



# Annual Review 2023

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Six-year-old Happy with her aunt Akello in Uganda. After years of pain in her eyes, Happy had trachoma surgery supported by Sightsavers in September 2023.





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## On the cover

Ophthalmologist Benjamin works in northern Uganda to treat blinding diseases such as trachoma.

Happy is overjoyed to play with friends in her village. Now the pain is gone, she's able to enjoy her childhood once again.



# Message from Sightsavers Ireland chair Joan Burton

**2023 has been characterised by great economic and political uncertainty globally. Despite this, Sightsavers Ireland has performed extremely well, ensuring money raised from the Irish public continues to reach record numbers of people with treatments for neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), supports more sight-restoring operations and significantly grows inclusive education and civic and political participation programmes we support.**



Following on from the Sustainable Development Goals agreed at the UN in 2015, Sightsavers Ireland continues to push for equality for people with

disabilities, supporting their economic empowerment and political participation. We're working to 'leave no one behind' by ensuring that our programmes are reaching the furthest behind first and are inclusive for people with disabilities, and that this can be effectively measured. We are working in collaboration with other organisations and through local partners in Ireland and globally, towards a world where persons with disabilities can participate equally in society.

I would like to thank all of the supporters of Sightsavers Ireland; without you none of this good work would be possible. So many lives are transformed as a result of your generosity, both in the short term and beyond, as health

and education systems are strengthened to support the next generation. The board of Sightsavers Ireland and I are so grateful for the impact that your donations make on millions of lives in some of the poorest and most marginalised countries in the world.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow board members of Sightsavers Ireland, who serve with energy and determination as we continue to deliver on our mission and our strategic objectives in a world where our services and our capabilities are needed now more than ever.

Finally, 2023 saw a change in leadership at Sightsavers Ireland as Ciara Smullen became the new CEO, replacing Feargal O'Connell. I would like to thank Feargal for his hard work and dedication during his time as CEO and wish him well for the future. Thank you to Ciara and the Sightsavers Ireland team for their work and commitment to the organisation in 2023, and I look forward to continuing our work together in 2024.

**Joan Burton**  
Chair, Sightsavers Ireland





Ten-year-old Anita helps with chores at home in Bong County, Liberia. Anita had her eyes tested at a Sightsavers eye screening and was given glasses to improve her vision.



# Message from Sightsavers Ireland CEO Ciara Smullen

2023 was the 20th anniversary of Sightsavers Ireland. We used this wonderful occasion to celebrate the many incredible milestones that have been reached and achievements made in the countries where we operate, thanks to the generosity of our supporters over the past 20 years.



Globally, this year saw significant advances across Sightsavers. Nearly 10 million eye examinations were carried out – an impressive 13% increase from 2022.

The number of people no longer needing treatment for at least one neglected tropical disease now stands at 65 million, with more than 4.8 million additional lives touched since 2022 in the countries where we work.

In 2023, we celebrated a monumental achievement with Benin and Mali, two countries we support, successfully eliminating trachoma as a public health issue. In a world facing daily challenges, it can be all too easy to overlook the incredible strides made by organisations like Sightsavers.

In Ireland, we've been operating in a challenging fundraising landscape, contending with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and a range of humanitarian emergencies, including the war in Ukraine and the crisis in Gaza, which have affected charitable giving. Yet, Sightsavers Ireland ended 2023 on a strong footing, demonstrating resilience and adaptability in an era where economic, political and environmental challenges intensify and affect charitable contributions here in Ireland, as well as the delivery of our programmes in West and Central Africa.

The strength of Sightsavers Ireland was evident time and again in 2023, with the team showing a continued commitment and dedication. I want

to extend my heartfelt thanks to each member of our team, who work tirelessly and with such passion to make a difference every day.

This year, we also celebrated the launch of a new five-year partnership with Irish Aid. We're thrilled to continue our impactful work with Irish Aid under the Irish Civil Society Partnership (ICSP) grant, supporting our programmes across four countries in Central and West Africa. This vital partnership plays a significant role in helping Sightsavers Ireland fulfil our mission.

Looking back on 2023, I'm proud to say that, despite these challenges, we've had a successful year in fundraising, bolstered by the guidance and support of the Sightsavers Ireland board, whose dedication to strong governance has been invaluable.

It was my honour to be appointed CEO of Sightsavers Ireland in 2023, and I extend my deepest gratitude to outgoing CEO Feargal O'Connell for his support and dedication. I'm delighted to lead this fantastic team, whose passion for our mission drives everything we do, and I look forward to the exciting work ahead.

Finally, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to our wonderful supporters. In a year filled with critical causes, your loyalty and commitment have been unwavering, and none of this would be possible without you. Your generosity is transforming lives as we continue this journey together to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote the rights of people with disabilities.

With warmest thanks,

**Ciara Smullen**  
CEO, Sightsavers Ireland



Farida and Dorine, volunteers from the local village health team, share a moment in Ayuda village in northern Uganda.



# About Sightsavers Ireland

Sightsavers Ireland was established in 2003 as an independent affiliate with the purpose of supporting the work of our global sister organisation, Sightsavers. As a global family organisation, we all work towards achieving the same vision and mission. Sightsavers Ireland has been implementing a bold and ambitious strategic plan 2022-2026, which seeks to complement the global strategic vision of Sightsavers and make a considerable contribution to its global impact.

## Strategy, aims and objectives

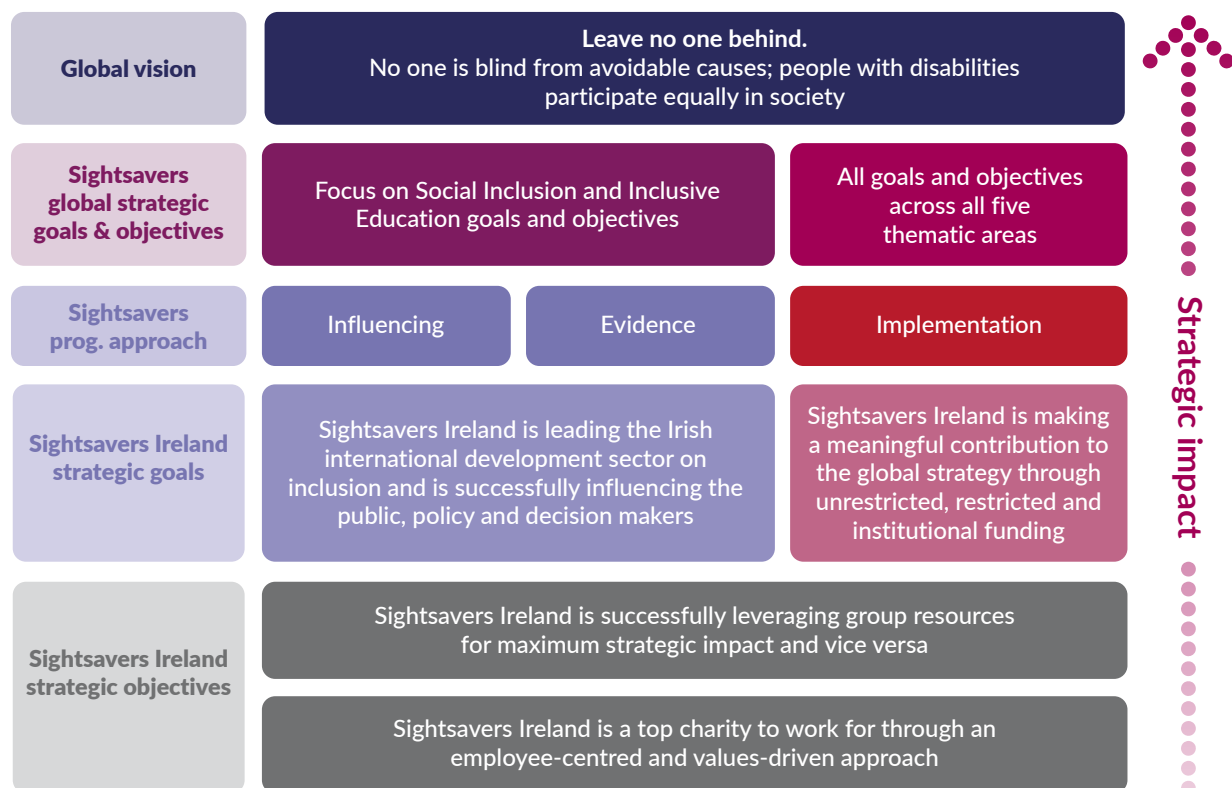
### Our vision

Our vision is of a world where no one is blind from avoidable causes, and where people with disabilities can participate equally in society.

### Our mission

Our mission is to prevent avoidable blindness, fight debilitating diseases and promote equality for people with disabilities.

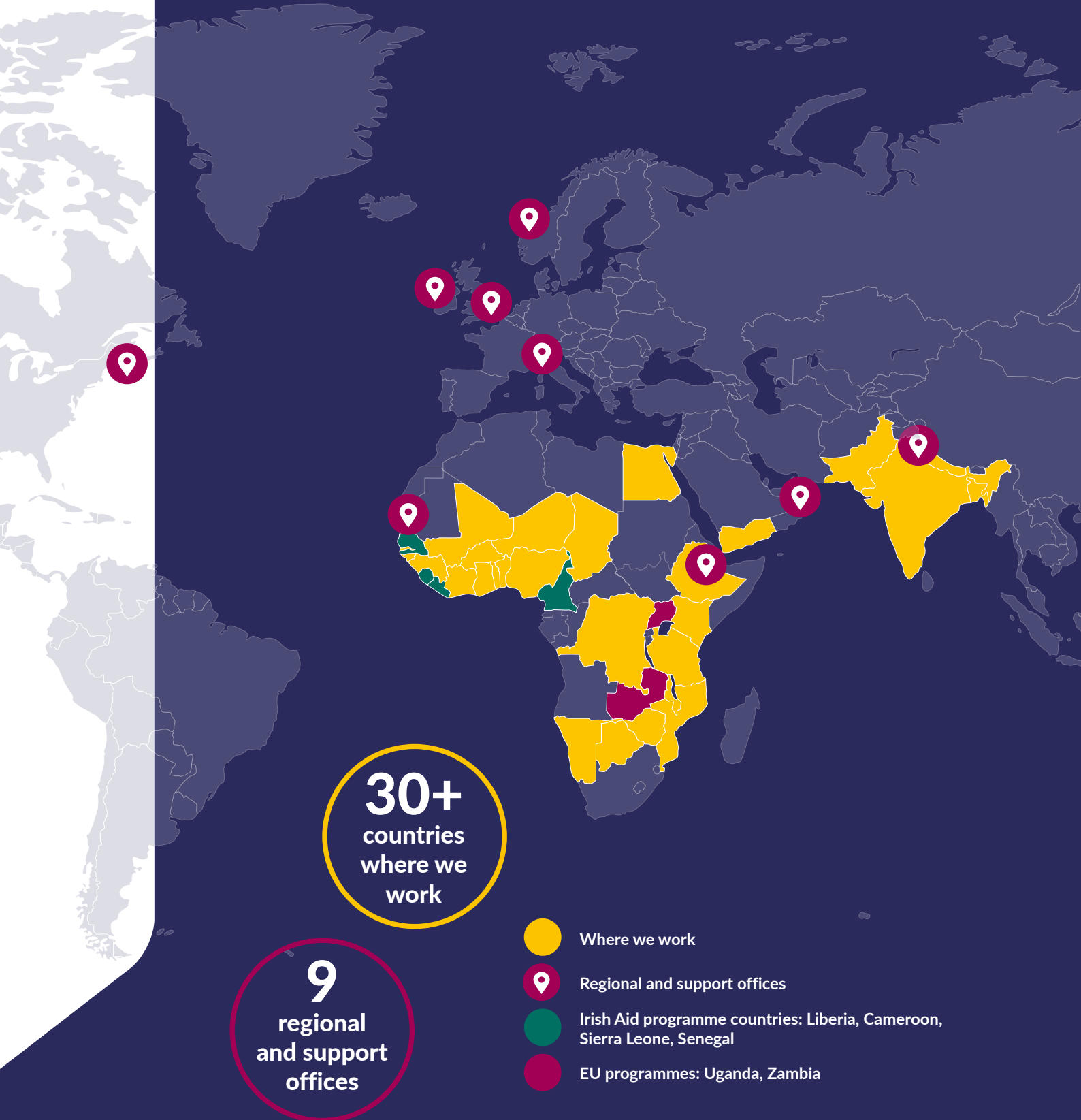
### Strategy map





## Where we work globally

Sightsavers works in more than 30 countries in Africa and Asia where we partner with local, regional, national and international organisations and governments. Sightsavers has nine regional and support offices around the world.



# Fundraising

**The Sightsavers Ireland team continues to be greatly appreciative for the ongoing support from our loyal supporters, particularly in these challenging times. 2023 was the 20th anniversary of Sightsavers Ireland: through the generosity of our supporters over the past 20 years, many incredible milestones have been reached and achievements made in the countries where we operate, and we continue to be eternally grateful for their support.**

The fundraising environment the Sightsavers Ireland team faced in 2023 was a difficult one. The ongoing cost of living crisis, continuous rises in fundraising costs, back-to-back emergency fundraising appeals and the closure of KBC and Ulster Bank all added to a testing year for the fundraising team. Despite the aforementioned challenges, Sightsavers Ireland's voluntary income totalled €5.1 million, (2022: €5.1 million), which was only 0.9% less than voluntary income received in 2022.

Of the €5.1 million of voluntary income, income from individual giving support accounted for €3.8 million (2022: €4.2 million), excluding major donors, which was 10% lower than the previous year's income. This decrease was attributed to the challenges outlined above.

The Strategic Partnerships team (corporates, major donors, trusts and foundations) once again had its most successful year ever with income totalling €1.1 million (2022: €0.6 million) – an increase of 86% when compared to 2022. This substantial increase in strategic partnership income was primarily as a result of a generous donation made by a corporate donor, alongside other significant donors responding positively to 20th anniversary fundraising appeals.

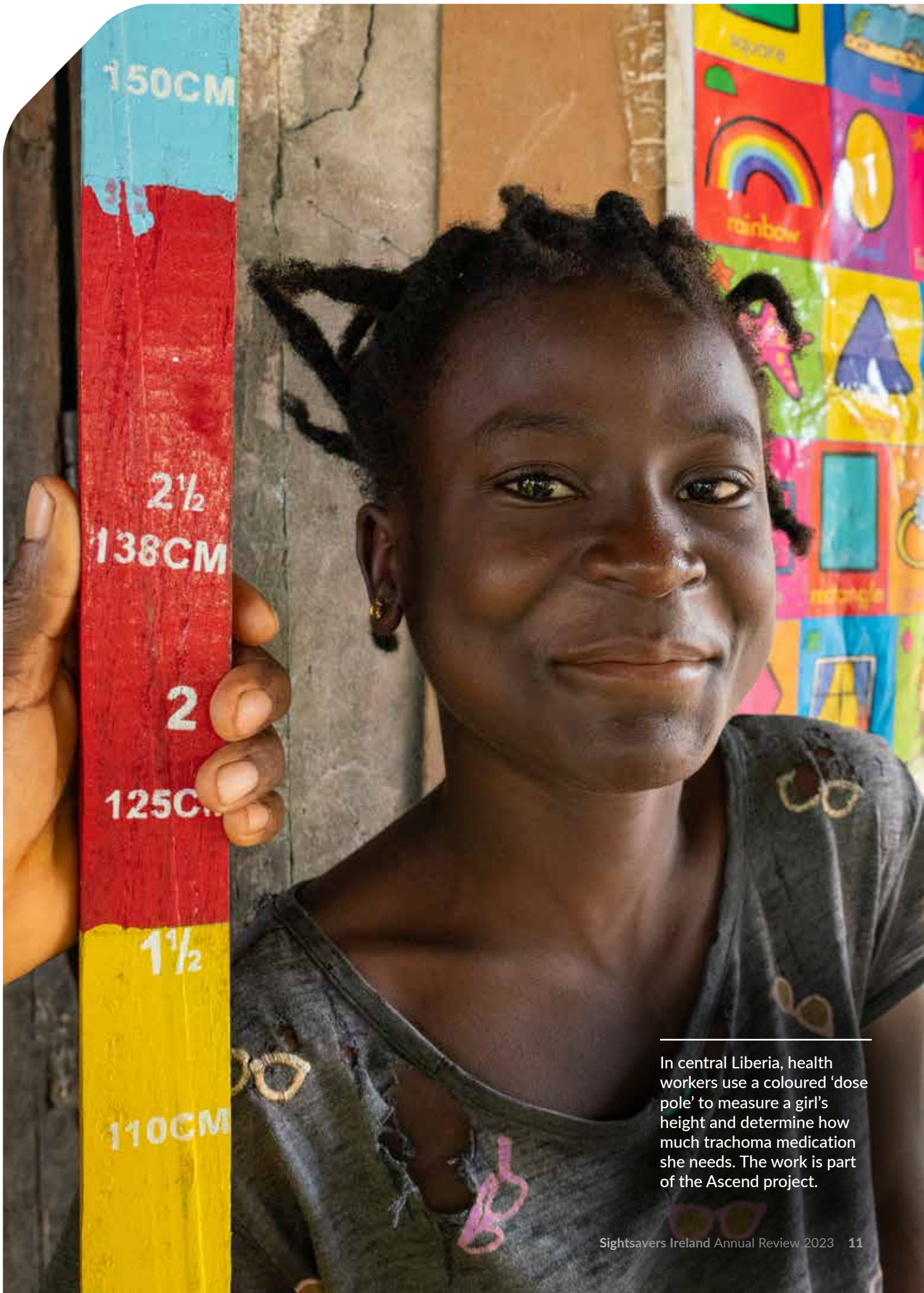
As in previous years, the organisation received a significant volume of legacy support, although the value of these legacies was not as high as previous years. The total income received through legacies in 2023 was

€129,839 which was considerably lower in comparison to the 2022 figure of €294,435. Legacy income is difficult to forecast however the organisation continues to invest in marketing specifically aimed at legacy giving in the last number of years.

Despite the difficult fundraising environment, Sightsavers Ireland finished 2023 in a solid position across all major pillars of the organisation. The organisation continued to demonstrate its resilience as it adapts to an era where various crises in economics, politics, geopolitics and the environment, continue to exacerbate already difficult circumstances and negatively impact charitable giving in Ireland and impact the delivery of our programming in West and Central Africa.

Sightsavers Ireland's agility and ability to pivot when presented with external challenges was proven on numerous occasions in 2023. For example, the team have identified and prepared for a new acquisition channel to recruit new Sightsavers Ireland supporters through face-to-face fundraising. This new will be piloted in 2024 adding diversity to our fundraising channels, but more importantly adding sustainable fundraised income to achieve growth to our numbers of regular giving donors. This new fundraising channel; a strong legacy pipeline for 2024; a well-developed tax campaign, and a growing number of high value corporate donations, all implemented by an established fundraising team, combine to give a positive outlook for 2024.





150CM

2½  
138CM

2  
125CM

1½  
110CM

In central Liberia, health workers use a coloured 'dose pole' to measure a girl's height and determine how much trachoma medication she needs. The work is part of the Ascend project.

# Irish Aid

**Sightsavers Ireland continues to appreciate the support generously provided by the government's Department of Foreign Affairs. 2023 was the first year of delivering 'Le Cheile: Together for an inclusive better world' through Irish Civil Society Partnership (ICSP) funding. Sightsavers Ireland continues to work collaboratively with the Irish government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and the continued partnership with Irish Aid.**

This important collaboration with Irish Aid is building on our extensive experience to bring about positive transformative change in systems, services and experiences for those in danger of being the furthest behind in Central and West Africa, including people with disabilities, especially women, girls and young people. While in Ireland, our team is delivering a high-quality Global Citizenship Education programme to build further awareness, understanding and solidarity with disability inclusion, and enable the Irish public to act in support of disability rights.

In the first year of the programme, we launched ambitious activities across five countries and five sectors: delivering impact in eye health, inclusive education, citizenship and political participation and climate action in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal, Cameroon and Global Citizenship Education in Ireland and in collaboration with country offices in West and Central Africa.

Following the six-month inception period, the team focused on building the foundations for transformative change across all of the thematic areas. In eye health, we influenced new national eye health policies and strategies in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Senegal, established national coordination mechanisms with the membership of organisations of people with disabilities, and delivered inclusive eye health training.

In inclusive education, Sightsavers Ireland influenced disability mainstreaming through our membership of education sector coordination groups in Cameroon and Senegal and also

delivered inclusive education training for teachers and officials. On citizenship and political participation, we worked with Senegalese parliamentarians to ratify the African Disability Protocol and the Marrakech Treaty. In Cameroon, we influenced the government to commit to the Inclusive Data Charter.

In the new area of climate action, we conducted a study on the impact of climate change on youth with disabilities in Sierra Leone and introduced climate action to school-aged children, while in Cameroon, we distributed basic hygiene kits to children with disabilities displaced by the impacts of climate change.

In Ireland, the Global Citizenship Education team visited more than 400 primary school students and directly delivered disability inclusion-focused Global Citizenship Education workshops with the use of virtual reality headsets. This was supported by the award-winning 'Put Us in the Picture' website, which raises children's awareness of disability inclusion, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Irish Aid programme.

This has been a challenging year for many countries across West Africa. In Senegal, ongoing political unrest and health worker strikes led to delays in implementation and data reporting. Instability and elections also slowed activities in Liberia and Sierra Leone. And while these challenges led to delays in signing agreements with governments, we are confident that we will deliver strong results through the programme in 2024.



# 2023 Results: The journey so far

## Overview

New organisational statement around locally-led development.

## Eye health

7k cataract surgeries, 28k people were refracted and 14k glasses supplied.



## Gender Equality

Ground work to ensure eye-health projects are accessible to women and people with disabilities.

## Inclusive education

New membership in Local Education group to mainstream disability in local education systems.



## Community Centre

## Citizenship and political participation

Youth consultation workshops focus on citizenship and political participation in three countries.

## Climate action

Raising youth climate change awareness in Sierra Leone.



## Global Citizenship Education

Sightsavers Ireland delivers disability inclusion awareness to 400 primary school students visited.



## Policy influence

Compulsory training in inclusive education for Cameroonian teachers.

## School



**Irish Aid**

An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs



Sightsavers

# European Commission

## **Tusambilile Chapamo – Let’s Learn Together (Zambia)**

The four-year Tusambilile Chapamo inclusive education project aims to empower children with disabilities in Zambia by increasing access to quality, equitable and inclusive education for 700 children and young people with disabilities through improved enrolment, retention and learning in 16 mainstream schools (11 government, three community and two private schools) and Chinsali Youth Resource Centre in Chinsali district, Muchinga province of Zambia.

The delivery of the project has continued to run well over the course of 2023, its third year, with 787 children with disabilities already enrolled (exceeding the four-year target), alongside exceeding its year four targets for teacher training and community engagement. The mid-term review was completed early in the year. The review was followed up with a project visit from the EU delegation in Zambia and Sightsavers Ireland CEO in May, with the travelling delegation praising the progress made in the past year.

With encouragement from the provincial and district education leadership, and savings achieved during the COVID-19 suspension of the project, the team has requested approval for an extension of the project to neighbouring Kapwepwe Zone. This was granted in January 2024. We have begun planning to scale up to a further six schools (one community, four primary and one secondary) which should reach a further 60 children with disabilities. This expansion of the project will allow Sightsavers to assess our approach to scaling this model. As we have already exceeded the original target

for enrolment, we have proposed to increase this to 845 while also increasing targets for other planned outputs.

Zambia suffered a severe Cholera outbreak in the final quarter of the year, though this primarily affected Lusaka and the project area was not affected. This has delayed some activities and the project responded by collaborating with the local Public Health Board, and distributed chlorine, buckets, and supported hygiene promotion communications.

## **Anyim Maber (‘bright and better future’): Enhanced opportunities for employment and employability for young people with disabilities (Uganda)**

The Anyim Maber project is a three-year project funded by the European Commission, and 2023 was the first year of project implementation. Sightsavers is working with three partners, as well as organisations of people with disabilities and business development partners to improve employment opportunities for young people with disabilities in four districts in Uganda.

Over the lifespan of this economic empowerment project, we will provide 120 existing youth entrepreneurs with business development skills and mentoring, with the aim of supporting them to grow their businesses and employ young people with disabilities. We will also provide vocational and business development training skills training to 480 young people with disabilities to improve their access to employment.



The project has made excellent progress in its first year, achieving strong results including:

- **Partners (organisations of people with disabilities) identified 120 entrepreneurs with disabilities across the four project districts, and 54 have already received in-depth business development training and mentoring.**
- **Organisations of people with disabilities identified a further 490 young people with disabilities who will benefit from one or more project interventions.**
- **120 of those young people with disabilities began a three-month vocational training course. Staff in the vocational training institutions were trained on disability inclusion, gender and safeguarding, and accessibility audits of the premises were carried out to ensure the learning environment was appropriate for students with disabilities.**

Based on the successes of year one, Sightsavers Ireland is positive that a strong basis has been built to achieve the planned objectives for the project in year two.



Two students with visual impairments using braille slates in a classroom in Chinsali district, northern Zambia.

# Our global performance in 2023

**The overall performance of the global organisation in 2023 saw a considerable improvement on 2022 in eye health and social inclusion, using the combined resources of the Sightsavers group. Although the numbers for neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are lower than in recent years, there was a rise in the estimated population no longer needing treatment for at least one disease due to our interventions.**

## Eye health

Sightsavers' global organisation carried out almost 10 million eye examinations, a 13% increase from 2022, exceeding the annual target by 5%, working in 16 countries and on 51 projects. More than half of examinations were at primary level, with project teams implementing programmes in schools, eye and other primary care settings, and the rest at secondary/tertiary level. We maintained a balanced gender ratio among those examined.

We performed more than 500,000 eye operations, over 90% of which were for cataracts. Although 7% below our ambitious annual target, delivery was impacted by climate, supply chain, resource and data reporting issues, there was a 3% increase in cataract operations compared with 2022. This is the highest number of cataract surgeries reported in a single year by Sightsavers' projects.

We reached 16 countries through 42 projects, with India contributing to more than three-quarters of global cataract surgeries. More women than men received cataract operations.

We also delivered eye health solutions to almost 920,000 people in 12 countries, exceeding our 2022 performance by 18%. More than 80% of the spectacles we distributed were in India, where we distributed more than ever before.

Although our ambitious projects targets were not achieved overall, strong partnerships with other providers and partners supported this element of our work. Nearly half of our programme participants were female and just over 6% were children.

## Neglected tropical diseases

In 2023, we made significant progress in providing NTD operations for people affected by trichiasis and hydrocele in 15 countries. Trichiasis, often known as advanced trachoma, is a condition caused by eyelashes turning inward and scratching the eye, leading to permanent blindness. Hydrocele is a swelling in the scrotum caused by lymphatic filariasis, a parasitic infection that impairs the lymphatic system and can lead to the abnormal enlargement of body parts, resulting in pain, disability and social stigma.

We facilitated 16,974 trichiasis operations, as well as supporting 1,565 hydrocele operations in 2023 helping thousands more patients to manage the symptoms of lymphatic filariasis.

We supported ministries of health in 12 countries to deliver preventive medication for five NTDs. We helped to deliver more than 60 million treatments, mainly onchocerciasis (a parasitic infection spread by black flies, which can lead to permanent blindness) and lymphatic filariasis, reaching an estimated 47 million people and achieving 90% of our 2023 annual target. These figures reflect the fact that a number of districts no longer require treatment or have reached the end of treatment cycles.

The number of people no longer requiring treatment for at least one NTD now stands at 65 million, an increase of more than 4.8 million from 2022 in the countries where we work. In 2023, Benin and Mali, two countries we support, eliminated trachoma as a public health problem. Note that outputs include all those supported by partners we collaborate with in the delivery of our programmes.



## Education

In 2023, we supported children with disabilities in 11 countries through schools-based support, providing education materials, assessments and referrals for specialist support, equipping schools to support learning for children with disabilities, providing support and training for parents, and training teachers on inclusive education. We provided formal schools-based support to 5,467 children with disabilities in three countries. This represented 84% of the annual target and was 60% lower than the previous year (13,675).

These figures reflect a shift in our strategic approach away from supporting individual students directly, and towards strengthening the education system itself, through policy change, developing better resources for teachers and training teachers on inclusive education. This shift will ensure our work has a longer-lasting impact and will benefit the entire education system, helping more students with disabilities to access education.

## Social inclusion and economic empowerment

In 2023 we provided training to almost 30,000 people with disabilities – 120% of our yearly target and a 16% increase from training conducted in 2022. India contributed 96% of the global activity.

Our economic empowerment projects continued to grow, with training and support in 12 countries for people with disabilities, farmers, small businesses and employers.

More than 1,000 people completed training programmes and more than 400 people secured new employment.

We also continued to support and engage with organisations of people with disabilities across our portfolio: 36 organisations with disabilities in four countries were trained to advocate for inclusive employment, and 45 organisations in Nigeria delivered training to employers on the Inclusive Futures disability confident toolkit.

## Human resource development

We progressed significantly in developing human resources for our health, inclusion and education programmes. We trained almost 65,000 professionals on health, education and inclusion short courses, 92% of our annual target. Almost 50,000 were education professionals. This includes almost 400 professionals trained to support disability inclusion in our economic empowerment programmes, and 129 surgeons trained in hydrocele surgery. We also supported three ophthalmic nurses to receive a professional qualification.

Across our programmes, 120,532 community-level volunteers were trained – 140% of the target of 86,373, although 49% of our 2022 achievement. Of the total number trained, 100,691 were community directed distributors (CDDs). The reduction in training for CDDs from 2022 to 2023 reflects treatment delivery patterns in our NTD programmes. Fewer mass drug administration treatments in Nigeria in 2023, for example, meant fewer CDDs needed to be trained.



In Bong County, Liberia, vision technician Ruth Zeo tests a student's sight, pointing to letters on a vision chart.

# 2023: Our global work in numbers



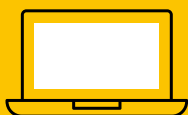
**465,000**

people had their sight restored through vital cataract surgery



**29,000**

people with disabilities received vocational training



Our global social media posts were seen in people's feeds more than

**15 million**

times



**60.8 million**

treatments were distributed to protect people from disease



Sightsavers Ireland's social media posts were seen in people's feeds

**1.9 million**

times, a 1,350% increase from 2022



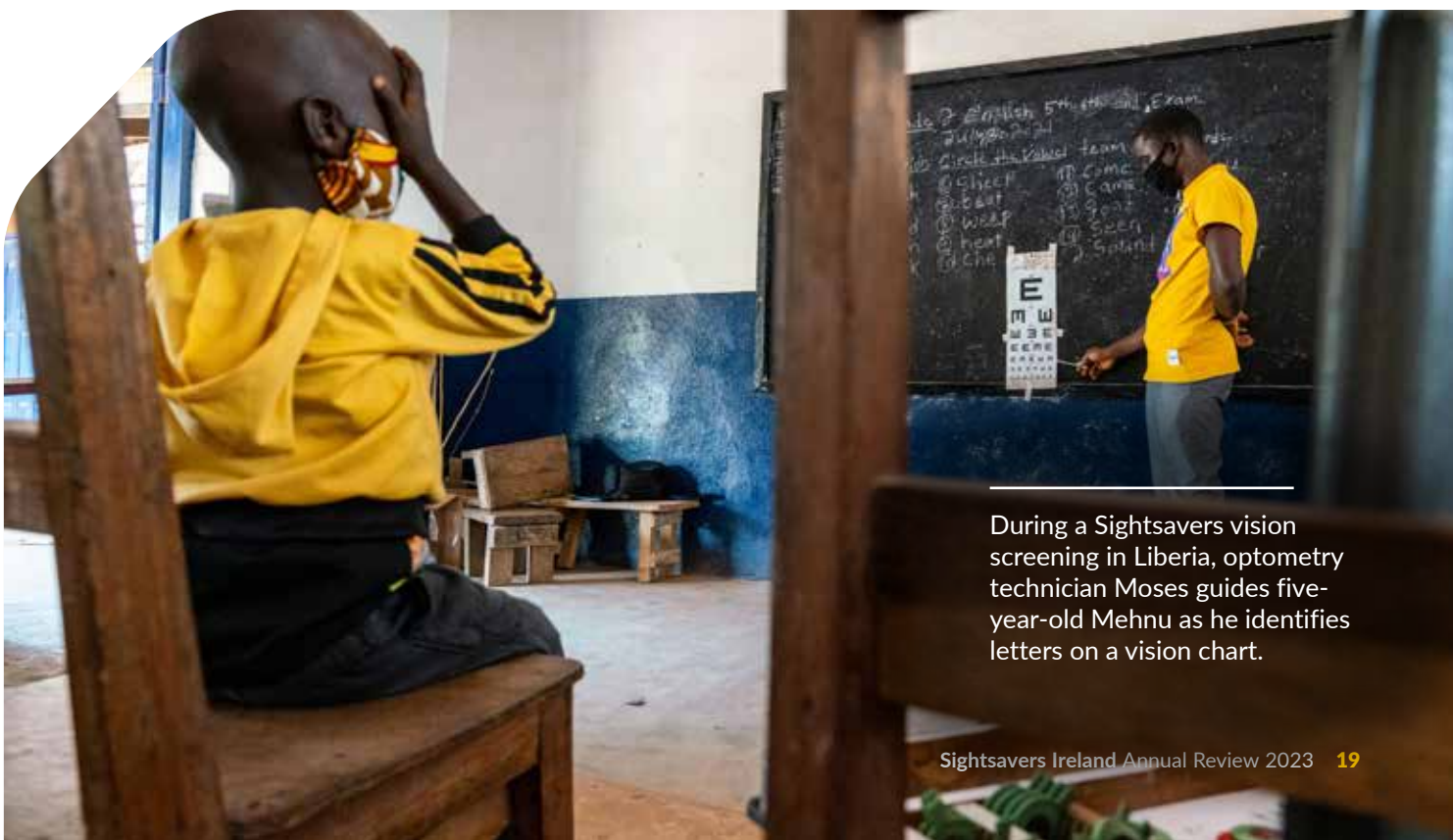
**23**

articles were published by us in peer-reviewed journals, containing high-quality evidence to inform our work



	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Eye health</b>				
People examined	6,309,510	6,444,117	8,816,597	9,985,681
Operations performed (including cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, hydrocele and trichiasis)	286,724	413,747	503,169	502,689
Cataract operations carried out	256,657	370,402	451,895	465,658
Spectacles dispensed	259,654	585,927	782,037	919,647
<b>Neglected tropical diseases</b>				
Treatments for trachoma	11,124,713	8,308,302	14,449,069	6,241,621
Treatments for river blindness	8,841,252	52,402,304	44,915,247	20,938,627
Treatments for lymphatic filariasis	2,016,150	74,465,405	53,669,105	16,043,423
Treatments for soil-transmitted helminths	4,378,966	11,407,199	14,430,770	5,584,249
Treatments for schistosomiasis	15,768,671	26,218,535	7,817,504	12,012,422
Total NTD treatments	42,129,752	172,801,745	135,281,695	60,820,342
<b>Education and inclusion</b>				
Children with disabilities being supported in school	9,032	19,788	13,675	5,467
People with disabilities who received training	16,921	4,413	24,366	29,288
<b>Human resources</b>				
Health workers trained to gain initial professional qualification	12	5	5	3
Professionals supported on eye health short courses	51,670	125,086	59,581	56,178
Professionals supported on education or inclusion short courses	5,732	49,783	18,901	8,443
<b>Volunteers</b>				
Total number of community volunteers trained	137,361	458,188	244,118	120,532

Note: Statistics from previous years may have changed from prior reporting due to updated information.



During a Sightsavers vision screening in Liberia, optometry technician Moses guides five-year-old Mehnu as he identifies letters on a vision chart.

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A participant at a cataract screening event in Kogi, Nigeria, who received essential eye care.





# Our organisation

Sightsavers Ireland was established in 2003 as an independent affiliate with the purpose of supporting the work of our global sister organisation, Sightsavers. We fundraise with the public, corporate partners, trusts, foundations and government donors. We raise the profile of issues related to our work with the Irish public, decision makers and policy makers. We have a team of 15 dedicated staff members, nine voluntary board members and 20,000 supporters. Our patron is President Michael D Higgins.

## Governance

### Board of directors

At Sightsavers Ireland we are fortunate to be governed by a dedicated board of directors. In 2023 the board met four times to review the performance of the organisation and its adherence to statutory requirements and relevant industry standards and codes.

The board is supported by a Finance and Audit sub-committee which meets twice a year to ensure financial oversight, validate the organisation's compliance with relevant accounting standards and provide scrutiny of the audited annual accounts, which can be found on our website.

### Committees

The board has appointed two standing committees:

- **Finance and Audit**, which monitors and reviews audit activities, the risk and control framework, the effectiveness of our processes and the statutory accounts and annual report
- **Sightsavers Irish Aid Programme Board (SIAPB)**, which monitors the activities and programmes of the Irish Aid grant and EU-funded programmes

Committees may include non-board specialist members, who voluntarily offer their expertise to assist the committees.

There are distinctions between the roles of the board and of the CEO and senior management team, to whom day-to-day operational management is delegated. Policy and strategic plans are prepared by senior management for consideration and approval by the board.

### Teams

The organisation comprises three core teams, whose leaders report to the CEO. A governance and compliance officer also reports directly to the CEO. The teams' responsibilities are:

- **Individual Giving** manages our fundraising and supporter care for the primary individual supporter base.
- **Strategic Partnerships** manages our major donors, trusts and foundations, corporate partnerships and institutional funding partners.
- **Communications and Public Affairs** manages our Global Citizenship Education programmes, policy, advocacy and public affairs, social media and website and communications and media.
- **Governance and administration executive and CEO** are responsible for governance, oversight of programme implementation, monitoring, operations, planning, finance, assurance and reporting.

Find out more about how we're run at [www.sightsavers.ie/how-were-run](http://www.sightsavers.ie/how-were-run)

## Accountability

### Board of directors

Sightsavers Ireland is committed to the highest standards of transparency, governance and accountability in ensuring that it delivers the maximum value and impact with the donations it receives from supporters and partners. Throughout 2023, the board of directors completed an internal review of the organisation's compliance with all relevant codes of practice:

- **The Irish Development NGOs Code of Corporate Governance**
- **The Guidelines for Charitable Organisations on Fundraising from the Public**
- **The Dóchas Guide to Ethical Communications**
- **The Statement of Recommended Practice, Accounting and Reporting by Charities**
- **The Charities Regulatory Authority's Governance Code**

Globally, Sightsavers continued to maintain an open data policy, which ensures that all documentation on strategy, partner management, quality control and programme evaluations are available on the Sightsavers Ireland website.

Sightsavers also conforms to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and to Accountable Now (formerly the International NGO Charter of Accountability).

### Governance code

The principles of the Charities Regulatory Authority's Governance Code are central to the core values of Sightsavers Ireland. The

board remains committed to maintaining our compliance with the code, which is reviewed annually and overseen by the audit committee.

### Safeguarding

All Sightsavers Ireland representatives and partners must abide by a code of conduct, and all staff must complete a compulsory online safeguarding module. Our global head of safeguarding supports staff and partners to minimise risks and respond appropriately to concerns. More than 40 Sightsavers safeguarding leads also spearhead safeguarding training, risk management and incident response in the countries they represent.

At Sightsavers Ireland, we have an obligation to protect children and at-risk adults from harm, whether from members of staff, partners, suppliers, contractors, consultants, or from involvement in our programme activities.

Information on our approach to safeguarding can be found on our website.

### Complaints and whistleblowing

In 2023, we continued to deliver an awareness-raising campaign about our Speak Up platform for reporting misconduct.

All new employees are required to attend a Speak Up induction session. We also identified additional means of communicating the system to our programme participants and partners, making use of existing practices such as programmatic kick-off meetings and feedback working groups.

The system complements our existing whistleblowing channels and our safeguarding and fraud reporting mechanisms.



## Environment

Across the global organisation, Sightsavers remained committed to tackling the effects of climate change in its programmes and reducing its environmental impact.

A set of 10 three-year climate action goals were developed, spanning different activities including programmatic work, strategic and funding partnerships and research.

Irish Aid-funded climate change adaptation activities in West and Central Africa have progressed. In Cameroon, we are advocating to

support children who have been displaced due to climate-related disasters.

We continue to promote environmentally sustainable practices in green vision centres in Sierra Leone, and are working to develop a toolkit for environmental sustainability for eye care facilities.

In Sierra Leone and Senegal, we are advocating for organisations of people with disabilities and young people with disabilities to be included in climate change policy development.

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## Equity, diversity and inclusion

### Disability inclusion in the workplace

In 2023, it was recognised that the Disability Inclusion Working Group had served its function of spearheading this area of work through cross-departmental collaboration. While acknowledging that much more remains to be done, each member of staff – and the organisation as a whole – will continue taking responsibility for creating a more inclusive workplace for people with disabilities.

Our Disabled Employee Network will lead the necessary discussions. Through other internal initiatives, including our disability awareness training (attended by more than 330 colleagues from 24 programme countries in 2023), we will continue to move this important agenda forward.

A Sightsavers Ireland Equity, diversity and inclusion policy was approved by the Sightsavers Ireland Board in 2023 as part of a benchmark under our MoU with Irish Aid.

### Racial diversity

In 2023, the Racial Diversity Focus Group merged with the Racial Diversity Working Group and worked together to implement a number of activities based on the results of the 2022 Sightsavers staff survey. 2023 highlights included a religious and cultural celebrations series, unconscious bias webinars and the creation of a public holidays calendar. An e-learning module on diversity and inclusion is being built, with the aim of launching to staff in 2024.



In Bong County, Liberia, 11-year-old Arthur reads to his father Francis, while wearing his new glasses provided by Sightsavers.

# What we achieved in 2023

**For more than 70 years, Sightsavers has been preventing avoidable blindness and fighting for the rights of people with disabilities worldwide.**

During 2023 we continued this vital work, treating millions of people for potentially blinding eye conditions and making huge progress on disability rights.

The past year has brought a variety of challenges. Conflict, political upheaval and economic instability have sent shockwaves around the world, with the potential to affect our work and income. However, we've still achieved amazing things during 2023. Our

loyal staff and partners, plus our dedicated supporters, mean we can continue our life-changing work even when times are tough.

As well as eliminating trachoma in more countries, we've continued to champion disability rights and have celebrated milestone anniversaries in several countries. But we couldn't have done it without you. Read on to learn about our achievements, all made possible by you.



## **Sightsavers Ireland's 20th anniversary**

We celebrated the 20th anniversary of Sightsavers in Ireland with an event in December attended by supporters, donors, current and former team members and friends. It was a wonderful evening where we reflected on the work of Sightsavers Ireland over the past two decades.



## **Benin and Mali became the latest countries to eliminate trachoma**

In May 2023, the World Health Organization confirmed that Benin and Mali had banished trachoma for good. Sightsavers has worked in both countries to protect people from the disease by distributing preventative medication, treating patients and encouraging good hygiene. Sightsavers global CEO Dr Caroline Harper said: "This is a momentous day. It's a huge achievement for the countries, and for all those people who have worked so hard to make this possible."





## Our disability rights campaign sent a message to world leaders

Our Promise in Peril petition called on world leaders to fulfil their promises to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and leave no one behind, including people with disabilities. It was signed by 48,063 people from 121 countries. Equal World ambassador Abia Akram, who represented the campaign at the UN's summit, said: "We're pleased that the political declaration has been adopted, as it contains explicit references to disability rights."



## Three programme countries celebrated anniversaries

Staff from our offices in Bangladesh, Kenya and Nigeria marked decades of hard work by celebrating their countries' significant achievements. Sightsavers Kenya and Sightsavers Nigeria each marked 70 years of work, the latter with an event in Abuja (pictured) attended by staff and government ministers. Meanwhile, Sightsavers Bangladesh marked its 50th anniversary with an event in Dhaka.



## Our deworming work received a \$16.9 million funding boost

We were awarded a sizeable grant for our work to tackle intestinal worms, after a funding recommendation from US charity evaluator GiveWell. For the seventh year in a row, GiveWell assessed our deworming work as being highly cost-effective, and as a result, we received the grant to fund work in Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and Democratic Republic of Congo. The grant will support our work to distribute deworming medication for school-age children.



## We championed disability-inclusive feminism at the Women Deliver conference

In July 2023, Sightsavers attended the Women Deliver conference in Rwanda, to call for action to ensure women with disabilities aren't forgotten in the women's rights movement. The conference was attended by 6,000 people, with 200,000 people joining online. We ran interactive sessions and our booth showcased stories of women with disabilities who have defined their own place in society.

# Risks and challenges

**Risk management and the maintenance of the risk register for Sightsavers Ireland continued to be managed by the CEO, who reported progress on mitigation actions, changes in the organisation's risk profile and the overall risk landscape to the board on a quarterly basis.**

## **Safety and security**

In 2023, some of our operations continued to be affected by security concerns, including the deteriorating situation across the Sahel, political instability and rising violent crime, banditry and inter-communal violence. Environmental impacts affecting food and fuel availability also create risks around the stability of the territories in which we work. We are seeing increasing levels of violent crime and direct attacks on aid sector employees. However, the situation in the Middle East has had minimal impact on our programmatic work and staff.

## **Poor programme implementation**

To mitigate the risk of failure in services or programme outcomes, in 2023 we mobilised many new programmes in line with standardised project design and inception methodologies. We invested in supply chain development across our programme portfolio through the introduction of new IT systems and improved integrated planning processes. Our partnerships framework has been updated, and monitoring frameworks continue to evolve, supported by rigorous programme reporting.

## **Inability to raise adequate voluntary income**

Challenging fundraising conditions continued in 2023, with cost-of-living pressures and humanitarian and conflict-related appeals drawing donor attention. High inflation saw fundraising costs increase, affecting our ability to reach new supporters and communicate with existing donors. We focused on optimising the audiences with whom we communicate and ensuring the most efficient fundraising spend.

## **Cyber security**

One growing challenge is maintaining a proportionate response to the risks posed by cyber-attacks that increasingly may involve the use of artificial intelligence. Conversely, the position is made worse because of a vacuum of consistent and cohesive national and international legislation and the actions of certain state actors.

## **Recruiting and retaining key staff**

Increasingly, candidates seek a positive work/life balance. We have responded by highlighting our flexibility and many blended/remote opportunities. The team at Sightsavers Ireland grew in 2023 with new staff members joining the organisation across all teams. We are therefore well positioned to continue to attract the best, diverse talent, with applicant numbers significantly up and a very low attrition rate reflecting the success of our family-friendly policies, support for staff wellbeing and competitive salary offers.

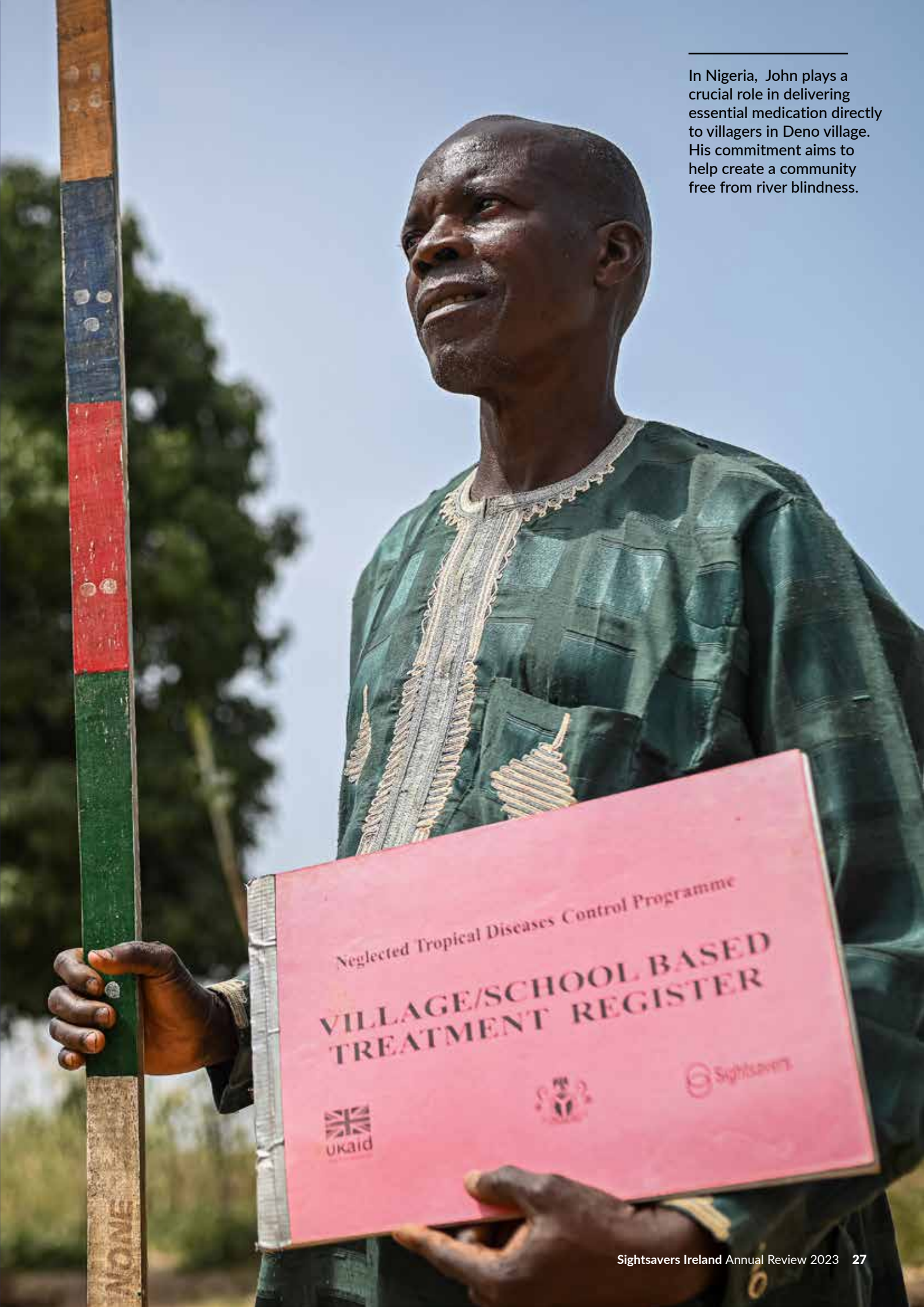
## **Media crisis in core markets**

We have been mindful of the rising number of ongoing debates on the work of non-governmental organisations, only commenting when necessary and appropriate. The media continues to focus on diversity, decolonisation and the depiction of programme participants, and there is growing expectation that we are transparent about how these themes relate to our work. The establishment of our Racial Diversity Working Group, including a survey of all staff, is a key organisational process to mitigate this risk.



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In Nigeria, John plays a crucial role in delivering essential medication directly to villagers in Deno village. His commitment aims to help create a community free from river blindness.






Neglected Tropical Diseases Control Programme  
**VILLAGE/SCHOOL BASED  
TREATMENT REGISTER**

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