of benevolent Rotarians.

This exercise was achieved exclusively by e-mail over the whole of 2005, without involving any travel expenditure and officially launched on March 4, 2006 in Sanarpatty, one of the 164 Dindigul villages concerned.

Many other much larger projects could of course be mentioned, starting with the 100,000 Intra Ocular Lens surgeries being jointly funded in 2006-07 for India by Rotary and OEU, Canada. What this paper modestly attempts to show, is that humanitarian globalization can be very cost-effective for smaller projects too. Indeed, is networking over 14 Time Zones, from the Bay of Bengal via Europe to the Pacific Ocean, not a stimulating example for *Vision 2020* in the spirit of Millennium Development Goal Nr. 8 (Partnerships) ?

So, for the benefit of future projects, let the main **Lessons Learned** be summed up as follows :

1. The **Internet** is a definite and obvious prerequisite for efficient networking. It should be combined with a few introductory or complementary phone calls. Concise **project drafts** should be established, dated, numbered, circulated and reviewed very conscientiously.
2. **Leverage** can be reached by approaching potentially interested supporters in the **right sequence**, i.e. demonstrating to each of them that support has