

# Focus

Your magazine from  Sightsavers Spring 2025

## Washing trachoma away

You've helped Pakistan eliminate this terrible disease, and we can't thank you enough!



# Welcome

## You've done something amazing!

**A huge and heartfelt thank you for helping Pakistan eliminate trachoma and giving people the chance to live their lives free from its cruel grip!**

This is a monumental achievement in public health, and it's also a testament to the resilience and dedication of countless individuals and partners who have come together to beat this painful, blinding disease.

Sightsavers started working to eliminate trachoma from Pakistan back in 2001, and it's been a long journey. But the result says it all. Around 3.7 million people are now protected from the disease, and we've helped create a stronger health service to keep it at bay.

As you can see from the map opposite, more countries where Sightsavers works are nearing elimination too, and each new success brings us closer to consigning trachoma to the history books where it belongs. We know how to beat it and we're not stopping now!

I hope you'll stay with us as we continue our fight to eliminate this terrible disease, and I hope you're proud of the part you helped play in Pakistan's success. We couldn't have done it without you.



My warmest wishes,

*Ella Pierce*

Ella Pierce  
Global Director of Fundraising

## In this issue...

**4 A sight-saving milestone**  
How Pakistan beat trachoma



© Sightsavers



© Sightsavers/Jason Mulikita

**6 Showing the way**  
Meet trachoma hero, Constance Gumbo



© Sightsavers/Malumbo Siyamba

**8 The joyous gift of sight**  
Esther's life-changing cataract operation



© Sightsavers/Steven Githiri

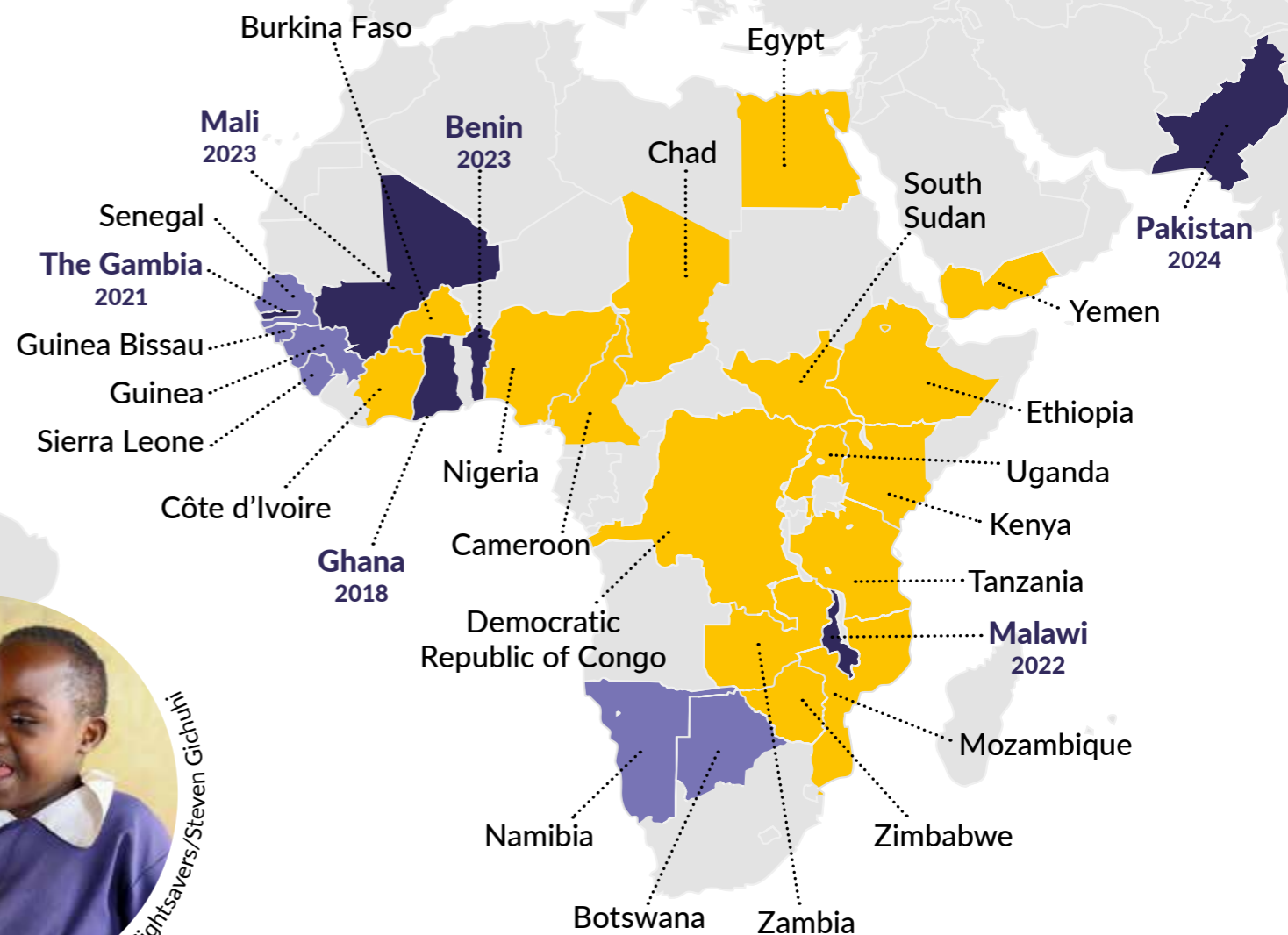
**10 Towards a fairer world**  
A new milestone in disability rights

## Wiping trachoma off the map

Step by step we're eliminating trachoma from all the countries where Sightsavers works, helped by amazing supporters like you. And Pakistan's latest success is a testament to what can be achieved through the collaboration, commitment and compassion of partners and local teams with a shared goal.

This map shows you countries the World Health Organization has confirmed as trachoma-free, and those that are getting closer. With your support, we'll keep going until the last one succeeds, and we can finally say goodbye to this horrible disease.

- Countries that have eliminated trachoma
- Countries nearing trachoma elimination
- Countries that are working to eliminate trachoma



# A sight-saving milestone

## Sightsavers' Adnan Youhana tells you how eliminating trachoma from Pakistan has transformed people's lives



Hearing the fantastic news that Pakistan had eliminated trachoma as a public health problem was a very proud moment for me and my colleagues at Sightsavers. It was

satisfying to see that our relentless efforts had paid off and know that millions of people can now live their lives free from this blinding disease.

I've seen the terrible impact trachoma can have on people's lives. Elderly people cutting or pulling out their eyelashes with tweezers to stop the excruciating pain, children with sore, weeping eyes they could hardly bear to open. It's heart breaking, and that's what kept me motivated to beat the disease.

We desperately needed to reach these people and, thankfully, we had an amazing

team to call on – our legion of female health care professionals, known as Lady Health Workers (LHWs).

### Community carers

In Pakistan, social barriers can exclude women from being visited by male healthcare workers. The LHWs face no such barriers. They're often the first level of healthcare for their local communities, supporting services such as immunisation, pre- and post-natal care, and family planning. As such, they're trusted and accepted into people's homes, making them perfect candidates to identify symptoms of trachoma in both male and female family members.

We helped train the LHWs to screen people for trachoma, record their findings and refer people with symptoms for further treatment. They also advised families on ways to help prevent trachoma spreading, such as washing hands and faces.



### Making Pakistan SAFE

You helped support the local teams who implement the World Health Organization's SAFE strategy:

**Surgery, Antibiotics, Facial cleanliness and Environmental improvements**

### Key achievements include:

- Training over **1,700** Lady Health Workers to identify trachoma cases
- Training **eight** trichiasis surgeons
- Distributing **500,000** doses of medication
- Building **500** latrines to improve sanitation and hygiene



© Sightsavers/Jamshyd Masud

Lady Health Workers are accepted into people's homes to screen women and children for trachoma

While this was happening, we worked with the health department to train eight surgeons to operate on people with trichiasis – the advanced and potentially blinding stage of trachoma.

Previously, there were no certified trichiasis surgeons in places where trachoma was active, so this was a big breakthrough. And the surgeons helped spread the word about trachoma and the free operations people could have, by appearing on radio programmes across the country. This multi-pronged approach has proved to be a winning formula. Pakistan's public health system is now stronger

than ever, and more able to treat trachoma and prevent a possible resurgence.

I'm really grateful and thankful to all you kind and generous Sightsavers' supporters for helping Pakistan eliminate trachoma – we couldn't have done it without you. I hope you'll continue giving your support so we can go on strengthening the country's eye care services.

**"Now the public health system is stronger than ever to treat and prevent trachoma!"**

**Adnan Youhana**



Photos: © Sightsavers/Jason Mulikita

Constance has spent three decades working to improve public health in local communities and districts

## Showing the way

**In Zimbabwe, dedicated health heroes like Constance are proving that trachoma elimination is within reach**

Constance Gumbo is the District Environmental Health Officer for Zimbabwe's Gweru district. She manages eye health teams and coordinates with the district nurses, medical officer and trachoma mobile team leader. Identifying reasons behind disease outbreaks is a key part of her role.

"With trachoma, we might look at whether people have an adequate water supply. They may be getting water from a riverbed

shared with animals, or maybe they don't have enough toilets," Constance explains. "Good hygiene can prevent trachoma from spreading. But some people have to walk five kilometres to reach their nearest borehole, and they can only carry so much."

Constance and her team are helping to implement both the WASH programme and SAFE strategy. WASH stands for water, sanitation and hygiene – and good hygiene is also a key element of SAFE.

"On average every person should have around 20 litres of water a day, which means a family of five needs 100 litres. That's a lot of trips to the borehole on top of childcare, household chores and all the other duties. We're making sure there's a borehole for every 250 people in Gweru, so it's easier for families to access fresh water."

The team also visits schools and communities to talk about trachoma, assess people's health and carry out mass drug administrations of antibiotics that can clear up infections.

"We try to reach everyone, sometimes spending up to 10 days in a community," says Constance. "We used to have lots of problems with children having infected eyes from trachoma and not going to school, but this has reduced."

**"Thanks to Sightsavers and other partners, we now have more people on the ground, and we have integrated a number of public health programmes with other departments and ministries. These are my greatest joys!"**

Constance



Forgive is now free from the pain and misery of trachoma



## No more pain

**Forgive, Chabota and Bubota are proof that the strategy Constance helps manage really works**

When an eye health team first examined them, brothers Forgive, Chabota and their cousin Bubota (above) were all suffering with sore, weeping eyes – telltale signs of trachoma. Desperate to help them, Chabota and Forgive's mother, Egnés, walked 10 kilometres to the nearest health centre to get treatment, but they weren't able to help.

Egnés was immensely relieved when she heard the boys could be treated at a Sightsavers-supported mass drug administration nearby. All three received treatment, thanks to supporters like you, and can now live their lives free from this debilitating disease.

## Will you help beat trachoma?

Step by step, we're coming closer to our goal of eliminating trachoma in all the countries where Sightsavers works. Zimbabwe could be next, and Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Sierra Leone are getting closer. Your extra gift today could help them reach every last community. **Donate now at [www.sightsavers.org/focus](http://www.sightsavers.org/focus) or by completing the form attached to the enclosed letter.**

# The joyous gift of sight

## The cataract operations you help support are nothing short of miracles for people like Esther and her family

**“I stayed inside the house for seven years,” mum of three, Esther tells us, describing how difficult her life was with cataracts. “My husband and oldest daughter, Monica had to lead me everywhere and do the chores. They did everything for me.”**

Esther’s husband, Stafford, explains how her sight loss affected the whole family. “It was hard, and I mean that. I had to cook, fetch water, find food, take Esther to the bathroom and bathe the kids. When I went to find work, I was worried about Esther’s welfare. But I had no choice.”

Life was tough enough already. In 2023, a cyclone destroyed the family home in Malawi, leaving Stafford and Esther with nowhere to live. In desperation, they moved their family to a house owned by one of Stafford’s grandparents in Malawi’s remote Nsanje district.

Although Stafford did his best to support everyone, trying to find work whilst looking after the family was exhausting. Meanwhile, Monica stayed at home to care for Esther and the younger children, so she was often absent from school.

**“Ooh, seeing my kid’s face for the first time! It was a joyous moment!”**

Esther

The family struggled on. But then Esther heard some village criers announcing that a Sightsavers-supported eye screening camp was setting up nearby. She seized the chance to have her eyes examined and, with Monica guiding her, walked to the camp.

A doctor examined Esther and diagnosed cataracts in both her eyes. When he told her she could have free operations to restore her sight, Esther was overjoyed. An ambulance took her and Stafford to the hospital, along with their baby son, Willie.

When a person has bilateral cataracts, only one eye at a time is usually operated on. But even after her first operation, Esther could see more clearly and gazed into the eyes of her baby son for the very first time. Back at home, the other children rushed to greet her and she hugged them. “I was over the moon. Very happy. I danced!”

Having her sight restored has made a huge difference to the whole family. As well as caring for Stafford and the children, Esther sells fish and doughnuts to help bring in extra money. Monica is happy to be back at school, and Stafford is building a new home – giving the family a brand-new start.



With her sight restored, Esther has regained her independence and confidence

## Thank you

**As well as helping to fund cataract operations in Malawi, your kind donations also go towards other key health measures such as eye screenings and training ophthalmologists. Plus, they help make schools more inclusive and reduce social stigma around disability.**



Photos: © Sightsavers/Malumbo Simwaka

Having her sight restored means that Esther (right), Stafford (left) can get on with their lives, and Monica (centre) can go to school



You're enabling children with disabilities to be taught in mainstream schools

Photos : © Sightsavers/Steven Gichuhi



A smiling Absalom and Irene

“We also have incentives for children with disabilities to come to school. We talk to the parents and share insights into the child’s performance. They also share history that we might not know, so that we understand the child better.”

**“Focusing on inclusion in early childhood development is very important... because that is when the children socialise and learn their belief patterns. If they’re not included at that point, they will have developed a sense of being left out. So, if they’re taken into school at the early levels, they will grow and learn together”**

Bradon, pre-primary schoolteacher, Kenya

# Towards a fairer world

**The African Disability Protocol (ADP) is now legally binding, protecting disability rights for more than 80 million people**

Your kind support goes far beyond saving sight. It helps to transform lives by empowering people with disabilities to access healthcare, education and employment - without discrimination. So, we're delighted that this important human rights treaty has finally come into force.

The ADP specifically addresses forms of discrimination affecting people with disabilities across Africa. It's a big step towards creating a more inclusive society. And we know how important inclusion can be from stories like Irene's, who was helped through one of the life-changing inclusive education projects you help fund.

**“Her progress has brought a lot of happiness”**

Irene has a speech impairment and finds it difficult to remember things. She was often excluded by other children because of her disabilities. But our inclusive Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) project in Kenya is helping her to thrive.

“There is a big change in Irene,” says her father, Absalom. “The society I come from, and my village saw her as a child who is disabled, who could not go anywhere, who could do nothing. Society now sees her as a very different person.

“I am now certain that Irene can learn, as I see her do the same things that other children do. Because of the programme, I am seeing her progress well and she is giving me hope.”

**“They will feel they are part of society”**

Bradon (right) is a pre-primary schoolteacher from Homa Bay, Kenya who has been trained as part of the project.

“In my class, we support children with disabilities by adapting the resources we have to suit their needs,” he explains. “We try as much as possible to involve them in all the activities, without prejudice.

“Each child with a specific difficulty is given an individualised education plan: this gives us a roadmap of what to do, how to do it, and the timeframe. We keep track of the child’s progress and the milestones they are achieving.



# Your will can change lives

By remembering Sightsavers in your will, you can help ensure more children like Irene get an education

Imagine knowing the life-changing work you care so much about can continue long into the future. That's what leaving a gift to Sightsavers in your will can do.

As well as helping to save sight and fight diseases, your special gift could train more inclusive education teachers such as Bradon and Zachariah (pictured below), enabling more children with disabilities like Irene to go to school and get a good start in life. You'd be doing something amazing, as Zachariah explains.

"Previously, parents of children with disabilities felt they had no hope for the future and because of that, they did not bother enrolling them in school. "But this [inclusive education] programme has helped create awareness to the parents and they are beginning to see the importance of enrolling their children."

**"My hope for these children is to one day see them becoming governors, chairmen and presidents"**

**Zachariah**



© Sightsavers/Kabantiok Solomon Kazahzachat



© Sightsavers/Kabantiok Solomon Kazahzachat

## Choose where your money goes

Making or changing your will may not be as complicated as you think and our free will guide tells you everything you need to know, from understanding inheritance tax to explaining the different types of gifts you can give.

You'll want to take care of your loved ones first of course, but when you've done so, please consider remembering Sightsavers in your will. It's a very special, lasting way to help ensure the incredible things you've helped achieve in your lifetime can continue after you've gone,

## Get your free will guide now

Visit [www.sightsavers.org/legacy](http://www.sightsavers.org/legacy) to download the guide or call **01444 446 600** and we'll post one to you. And thank you for your wonderful kindness and support.