

# The UNESCO Chair in Visual Health and Development

## Rendezvous à Paris

### From our beginnings in Paris 2002 to present day Paris 2014

By Janet Leasher, COM representative, Coordinator of the North American Associated Center

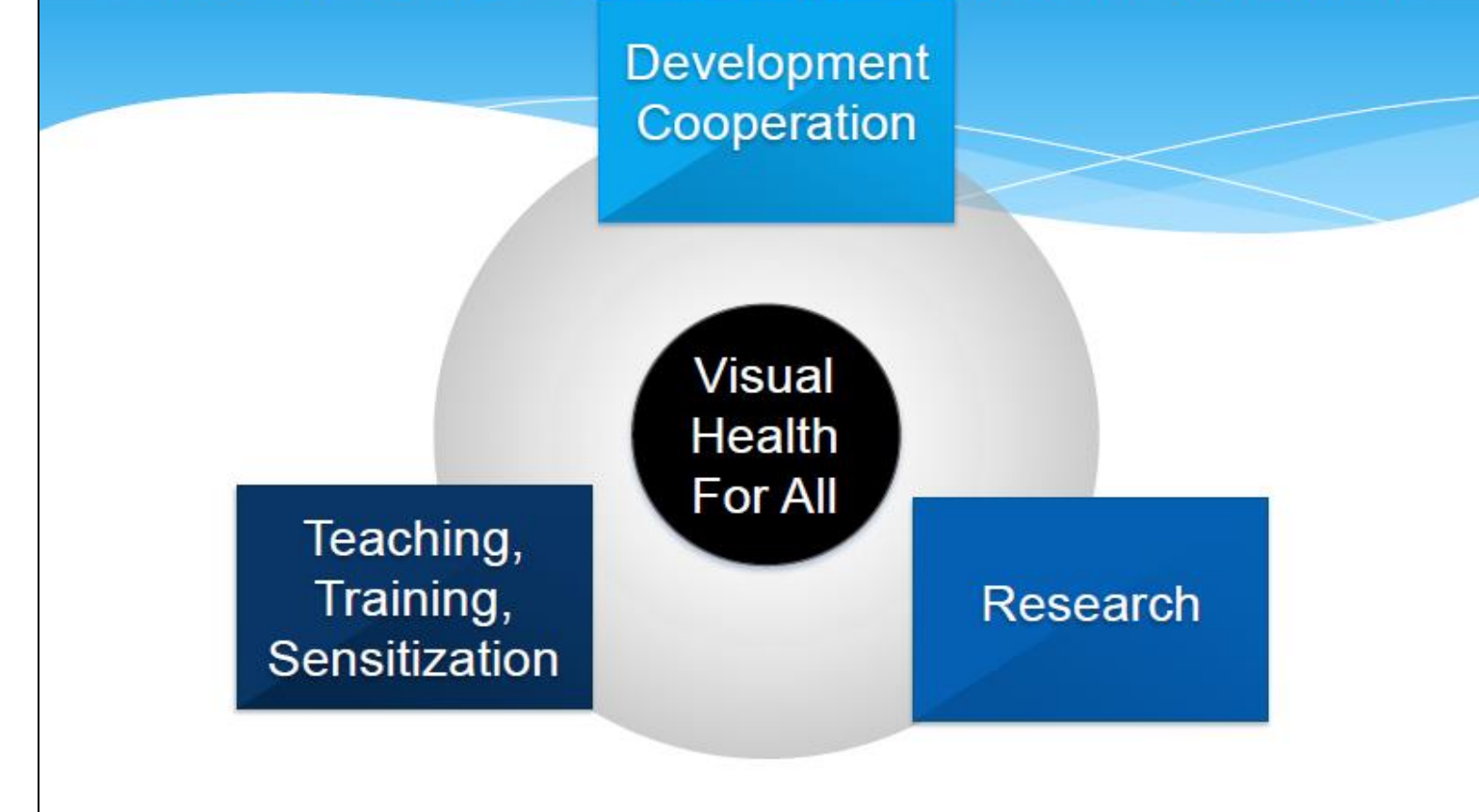


#### History

On March 5th, 2002 the **Polytechnic University of Catalonia** and **UNESCO** signed an agreement here in Paris to establish the **UNESCO Chair in Visual Health and Development**. Co-directors and provocateurs, **Laura Guisasaola** and **Anna Rius** spearhead a dynamic multidisciplinary team with international cooperation expertise in development and how visual health plays its role. Three Associated Centers—North America, Central America and South America— contribute to the ingenuity of the Chair.



Our mission is for all to have access to quality visual health through the action lines of Research, Teaching and Sensitization, and Cooperation for Development.



#### Cross-cutting Themes



#### Achievements and Highlights in a Pictorial Timeline

Congress Visual Health & Development ∞ Training for Trainers Course ∞ Project VERAS ∞ Regional Forums and Workshops ∞ Museum Exhibit: An optical illusion is an optical truth ∞ Children's Book: The Eye Tree ∞ SAVIM Studies in Central (2004, 2009) and South America (2008) ∞ Courses in Cooperation for Development and in Human Rights Approach ∞ World Sight Day Activities ∞ Corporate Social Responsibility Protocols for Visual Health ∞ RAAB El Salvador ∞ Global Burden of Disease Study 2010 ∞ NGO's in Visual Health in Central America: Who are We and What do we do? ∞ UNESCOVISION Global Research Network ∞ IABP Council of Members ∞ WCO ∞ Cine Para Ver -Short Film Festival ∞ Inequalities in Vision Status in Catalonia, Spain and Europe ∞

#### Strengths and Challenges

The strengths of the achievements are grounded in a **broad development perspective** with community driven **all-inclusive human rights**-based methodologies with a firm commitment to **sustainable** human development following the tenets of UNESCO.

University-based associated centers are led by forward-thinking inter-professional women with training in population health and public health who challenge the status quo

The core evidence basis of any action fostered the situational analyses of the State of Visual Health in the World (SAVIM) protocol, and by welcoming stakeholders in the evaluation and project development and implementation phase. This resulted in a creative and extensive coalitions bridging barriers and forming powerful partnerships and successful outcomes.

The team has surmounted **challenges** of discrimination being from the 'north', being women, being optometrists, and thinking beyond vertical or clinical solutions. Most recently, with the economic crisis and recession, financial reductions have almost crippled the large scale projects anticipated. We addressed these issues in a think-tank forum entitled *Cooperation in times of Crisis*, and while we have had to put a hold on many planned projects, we resolve to continue.

#### Cooperation for the Future

The **UNESCO Chair in Visual Health and Development** stands firmly in the belief that the prize is quality visual health for all. The **promotion of visual health** is our main tenet. This includes the prevention of visual impairment; but the determinants of visual impairment must be interrupted to eliminate avoidable blindness. For all persons who live with visual impairment, our agenda must prioritize equity through elucidating and eliminating inequalities in quality of life and development.

The Chair has been honored to be accepted as a member of the IAPB since 2007. We are a comparatively smaller organization, with fewer individuals, than other member organizations, yet we believe we leverage our strengths to effect change with limited resources.

We welcome the opportunity to partner with you if our expertise, mission and universal themes and philosophies match yours. Contact us!

