

Focus

Your magazine from  Sightsavers Autumn 2024

Achieving our vision

You're helping to support and strengthen eye health in all the countries where we work

Saving sight, transforming lives

Welcome to your autumn issue of Focus, which highlights how your support is helping to improve people's eye health – central to what Sightsavers is all about.

Blindness doesn't just affect the person who has lost their sight. It has a ripple effect, which impacts families, communities and national economies too.

In the countries where we work, parents or relatives with sight loss can often depend on the children of the family to care for them – reducing the children's chances of an education. And in some areas, blindness or disability can be seen as a curse or punishment – so people who are blind or the parents of children who are blind may face discrimination from their communities.

With your help, we're working to change things and, as you turn the pages, you'll see just some of the many ways in which your amazing support is transforming the lives of people such as Nyangan, Shawon, Akai and Ruth. Thank you for being there for them – and for us. You really are making a difference.



My very best wishes,

Ella Pierce

Ella Pierce
Global Director
of Fundraising



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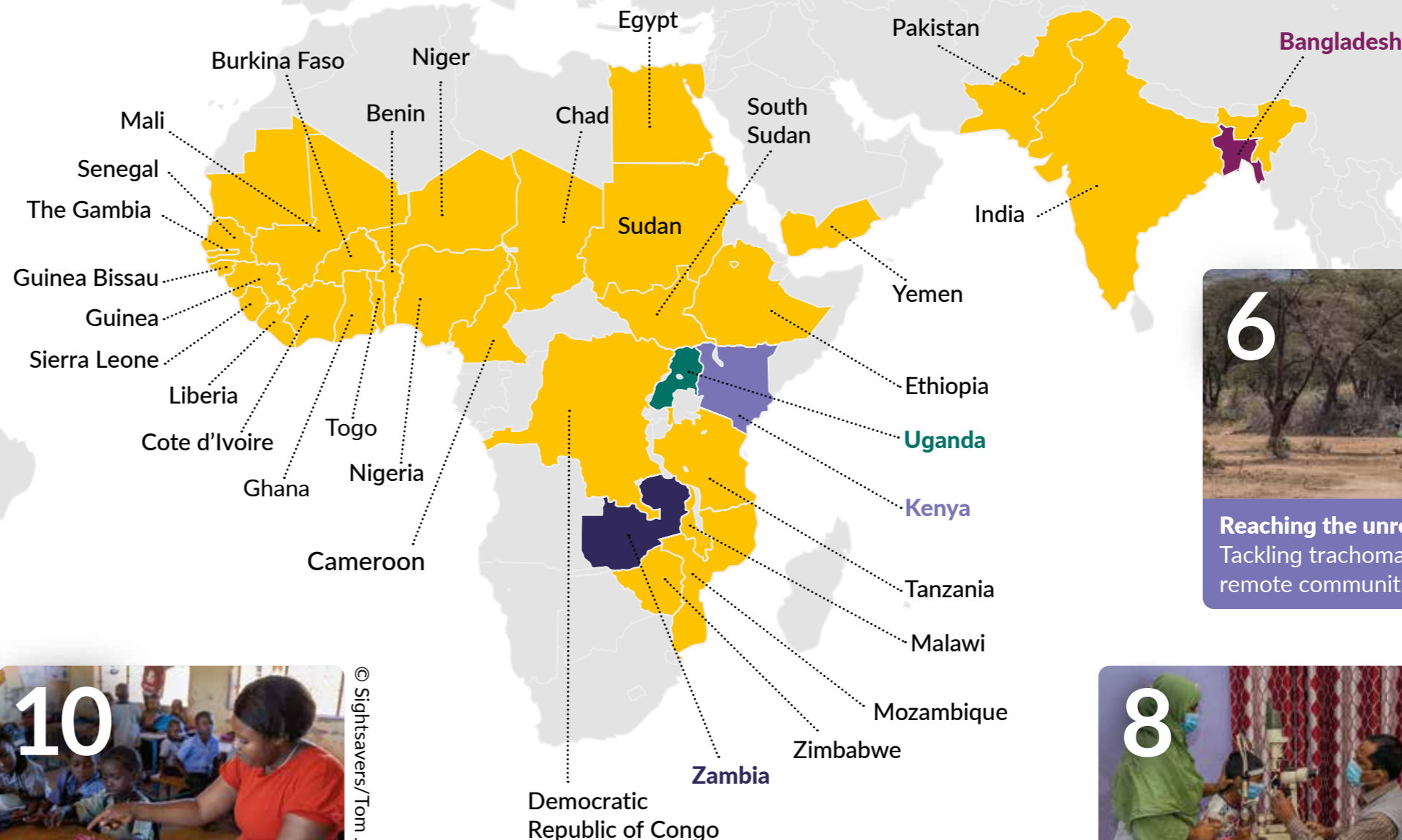


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Creating equal chances Helping children learn and thrive together

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Putting eye health on the map

Sightsavers' first eye health programmes started in the 1950s in Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Nigeria. Today, we work with our partners and local communities in more than 30 countries worldwide – helped by amazing supporters like you. Last year alone, we delivered eye health solutions to almost 920,000 people in 12 countries; carried out 10 million eye examinations; performed more than half a million eye operations and dispensed over 900,000 pairs of glasses.



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In the three years of the project, Dr Gladys and the local eye health team covered 27,000 km, carried out 58,336 eye examinations, and performed more than 3,400 cataract operations.



Photos: © Sightsavers/Martin Kharumwa

Championing change

In Uganda, you're helping to protect people's sight and build a strong, sustainable eye care system for everyone

As the first ophthalmologist in Karamoja, Uganda, Dr Gladys Atto has been part of a three-year eye health project supported by Sightsavers, our partners and the UK government through UK Aid Match. The results have been transformational.

"A lot has to be done to improve eye care in Uganda," says Dr Gladys. "If Sightsavers had not supplied me with everything that I use for surgery and for diagnosis, I would be a very redundant ophthalmologist here."

The project, which began in 2020, reached out to those who traditionally face barriers, such as people who are older or have disabilities, nomadic, hard-to-reach communities, and women and girls. "We gave health talks over the radio to make information available to people," explains Dr Gladys. "And for those who could not come to us, we made sure that

we went and visited them, and picked them up and brought them to the hospital."

Although the project has now ended, this outward-reaching approach continues, and is having a ripple effect across Karamoja. As word spreads about the free eye care that's available, more people are actively seeking help, and Dr Gladys now has much better facilities in which to treat them.

"We had a very small eye unit when I arrived, and there was no air-conditioning," says Dr Gladys. "It was very hot, and after [cataract] surgery, our patients had nowhere to sleep, so we had to admit them onto the medical surgery wards. Now, we have a new, well-equipped eye unit and a spacious theatre where we can ensure infection prevention and control. This is what any ophthalmologist would want."



Nyangan, pictured with two of her grandchildren

Nyangan's new start

As her cataracts worsened and her vision faded, Nyangan struggled to care for herself. Until surgery restored her sight and her independence.

Nyangan used to tend her own and other people's gardens, thatch roofs and collect firewood. But cataracts brought an end to her activities. "It gave me a lot of challenges," says Nyangan, talking about her failing sight.

"I couldn't even find a door if I wanted to get out of the house. I couldn't go anywhere."

Nyangan struggled on, not knowing where to turn, until she learned that free help was available at a Sightsavers-supported hospital. Following an examination, Nyangan was referred for cataract surgery, and from the moment her bandages were removed she felt happier.

"I said wow!" says Nyangan. "Now I can help myself and even do things I had stopped doing."



Dr Gladys now has the equipment she needs to care for her patients

Reaching the unreachable

We're taking eye health to remote, rural communities, including Turkana in north-west Kenya

In Turkana's vast, unforgiving desert landscape, getting treatment for painful, debilitating eye conditions such as trichiasis (advanced trachoma) can seem an impossible task.

Households are scattered across wide areas, and people's nomadic way of life means they move from one grazing area to another, seeking water and food for their livestock. They can be thousands of kilometres from the towns and cities where eye hospitals and clinics are based. So, with your ongoing support, we're reaching out to them, with community volunteers, mobile surgical teams and pop-up operating theatres. For Akai and her family, being able to access this free eye care was critical.

Not a moment to lose

Akai had lived with the excruciating pain of trichiasis for much of her life. As her in-turned eyelashes gradually scratched away her sight, she worried about her sister, Ing'oya, and daughters Ipo and Amoni. Would they end up like her?

A home visit from community volunteer James Lumoria confirmed Akai's fears. It was too late to save her sight, and every adult woman in her household had trachoma. But James explained that surgery would ease Akai's pain and that her family would get the treatment they needed to prevent them from going blind.



James helps Akai to the church

James told the family that their surgery would take place in a pop-up operating theatre being set up in a community church. It was an unlikely setting. But as the team of nurses and surgeons unloaded fold-up beds, screens, and cases of sterile equipment from a pickup truck, things began to take shape...



Photos © Sightsavers/Tommy Trenchard

Saving sight in the most unlikely place



Ing'oya, Ipo, Amoni and Akai walk the dry, dusty route to a pick-up point, from which a Sightsavers vehicle will take them to the church.



Meanwhile, the mobile surgical team prepares a pop-up operating theatre, where the women will receive their trichiasis surgery.



With everything in place, surgeons Edwin and Maurice don their gowns and work steadily with their team, barely pausing for breath between patients.



After surgery, Ing'oya, Ipo, Amoni and Akai join the other patients to receive pain relief, and ointment for their eyes. Tomorrow, their bandages will be removed.



The surgeons visit the women at their homes to check their eyes and advise them on post-surgical care.



Ipo is all smiles: "There's no more pricking," she exclaims. "I can see! I can see very far." Akai is happy too. Although her sight could not be restored, she is no longer in excruciating pain.

Building a lasting legacy

Together, we're helping to create a more sustainable and inclusive eye health care system in Bangladesh

It's been 50 years since Sightsavers first began working in Bangladesh, and we're proud to be a trusted partner in the country's efforts to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote the rights of people with disabilities.

Our contributions have been diverse and far-reaching, from training doctors, nurses and ophthalmic paramedics, to supporting the development of a new eye hospital and helping to reach marginalised communities – such as those in rural areas. This includes a community-based rehabilitation programme for people who are blind or have visual impairments.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication and hard work of everyone

involved, including the health ministry, medical teams, local communities, and partner organisations. With your support, we'll continue pushing the boundaries of what's possible and keep exploring and planning more ways to improve people's eye health, so that future generations can have the support they need.

Since 1973,
Sightsavers and our
partners have:

Performed more than
2 million cataract operations

Carried out **24 million** eye examinations

Supported **10,000** people
with disabilities

Find out more at:
[www.sightsavers.org/
bangladesh50](http://www.sightsavers.org/bangladesh50)

Shawon and his dad, Mohammed, after Shawon's first cataract operation



Shawon and his mum, following his successful cataract surgery

Give a gift that lasts a lifetime

Shawon's story shows how straightforward cataract surgery can give a child a second chance. By leaving a gift to Sightsavers in your will, you could help us reach more children like him – restoring their sight, their independence and their potential. To find out more about this special way of giving, visit www.sightsavers.org/will

Saving Shawon's sight

With our partners, we help ensure that more children like Shawon, get the urgent eye health care they need

When we first met Shawon he was struggling at school and at home, because of his failing eyesight. "I can't write because I can't see," he told us. "When I watch TV for a while, my eyes hurt. And when I close my eyes, tears come out. I do play in our front yard, but if I play in the sun, when I come back home, tears come out of my eyes."

Shawon's father, Mohammed was desperately worried about his son and

tried to get him help, but no one could identify the problem. Then he took Shawon to a Sightsavers-supported hospital in Dhaka. Shawon was diagnosed with cataracts in both eyes and, much to Mohammed's relief, was booked in for free surgery.

With his sight now restored, Shawon can keep up at school, play with his friends and have a brighter future ahead. His smile shows how happy he feels.



Following training, Ms Chilongo can teach all of her students together

Creating equal chances

Every child deserves a good start in life, and together, we're helping children with disabilities in Zambia to thrive

Education is key to helping children with disabilities overcome the barriers that can often hold them back in life. By learning and playing alongside their peers they can feel included, accepted, and inspired to reach their full potential. That's why we're extremely proud of the inclusive education project you're helping to fund in the Chinsali district of Muchinga province.

The four-year project is part of the Tusambilile Chapamo 'Let's learn together' initiative, which supports children with disabilities in Zambia. It runs until 2025 and is a partnership between Sightsavers, the European Union, the Zambia Federation of Disability Organizations, and the Zambia Ministry for Education.

Students are supported from their early years right through to university education, and the project particularly focuses on empowering young women and girls, who can experience high levels of discrimination and exclusion. Students also receive help to transition from education into employment.



Through the project, teachers like Ms Chilongo are trained to teach students with visual impairments and other disabilities alongside their peers. "My attitude towards children with disabilities has changed from the time I attended that training," says Ms Chilongo. "I saw the importance of supporting those children also."



Photos: © Sightsavers/Tom Jenkinson

Giving Ruth the chance to shine

Thanks to Ms Chilongo's support, Ruth is now enjoying her lessons and wants to become a nurse one day

Ruth's eyesight problems started when she was a baby but had never been properly diagnosed. "It brings headache (and) when in pain she misbehaves," explained her mother Justina, when we first met the family.

Thankfully, Ruth received a free eye screening through the programme, and she was found to have a refractive error, which could be corrected with glasses. These are also provided free through the project, as are the adaptive learning materials Ms Chilongo uses to teach Ruth and four other children with disabilities in her class.

"I've seen a change in Ruth," says Ms Chilongo. "Now I can say that she's able to write, she's able to copy from the board writing in the book."

Let's learn together

Discover more about this innovative project and how it's helping children like Ruth at: www.sightsavers.org/learning

Marathon marvels

We're so grateful to our London and Brighton Marathon runners, including Josh Cullimore and Joel Barker

Josh completed the London Marathon in three hours 50 minutes and raised a brilliant £4,034 to help save and restore people's sight.



"I'm a doctor and have spent some time working in Africa where I witnessed the enormous need for Sightsavers' work," he told us. "I was really honoured to promote and fundraise for the charity."

Meanwhile, in Brighton, Joel was reflecting on his own very personal marathon achievement. "My stepdad, John, sadly passed away on 15 February after a long illness and I wanted to do something in his memory," Joel explained.

"He was one of the nicest and most caring people you could ever meet and a big supporter of Sightsavers. That's why I chose to raise vital funds for them. Imagine a world where you can't see."

We're very grateful for the wonderful **£740** raised by Joel, and we'd like to thank all the team Sightsavers runners who put so much time and energy into helping others. We think you're amazing!

"To anyone thinking of raising money by completing any kind of event for Sightsavers I would say do it"

Joel Barker



Feel inspired?

Whether you'd like to join an organised event or plan your own fundraiser there are countless ways to help save sight and change lives. Find out more and set yourself a challenge at www.sightsavers.org/fundraise

Long-distance legend

Having completed the famed Land's End to John o'Groats walk in his 20s, intrepid Philip Balls decided to do it again for Sightsavers!

Now aged 70, Philip is a long-term supporter of Sightsavers, and he set himself this very personal challenge to help others. He created a Just Giving page and recorded details of his often-challenging journey, inspiring friends and family to raise an amazing **£1,695**. Philip completed his epic 64 day walk on Thursday 30 May, and we hope he's proud of his sight-saving achievement, because we're really proud of him.

