

Focus

Your magazine from  Sightsavers Spring 2024

Sharing the joy

You've helped free more children like Lanoi from blinding trachoma and we can't thank you enough

New year, new hope

Welcome to your first issue of Focus for 2024 and get ready to be inspired! In these uncertain and often difficult times, you are saving sight, transforming people's lives, and supporting the changes we need to build a fairer, more equal world.

One of the things I love most about Sightsavers is that it empowers people. Whether it's a person having their sight restored through cataract surgery, a community being freed from blinding trachoma, or a student seeing the chalkboard at school after receiving a free pair of glasses. The results are amazing to see and, in my view, this is what sustainability is all about.

Sightsavers focuses on the human being, irrespective of their gender, their race, or their disability. I think that's a very important thing. You'll find lots of examples inside your magazine, and I hope you'll keep giving us your wonderful support. Thank you.

My very best wishes,



Fatoumata Diouf
Sightsavers
Regional Director
for West Africa



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Goodbye trachoma!

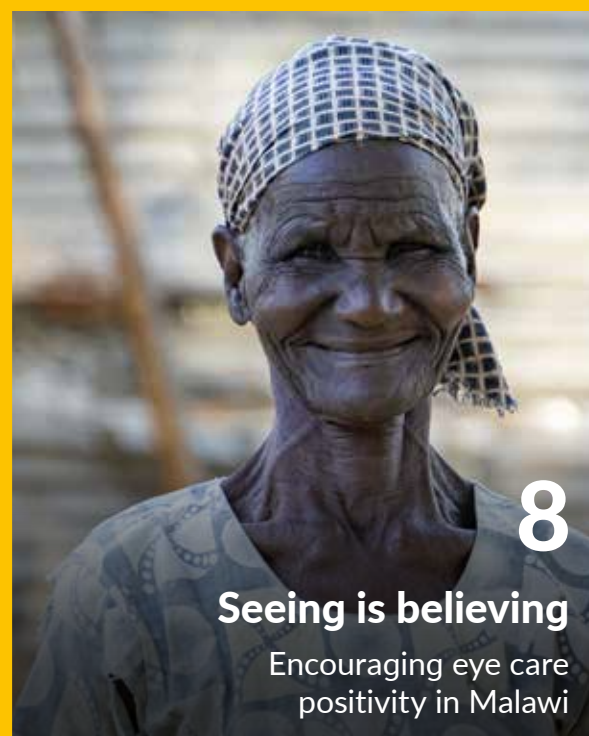
Together we can free Kenya from trachoma



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Driving positive change

You're supporting the most vulnerable people in society to have their voices heard as they fight for a fairer, safer and more inclusive world.

Calling for action

A huge thank you to everyone who joined our #PromiseInPeril petition, calling for world leaders to honour their Sustainable Development Goals

Adopted in 2015 by UN member states, the Sustainable Development Goals set ambitious, wide-ranging targets to end poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. Through #PromiseInPeril we called for stronger action to ensure no one is left behind, and over 48,000 supporters from 121 countries joined the fight.

If you'd like to support our latest campaign and keep up the momentum, please visit www.sightsavers.org/campaigns where you can find out more.

Raising awareness

A new Netflix film about Sightsavers' campaign ambassador John Chiti aims to change the way people think about albinism



© Sightsavers/Jason J Mulikitta

John, who's from Zambia, is an ambassador for the campaign to ratify the African Disability Protocol, which is part of our wider Equal World campaign that fights for disability rights. The film, **Can You See Us?** is based on his life, and it shows the high levels of alienation and social stigma people with albinism face across Africa. Sadly, many people are forced to stay in hiding because the threat of extreme violence is so great.

John hopes the film, which began streaming in August, will help raise awareness and prompt African governments to take action to enact the protocol, which expressly recognises the challenges people with albinism face. In total, 15 ratifications are needed for the legislation to become law across Africa, and eight countries have already taken this step.

Watch the thought-provoking **Can You See Us?** film on Netflix now!



Lanoi (right), with her mum, Mesikana (standing), little sister, Teresian, and uncle, Sayianka, outside their home

Goodbye trachoma!

Together, we can beat this painful, blinding disease – and we’ve got our sights set on Kenya



Joel hands Lanoi’s antibiotics to Mesikana

It’s the world’s leading infectious cause of blindness, and it’s caused pain and misery for countless generations. But, thanks to supporters like you, five of the countries where Sightsavers works have already eliminated trachoma. We’re hoping Kenya could be one of the next.

“I love my job and it gives me a lot of emotional satisfaction,” says Dr Maurice Abony, surgeon and Sightsavers’ Programme Manager for trachoma in Kenya. “You go to a community where people are on the verge of going blind from trichiasis [advanced trachoma]. But by carrying out a 20-minute surgical procedure you can reverse the whole scenario.”

Since our work in Kenya started, we’ve supported mass drug administrations to treat children and adults with trachoma and protect whole communities. Dr Abony and his fellow surgeons have performed countless operations to correct people’s in-turned eyelids, a painful and potentially blinding symptom of trichiasis. Working tirelessly beside them are amazing community health volunteers like Joel, who distribute antibiotics, help identify people needing surgery, and raise awareness about the importance of washing hands and faces to stop the disease from spreading.



Dr Abony is passionate about saving people’s sight

© Sightsavers/Tommy Trenchard

Seeing Lanoi smile

Her smile says it all. Four-year-old Lanoi no longer has trachoma, and she can enjoy her childhood again!



Photos: © Sightsavers/Sam Otieno

Lanoi desperately needed help when our team found her. With her sore eyes streaming she was in a lot of pain, like many children and adults in her village. Concerned about her daughter, Lanoi’s mum, Mesikana, had been washing Lanoi’s eyes with clean water. But the infection wouldn’t go away. Thankfully, Joel identified the problem and arranged for Dr Abony to come and examine the whole community.

When Dr Abony arrived, the children lined up and waited patiently as, one by one, he gently examined their eyes. Joel then measured each child with a dosage pole to determine the correct level of medication and handed out antibiotics. Dr Abony also told their families about the need to continue treatment and wash hands and faces regularly to prevent the disease from returning.

A few days later, Lanoi’s eyes were clear, and her infection was gone. And the whole community is now better informed about trachoma. “I am now aware that you can think it’s a small eye problem, but if you neglect it, it can lead to blindness,” explained Lanoi’s uncle, Sayianka. “I will advise other parents whose children have similar conditions that they need to make sure they clean their children’s eyes and get the right medication.”

SHIP sails ahead

Thanks to supporters like you, our innovative school eye health programme is transforming children's lives in Pakistan

SHIP stands for School Health Integrated Programming and it's taking eye health into classrooms – ensuring children with visual impairments are identified and receive the help they need.

Through SHIP, teachers are trained to screen their students for a range of refractive errors and eye conditions, including short and long-sightedness and cataracts. They refer any students with vision problems to mobile optometric technicians, who provide free glasses to those who need them, carry out further tests and arrange treatments such as cataract surgery.

We launched SHIP in Pakistan in 2018 and, so far, we've screened more than 107,300 children. Zahra is one of them.



Zahra with her family, including her mother, Zahida (far right)



“I would encourage all the girls who have weak eyesight to wear glasses, because if this issue is left unattended our eyesight will deteriorate”

Zahra



Embracing every moment

With her eyesight problem corrected, Zahra is now thriving at school and can do all the things she loves

Zahra is 14 years old and lives in Islamabad with her family. She enjoys baking, painting, going to school and helping at home. But she's been through a lot.

Around two years ago, Zahra began having eye issues and headaches. The doctor prescribed eye drops. But then her father sadly died, and life became very difficult.

“Everything stopped,” said Zahra's mother, Zahida. “Our restaurant business closed, then Zahra's grandmother died and one of her uncles developed kidney failure.”

Both parents had been determined their daughters would gain an education. “It was my husband's biggest dream, and I will dedicate my life to this cause,” says Zahida. But with the family under so much pressure, Zahra kept quiet about her worsening eyesight and struggled on at school. Despite her efforts, she



fell behind in lessons and her grades suffered badly, making her frustrated and tearful. Then, her teacher told her about SHIP, and it changed everything.

After having her eyes examined, Zahra was given glasses to wear. There can be stigma about girls wearing glasses in Pakistan, but Zahra's classmates all gave her a positive response, and boosted her confidence.

“My friends told me that the glasses looked good on my face,” says Zahra. “Before, I used to ask them to help me. Now I can see the chalkboard clearly. My glasses have been a very positive addition to my life.”

Seeing is believing

Our eye screening camps in Malawi are saving sight and creating a huge ripple of positivity towards eye health

Overjoyed at having his sight restored by cataract surgery, Wilson (below) has become an advocate for eye health in Chikwawa, Malawi – sharing his story with neighbours and encouraging them to get treatment.



"I became a programme ambassador because when I saw the goodness that had been done, I didn't want to keep it to myself," he told us.

One of those neighbours was Alice, who also had cataracts, but who had heard frightening stories about surgery. "People said that when you go into theatre your eyes will stop seeing, and you will never see again," she explained. "I was afraid, but Wilson reassured me."

False beliefs about medical treatment can be common in rural communities. But by talking about their own positive experiences, people like Wilson are helping to dispel the fears.

Rose Mbwinja (below right) is spreading the word too. One of the interpersonal communicators we support, she walks door to door, telling people when the eye camp is visiting and urging them to go. Run by optometrist George Richard and ophthalmic officer Rex Bwanausi, the camp is always very popular.



Rex carefully examines a patient's eye at one of the screening camps

"Mr Bwanausi does a commendable job in our area," Rose explains. "To the point that if you just say 'Mr Bwanausi is coming' it is like a president is coming. You will find that a hundred and more people will gather."

Rex and George (right) spend the day carefully examining people's eyes and talking to them about their eye conditions. They provide medicine for minor conditions and refer those with cataracts for surgery. Examining so many people is a long and arduous task, but it's something the two men do with patience, warmth, and efficiency – inspiring trust and confidence.



With her sight restored after cataract surgery, Alice and her son, Lino, beam at each other in delight



Photos: © Sightsavers/Bennie Khanyizira/Homeline Media Malawi



Help support our amazing teams

Rex, George, Wilson, Rose and many others like them are showing that cataracts and other eye conditions can be treated. People's sight can be saved and restored. If you'd like to send an extra gift to help us, we'd be really grateful. Thank you.



Photos: © Sightsavers



Eye health hero

In Sierra Leone, Dr Jalikatu Mustapha is championing women's eye care and better access to eye health services

Dr Jalikatu is currently the only female ophthalmologist in Sierra Leone and has recently been appointed as the country's Deputy Health Minister. As we near International Women's Day on 7 March, we're paying tribute to this remarkable woman – and to everyone fighting for fairness and inclusion.

"In Sierra Leone, accessing eye health services has always been more difficult for women than for men," explains Dr Jalikatu. "It's one of the areas I'm passionate about, and we're now targeting women more with health campaigns."

"We're offering free outreach services for women and girls in particular, to get them to come to the hospital. And one of the ways that Sightsavers helps is by subsidising the cost of surgery or treatment."

In 2020, Dr Jalikatu became manager of Sierra Leone's national eyecare programme. She also received an Eye Health Hero award from the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) in recognition of her work.

Now, as Deputy Health Minister she has an even bigger opportunity to continue transforming the country's eye health.

"I really look forward to continuing working with you all to take eye health and health care forward. Eye health remains a top priority for me, and I would like to lead the ministry's efforts in this area. I hope this leadership position gives me a better platform to advocate for eye health. I am really excited, and I can't wait to see all we can do."

"People were coming who were completely blind and didn't have the will to live. And then the next day, the transformation after just a 15-minute operation was more than anything I'd ever seen. They were completely different. They had regained their independence. And that was what inspired me to go into ophthalmology"

Dr Jalikatu

Inspiring change

You're helping to highlight Sightsavers' work to break down the barriers women with disabilities face

We're passionate about social inclusion for all, ensuring everyone, regardless of disability or gender, has access to education, health and livelihood opportunities. But across the world, women and girls face inequalities that increase their risk of disease, low pay, domestic and sexual violence and other issues.

These inequalities are compounded for women with disabilities. That's why at the 2023 Women Deliver conference in Rwanda, we called for action to ensure they aren't forgotten when it comes to women's rights. Our stand featured some of the amazing women who have overcome stigma and negative attitudes to define their own place in society. Abia Akram is one of them.

"I am a woman with disabilities and I am proud of who I am"

"People always judge from physical appearances," says Abia at the start of her TEDx talk. "In the 33 years of my life I've always had the same question – 'what's wrong with you?'"



Photos: © Sightsavers/Abia Akram



But rather than let comments like this hold her back, Abia has become instrumental in leading the disability youth and women's movement in Pakistan and the wider Asia-Pacific region. She's the leader or member of multiple international organisations, is on Sightsavers' Board of Trustees and is an ambassador for our Equal World campaign.

At the Sustainable Development Goals Summit last September, Abia represented Equal World and took part in a civil society dialogue session with the UN Secretary-General. She presented him with our #PromiseInPeril petition, putting disability inclusion clearly on the agenda at this crucial global event.

"In some countries we are seeing hope," says Abia. "We are seeing the leadership role of women and girls with disability and it's really creating positive change."

Defying discrimination

You can read more about the inspirational women featured on our stand, and see Abia's TEDx talk at www.sightsavers.org/womendeliver

Epic fundraising feats

When it comes to helping tackle avoidable blindness and transforming lives, there's no stopping you!

Courtesy of Geoff Woodward



Geoff's Everest endeavour

Intrepid Geoff Woodward joined his pal Steve on an epic 15-day trek to Everest base camp and beyond

Together with friends, family members and expert guides, Geoff and Steve hiked for five to eight hours each day in sub-zero temperatures and raised a magnificent **£2,030** to help others.

"This was one hell of a physical challenge for me, being a previously inactive pensioner," says Geoff. "And I did suffer from altitude sickness. But my sponsors kept me going."

Team Tuk Tuk's triumph

Our intrepid team of fundraisers drove 2,000 miles from Malvern to Marrakesh in a four-seater Tuk Tuk

Husband and wife Paul and Debbie Morrissey and friends Andrew Coles and Bobby Whatley began their Marrakesh Express mission last April. Taking it in turns to drive the Tuk Tuk, they travelled from Malvern to North Africa via Spain. There were a few adventures and near disasters along the way, including a lost passport and front tyre puncture!

Together, team Tuk Tuk raised an outstanding **£10,352** through crowdfunding. Their efforts were phenomenal, and we can't thank them enough.

Courtesy of Andrew Coles



Courtesy of Anna White

Peter's big jump

In September, plucky Peter White (alias James Bond) dived from the skies in his own daring charity skyfall

Peter soared a breath-taking 13,000 feet above Beccles Airfield before bravely jumping out of the plane and gliding down. With the help of his instructor, he made the perfect landing, and raised a sky-high **£657** for Sightsavers.

Ready to make a difference?

We're extremely grateful to every single person who raises money to support our work, and there are lots of different ways you can be involved. Find out more and start planning your own fundraising adventure at www.sightsavers.org/fundraise