

press release

Standard Chartered launches 5 vision centres, including Mobile eye unit in North East

- *To cover 300,000 people under its Seeing is Believing project in 3 years*

February 08, 2018 – Guwahati, Assam (India): Standard Chartered Bank today announced the opening of five vision centres, including one mobile eye unit, across the states of Assam, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh. This is a part of the bank's Seeing is Believing (SiB) project, a global initiative to tackle avoidable blindness and visual impairment. With this launch, the Bank has taken the total tally of such vision centres across India to 125 across 22 states.

These vision centres are located in Hajo and Suwalkuchi in Kamrup (Rural) Districts, Sarupather (Golaghat District) and in Malbazar (New Jalpaiguri District). The mobile eye unit will be operational in the Namsai District of Arunachal Pradesh.

All these projects will be implemented in collaboration with the Canadian NGO, Operation Eyesight Universal and its partner hospital Sri Sankaradeva Nethralaya (Guwahati - Assam); Chandraprabha Eye Hospital (Jorhat - Assam), Siliguri Greater Lions Eye Hospital (Siliguri – West Bengal) and National Programme for Control of Blindness and Visual Impairment, Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

These new vision centres will act as a hub for implementation of community eye health projects which will include a comprehensive door to door survey by women community eye health workers to identify those suffering from eye problems and provide them appropriate treatment at the base hospitals. Additionally, the launch of a Mobile Eye Unit linked to Namsai District Hospital's Eye Department will bring quality primary eye care services to the low-density population of Namsai District by travelling across the difficult terrains of the region.

Standard Chartered Bank, since 2003, has invested over INR 90 Crores in India towards SiB and has positively impacted over 1.3 crore people. India is one of the most important markets for the Bank's global SiB programme having made a significant and tangible impact in fighting avoidable blindness.

Ms. Karuna Bhatia, Head of Sustainability of Standard Chartered Bank, India, said, "Globally and in India, we are celebrating 15 years of successful completion of SiB project. India, in fact, has delivered the highest number of SiB projects (19) and sight-restoring surgeries (15,19,488) within the entire global network of the Bank. One third of these eye surgeries funded by SiB globally have taken place in India.

Eye-care is a critical component of health care. By building eye-care capacity in the country, we are improving health systems and infrastructure. Through sustained investment and innovation, and by integrating SiB projects within national health systems, we are extending the impact of the programme to many marginalised communities in India," **Ms Bhatia added.**

India has over 1.2 crore blind people, the largest anywhere in the world; however 80% of blindness can be prevented through a simple cataract surgery or a pair of spectacles. The North-Eastern region of India has the highest prevalence of blindness among all regions in the country with over 2% of the entire population suffering from blinding conditions with the remote state of Arunachal Pradesh being the second highest (2.28% according to recent estimates with cataract being the main cause).

Ms Bhatia said, “Through this project, over 100 Government ASHA workers will be trained in primary eye care enabling them to conduct door to door surveys in their respective villages, screen the populace for potentially blinding conditions and conduct eye health awareness sessions leading to increased referrals and surgeries. We anticipate in the next 3 years, over 1,200 surgeries will be performed, whereby reducing the prevalence of blindness in Namsai District to 0.3% (WHO and Vision 2020 India target) and promoting over 40 villages as avoidable blindness free.”

At the end of the three year project, it is anticipated that over 3,00,000 persons will be screened for potentially blinding conditions, over 3,000 will undergo sight-saving surgeries and over 3,200 will receive spectacles in these four districts of these three states covered under the project. *It is also estimated that at the end of the three year project, prevalence of blindness will be reduced from 2.1% to 0.3% (WHO and Vision 2020 India target) and over 200 villages will be declared avoidable blindness free.*

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Note to Editors

Standard Chartered Bank India

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