

Policy and advocacy 2023 annual summary

Key achievements in East, Central and
Southern Africa

June 2024

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Kenya.....	3
Adoption of functional assessment tools and manual by the Ministry of Education for children with disabilities.....	3
Implementation of inclusive education reforms	3
Progress towards the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Bill	4
Finalisation of the national eye health policy	4
Malawi	4
Persons with Disabilities Bill passed in Parliament	4
Ratification of the African Disability Protocol.....	5
Revision of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights policy.....	5
Development of disability inclusive primary school improvement plans	5
Integration of disability inclusive measures into the community health strategy.....	5
Mozambique.....	6
Implementation of the national decree on the accessibility of public buildings.....	6
Harmonisation of the ophthalmology training curriculum in line with the regional standard	6
Tanzania	6
Revision and implementation of the eye care strategic plan	6
Uganda.....	6
Ophthalmologists integrated into the human resources for health structure	6
Integration of eye health consumables into the standard drug list	7
Zambia	7
Development of the National Eye Health Strategic Plan	7
Integration of disability data into the Health Management Information System.....	7
Establishment of a parliamentary caucus on the rights of persons with disabilities	8
Revision of the Education Sector Plan	8
Representation of people with disabilities in the Voluntary National Review.....	8
Zimbabwe.....	8
Development of provincial level eye health plans in Zimbabwe	8

Development of guidelines for the employment of persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe	9
Preparation for 2024 Voluntary National Review	9

Introduction

This report is a summary of the key successes in policy and advocacy achieved across the East, Central and Southern Africa (ECSA) region in 2023, led by the country offices in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, with support from the Policy and Global Advocacy team, Global Technical Leads and other teams. The report aims to provide an overview of the most significant achievements, although it is not exhaustive and there are many other examples of progress made towards Sightsavers' policy and advocacy goals which have not been included in the interests of keeping the summary at a manageable length. Sightsavers recognises that policy change requires long-term investment from multiple actors including government, civil society and international NGO partners, and it is important to note that these achievements are not solely attributed to the input of Sightsavers. For a comprehensive overview of Sightsavers' work on policy and advocacy in 2021, 2022 and 2023 please refer to the [Advocacy Outcomes Dashboard](#).

Kenya

Adoption of functional assessment tools and manual by the Ministry of Education for children with disabilities

In 2023, Sightsavers supported the completion and dissemination of a functional assessment tool and an accompanying manual, for the purposes of identifying children with disabilities in schools and understanding their needs. The tool and manual is designed to be used by Curriculum Support Officers and Special Needs Education networks, the Ministry of Education, Teachers' Service Commission and other key stakeholders at the county and national level. The tool and manual have been adopted by the Ministry of Education and will be launched in 2024. Once it has been effectively rolled out, this will be instrumental in generating accurate data on the prevalence of disability among children in schools, and enabling education providers to meet their needs.

Implementation of inclusive education reforms

In June 2023, the Presidential Working Party on Education Reforms released a report, identifying gaps and opportunities for the promotion of inclusive education for learners and trainees with disabilities in Kenya. The report made recommendations aimed at improving the quality of learning, teacher training, equity and access with a focus on addressing the needs of those in marginalized areas and those with special needs. Sightsavers worked together with the Action for Children with Disabilities network to disseminate the report and advocate for the implementation of its recommendations. The Ministry of Education was receptive, and some recommendations have already been implemented. As an example, in

90% of public schools, the transition from primary to secondary education is now delivered in the same facility, to reduce the drop-out rate, particularly among children from underprivileged backgrounds or those with disabilities. Sightsavers will continue its efforts in 2024 to advocate for the full implementation of the report's recommendations.

Progress towards the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Bill

As part of Sightsavers' advocacy work under the Global Labour Programme, we commissioned a researcher to review the extent to which Kenya's laws are consistent with the provisions of the UNCRPD. The assessment recommended a review of the Persons with Disability Act of 2003, to ensure compliance with UNCRPD and other legal rights frameworks. Following this process, we organized a multi-stakeholder forum to discuss these reforms, with a view to agreeing on a clear roadmap for finalization of this policy which has been under review for many years. The 2023 Persons with Disabilities bill has passed its first and second readings in Parliament. A third reading is due to take place in 2024, after which the bill can move forward to be signed into law.

Finalisation of the national eye health policy

Over the past few years, Sightsavers has been supporting the Ministry of Health to develop a National Eye Health Policy. Sightsavers led the National Eye Health Working Group in drafting this policy, designed to run from 2022 to 2030, through a validation process by key stakeholders. This document was largely finalised in 2023, and will guide the national and county governments in enhancing eye care services in Kenya. We are awaiting the inclusion of data from a Rapid Assessment of Avoidable Blindness (RAAB) which will be ready in March 2024. Approval by the Council of Governors and launch of the policy is due by the end of 2024.

Malawi

Persons with Disabilities Bill passed in Parliament

In 2023, the Malawi National Assembly passed the Persons with Disabilities Bill, a law which has consolidated the Handicapped Persons Act of 1972 and the Disability Act of 2012 and is aligned with the UNCRPD. This is a landmark achievement and the culmination of an advocacy campaign running for more than ten years, led by a coalition of stakeholders including the Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA), and international NGOs including Sightsavers and World Vision. The final push came in December 2023, when Sightsavers, World Vision and FEDOMA facilitated consultations with the parliamentary committee on community development and social welfare to advocate for the passing of the bill. The new law will improve access to health care, education and other

services for persons with disabilities, and the law stipulates that the construction of new buildings will have to be disability-friendly. The new law also provides for the establishment of a Disability Trust Fund to help implement activities that fulfil its objectives in upholding the rights of persons with disabilities.

Ratification of the African Disability Protocol

The day after the passing of the Persons with Disabilities Bill, Malawi ratified the African Disability Protocol (ADP), a human rights treaty that addresses discrimination affecting people with disabilities living in African countries. Together with FEDOMA, Sightsavers was a key driver of the campaign for ADP ratification, and facilitated consultation with the ministries of gender and foreign affairs, the two key government stakeholders whose approval was necessary to take it forward.

Revision of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights policy

In 2023, Sightsavers Malawi supported OPDs and the University of Malawi Disability Rights Clinic to provide input into the new Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) policy document. Sightsavers facilitated the participation of partner organisations in all three regional consultation meetings, as well as the engagement of a select number of participants in the national review of the SRHR policy. The first draft of the SRHR policy has been released, and as a result of the consultations and contributions, it includes provisions for person with disabilities.

Development of disability inclusive primary school improvement plans

Malawi's primary school grant guidelines stipulate that primary school improvement plans should include provisions for children with disabilities, and plans with no provisions for children with disabilities are not eligible for funding. However, until now, this has not widely been translated into practice. In 2023, Sightsavers engaged with schools to advocate for the introduction of provisions for children with disabilities into the school improvement plans. In addition, Sightsavers encouraged district level education officials to comply with the guidelines in their allocation of funding. As a result of this, several schools have received the new funding from the Ministry of Education to implement their disability inclusive plans, and Sightsavers is looking to scale up this initiative to other districts in 2024.

Integration of disability inclusive measures into the community health strategy

In 2023, the Ministry of Health approached Sightsavers and FEDOMA, to ask for support in finalising the community health strategy and ensuring that it reflected the needs of persons with disabilities. Sightsavers and FEDOMA were involved in the drafting the framework and the development of the budget for its implementation. Recommendations such as the inclusion of the provision of assistive devices for persons with disabilities, and sunscreen for persons with albinism were accepted, and the framework was launched in November 2023.

Mozambique

Implementation of the national decree on the accessibility of public buildings

In 2018, a national decree was introduced, stating that every new public building constructed in Mozambique should be accessible to people with disabilities, and that existing buildings should be adapted. However, in practice, new buildings often don't conform to the decree, and five years after the decree was passed, the lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities remains an issue. In 2023, Sightsavers engaged with the construction personnel at the Ministry of Health, to identify the key health facilities which require adaptations to make them accessible for persons with disabilities. A list of health facilities has not yet been drawn up, and Sightsavers will continue to advocate on this issue in 2024.

Harmonisation of the ophthalmology training curriculum in line with the regional standard

At present, the training curriculum for ophthalmologists in Mozambique is outdated and does not conform to the regional standard. In 2023, Sightsavers contracted two ophthalmologists as consultants to work on the harmonisation of the Mozambican ophthalmology training curriculum in line with the regional standard set by the College of Ophthalmology for Eastern, Central and Southern Africa (COECSA). This will involve updating the training curriculum, improving its quality and enabling the recognition of Mozambican ophthalmology qualifications across the region. Longer term, the updated training curriculum will translate into improved ophthalmology services for patients in Mozambique.

Tanzania

Revision and implementation of the eye care strategic plan

Sightsavers engaged with government and OPD partners to revise the National Eye Care Strategy. The Ministry of Health took measures to involve eye health partners in assessing the existing strategy, identifying the gaps and developing an updated version. Sightsavers met with decision-makers at the national, regional, and district levels to advocate for an increase in the eye health budget, provision of medicines and ophthalmic equipment, in line with the eye care strategic plan. These advocacy efforts translated into an increase in the allocation and disbursement of funds to purchase eye care equipment for ten district hospitals in Tanzania.

Uganda

Ophthalmologists integrated into the human resources for health structure

Following long-term advocacy efforts from Sightsavers and other organisations, ophthalmologists were integrated into the human resources for health (HREH) structure. Hospital directors were requested to include these positions in their requests for human resources at their hospitals, to ensure that the positions were filled. Sightsavers engaged with the Ministry of Finance to advocate for the allocation of resources to pay the salaries for the new positions.

Integration of eye health consumables into the standard drug list

Sightsavers held meetings with the National Eye Care Coordinator and facilitated a review of the national health procurement services' standard list. A revised standard list has been released, which incorporates eye health consumables. Further engagement is needed to ensure that the provision of intra-ocular lenses (IOLs) consistently meet the necessary specifications, and Sightsavers' advocacy work will continue in 2024.

Zambia

Development of the National Eye Health Strategic Plan

Even though it has technically expired, Zambia still uses the 2017-2021 National Health Strategic Plans. The Ministry of Health has been working with stakeholders involved in eye health including, universities, civil society groups and OPDs, and has developed a draft 2023-2028 National Eye Health Strategic Plan (NEHSP). In 2023, Sightsavers supported the development process, facilitating input from OPDs, ensuring the inclusion of a focus on the collection of disability disaggregated data, and contracting a consultant to finalise the NEHSP. The Ministry of Health has committed to launching the NEHSP, although this has not yet been done, and to financing 65% of the budget, with partner organisations financing the remainder. This is a huge step, as currently, 100% of the eye health budget is covered by partner organisations. Sightsavers will continue to be involved in 2024 to work on the official launch and implementation of the NEHSP.

Integration of disability data into the Health Management Information System

In 2023, Sightsavers participated in a review of the Health Management Information System (HMIS), advocating for the integration of eye health indicators to generate the data for the calculation effective refractive error coverage and effective cataract surgical coverage. In most cases, health facilities do not plan for the inclusion of people with disabilities, and do not know how many people with disabilities are accessing their services. The commitment to record disability disaggregated data is already noted in the National Eye Health Strategic Plan but as yet there are no data collection tools for disability disaggregated data. Sightsavers engaged with the Ministry of Health at district level to provide technical assistance on the collection of inclusive data. Integration of Washington Group Questions isn't possible in the HMIS, so the HMIS would record whether or not patients have a disability card. In 2022 Sightsavers established eye health INGO partner meetings, as

platform to facilitate coordination among partner organisations and amplify the impact through the release of joint recommendations and statements. and these continued in 2023. The meetings continued in 2023 and proved to be an effective mechanism for the joint review of the HMIS.

Establishment of a parliamentary caucus on the rights of persons with disabilities

The National Assembly of Zambia established a member-led caucus on the rights of persons with disabilities, in which members of parliament have made a commitment to champion disability inclusion across policies, laws and mechanisms for state accountability. Sightsavers was part of a network together with OPDs, providing resources for the launch of the caucus. The purpose of the caucus is for MPs to influence disability inclusive legislation and budgeting, representation, and oversight over executive actions. With support from Sightsavers and the Zambia Federation of Employers, OPDs engaged with the Zambia Revenue Authority to share available information on tax incentives for employing persons with disabilities. This led to increased understanding by employers of the tax incentives available.

Revision of the Education Sector Plan

Working with other stakeholders, Sightsavers contributed to the Zambia National Education Coalition review of the Education Sector Plan, providing written submissions with recommendations to strengthen the emphasis on disability inclusion. The Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations and other OPDs were also involved in the process. The curriculum has also been reviewed, with an increased focus on vocational skills. This will help to cater for learners with special educational needs or disabilities who don't excel academically to venture into vocational jobs and increase their employment opportunities.

Representation of people with disabilities in the Voluntary National Review

In 2023, Sightsavers collaborated with other civil society organizations to produce a Voluntary National Review (VNR) shadow report on the extent of the progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sightsavers facilitated the input of OPDs, ensuring that the experiences of people with disabilities were reflected in the shadow report, and documenting the evidence showing the gaps in SDG implementation. The VNR shadow report concluded that the majority of the SDG targets in Zambia are not on track. The report was validated, submitted to the Government and presented at the High-Level Political Forum in New York.

Zimbabwe

Development of provincial level eye health plans in Zimbabwe

As part of the Inclusive Eye Health Project, Sightsavers facilitated and supported the formation and sitting of the first Provincial Prevention of Blindness Committee (PPBC) in

January 2023. Sightsavers coordinated all partners involved in eye care at provincial level in one forum to discuss eye care activities and plans. Additionally, a committee was nominated to coordinate the different aspects of eye care services. The Provincial Medical Directorate within the Ministry of Health was nominated as the chair, while other partners such as Zimbabwe National League for the Blind, Imvelo trust and Council for the Blind took up other roles. The creation of the PPBC has resulted in the province developing specific eye care plans annually and including eye care in the overall provincial health budgets which are submitted to national level.

Development of guidelines for the employment of persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe

In 2023, Sightsavers engaged with the Department of Disability Affairs in the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare to discuss the drafting and adoption of guidelines for the employment of persons with disabilities. The department was in agreement that these are important and indicated that some initial work had been done on this. Sightsavers pledged funding and technical support to continue this work, and the Ministry will be submitting an action plan with a budget for how to proceed with this in 2024.

Preparation for 2024 Voluntary National Review

In November 2023, the Sightsavers team met with a representative from the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare under the Department of SDGs and Agenda 2030. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the process for preparation of the High-Level Political Forum meeting in New York in 2024, at which Zimbabwe has agreed to present a Voluntary National Review (VNR) on its progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The government has already approved a road map and concept note for this process. Sightsavers was encouraged to support the process through the SDG reference group, which is the voice of CSOs. In December, Sightsavers provided financial support for the facilitation of provincial-level consultations, to ensure that the voices and experiences of persons with disabilities are reflected in the VNR.