



Focus

Your magazine from  Sightsavers Spring 2025

Washing trachoma away

Congratulations! You're part of Pakistan's incredible success in eliminating this terrible disease

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A sight-saving milestone



Sightsavers' Adnan Youhana tells you how eliminating trachoma from Pakistan has transformed people's lives

Of course, success depended on us treating every single person, which was a huge challenge. The driving force behind this was our legion of female health care professionals, known as Lady Health Workers – read on for more about them.

I've seen the terrible impact trachoma can have. Elderly people pulling out their eyelashes with tweezers to stop the excruciating pain, children with sore, weeping eyes they could hardly bear to open. It's been heartbreaking. But like you, I knew I had a role to play in ending people's agony.

Hearing that Pakistan had eliminated trachoma was a very proud moment for me and my Sightsavers' colleagues. We were relieved to know that millions of people can now live their lives free from this blinding disease, and I'm sure you feel the same.



Reaching out to everyone and creating lasting change

In Pakistan, social barriers can exclude women from being seen by male healthcare workers. Thankfully, Lady Health Workers (LHWs) are accepted into people's homes and can identify symptoms of trachoma in both male and female family members.

With your support, we helped train the LHWs to screen people for trachoma, record their findings, and refer people with symptoms for further treatment.

The LHWs also advised families on ways to help prevent trachoma from spreading, such as washing hands and faces. And while this was happening, we began working closely with the health department – training surgeons to perform trichiasis operations.

Previously, there were no certified trichiasis surgeons in areas where trachoma was active.

Now there are eight, and we broadcast the message via radio, nationwide.

This multi-pronged approach proved to be a winning formula. More and more people got to know about trachoma and the free operation they could have, and Pakistan's healthcare system is stronger and more able to stop the disease from returning. But we still need you with us!

We urgently need to help more countries reach elimination, and we also want to keep on strengthening Pakistan's eye care services for future generations. Together, I know we can do this, and I can't thank you enough.

“Now the public health system is stronger than ever to treat and prevent trachoma!”

Adnan Youhana



LHWs are trusted and respected in their communities, which gave us a huge advantage

Making Pakistan SAFE

You've helped transform so many lives, and your continued support can keep trachoma at bay through the SAFE strategy (surgery, antibiotics, facial cleanliness and environmental improvements). In Pakistan, you helped:

- Train over **1,700** Lady Health Workers to identify trachoma cases
- Train **eight** trichiasis surgeons
- Distribute **500,000** doses of medication
- Build **500** latrines to improve sanitation and hygiene

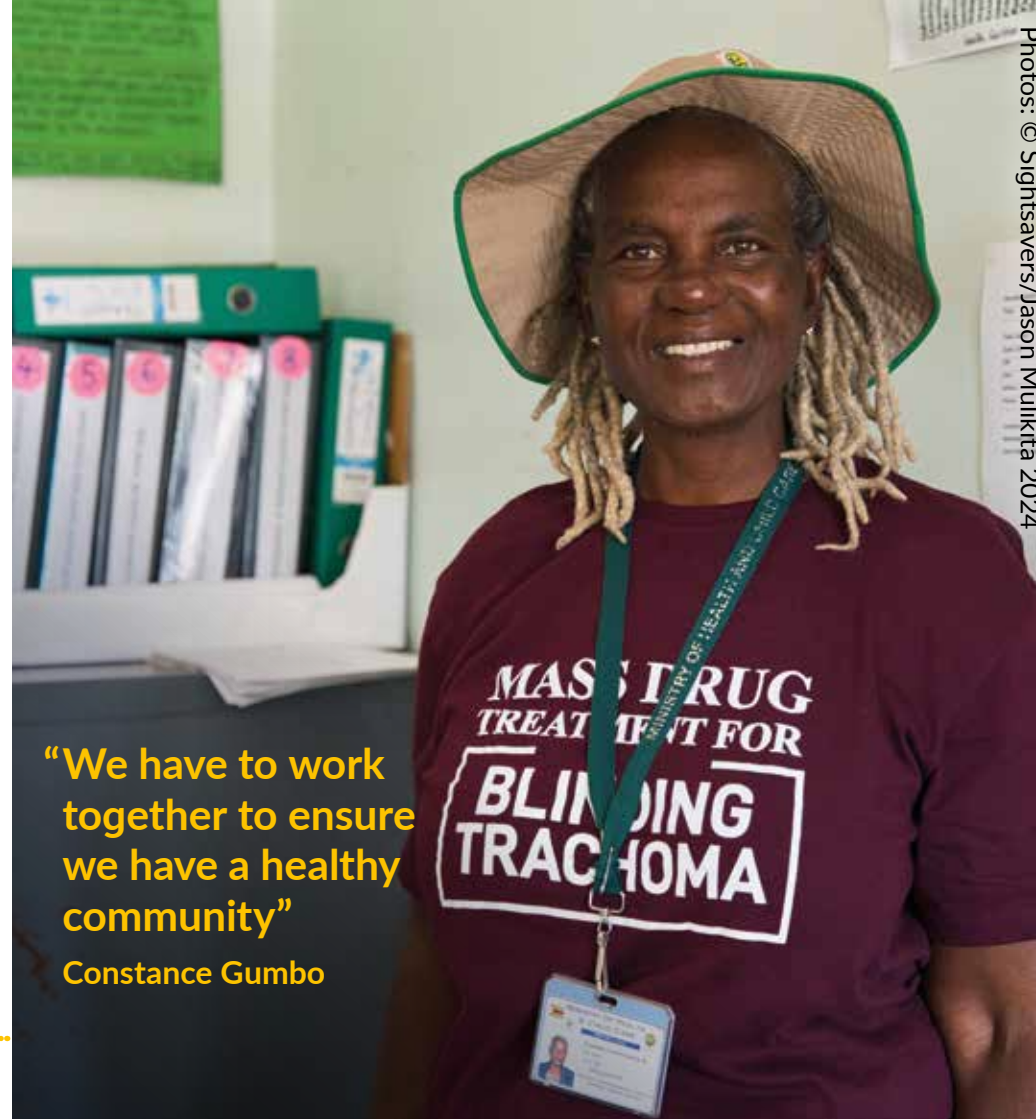
Showing the way

You support dedicated people like Constance Gumbo, who's at the forefront of Zimbabwe's fight against trachoma

Constance is the District Environmental Health Officer for Zimbabwe's Gweru district, and she's a very busy woman. Identifying reasons behind disease outbreaks and working hands-on to tackle trachoma and other public health problems are all part of her role.

"We're helping communities build toilets, access clean water, and learn essential hygiene practices, empowering them to protect their health," Constance explains. "We also visit schools and villages to talk about the disease, assess people's health and carry out mass drug administrations of antibiotics that can clear up infections."

Reaching remote, rural communities can be a challenge. "Thanks to Sightsavers and other partners, we now have more people on the ground, and we have integrated a number of public health programmes with other departments and ministries," says Constance. "These are my greatest joys!"



Photos: © Sightsavers/Jason Mulikita 2024

"We have to work together to ensure we have a healthy community"

Constance Gumbo

No more tears

Every day, Constance and her team meet children like Forgive, Chabota and Bubota – in pain and in urgent need of help

When the eye health team first examined them, brothers Forgive, Chabota and their cousin Bubota were all suffering from sore, weeping eyes – telltale signs of trachoma. Their families were immensely relieved when they heard the boys could be treated at a Sightsavers-supported mass drug administration nearby.

Thanks to your generosity, the three boys will receive regular antibiotics, and can live their lives free from this debilitating disease.



Wiping trachoma off the map

Turn to the back page to see which other countries are coming closer to elimination.

“Seeing my kid’s face for the first time! It was a joyous moment!”

Esther



The joyous gift of sight

The cataract operations you help support are nothing short of miracles for people like Esther and her family

“I stayed inside the house for seven years,” mum of three, Esther tells us, describing how difficult her life was with cataracts. “My husband and oldest daughter, Monica had to lead me everywhere and do the chores. They did everything for me.”

Esther’s husband, Stafford, explains how her sight loss affected the whole family. “It was hard. I had to cook, fetch water, find food, take Esther to the bathroom and bathe the kids. When I went to find work, I was worried about Esther’s welfare. But I had no choice.”

Stafford did his best to support everyone. But when he was away working, Monica had to stay at home to care for Esther and the younger children. This meant she was often absent from school.



The family struggled on until Esther heard that an eye screening camp was being set up nearby. She went for an examination and was diagnosed with cataracts in both eyes. When the doctor told Esther she could have free operations to restore her sight, she was overjoyed.

With bilateral cataracts, only one eye is operated on at a time. But even after her first operation, Esther could see more clearly and gazed into the eyes of her baby son for the very first time. Back at home, the other children rushed to greet her and she hugged them. “I was over the moon,” she said. “Very happy. I danced!”

You made Esther’s miracle happen!

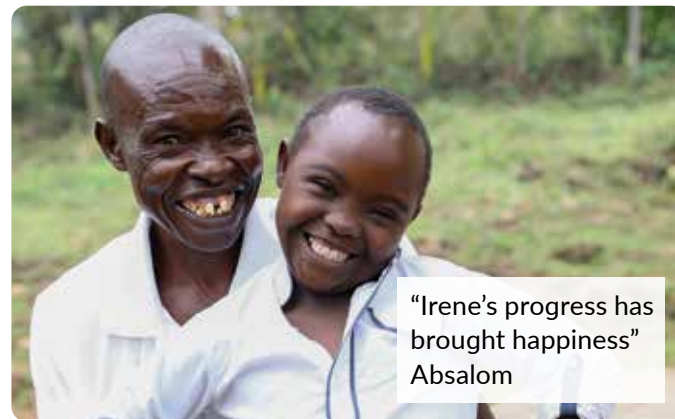
And your kind donations mean we can reach more people like her and help restore their sight. It may be a straightforward cataract operation, but for people like Esther it’s the chance to see their children, regain their independence and live their lives again – the most amazing gift you could give.

Together for a fairer world

The African Disability Protocol (ADP) is now legally binding, protecting disability rights for more than 80 million people

Your kind support helps transform lives – enabling people with disabilities to access healthcare, education and employment without discrimination. So, we're delighted that this human rights charter, which we've long petitioned for has finally come into force.

The ADP is a significant step towards creating a more inclusive society in which people with disabilities are protected by specific laws that cater to their needs. And we know how important inclusion can be from story's like Irene's, who was helped through one of the life-changing inclusive education projects you help fund.



"Irene's progress has brought happiness"
Absalom

Irene has a speech impairment and finds it hard to remember things. She was often excluded by other children because of her disabilities. But today, she's thriving.

"There is a big change in Irene," says her father, Absalom (pictured with Irene above). "The society that I come from saw her as a child who could not go anywhere, who could do nothing. Society now sees her as a very different person. Because of the programme I am seeing her progressing well and she is giving me a lot of hope."

Photos: © Sightsavers/Steven Gichuhi 2022

"They feel they are part of society"

Bradon is a pre-primary schoolteacher from Homa Bay, Kenya who has been trained as part of the project.

"In my class, we support children with disabilities by adapting the resources we have to suit their needs," he explains. "We try as much as possible to involve them in all the activities, without prejudice."

"Each child with a specific difficulty is given an individualised education plan: this gives us a roadmap of what to do, how to do it, and the timeframe. We keep track of the child's progress and the milestones they are achieving."

"Children socialise and learn their belief patterns in early childhood. If they're not included at that point, they will develop a sense of being left out. But if they're taken into school early, they will grow and learn together"

Bradon, pre-primary schoolteacher, Kenya



Will you help beat trachoma?

With you by our side, we're determined to eliminate trachoma from all the countries where Sightsavers works – and we're making good progress.

Pakistan's latest success is a testament to what can be achieved through the collaboration, commitment and compassion of partners and local teams with a shared goal. But we need to do more.

Here, you can see the countries confirmed as trachoma-free by the World Health Organization, and those that are getting closer.

Your extra gift today could help give them the final push they need. Donate now at sightsavers.ie/focus or complete the form attached to the enclosed letter.

- Trachoma eliminated
- Nearing elimination
- Working to eliminate

