

# Focus

Your magazine from  Sightsavers **Autumn 2023**



**Together we're changing lives**

Find out how you helped Shamima and her daughter, Toha, smile again!



# Celebrating three major triumphs!

## Just look at the difference you're making

Half a century ago, we started working in Bangladesh with our partners and local communities. We wanted to help prevent avoidable blindness and ensure people who have disabilities or are from vulnerable communities enjoy the same rights as everyone else.

Today, millions of people like Shamima (featured on the cover) can access free eye care and have equal opportunities to thrive. We couldn't have done it without you, our wonderful sight savers, and on pages 8 and 9 you can see how much has been achieved, and what we're still determined to do.

Not only that! After many years of hard work and collaboration, Mali and Benin have become the latest countries to eliminate trachoma – adding two more historic successes to our map (opposite). I hope you're proud of what you're helping to achieve, and that you enjoy the special, heartfelt message on pages 4 and 5 from our country director for Mali, Dr Boubacar Morou Dicko.



My very best wishes,

*Ella Pierce*

Ella Pierce  
Global Director  
of Fundraising

## In this issue...

4 **A message of hope**  
Mali and Benin  
beat trachoma



© Sightsavers/Reza Shahriar Rahman

6 **Happy 50th anniversary**  
Sight saving  
success in  
Bangladesh



© Sightsavers/Malumbo Simwaka

10 **Leaving no child behind**  
Inclusive education  
in Malawi

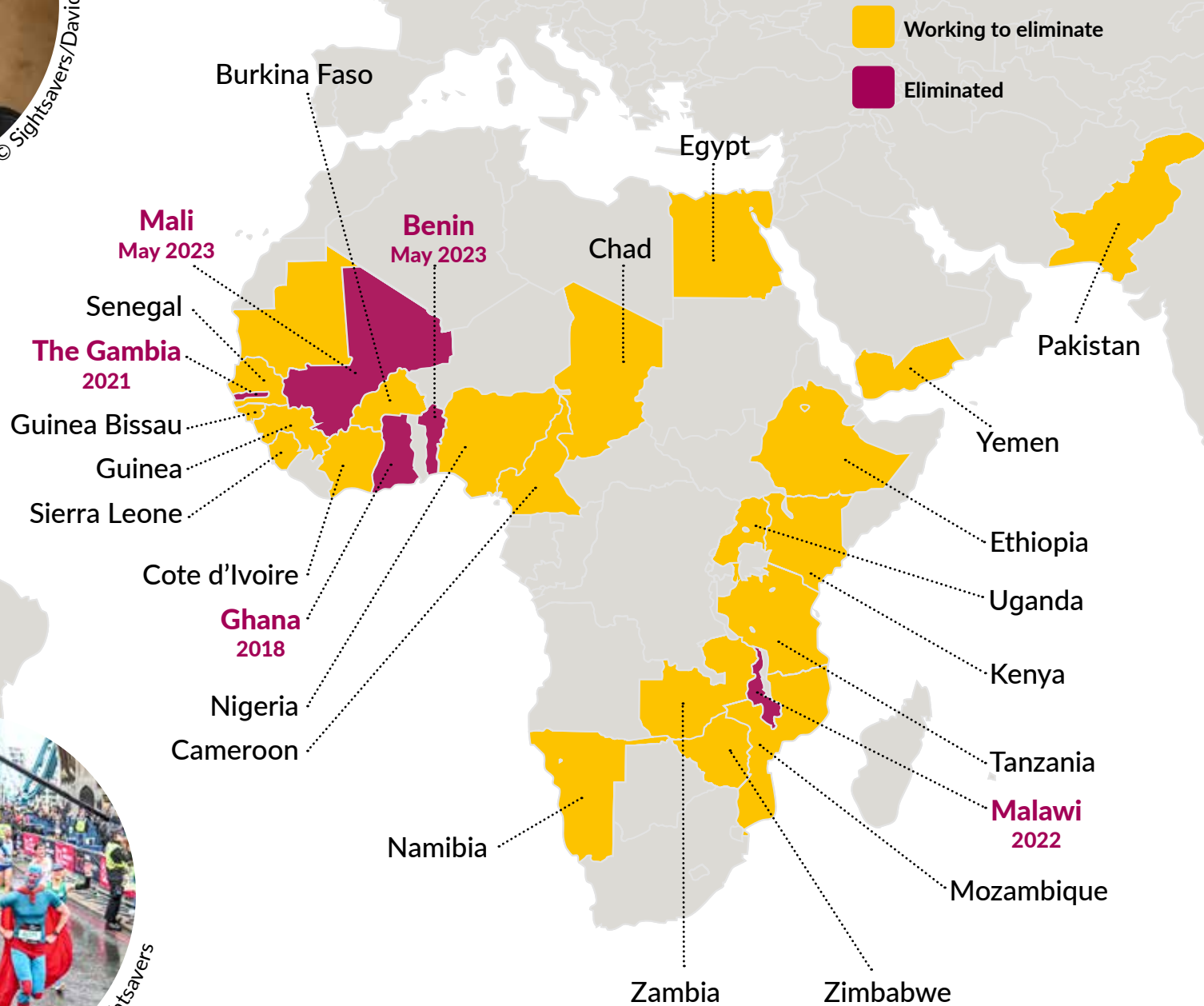
12 **Simply the best**  
Your latest  
fundraising feats



© Sightsavers

## Wiping trachoma off the map

Day by day, step by step, we're striving hard to eliminate trachoma in the countries where we work – together with governments, our partners, and the eye health teams and community volunteers you so generously support. Mali and Benin's historic milestones bring us closer to our goal. but we can't be complacent. The map below shows where we've already helped eliminate trachoma and where our efforts are still focussed, backed by amazing people like you.





# A message of hope

## Our country director for Mali, Dr Boubacar Morou Dicko, explains what winning against trachoma has involved

We have a saying in Mali – ‘Dôni-Dôni te-tô-to kola’. It means that if we do something every day, we can conquer any challenge. And this is especially true when it comes to tackling trachoma.

Mali’s vast size and the huge number of people needing treatment were both major hurdles, as were conflict and political unrest. Thankfully, the World Health Organization’s SAFE strategy (surgery, antibiotics, facial cleanliness and environmental improvements) gave us the tools we needed to work effectively with our partners.

Sometimes we had to think outside the box. Many people live in remote areas, far from towns and cities. Instead of sending health workers hundreds of miles to treat them, we trained local volunteers to distribute antibiotics in their communities. This community-led

approach was first trialled in Mali in the 1990s and has worked so well that it’s now being used across Africa.

Sadly, the central and northern parts of Mali have been hit by conflict over the last two decades. To keep health workers safe, we therefore identified ‘safe zones’ where people could travel for a trichiasis operation, and we reimbursed their transport costs.

Mali’s story shows that with a can-do attitude, and the right support, we can eliminate this blinding disease. You’ve helped us on our journey, and I can’t thank you enough. With your continued support and generosity, Sightsavers can keep fighting to beat trachoma – a fight we can and must win.

*Dr Boubacar Morou Dicko*

Dr Boubacar Morou Dicko

In Mali, volunteers were trained to distribute medication for trachoma in rural areas, ensuring no one was left behind



© Helen Keller Intl

## Double victory!

Teams in both Mali and Benin have worked hard to reach and treat people for trachoma, ensuring no one is left behind. Just take a look!

- **29.1 million** doses of antibiotics distributed, and 136,671 latrines built in Mali to prevent trachoma infection spreading
- **243 surgeons** trained in Mali to carry out trichiasis surgery
- **1.2 million** households across 26 districts in Benin reached with WHO facial cleanliness and good hygiene practices
- **771** cases of trichiasis (advanced trachoma) managed and 682 surgeries performed in Benin



Both photos: © Sightsavers/David Gnaha



## “It’s a big feeling of joy”

**In Benin, Adou can tend his farm again, following his sight-saving trichiasis operation**

Adou (left and above) lives in Borgou, and farming is what he knows best. “I used to farm a lot,” he says. “Look at my hands. See how they are.” But trachoma threatened to take away his livelihood and independence.

“It started with a reduction in sight,” explains Adou. “My eyes felt like there were grains of sand in them. I used to be able to weed 30 to 40 furrows a day. Now, I can’t do it anymore. So I have to ask the children to help.”

Thanks to the help of supporters like you, Adou received his trichiasis operation, freeing him from pain and the risk of blindness. “I feel much better,” he says. “There is no more pain.”

**“If you can’t see, how are you going to work to feed your family?”**

Adou



# Happy 50th anniversary!

## We're celebrating 50 years of eye health and inclusion in Bangladesh, helped by our partners and you, our supporters

Since 1973, Sightsavers and our partners have been helping to prevent avoidable blindness, strengthen eye health services and create a more inclusive society in Bangladesh.

Our work is far ranging, and includes screening people for eye problems, providing sight tests to check for refractive errors, and supporting sight restoring cataract operations. We also help train community health workers and run inclusive programmes such as Equal Bangladesh and Right to Health, to make sure people who have disabilities or live in vulnerable communities have equal access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. None of this would be possible without amazing supporters like you.

Together, we're helping to improve the health and wellbeing of millions of people such as Shamima, who you can meet overleaf. With your support, we'll continue to push the boundaries of what's possible and explore new ways to improve eye health and disability inclusion, leaving no one behind.

### 1980s

Our eye health interventions and community eye camp surgeries continue, and we begin our first community-based Disability Inclusion programmes and education programme for the blind.



### 1970

In 1973, we begin working to help tackle the high prevalence of avoidable blindness and a lack of access to eye care services. With local partners, we quickly establish eye care centres, train staff and provide equipment and supplies to reach those in need.



### 1990s

Thousands of children and adults have their sight restored through our Modular Eye Health programme. In 1997, we help fund the first-ever ophthalmic microsurgery training programme in Bangladesh.

### 2000s

In 2003, we begin our Seeing is Believing project. Over 17 years it reaches millions of people through screenings, distributing glasses, providing cataract operations and training health workers.



### 2010s

We work in collaboration with the Bangladesh government to publish the country's first National Blindness and Low Vision Survey. In 2018, with the help of UK Aid Match, we launch the Right to Health project (see Shamima's story overleaf). Our Social Inclusion programmes begin.



### 2020s so far

We start promoting inclusive education for children with disabilities and work with our partners to transform education systems. In 2022, we reach a milestone of more than two million eye surgeries in Bangladesh! In May 2023, our Equal Bangladesh campaign launches, see right.



## Equal Bangladesh

**'Don't wait for change to happen – be the change!' That's the inspirational message behind our crucial campaign**

We believe that everyone should have the right to go to school, find a job, have equal access to health care and take part fully in society. Yet despite these rights being upheld in law, people with disabilities are often denied them because of stigma and discrimination. Sightsavers' Equal Bangladesh campaign seeks to change this.

Launched in May, our campaign is in partnership with 20 organisations for people with disabilities and a number of civil society organisations. Together, we're pushing for the proper implementation of laws that protect and enhance the rights of people with disabilities in Bangladesh.

### Take action for change

Join our campaign for disability rights and help ensure equality for all. To find out more visit: **campaigning.sightsavers.org/take-action**





# Seeing and thriving

## Shamima received sight-saving cataract surgery through our Right to Health project in Bangladesh

“Those of you who cannot see properly, who cannot see distance, I am saying to you, please come quickly!” Mokhter’s voice boomed out of a huge green megaphone on top of a motorised tuk-tuk travelling slowly through Shamima’s village. Her older sister Munina heard it and rushed home to share the good news that would change Shamima’s life!

Shamima has hearing and speech difficulties. To communicate, her loving family devised their own form of sign language, using touch, gestures, and facial expressions. Even Shamima’s one-year-old daughter, Toha, learned to use it. But Shamima’s sight was gradually deteriorating, making it much harder to interact. Mokhter’s message offered new hope – the chance to have free screening at a local eye camp.

Shamima visited the eye camp where she was diagnosed with cataracts. She was referred to hospital for surgery, with all treatment and travel costs covered. Two days later Shamima was back home – her sight restored!



Shamima with her family, including her older sister Munina (right)

Life is so much better now. Shamima is much more independent and looking after Toha is far easier. She can also enjoy hobbies such as making children’s clothes. Not only that, as word has spread about her operation the ripple effect has been amazing, with more family, friends and neighbours seeking help for their own eye issues.

### Give a gift that lasts a lifetime

Shamima’s inspiring story shows how straightforward cataract surgery can change everything for a person and benefit their family too.

**By leaving a gift to Sightsavers in your will, you’ll help us reach more people with disabilities who might otherwise miss out – restoring their sight, their lives and their futures.**

To find out more about this special way of giving, visit: [www.sightsavers.org/legacy](http://www.sightsavers.org/legacy)



Tuk-tuk health broadcasts are part of Sightsavers’ drive to get more people attending local eye camps

### Right to Health Bangladesh in numbers

- 1,838 screening camps
- 877,919 people examined
- 47,569 cataract surgeries performed
- 508,405 non-surgical treatments administered
- 1,802 health workers trained on inclusive primary eye care, gender and disability inclusion

Shamima holds up a pair of children’s trousers she made. A hobby she can enjoy again following cataract surgery



### Eye health for all

Supported by UK Aid Match, Right to Health ran from 2018 to 2022, and focused on restoring sight and making health services accessible for people with disabilities and marginalised communities in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Today, we’re continuing our efforts, helped by amazing supporters like you.







Maytina makes sure the children she cares for learn their Abc's and numbers and are prepared for the transition to primary school

# Leaving no child behind

In Malawi, you're helping children with disabilities get off to a great start in education



Of the 61 million children missing out on primary school globally, at least one in three has a disability. Yet being able to learn, play and develop alongside their peers is vitally important in helping to improve wellbeing and foster the self-confidence and life skills that enable children with disabilities to fully take part in society.

Through our Inclusive Early Childhood Development Education project, Sightsavers and our partners are showing the difference inclusive education can make to pre-school children such as Theresa (far right). Together, we're supporting more than 40 community childcare centres in the Chikwawa and Ntcheu districts of southern Malawi.

We're also training committed volunteer pre-school teachers, called 'caregivers', such as Maytina Thembachako.

"Before my training, I didn't know how we could integrate abled and disabled students," says Maytina. "But afterwards it was a very easy task for me."

Nutrition is vital to a child's development, and many centres set up school gardens to grow cereal crops for porridge. At Maytina's centre, parents were also given goats, so they could fertilise their fields with the manure and earn more from their crops. And every child was health screened, with those needing medical care, physiotherapy or other support being referred for free treatment.

The results have been incredible. Not only are more children with disabilities going to school, but we're seeing a positive change in people's attitudes towards their capabilities and potential. **We're working hard to ensure that this, and other inclusive education projects continue, and we're extremely grateful for your support.**

Photos: © Sightsavers/Malumbo Simwaka



**"Inclusive Education training is about treating all children equally, so they all have the opportunity for quality learning, whether they are disabled or abled"**

Maytina



© Sightsavers/Jason J Mulikita

## The chance to blossom

After just four months at her local childcare centre, Theresa could walk and recite the alphabet.

A nasty attack of malaria when she was a baby sparked a range of health problems that affected Theresa, and before attending her local childcare centre she hardly said a thing. Today she's like a different child – much to the delight of her great-grandmother, Beatrice.

"We believe that Theresa attending the centre helped her start walking," Beatrice told us. "Theresa has been going to hospital ever since she was young, but she was not able to walk until now."

Seeing Theresa's transformation has made the whole family more hopeful about her future, and Beatrice has also noticed a change in people's attitudes towards children with disabilities.

"They [the committee] have managed to sensitise the people in the village about how good it is to have those kids in school," she said. "The attitude of the community has changed a bit – they're now looking at disability as something they can live with, and that people with a disability can also go to school."



# Simply the best!

**A huge thank you to all the amazing supporters who went the extra mile to save sight and change lives**

Avid sight savers **Ben and Mat Molyneux** have raised thousands to help others. In April, the two brothers repeated their London Marathon success of 2021, raising a fantastic **£6,283** between them and bringing their marathon total so far to over **£11,590**.

Ben, who has supported Sightsavers since 2000, was also awarded a Guinness World Record for the fastest marathon dressed as a male Lucha libre wrestler! Congratulations to you both and we really appreciate your support.

**“There is no charity with a better outcome for every pound donated. The effect on people’s lives is incalculable”**

**Ben Molyneux**



In another intrepid endeavour, Helen O'Connor completed the AJ Bell Great Manchester run – her first half marathon – and raised a generous **£727**. Thank you Helen, that's a really great achievement.

**Matt Pereira** was another London Marathon marvel for Sightsavers, raising a brilliant **£5,309**. Matt's grandparents have supported us for many years and Matt ran in memory of his grandfather, Alan, who sadly passed away. We know he'd be proud of you Matt, and we can't thank you enough for your kindness.



## Choose your fundraising feat

We're grateful to all our team Sightsavers runners – and to everyone who raises money to help prevent blindness and create brighter futures. If you'd like to take part in an event we'd love to hear from you, just email [events@sightsavers.org](mailto:events@sightsavers.org) – and you'll find lots of ideas for supporting our work at [www.sightsavers.org/fundraise](http://www.sightsavers.org/fundraise)