

A contribution to better sight

Over the next three years, Panalpina will be helping the partially sighted in West Africa by contributing 550,000 Swiss francs to a Swiss Red Cross project to combat blindness in Ghana.



Panalpina CEO Bruno Sidler and Daniel Biedermann, Director of the Swiss Red Cross, signing the sponsorship agreement.

Panalpina has been active in West Africa for many years, and we thus have strong links with the region. At the beginning of this year these flourishing local ties led us to support a project launched by the Swiss Red Cross (SRC) as part of the international "right-to-sight" program. The SRC, which is the largest Swiss aid agency, has been active since 1990 in preventing and treating poverty-related blindness, which affects 184,000 people in Ghana. Its activities focus on two regions in particular.

Social responsibility

CHF 1 million will be spent on the project between 2003 and 2005, after which the SRC's Ghanaian partners will take over full responsibility for it. Panalpina is contributing CHF 550,000 to the program. "The important thing is to provide concrete aid for sufferers where they need it," explains Panalpina's CEO Bruno Sidler, adding:

"Every company has a social responsibility. We are discharging ours by supporting this SRC project."

Dr. Maria Hagan, the eye specialist who heads the Ghana health authority's national eye program, gives the following reasons why poverty-related blindness is so prevalent: "More than 80 percent are blind because they suffer from cataracts caused by the widespread trachoma infection that is associated with poor hygiene, or from sight loss due to vitamin A deficiency." And she instantly says how these causes are countered: "Cataracts are treated by a simple operation, while we take preventive measures to combat trachoma and vitamin A deficiency, which affects children in particular."

Prevention, treatment, vision correction

As part of the international "right-to-sight" project, the Red Cross – in conjunction with the health authorities – is focusing on three areas: prevention, treatment, and the manufacture and distribution of corrective aids. The objective is to halve the incidence of poverty-related blindness to 0.5 percent of the population by 2010.

Over 30,000 people have already been treated in 2003, 1,658 of them undergoing operations for cataracts. The first half-year was also used to renovate four eye clinics and to train both Red Cross volunteers and opticians.

Win-win situation

Hagan is happy with activities to date. She points out that every partner contributes: "We cannot achieve our objective of pre-

venting poverty-related blindness without the help of the SRC and donors like Panalpina." Ron Bannerman, the SRC official responsible for Ghana, details the allocation of roles: "Together with the health authorities we concentrate on establishing and expanding eye hospitals, training doctors, nurses, opticians and Red Cross volunteers and setting up optician centers – while Panalpina's financial commitment means that we don't have to worry about where the money will come from." Panalpina's support – Panalpina is concentrating its sponsorship activities on this project – thus enables the SRC to concentrate on the program itself, collaborating with the health authorities to drive it forward. In the final analysis, everybody wins – but above all Ghana's visually impaired, its many sufferers from poverty-related blindness.

Poverty-related blindness

There are over 40 million blind people in the world, and the number is increasing every five seconds. Most of the blind live in the countries of the South. 80 percent of them went blind unnecessarily – as a result, that is, of diseases which can be cured or prevented by simple means. This poverty-related blindness has grave social and economic consequences. For further information, visit www.redcross.ch

