

Policy and advocacy achievements of 2023

India

June 2024

Introduction

This report is a summary of the key successes in policy and advocacy achieved in India in 2023, led by the country office, 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](#).

Social inclusion

Introduction of measures to ensure disability inclusive elections

In the states of Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand, Sightsavers engaged with government stakeholders to ensure that upcoming elections are made inclusive for persons with disabilities. Enumeration was conducted to determine eligibility to vote for all persons with disabilities of voting age through door-to-door collection of information. OPDs provided technical support in accessibility demo polling and household level polling for severe disability groups for the first time in the country. In Jharkhand, Sightsavers India supported the election process by facilitating access for voters with disabilities, and provided technical support in developing braille enabled ballot papers for visually impaired voters. The State Election Commission office has acknowledged the support of Sightsavers India in organizing disability inclusive facilities for persons with disabilities and have requested further collaboration in scaling up this initiative ahead of the 2024 general election.

District level population data disaggregated by disability released for the first time

As part of Sightsavers India's data advocacy with the government through its National Indicator Framework project initiative and SDG localisation, the government of India has released its first tranche of disability disaggregated disability for the entire country. This data is released through the Unique Disability Identity Portal which shows for the first time shows district level population data for 21 types of disability as per the 2016 Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act. In this first phase, around 9 million persons with disabilities have been recorded, and this will increase as more persons with disabilities undergo assessment and their data digitalisation is shown in the portal. Some of the states have reported low figures or inaccurate data due to their lack of data infrastructure and human resources to upload data. The release of this disability disaggregated data into the public domain will support planning, budgeting and policy making.

Inclusive education

Launch of an inclusive National Curriculum Framework

The Indian Ministry of Education announced the development of a new National Curriculum Framework in September 2023. Sightsavers India reviewed the draft, and presented recommendations to ensure it included provisions for children with disabilities and visual impairment. The original draft had many gaps in this regard. Sightsavers engaged at state level with the teacher training and curriculum development directorates, and at the national level with the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the nodal agency for the development of the National Curriculum Framework. As a result of these engagements and dialogues, Sightsavers ensured that recommendations on inclusive pedagogy, accessibility and inclusive learning opportunities were included in the final version of the National Curriculum Framework.

Implementation of the inclusive education policy

Sightsavers India worked closely with the state and district education departments across all eight programme states to ensure the inclusive education policy is effectively implemented on the ground. As a result, a large number of students with disabilities have been given access to a travel allowance and received braille and large print books, teachers have been provided with refresher trainings on inclusive education, and classroom teachers were trained in inclusive pedagogy. In states including Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, ICT devices were provided by the education departments with technical assistance from Sightsavers India to disseminate among visually impaired students for their digital learning.

Development of Block Resource Centre plans

As part of its inclusive education advocacy initiative, Sightsavers India worked with 5 State Governments (Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan) in demonstrating model Block Resource Centres (BRCs) for visually impaired students. BRCs support rural schools through resources, training, and innovative practices, serving as a hub for learning and development in rural areas, providing access to various educational resources, including books, multimedia content, and educational tools. The results from these state level demonstrations were disseminated and deliberated with key education officials for wider scale-up. As part of this collective strategy, OPDs and Disability Specialised Organisations were also consulted in developing comprehensive BRC plans. In state planning meetings, the BRC plan was approved and it was presented to the central government for joint funding. As a result of this engagement, a special allocation was granted for the strengthening of BRCs in the state.

Development of inclusive education plans and budgets

In 2023, Sightsavers worked in 6 States in India with State Education Departments (Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh & Rajasthan) providing technical and professional assistance to the Inclusive Education Units of Government Education Departments. Sightsavers contributed in developing budgets and plans for

inclusive education in these states. Despite economic challenges, the budget for education has been increased by 15-20%. As a result of Sightsavers' close engagement with education departments, the budgeting in the annual inclusive education planning has changed. Funding has been allocated for disability assessment, providing special funds for accessible educational materials and assistive devices.

Inclusive eye health

Incorporation of blindness control and disability inclusion into village level development frameworks

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) are the cornerstone of decentralised governance in India. The PRI pilot for this programme initiative was launched in Kasganj district of Uttar Pradesh in May 2023. As part of this pilot initiative, 30 MoUs have been signed between all targeted 30 pilot Panchayats and Sightsavers to localise eye health and disability inclusion at the village level. Initial trends from the pilot are providing promising results, PRIs have made resource allocations in their constituencies, and are monitoring the local government health and development cadres on their delivery of community eye health and disability inclusive initiatives. This pilot has offered a very effective advocacy template to implement the SDG principle of Leave No One Behind in terms of eye health and disability inclusion at the local level.

Integration of eye care into the road safety initiatives

As part of its Vision and Road Safety Alliance, Sightsavers India organized two policy consultations in New Delhi. The consultations were attended by officials from the Ministries of Health, Family Welfare and Transport, eye health organisations, transport and automobile industry representatives, civil society organisations and media. Both consultations deliberated on vision induced road safety measures and provided best practices and collaborative initiatives for road safety. Sightsavers India released two research studies and disseminated it to stakeholders involved in road safety. Currently 150,000 people are killed every year in India due to road accidents, and poor vision among commercial vehicle drivers is one of the contributing factors. The consultations led to unanimous agreement to forge cross-sector partnerships among road safety organisations, scale up eye screening for commercial vehicle drivers with special emphasis on highways and expressways, mobilize and coordinate resources from NPCB, MORTH Road Safety Initiatives and CSR activities of the companies dealing with automobile, insurance, finance and freight.

Development of state level eye health plans and budgets

In 2023, Sightsavers worked in eight states, providing technical and professional assistance to the National Programme for the Control of Blindness and Visual Impairment (NPCB&VI) of Government health departments. Sightsavers has contributed in developing budgets and plans for eye health programmes in these states. Due to concerted efforts both at national and state level, appropriate budget allocations have been made for the states under the NPCB&VI programme and Government Health Insurance coverage. Through its Rural Eye

Health Programme in 102 districts across eight programme states, Sightsavers leveraged 486 million rupees in 2023, compared to 333 million rupees in 2022 for cataract surgery.

Cross-cutting

Commitments made on disability inclusion at the G20 summit

Sightsavers India organised three policy consultations in Bhopal, Ranchi, and Bhubaneswar to deliberate and address critical issues related to gender equality and disability, with participation from 40 OPDs. The recommendations from these consultations encompassed crucial topics such as disability disaggregated data, adaptive social protection measures for persons with disabilities, STEM education for children with disabilities, employment, entrepreneurship opportunities, livelihood enhancement for women with disabilities, and the mainstreaming of gender and disability. These policy recommendations fed into the political declaration which was presented and voted on at the Bhubaneswar Gender Equality & Disability Working Group Summit held in April 2023. As a result of these impactful policy consultations, two policy recommendations were recognised in the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration:

1. Ensure equal access to affordable, inclusive, equitable, safe and quality education from early childhood through higher education to lifelong learning and support the greater enrolment, participation and leadership of all women and girls, including those with disabilities, in STEM fields and in emerging digital technologies.
2. We commit to addressing skill gaps, promoting decent work and ensuring inclusive social protection policies for all. Towards this aim, we aim to achieve sustainably financed universal social protection coverage and consider portability of social security benefits through bilateral and multilateral agreements.

Development of an SDG localisation toolkit

As part of Sightsavers India's SDG localisation initiative with OPDs, district level SDG consultations were organised in collaboration with district administrations and State SDG cells in Odisha and Jharkhand. The main objective of the consultation was to develop effective strategies to translate the SDGs into district and sub-district level implementation plans. As a result, government departments at district level have been mandated to develop their own disability inclusive strategies in their ongoing programmes with the assistance of OPDs and will report their performance to the district committee on persons with disabilities constituted under the 2016 Rights for Persons With Disabilities Act. In addition, Sightsavers India has developed a localisation toolkit to work with local authorities on the disability and eye health agenda. This toolkit will be scaled up in 2024 and a strategy has been developed to take it forward.

Introduction of a Disability Inclusive Marker to be used by UN agencies in India

Sightsavers India worked closely with UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) India office, holding a dialogue with UN Agencies and OPDs for the implementation of the UN

Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) and WHO Health Equity Report for Persons with Disabilities. It was agreed that all UN agencies in India will work under the UNDIS framework and track their disability performance. To achieve this, Sightsavers India worked with UNRCO in developing a Disability Inclusive Marker for its UN country office team, to assess the extent of disability inclusion in projects implemented by the UN or in government partnerships. Sightsavers India is now part of the National Expert Group on Disability Indicators formed by UNRCO, and provided technical assistance to the UNRCO Office in drafting the Disability Inclusive Marker to be applicable to all UN agencies working in India.