

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 with visual impairment may face discrimination from their communities.

With your help, we're working to change this 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 Zambo. Thank you for being there for them – and for us. You are truly making a difference.



My very best wishes,

Ciara Smullen

Ciara Smullen
CEO Sightsavers
Ireland

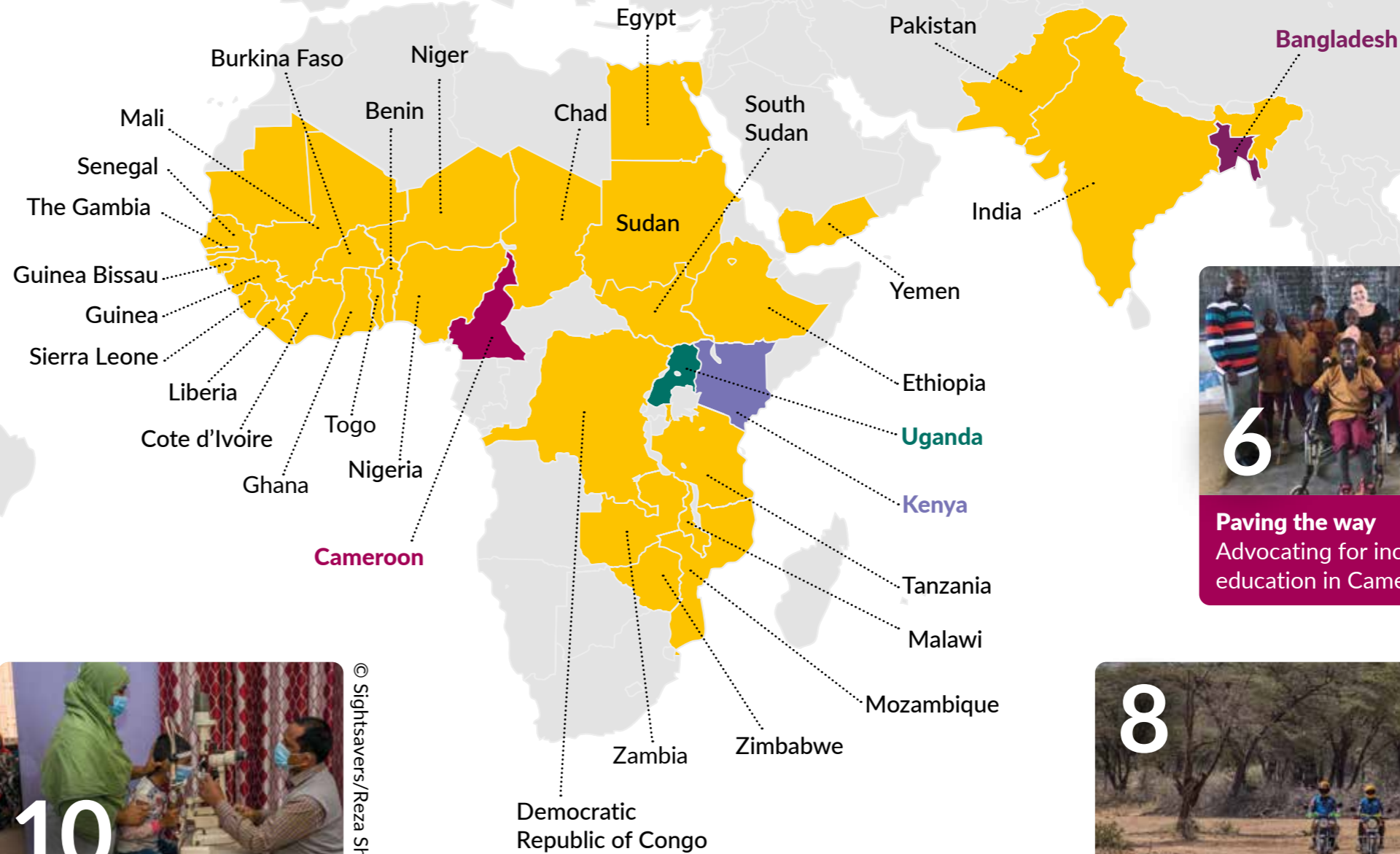


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Putting eye health on the map

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

Paving the way

Our Global Citizenship Education Manager, Meadhbh, explains how Irish students are championing inclusive education

At Sightsavers, we believe that all children have the right to high-quality education from an early age, regardless of their disability status.

Sadly however, children with disabilities who live in low and middle-income countries are often left furthest behind – either missing out on school altogether or receiving a sub-standard education. This can hamper their chances to reach their full potential and live fulfilled, happy and healthy lives.

We need to increase understanding of the barriers children with disabilities face and encourage empathy and respect – so that every child can feel included, accepted, and inspired to learn. And if we want lasting change, we must work with our society's youngest members. Through our Global Citizenship Education Programme, supported by long-term partners, Irish Aid, we're helping to teach future generations that inclusivity is a right for everyone, regardless of who or where they are.

Opening doors to understanding

As part of the programme, we've partnered with a school in Cameroon to bring students and teachers from both countries closer together. It's the first time in Sightsavers Ireland's history that we've done this, and it all started last year, when I visited Ngallan School in Cameroon to hold a Put Us in the Picture workshop.

You may have heard of Put Us in the Picture. It's an educational tool developed by Sightsavers Ireland to teach primary school children about inclusive education, the Global Goals, and Ireland's overseas development programme.



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The workshop at Ngallan School was a huge success, with teachers keen to collaborate with those in Ireland on how to include and teach children with disabilities. The students were just as excited. They couldn't wait to connect with Irish children and learn more about the experiences of those with disabilities inside and outside the classroom, as well as about Ireland's food, language, culture, games, names, and languages.

I flew home full of hope at the potential of this brilliant new partnership and how it can help students explore the similarities they share, learn from one another and have fun along the way as they increase their understanding.

Over the next four years, we'll be carrying out more school workshops and sending ideas back and forth across West Africa, thanks to our country teams in Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Liberia. Meanwhile, I'm very proud that children here in Ireland are at the forefront of this pathway to better fairness and equality.

Together, we can help create a more compassionate and empathetic generation who will believe they can change the world, no matter how big or small that change may look. And this brings me to you, our amazing supporters. No matter your donation, you are making an impact, and we can never thank you enough.



Zambo enjoyed participating in the project and sharing his experiences with children in Ireland

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.

Advancing eye health services

It's been 50 years since Sightsavers first began working in Bangladesh to protect sight and fight for disability rights

In that time, your support has helped train doctors, nurses and ophthalmic paramedics, supported the development of a new eye hospital and reach people with disabilities and marginalised communities.

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 continued support, we'll keep pushing the boundaries of what's possible, including exploring and planning more ways to improve people's eye health, so that future generations can access the services 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 about our work in Bangladesh at www.sightsavers.ie/bangladesh50



Photos: © Sightsavers/Reza Shahriar Rahman

Saving Shawon's sight

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

When we first met Shawon (pictured with his mum), he was struggling at school and at home because of his failing eyesight.

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.



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

A lasting gift

Our fundraising manager, Declan, explains how the kind gifts people leave Sightsavers in their wills, can create joyous moments that last a lifetime



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One of the most inspiring aspects of our work is witnessing the profound joy and wonder of a person whose sight has been restored, whether through cataract surgery or with a simple pair of glasses. Gifts in wills help create these wonderful moments.

A special and personal gift in your will can help us invest in the future of sight restoration

In Sierra Leone, just six ophthalmologists serve a population almost twice the size of Ireland. In Zimbabwe, there are only 27 ophthalmologists for its 15 million population. The need for more eye health professionals is vital to our work.

A gift in your will means we can invest in training more specialist doctors and nurses, like ophthalmologist Dr Jalikatu Mustapha in Sierra Leone and ophthalmic nurse Jeremiah Gwafa in Zimbabwe, whom you've met in previous issues of Focus.

Over the last five years, more than 100 supporters have generously remembered Sightsavers Ireland with a gift in their will. By leaving your gift, you too can help train more eye health specialists to transform more lives long into the future.

"I believe that sight is a true gift, and if a person can have it restored with surgery I want to help. Life without sight is hard. I cannot imagine not being able to see colour and the wonders of nature"

Sightsavers' supporter

Here to help

I'd love to tell you more about how a gift in your will can change lives, and how we can help you make or amend your will for free. Please email me at dwhite@sightsavers.ie or call **(01) 270 0021**. Thank you.



Your gift can help train more much-needed ophthalmic nurses like Jeremiah

© Sightsavers/Jason J Mulikita

Our fundraising family

Across Ireland, kind people like Olivia and Adam have been finding more ways to raise money and save sight

© Sightsavers



Top of the class!

Congratulations Kilkenny College!
You've made a big impact in supporting our work to protect sight and fight for disability rights

Every year, transitional year students at the college propose different charities to raise money for, and we're especially grateful to Adam, whose passionate presentation about Sightsavers inspired his fellow students to choose us.

Together, the students raised an incredible **€10,000**, giving a huge boost to our work. We're so grateful for their efforts, and we were thrilled to visit the college and show them some of the sight-saving, life-changing programmes they're now supporting. Well done to all of you, and we hope you're proud of what you're helping to achieve.

Olivia's heroic haircut

We're so proud of 10-year-old Olivia, who sacrificed some of her beautiful locks to help others less fortunate

Olivia, who lives in Clara Vale, Co. Wicklow, decided to selflessly donate 14 inches of her gorgeous hair to the Rapunzel Foundation, which provides free wigs to people with long-term hair loss. But she didn't stop there.



Having seen our TV ads, Olivia decided that she'd also raise money to help people with visual impairments and sight loss. She set up an iDonate fundraising page to share her story and held a pyjama day at her school. The result was a massive **€1,410** for Sightsavers Ireland and the Irish Guide Dogs. Thank you so much Olivia, we really appreciate your kindness.

Ready to make a difference?

If you've been inspired by Olivia and Adam and would like to plan your own fundraiser, there are countless ways to help save sight and change lives. Find out more and set yourself a challenge by calling Michael on **01 230 0059** or emailing **info@sightsavers.ie**.

You'll also find lots of fundraising ideas at **sightsavers.ie/fundraise**