

# Empowerment and inclusion

Strategic framework 2015



Sightsavers

**Front cover and this page:** Bhanvari Devi, 35, lost her sight after complications in pregnancy. Her husband left her, forcing Bhanvari and her two children to move in with her parents.

Bhanvari met Manju, left, who runs a self help group for people with disabilities. Manju has been a positive role model, showing Bhanvari that it's possible to live independently.

Bhanvari now has a disability certificate, a travel pass and a regular pension. She has been given independent living skills training and earns an income spinning wool.



## Acknowledgements

This strategic framework was formulated through a collaborative and organisation-wide effort, involving Sightsavers staff from every region in which we work. This document was a collaborative effort by the many staff that engaged and contributed. There are far too many people to list individually; but special thanks go to the staff and stakeholders who participated in workshops in Bangladesh, North India and the UK, and the many discussions that took place with people in every team at our UK office.

At various stages in the development of this strategy, individuals and experts from other organisations also played a valuable role in

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**Tracy Vaughan Gough**

Global Technical Lead: Social Inclusion

# Empowerment and inclusion

## Social inclusion strategic framework 2015

When Sightsavers was founded in 1950, its goal was to transform the lives of visually impaired people in Africa, through education and livelihoods. Since then, our focus has expanded to address the prevention of blindness, provision of eye services and the elimination of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). This document provides our framework on social inclusion<sup>1</sup> and identifies our main areas of future work. It explains our rights-based approach of mainstreaming disability throughout our programming and operations, and it complements our other global strategies on eye health, education and research. It also explains our aim to support targeted interventions which redress the inequalities experienced by people with disabilities in the countries where we work.

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1. Social inclusion activities are articulated as a thematic priority within Sightsavers' Strategic Framework: Making the Connections (2012-18).<sup>[BACK]</sup>

# Background

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A socially inclusive society is one in which all people enjoy the same rights and where no one experiences stigma and discrimination.

People may be discriminated against for different reasons but the outcomes are often the same. For individuals, discrimination can lead to poverty, lack of protection and disenfranchisement. More broadly, the marginalisation of individuals serves to weaken social cohesion and contributes to conflict and economic and social inequalities. In order to achieve the goal of a socially inclusive society, **individuals and groups** who are marginalised or excluded need to claim, and exercise, their rights and responsibilities. **Institutions**<sup>2</sup> should recognise those rights and be responsive to the needs of all members of society.

People with disabilities, who make up an estimated 15% of the world's population<sup>3</sup>, are among the most marginalised people in

the world. Over 80% of people with disabilities live in low- and middle-income countries, where they are over-represented among the poor. Yet people with disabilities are often disregarded in development planning, which means their needs and interests are not addressed. This oversight has a negative impact on their ability to transcend poverty. It limits their contribution to and participation in society and contributes to further exclusion. Women and girls with disabilities face additional challenges due to gender inequality.

This strategic framework clarifies what disability inclusion means for Sightsavers and sets out how we can embed it throughout our organisation. It outlines an ambitious programme of what we aspire to achieve, in collaboration with people with disabilities, to achieve our vision: a world where no one is blind from avoidable causes and where visually impaired people participate equally in society.

## Acronyms

<b>NTDs</b>	Neglected tropical diseases
<b>MDA</b>	Mass drug administration
<b>UNCRPD</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
<b>DPOs</b>	Disabled People's Organisations

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2. Institutions' refers to both formal and informal structures from families and households to civil society organisations, governments and the private sector.<sup>[BACK]</sup>
  3. WHO/World Bank (2011) World Report on Disability.<sup>[BACK]</sup>

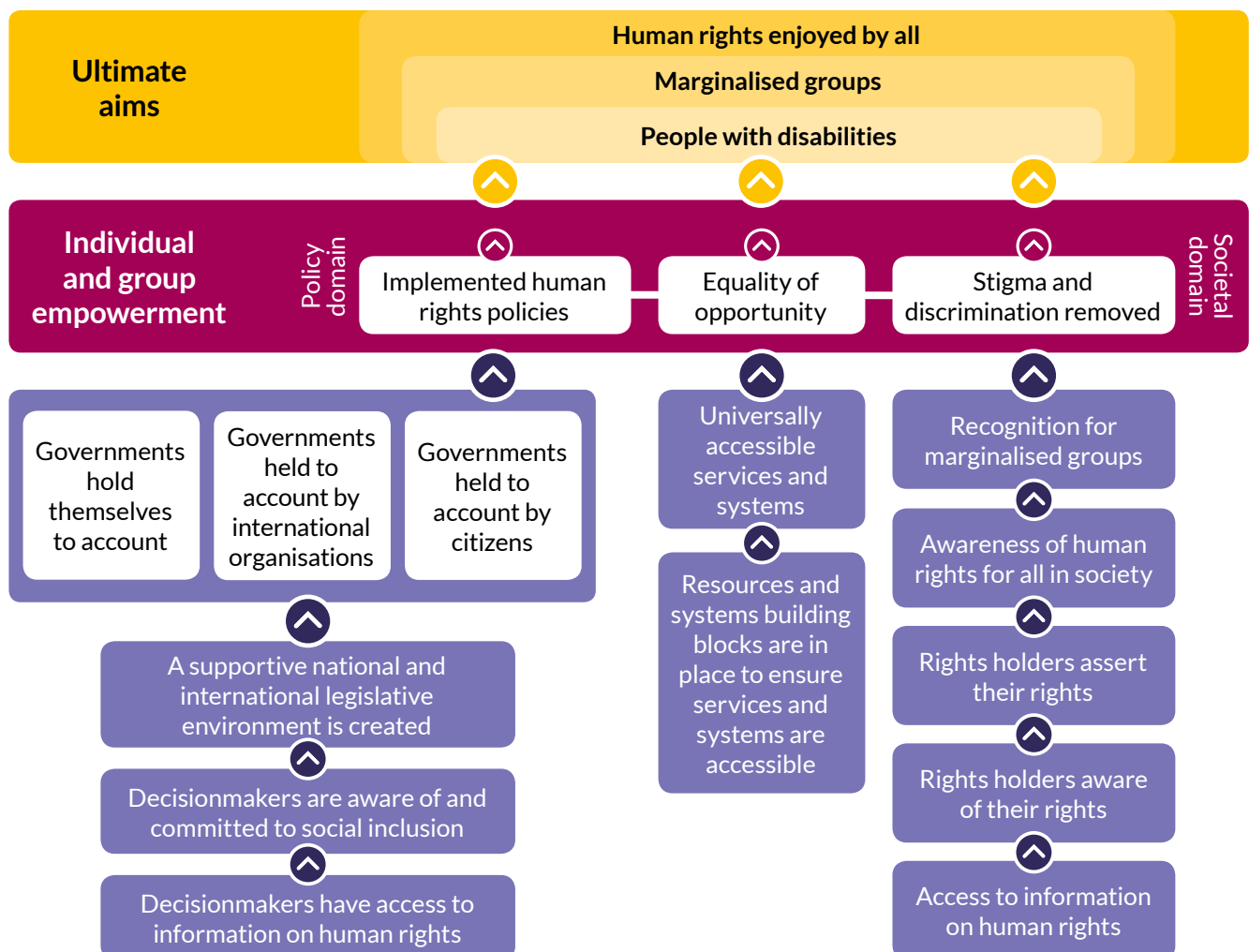
# Theory of change

Our approach to social inclusion is based on a theory of change that aims to fulfil the human rights established in the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD). We recognise that change is complex, but see three interrelated pathways as critical:

**A Human rights policies and laws are in place and implemented by national governments.** This requires legislative and governmental accountability, effective legal mechanisms and citizen engagement.

**B People with disabilities have equality of opportunity.** This means being able to access services such as education, health and legal protection.

**C Stigma and discrimination are addressed.** These are often deep-rooted causes of marginalisation. While challenging to address, building acceptance of diversity is crucial to lasting social change.



# Areas of focus

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Achievement of our vision will be informed by these pathways. An inclusive eye health programme, for example, will be based on:

- A** an understanding of the health legislation and policy framework from a disability perspective.
- B** ensuring the quality, availability and accessibility of services.
- C** tackling attitudes towards people with disabilities at family and community levels, as well as addressing the capacity of health workers to deliver services in a way that is non-discriminatory.

Based on our theory of change, for the duration of the current strategic framework, Sightsavers will be guided by the three pathways in focusing on **mainstreaming disability inclusion** within our existing portfolio and operations<sup>4</sup>. We will also work with people with disabilities in order to support their efforts to claim and realise their rights through **targeted, strategic interventions** that contribute to their individual and collective empowerment.

Our strategy outlines **seven strategic objectives** (shown on pages 7-12), two of which are cross-cutting. All seven will ultimately contribute to addressing stigma and discrimination. Within each objective, we identify focus areas to be prioritised in the short term.



Sightsavers' primary focus is on achieving equal rights for people with visual impairment. We aim to realise these rights by promoting the rights of all people with disabilities. Our overarching approach is via a pan-disability perspective, especially in relation to our advocacy work. People with visual impairment, however, do face specific challenges.

**We will ensure, in line with our strategic vision, that the needs and interests of people who are blind or have low vision are a particular focus of our work.**

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4. Through making operational the existing organisational policies and commitments and utilising and adapting existing tools. <sup>[BACK]</sup>

# Mainstreaming inclusion in what we do

## Objective 1:

### Mainstream disability inclusion in our health programmes

Health programmes are Sightsavers' largest portfolio and area of particular expertise. This is where we have the opportunity to make the most impact for people with disabilities. By embedding inclusion in our eye health and NTD programmes we can deliver more effective programmes by reaching the most marginalised and ensure that infrastructure is accessible, that quality services are provided, and that referrals to other services (e.g. rehabilitation) are systematised. It means factoring in inclusive approaches at the start of planning to ensure that they are cost effective<sup>5</sup> and sustainable. Sightsavers will adopt a phased approach to test our assumptions of what works through pilot initiatives. What we learn through these will inform other health programmes.

#### Priority focus

##### Strengthen disability-inclusive eye health programmes

Using existing disability mainstreaming tools and expertise<sup>6</sup>, Sightsavers will pilot an inclusive eye health initiative, in line with our eye health strategy<sup>7</sup>, in order to demonstrate a model approach for replication. The pilot will involve collaboration with new and existing partners. Tools will be developed and the process documented to maximise the learning.

#### Priority focus

##### Develop effective and inclusive NTD programmes

In line with NTD strategic approaches<sup>8</sup> Sightsavers will identify entry points to ensure that people with disabilities are reached, for example, in mass drug administration (MDA) treatments. Initially, the knowledge gaps should be addressed through quantitative and qualitative data collection. Interventions may include expanding coverage surveys to include disability and/or testing the lessons of our disability data disaggregation pilot in test sites covering multiple NTDs. If the data confirms the need to strengthen the inclusiveness of NTD programmes, there may be several opportunities to expand coverage. These could include using Sightsavers' connections to DPOs to share information and/or strengthening the capacity of community-directed distributors and partners to improve outreach.

5. Light for the World (2014) Inclusion Works. <sup>[BACK]</sup>

6. Eg CBM Inclusion Made Easy – in eye health programmes (2012). <sup>[BACK]</sup>

7. Sightsavers Eye Health Strategy (2013-2018). <sup>[BACK]</sup>

8. Eg Fast track Initiatives: Sightsavers (2011) Elimination of Blinding Trachoma and Sightsavers (2011) Elimination of Onchocerciasis. <sup>[BACK]</sup>

# Mainstreaming inclusion in what we do

## Objective 2:

Develop demonstrable models of effective inclusive education<sup>9</sup>

Inclusive education is a fundamental driver of development. It enables children with disabilities to realise their rights, facilitating their participation in, and contribution to society; supports poverty reduction and

can tackle discrimination through social integration. Efforts will be made to link education and inclusion programming where opportunities exist.

## Objective 3:

Scale up efforts to achieve diversity in the workplace

Diversity benefits any organisation. Sightsavers will work to strengthen our internal policies to support the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities.

### Priority focus

**Ensure Sightsavers is an employer of choice for people with disabilities**

Sightsavers will strengthen efforts to ensure that more people with disabilities are recruited, and retained, at global and country office level and that measures are put in place to ensure that they progress and develop their careers on an equal basis. Senior leadership will oversee a human resources plan of action on organisational diversity, drawing on external expertise where relevant. We will work, for example, with disabled people's organisations to help us overcome any barriers to employing people with disabilities.



Jenneh, who is blind, is thriving in her mainstream school in Sierra Leone and wants to be a teacher when she's older.

9. Sightsavers Education Strategy 2013-2018. [\[BACK\]](#)



# Working with people with disabilities on strategic empowerment

## Objective 4:

Support people with disabilities to realise their potential through determining, advocating for and claiming their rights (voice, agency and participation)



**This outcome area relates to strategic interests (eg political rights) as opposed to practical needs.**

The premise is that people with disabilities experience barriers to claiming their rights in both societal and institutional spheres, but that “...with the right resources, people can find their own solutions...”<sup>10</sup>

## Priority focus

**Promote political participation through inclusive elections**

The right to vote is critical to democracy and the UNCRPD<sup>11</sup> underscores the equal right of people with disabilities to participate in political life. Yet, in many countries people with visual impairment, for example, are not able to cast their vote independently because the mechanisms are not inclusive. Sightsavers will consolidate our learning from experiences in West Africa as well as that of other actors<sup>12</sup>. Then, building on best practice we will work with electoral commissions and partners to ensure that future national, district and local elections are inclusive of people with disabilities.

10. Sightsavers sustainability statement. <sup>[BACK]</sup>

11. UNCRPD, Article 29. 'States Parties shall ...undertake to:  
a. Ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others... including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected, inter alia, by: i. Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use; ii. Protecting the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums...' <sup>[BACK]</sup>

12. Eg UNDP, NDI, IDEA, IFES, MIUSA. <sup>[BACK]</sup>

# Working with people with disabilities on strategic empowerment

## Objective 5:

Facilitate economic independence of people with disabilities<sup>13</sup>



Sankarlal lost his sight and struggled to earn a living, but a loan from the government scheme has enabled him to run a small shop and support his family.

Disability and economic poverty are inextricably linked. **Investing in people with disabilities can also contribute to poverty reduction, reducing economic inequalities and greater social capital.** Sightsavers will prioritise **economic empowerment** of the poorest people, noting that this area covers a broad range of possible interventions<sup>14</sup>. We will evaluate economic empowerment interventions<sup>15</sup> to develop a more cohesive approach<sup>16</sup> and will increase our research into, for example, the impact of legislation on quotas, utility of training schemes, and what drives employer motivation in increasing participation in labour markets.

## Priority focus

**Promote inclusion in financial services for people with disabilities**

**Sightsavers will challenge the inequality that persists in the financial sector.**

Financial services, from microfinance bodies to banking institutions, can support economic independence. But they remain out of reach for many people with disabilities due to direct exclusion or indirect causes such as inaccessible buildings or ATMs. While some success has been achieved at policy level, implementation of inclusive practice remains a challenge. It must be a priority if people with disabilities are to be economically independent. Sightsavers has an advocacy role to play. We will set up a financial exclusion learning group to assess what can be learned from work in India and elsewhere on accessible banking.

13. UNCRPD Article 27 Work and employment. <sup>[BACK]</sup>

14. See other related resources listed in Coe, S and Wapling, L (2010) Travelling Together, World Vision UK, pp81-82. <sup>[BACK]</sup>

15. See also: Marriott, A and Gooding, K (2007) Social Assistance and Disability in Developing Countries, DFID and Sightsavers. <sup>[BACK]</sup>

16. As articulated in Sightsavers Research Strategy (2014-19). <sup>[BACK]</sup>

# Cross-cutting

## Objective A:

### Address gender inequalities and women's empowerment

Women make up two-thirds of people who are blind. Contributing factors to this imbalance include the social barriers women experience in accessing eye health services<sup>17</sup>. Women with disabilities are particularly marginalised, more likely to experience violence and less likely to benefit from development initiatives<sup>18</sup>. Yet women's roles within their families and communities make them drivers of development. Failure to address their specific needs can also have a detrimental impact on wider community development.

Sightsavers will design and implement programmes with a clear understanding of context-specific gender dynamics and will put in place mechanisms that do not further entrench negative cultural values. Gender will be a cross-cutting consideration throughout programming areas and targeted interventions will address context-specific needs and interests identified by women with disabilities.

## Priority focus

### Develop pilot interventions targeted towards realising the rights of women and girls with disabilities

We will establish connections with leading women's rights networks in order to influence a disability perspective and/or develop targeted projects responding to specific needs and interests. We will collate good practice on promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities to be shared and replicated.

## Priority focus

### Embed gender analysis in each programme development plan

Sightsavers will conduct gender analysis at the start of each health, education and inclusion programme to assess barriers and identify what needs to be done to ensure equal access to women and men, girls and boys.

17. WHO (2002) Genderblind. <sup>[BACK]</sup>

18. UNCRPD, Article 6. 1. 'States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. 2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the present Convention'. <sup>[BACK]</sup>



Visually impaired young women take part in self-defence training in Bhopal, India.

# Cross-cutting

## Objective B:

Developing effective influencing interventions/approaches



A self help group for women meets in Katrlyasar village, India.

Advocacy on disability rights is fundamental to implementation of the UNCRPD and integral to both our mainstreaming and targeted inclusion objectives. This means identifying the most strategic entry points at each level in order to raise the visibility of disability rights, and effect greater inclusion. **Sightsavers will strengthen country level advocacy planning as an integral aspect of programme planning**, benefiting from technical resources from the global policy and advocacy team and joining up advocacy initiatives where possible<sup>19</sup>.

## Priority focus

### Greater joined up national and global UNCRPD advocacy efforts

Sightsavers will assess the knowledge gaps among people with disabilities and other stakeholders (eg decision-makers) on the UNCRPD and national disability legislation. Activities may include designing ways to raise awareness of the UNCRPD with partners; delivering advocacy training for partners; and promoting greater and more proactive engagement by country offices with national disability organisations to develop common priorities and maximise impact.

19. This priority compliments the Sightsavers global advocacy and policy team's influencing strategy. <sup>[BACK]</sup>

# Applying the strategy

## Accountability, capacity building and institutionalisation

This strategy, while reflecting Sightsavers' longer-term aspirational perspective, is based on a pragmatic approach which sets out what we plan to achieve within the timeframe of the current strategic framework. In the period 2015-2018, Sightsavers will concentrate on the priority focus areas outlined above and the mechanisms required to establish social inclusion as integral to our programme delivery. Sightsavers monitors its impact globally using the strategy, implementation and monitoring (SIM) card tool. In order to measure progress on inclusion, our strategic objective has been revised to: **Demonstrate effective approaches that impact positively on the inclusion, and empowerment, of people with disabilities.** A more detailed implementation toolkit will be developed, but key elements of that toolkit will emphasise:

- the importance of **ownership and leadership** in moving forwards on identified priorities.
- the need for robust **monitoring and accountability** mechanisms in order to measure progress.
- **capacity-building and investments in technical expertise** in order to build consensus on a common vision of disability inclusion and development of the technical skills required to deliver.
- **learning** through research, documentation and piloting new and innovative approaches; communicating lessons and supporting replication.



Susan (left) and her friend Jessica learn by sorting shapes in their classroom at Bishop Willis school in Uganda.

# Empowerment and inclusion

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## Mainstreaming

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### Inclusive health

#### Priority focus

Strengthen disability-inclusive eye health programmes

#### Priority focus

Develop effective and inclusive NTD programmes

### Inclusive education

#### Priority focus

Demonstrate scalable, cost-effective approaches to education for children with disabilities

### Organisational diversity

#### Priority focus

Ensure Sightsavers is an employer of choice for people with disabilities

## Cross-cutting

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### Equal rights for women and girls with disabilities

#### Priority focus

Develop pilot interventions targeted towards realising the rights of women and girls with disabilities

#### Priority focus

Embed gender analysis in each programme development process intersectional inequalities through targeted interventions for women and girls with disabilities

### Influencing

#### Priority focus

Greater joined up national and global UNCRPD advocacy efforts

# Empowerment of women and men with disabilities

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## Voice, agency and participation

### Priority focus

Promote the inclusion of people with visual impairment in electoral process

## Economic empowerment

### Priority focus

Promote inclusion in financial services for people with disabilities



“I used to sit inside the house and my wife used to go to work and support me. People thought I was unproductive and pitied me. Now I earn myself, I’m very happy.”

**Sankarlal Sansi**

We work with partners  
in developing countries to  
eliminate avoidable blindness  
and promote equal opportunities  
for people with disabilities

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Bumpers Way  
Bumpers Farm  
Chippenham  
SN14 6NG  
UK

+44 (0)1444 446 600

[info@sightsavers.org](mailto:info@sightsavers.org)

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