

Policy and advocacy 2023 annual summary

Key achievements in West Africa

June 2024

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Introduction

This report is a summary of the key successes in policy and advocacy achieved across West Africa in 2023, led by the country offices in Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cameroon, Senegal, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo, Guinea, 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](#).

Benin

Progress towards ratification of the African Disability Protocol and Marrakech Treaty

Sightsavers has engaged in a campaign for ratification of the African Disability Protocol and Marrakech Treaty since 2022, in collaboration with the Federation of Associations of People with Disability in Benin (FAPHB). In other countries which have ratified these international frameworks, a committee was established to lead the process. However, Benin did not have a structure such as this to guide the process. Sightsavers therefore provided support to set up a committee with various associations representing people with disabilities such as the Paralympics group, the FAPHB and regional groups, and supported the committee in requesting meetings with the government stakeholders such as the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance (MASM) to discuss the ADP and Marrakech Treaty ratification process. The ADP process is overseen by the MASM, but ratification also required approval of the MoJ and MFA. Engagement from Sightsavers and the committee raised the profile and level of prioritisation given to the ADP by the MASM in 2023. As the same ministries are the focal points for ratification of the Marrakech Treaty, Sightsavers and the committee are engaging on both processes at the same time.

Introduction of a quota for people with disabilities in public sector recruitment

Following a government decree, since June 2023 there is a quota for people with disabilities for recruitment in the public sector. Sightsavers played a role in delivering this achievement through its campaign for ratification of the African Disability Protocol, which raised the profile of disability issues among government stakeholders, highlighted the lack of measures in place, and prompted action to address the needs of persons with disability.

Burkina Faso

Revision of the examination process in schools to make it more disability inclusive

Following a long process of advocacy led by OPDs with the support of Sightsavers, the Burkinabé Minister for Education adopted a decree in 2023, outlining specific measures for candidates with disabilities in school examinations and tests. Sightsavers funded and facilitated a workshop for education stakeholders to discuss ways to improve the inclusion of people with disabilities in end-of-year examinations. The aim was to identify specific measures to be taken during school examinations. These measures were then codified in the decree. The decree is in line with article 24 of the CRPD, which affirms that ‘States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education’.

Cameroon

Technical validation of the inclusive education policy

An important milestone was reached in 2023 with the technical validation of the inclusive education policy by the Ministry of Basic Education. Sightsavers provided technical assistance and support over many years to ensure that the inclusive education policy contains sufficient provisions for the needs of children with disabilities. In order to reach political validation and the launch of the inclusive education policy, it will be necessary to obtain feedback from other key ministries to give their approval. Sightsavers will continue to support the Ministry of Basic Education through this process in 2024.

Introduction of module on inclusive education in teacher training curriculum

In September 2023, a letter signed by the Cameroonian Ministry of Secondary Education officially instituted ‘inclusive education’ as a training subject for student teachers in general teacher training colleges as from the 2023-2024 academic year. The inclusion module of the education policy has been officially released and is now compulsory within the 62 teacher training colleges across the country. Sightsavers’ long-term advocacy for inclusive education played an important role, contributing to the development of a strategic plan for the

education and training sectors, providing technical assistance and ensuring that disability inclusion was integrated.

Representation of people with disabilities on neighbourhood and village committees

Sightsavers has been advocating for many years for the representation of persons with disabilities at the local level. On July 19 2023, the Minister of Decentralisation and Local development issued an order establishing the terms and conditions for the creation, organisation and operation of neighbourhood or village committees within the framework of citizen participation. Provision 19 paragraph 2 stipulates that the composition of the office of the neighbourhood or village committee must take into account gender and disability in terms of its representation. Beyond this, councils such as Maroua 3 in the Far North region, have expressly committed to revising their municipal development plans, to make them inclusive.

Côte d'Ivoire

Domestication of the provisions for inclusive employment as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Cote d'Ivoire ratified the UNCRPD in 2014 but implementation remains an issue. To address this, Sightsavers engaged with OPD and government partners to establish a technical working group and draft a decree for the implementation of the UNCRPD. The decree sets out specific measures for the application of the UNCRPD, for example setting out standards of accessibility for public buildings, revision of the housing code to address the needs of people with disabilities, and measures to create employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. The decree was submitted to the Prime Minister's Office in 2023. Efforts will continue in 2024 to advocate for its approval and implementation.

Ghana

Revision of the Persons with Disabilities Act in Ghana

The Persons with Disabilities Act, 2006 (Act 715) has been under review since 2015 to ensure it conforms to the UNCRPD, including provisions on inclusive employment and access to the built environment. In 2023, the Attorney General reviewed a draft bill, raising key issues to be addressed. Sightsavers supported the National Council on Persons with Disability and Ghana Federation of the Disabled, to organise a workshop for the technical committee to address the queries raised by the Attorney General's department. A validation workshop was organised to present the revised bill to key stakeholders and approve the changes. The next step will be to submit the bill to parliament.

Guinea

Introduction of a section on inclusive education in the teacher training curriculum

Together with local OPDs, Sightsavers has been advocating for many years for the introduction of a section on inclusive education in the national teacher training curriculum. Before 2022, Guinea's teacher training programme did not have any focus on disability inclusion. Following the advocacy efforts of Sightsavers and partners, a section on inclusive education was incorporated into the teacher training programme for the first time in 2023.

Liberia

Launch of a new eye health policy

In September 2023, the Ministry of Health in Liberia unveiled the new National Eye Health Policy and Strategic Plan. In addition, the Ministry of Education integrated screening for refractive error into school health plans, so that children receive routine eye tests as part of their schooling. These have been key advocacy goals for Sightsavers for many years. Sightsavers provided technical assistance in reviewing draft eye health policies and plans, trained OPDs and civil society organisations to strengthen their capacity to advocacy for inclusive eye health, and convened meetings between government and civil society partners to facilitate dialogue. Further advocacy efforts are needed to ensure that the government provides sufficient funding for the implementation of the school health plans. Once they are rolled out, this will transform access to eye care services for children in Liberia.

Mali

Allocation of a budget for inclusive education by Fana council

Following a workshop led by Sightsavers, the council of Fana, a town 110 km from Bamako, set aside a budget for inclusive education within its overall 2024 budget. This builds on the local development plan, which was revised in 2022, with support from Sightsavers, to integrate inclusive education. In addition, the council established a committee to monitor the implementation of budgetary commitments, chaired by the local government representative.

Mali makes national commitments on disability inclusion at the SDG summit

Sightsavers supported the participation of the Malian federation of OPDs and the national council of civil society during the process of developing Mali's national commitments on the SDGs to include a focus on disability. As a result of these efforts, Mali's political declaration on the implementation of the SDGs in Mali included the issue of disability at the world summit on the SDGs in 2023. Sightsavers also supported civil society organizations to

develop their own alternative report on the SDGs. As a result of these actions, there is an awareness among the Malian authorities of the need to include OPDs in the SDG monitoring committee to report on progress towards disability inclusive development.

Nigeria

Domestication of the National Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights policy in Kaduna State

2023 saw the domestication of the National Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights policy in Kaduna state. Sightsavers initiated collaboration with OPDs through the Inclusive Family Planning (IFPLAN) project to pool resources and advocacy efforts in influencing key stakeholders in the health sector and ensure that the National Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights policy was domesticated and addressed the needs of persons with disabilities. Sightsavers began the process with stakeholder mapping and engagement, followed by a policy development workshop with government decision-makers, culminating in the sign-off of the policy document by the Permanent Secretary and Commissioner of Health on 5 December 2023.

Ratification of the African Disability Protocol

On 13 February 2023, the President of Nigeria signed the African Disability Protocol (ADP). This was a key milestone, but Sightsavers conducted further follow-up calls and visits to the Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities to ensure the ADP was kept on the agenda and maintain the momentum towards full ratification. On 21 May 2023, approval was given for the ratification, and on 19 October 2023, the ADP was ratified.

Senegal

Progress towards the finalisation of the inclusive education policy

In Senegal, Sightsavers supported the Ministry of Education in drafting the inclusive education policy. The Ministry of Education shared a draft policy document with Sightsavers and other stakeholders for their technical input. Sightsavers facilitated engagement between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Local Government, and the Ministry of Community Development, bringing together the key stakeholders to provide input to the content and policy development process. This was an important step towards technical validation of the policy, following which political validation will be needed to formally launch the inclusive education policy.

Implementation of the decentralisation law to promote disability inclusion

One of the advocacy objectives in Senegal is for the government to introduce measures to promote disability inclusion through implementation of the decentralisation law. In 2023, this led to local authorities in Pikine, Kaffrine and Louga increasing the proportion of the budget allocated to disability inclusion from 2% to 5%. This enabled local councils to fund the renovation of schools to make them more accessible for children with disabilities, as well as seed funding to support women with disabilities setting up small businesses.

Sierra Leone

Establishment of district eye health committees

In Sierra Leone, 2023 saw the establishment of district eye health committees across 14 districts, to oversee the delivery of eye health services at the community level. Crucially, people with disabilities are represented on the committees, ensuring that they are involved in the decision-making process, the identification of needs and allocation of resources. Sightsavers played an important role in advocating for these changes through the Irish Aid ABW eye health project, providing technical assistance to government and OPD partners.

Togo

Progress towards Ratification of the African Disability Protocol

Sightsavers supported the presentation of the UNCRPD report in March 2023. This process also provided opportunities to influence the political process of ratification of the African Disability Protocol (ADP). Sightsavers is leading the ADP ratification campaign in Togo, with support from the Togolese federation of OPDs (FETAPH), and the committee for ADP ratification, which is funded by the African Union. Before the launching of the campaign by Sightsavers, the ratification process was led by the committee. Since the start of the campaign, Sightsavers has joined the committee and boosted the profile of the ratification process. Sightsavers has contributed funding to support the process, increased communication around the ADP, and facilitated meetings with government stakeholders. The ADP has been reviewed in parliament, but the final decision to announce ratification during a plenary session is still pending. Elections are expected in April 2024, and further progress will not be made until then. However, the ADP is on the list of presidential priorities.