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Leeds couple to open Congo eye clinic

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OTHER

Henri Samoutou has helped patients in Africa before

Two British medical practitioners are selling up and moving to the Republic of Congo to open an eye hospital.

Joyce Samoutou and her husband Henri are leaving their medical posts in Leeds to open a clinic dealing with cataracts, glaucoma and other eye problems in Africa.

Mrs Samoutou, a GP in Seacroft and Colton, said there was no provision for eye patients in the north east Congo.

Henri Samoutou is an ophthalmic technician with surgical skills.

He is set to leave his post at St James's Hospital in Leeds in the new year.

The couple have raised almost £62,000 of the estimated £100,000 they will need to establish and run the clinic for the first year.

They are hoping to set up a clinic helping patients with eyesight problems in Impfondo, capital of the Likouala Region.

Dr Joyce Samoutou said she had worked at the Leeds practice for three years but she and he husband felt they had to help those with limited medical provision in Africa.

She said: "We found out that Republic of Congo has never had eye centre offering surgery before.

"According to World Health Organisation four out of five people in that region are either blind or visually impaired for avoidable reasons.

"Simple cataract surgery costing about £50 will change lives.

"Imagine you've got an eye problems so life is hard, it's even hard to get to visit a doctor because of either distance or money.

"Yet, with a simple operation these problems can be resolved, but the doctors out there cannot carry out the work and there are no referrals, so we're really passionate about going.

"We have worked in Africa, in Gabon between 2006 and 2008, doing about 1,000 operations a year so we want to go to a another area and help there."

Dr Samoutou said Impfondo was a remote town that only had electricity twice a week for a limited period of time, so solar panels were needed at the clinic.

She added: "We've helped others by restoring sight and therefore giving them their ability to earn a livelihood back, it's really special."

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