

Karamoja elders get eye care

MOROTO

By Olandason Wanyama

Close to 5,000 elderly persons have received eye care services under the expanded Sight Savers pilot programme in Moroto district.

Sight Savers, an international development organisation, which works with partners to eliminate avoidable blindness, has partnered with the gender ministry to offer free eye care services to the elderly persons, using the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) pay points. Pay points are gazetted places where elderly persons go to access their regular monthly SAGE finances.

Hundreds with severe eye cases like trachoma trichiasis and cataracts, were driven to Moroto Regional Referral Hospital for surgery and treatment.

The week-long pilot exercise covered four sub-counties of Rupa, Nadunget, Katikeikile and Tapac in Moroto district.

Speaking from the hospital's eye clinic, Nakode Ilukol, a SAGE beneficiary, commended Government for the programme.

"I lost my vision two years ago and it has been problematic for me. Since then, I cannot tell who is who apart from hearing their voices," she said.

Ilukol said it was a good strategy to mobilise the elderly for the free eye treatment.

The Sight Savers programme manager, Moses Wakaisuka, said the move was a combined effort.

"When beneficiaries come for their payments at the pay points, those with eye problems take advantage of the programme and have their eyes checked. It is expected that this will



Karimojong elderly women line for free eye care services at Nadunget sub-county headquarters in Moroto district. Photo by Olandason Wanyama

services in the country," he said.

Wakaisuka also said improved sight for the visually impaired would enhance accountability.

"Once elders retain their sight, they will be able to see and count their own money, hence eliminating the use of alternative recipients," he said.

Wakaisuka said although his organisation had piloted the scheme in Moroto, they would roll it out to other districts.

"What we are doing is to see how we can have sight of the elderly restored," Wakaisuka said, adding that most of them had been cheated of their money.

ON THE GROUND



■ Moses Wakaisuka, the programme manager of Sight Savers, said the

organisation was planning to roll out counselling services for patients who had treatable eyesight

to regain their sight.

"Soon, we shall also establish counselling services for such patients who fear under going surgery," Wakaisuka said.

The district SAGE focal officer, Addah Anyakun, welcomed the partnership saying several people had been identified with visual impairment and were being treated.

Anyakun also said beneficiaries were losing a lot of money to those who guide them around the villages. She was optimistic that the efforts would improve the quality of life of the beneficiaries.