Focus
Your magazine from Sightsovers Spring 2020

Achieving the incredible
You've helped halve blindness in the Sundarbans, transforming the lives of people like Sandhya
Even more to be proud of

You’re helping to protect thousands from trachoma in Egypt

Writing your Focus welcome message is one of my favourite things to do. That's because it gives me the chance to acknowledge your incredible support and share some of the amazing achievements you’ve been part of, such as our first-ever mass drug administration in the Menia region of Egypt.

As you can read on page 4, nearly 300,000 people in Matay are now protected from the pain and misery of blinding trachoma. You’ve also taken us another step closer to eliminating the disease in all the countries where we work by 2025, and I can't thank you enough. Mercia Cumaio is one of our amazing heroes helping to beat trachoma in Nampula, Mozambique. Her dedication is inspiring and, despite many challenges, she and her team are getting great results. You can read her story on page 6.

Talking of inspiring, on page 8 we celebrate our five-year Sundarbans Eye Health Service Strengthening Project, supported by Standard Chartered and sight-savers like you. Find out how you've helped to halve the number of people with blindness in this remote part of eastern India, transforming the lives of Debola, her husband Nami, and many more like them. You're doing so much to help others, and I really hope you'll enjoy this issue of Focus and reading about your wonderful sight-saving successes.

My very best wishes,

Becki Jupp
Global Director of Fundraising

In this issue...

4 Mission Menia
First steps to a trachoma-free Egypt

6 Meet Mercia Cumaio
Fighting trachoma in Mozambique

8 Halving blindness
Success in the Sundarbans

10 Education for all
Enabling children with disabilities to go to school

12 Brighter futures
How a gift in your will can change lives

The end is in sight
See page 5

My Sightsavers

Get the latest on life-changing work you support, share your fantastic fundraising stories, join our community of like-minded sight-savers and much more. Whatever you want to see, say or share, stay connected your way:

Visit www.sightsavers.org
Email info@sightsavers.org

Share SightsaversUK
Telephone 0800 466 1111

Follow @Sightsavers
Write to Freepost SIGHTSAVERS

See Sightsavers
Thanks for your support!
Fantastic first

Thank you for supporting the first-ever mass drug administration in Egypt, to help eliminate blinding trachoma

Ancient medical documents dating back to 1500 BC show that trachoma has affected people in Egypt for millennia. Now, with your help, nearly 300,000 people in Egypt’s Menia region are being protected from this painful, blinding disease. Once again, you’ve helped make history and given families and communities the chance to enjoy a trachoma-free future.

Revealing results
Through our pioneering Global Trachoma Mapping Project, we identified four areas in Egypt where trachoma was rife. One of them was Matay. Alarmingly, we found that nearly 10 per cent of children aged between one and nine had classic symptoms of trachoma, including sore, weeping and extremely itchy eyes. We knew we had to reach and treat them urgently.

We helped train amazing teams of health workers to distribute doses of the antibiotic Zithromax®. Their commitment was incredible. In just a week they visited houses in 24 villages and three suburban areas, and treated over 288,000 people – a remarkable achievement. As well as administering the medication, the teams shared information on how to keep trachoma at bay by regularly washing hands and faces. The disease is easily spread by flies and through touch, so good hygiene is crucial in preventing it.

288,365 people were treated by Sightsavers-trained health workers in Egypt’s Menia region in just one week

The End is in Sight

Another step closer, but we still need your help

This first mass drug administration is a real milestone for public health in Egypt, and we’re grateful to our partners – and to you – for helping to make it happen. But we can’t stop now. More than 11 million people in Egypt are still at risk of trachoma, and we want to eliminate it in all the countries where we work by 2025. To do this we urgently need to reach many other trachoma-endemic areas – including the three other regions in Egypt where people are still suffering. Please, if you can, send an extra gift today and help protect more families from this cruel, blinding disease.

Find out more about our End is in Sight appeal at: www.sightsavers.org/endisinsight
Eye health hero

With your help, kind-hearted Mercia Cumaio is working to eliminate trachoma in Mozambique

Mercia is the programme manager for our Nampula eye care project in north-east Mozambique and has worked for Sightsavers for nine years. In 2019, the International Association and Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) named her as an Eye Health Hero, in recognition of her outstanding dedication to eye care services in Mozambique.

At the awards ceremony, Mercia spoke about her work and her commitment to eliminating trachoma as a public health problem. “Eliminating trachoma is essential,” Mercia tells us. “If it’s not treated in time, the disease can cause irreversible blindness. This causes patients in the community to become isolated, leading them into a cycle of poverty. Eliminating trachoma will ultimately improve people’s quality of life.”

Mercia was inspired to work in eye health after witnessing the discrimination faced by people with visual impairments. “The situation made me realise how people who are blind can be treated so harshly by society,” she explains. “It made me want to pursue a career where my work could make a positive difference to people’s lives.”

Almost 70 per cent of Nampula’s six million people live in remote rural areas, often with poor sanitation and little access to eye health services. Communities like these are very vulnerable to trachoma, and when Mercia first started working in the region, many people had trichiasis, the advanced stage of the disease.

“Almost no operations were being performed on people with advanced trachoma – fewer than 10 patients had surgery each year,” says Mercia. “But thanks to The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust’s Trachoma Initiative, led by Sightsavers, the situation has improved dramatically.”

Today, cases of trachoma have fallen in three districts, and more than 1,500 people have been treated. “It makes me really proud to know that we have worked hard and reached many patients that would not have been treated through the normal eye health system,” says Mercia. “The programme has changed the way community members think about eye care and has made sure more people seek help for eye issues.”

Maria’s new beginning

Thanks to Mercia, grandmother Maria Fonte has had her sight restored and her life transformed

When one of Maria’s eyes started weeping and hurting she kept on working in the fields and caring for her family. But as the pain grew worse and her sight deteriorated, she found it increasingly hard to cope. Thankfully, Maria heard that free treatment was available through Sightsavers, and sought help.

Following straightforward trichiasis surgery arranged by Mercia, this energetic lady is pain free and enjoying a new lease of life. Her happiness is clear to see.

“My favourite part of my work is seeing patients’ joy following sight-saving surgery, when they have their bandages removed”

Mercia Cumaio

Photos: ©Sightsavers/Zinyange Auntony
Achieving a vision

You’ve helped transform eye health in the Sundarbans, eastern India, improving thousands of lives

The Sundarbans is a remote area of 102 islands in the delta region of West Bengal. More than 40 per cent of people there live below the poverty line, so can’t afford eye examinations or treatment for conditions such as cataracts. One in every 50 people used to be blind. Today, thanks to your incredible support, this number has been halved.

Pioneering project
In September 2013, we began our five-year Sundarbans Eye Health Service Strengthening Project, supported by Standard Chartered and amazing sight-savers like you. We set ourselves an ambitious goal to overhaul the region’s eye care and give 4.7 million people access to affordable, high-quality eye health services. This involved setting up and equipping eye health centres across the region, and providing outreach camps and school screenings to identify cataracts and other eye conditions.

We also wanted to train eye health teams, teachers and community volunteers, ensuring the services could continue long into the future. Together we’ve helped thousands of people, including Debola, Nami and Sandhya.

Saving sight, changing lives
In just five years, you’ve helped support life-changing and long-term improvements to eye services in the Sundarbans, including:

- 17 eye health centres created
- 5 hospitals provided with equipment and training
- 451,000 children and 401,600 adults screened for eye issues
- 32,000 life-changing cataract operations supported
- 13,300 free pairs of glasses distributed

Sightsavers carries out high-quality, independent research to support our fight against avoidable blindness. Our research in the Sundarbans has been recognised in a special edition of the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. Visit our research centre to read the full report: research.sightsavers.org

Sharing the joy
Cataracts affected Debola, her husband Nami and their whole family. Thanks to you, their sight is restored and life is looking brighter

Debola and Nami live with their three children in a remote Sundarbans village. A few years ago the couple both developed cataracts and their vision deteriorated. Nami was no longer able to earn an income from fishing, while Debola couldn’t look after the family.

“When I had my eye problems, I couldn’t see anything,” Debola told us. “Everything looked black – totally black. I couldn’t cook and feed my family properly because of the darkness.”

The couple were so desperate that they tried a number of local remedies, including applying lotus honey, leaves and even snails directly to their eyes. Fortunately they received sight-saving cataract surgery through our project, and the whole family is much happier.

“I can see very clearly now. I can even use my fishing net at night now my sight has been restored”
Nami

Seeing again
Before receiving her glasses, 47-year-old teacher, Sandhya struggled to see, affecting her ability to carry out everyday tasks and teach local children. Fortunately, a community health worker told her about a Sightsavers-supported eye screening camp nearby. Sandhya was measured for glasses and they arrived a week later. Now she can do everything she couldn’t do before.

“My biggest joy is being able to see my granddaughter again”
Sandhya
All included

In Sierra Leone, you’re helping to give visually impaired children like Abdul the chance to gain an education

Abdul is wearing his smart school uniform and looking forward to maths, his favourite lesson. At lunchtime he’ll have something to eat and play football with his best friend Santily before school starts again. It’s just an ordinary day for this 13 year-old boy, yet it’s extraordinary too. Abdul was born with cataracts in both eyes and he could easily have missed out on an education.

Sadly, in Sierra Leone and many other countries, there is stigma and misconception around people with disabilities. All too often, children like Abdul can be written off and considered not worth educating. Even if families decide to send their visually impaired children to school, teachers often lack the skills and resources to address their needs. Yet it doesn’t have to be this way.

With your support, we’re training teachers in Sierra Leone to include children with visual impairment and other disabilities in mainstream schools and classrooms. Teachers and students are also becoming disability champions, helping to change people’s negative perceptions. Abdul is a prime example. As a disability champion in his school, he’s drawing on his own experience to help others and prove that they, like him, are as capable of learning as anyone else. Following Sightsavers-supported surgery, Abdul now has his sight back, yet he continues to champion inclusive education and be a true inspiration for others.

Classroom care

Head teacher Kadie Moore wants every student in her school to shine, and now she’s even better at supporting them

Following training you helped fund, Kadie knows that disability does not mean inability. She’s now equipped with a range of skills to help identify and address her students’ needs, including seemingly small changes that can make a huge difference.

“We learned that if a student has a problem with their eyes, if you seat them at the back, they will not see,” explains Kadie. “When you place them at the front of the classroom, before the blackboard, they will be able to see properly.”

Children with disabilities often have to endure name-calling and other teasing from fellow students. Kadie does her best to discourage this in assembly, by talking about people with disabilities who’ve gone on to do great things. She encourages a great sense of friendship, motivation and togetherness that can enhance the whole school. Her positive approach seems to be working, and more parents are sending their children with disabilities to the school.

“I want the children in this school to achieve their potential – I want to see big titles and future leaders”

Kadie Moore

Sierra Leone successes

824 children with disabilities now in mainstream education
945 teachers trained in inclusive and special needs education
27 participants from teacher training institutions trained in disability and inclusion
180 teacher representatives from 45 project schools trained as inclusion champions
89 head teachers and their deputies trained in inclusive and special needs education
61 community leaders in 45 school communities trained and supported to develop by-laws
Legacy of hope

By remembering Sightsavers in your will, you can go on transforming people’s lives long into the future

In its first ever report on vision, the World Health Organization warns that rates of blindness in low- and middle-income countries are up to eight times higher than in wealthy countries, with people living in rural areas, ethnic minorities, women and older people suffering disproportionately. Furthermore, close to one billion people across the globe struggle to see for want of a pair of glasses. You can help to change things.

A life-changing gift

“In this day and age, it’s terrible to know that people are struggling to see and get on with their lives when all they need is a straightforward cataract operation or a simple pair of glasses. We want everyone to have a right to eye healthcare, regardless of where they’re born, where they live or how much money or land they possess – and you can make a huge difference to our crucial long-term work.

The funding we receive from gifts in wills enables us to plan vital eye care services, support sight-saving cataract operations and protect entire communities against blinding diseases. Please, if you can, remember Sightsavers in your will. Your kind gift will have a lasting impact on so many people’s lives. Thank you.”

Caroline Harper

If you are considering leaving a gift to Sightsavers in your will, please visit www.sightsavers.org/legacy. Or for a friendly, no obligation chat, just call 01444 446 600

Sightsavers

Registered charity numbers 207544 and SC038110

Front cover: ©Sightsavers/Atul Loke
Photo credits for this page, top to bottom: ©Sightsavers/Graeme Robertson, ©Sightsavers/Siegfried Modola, ©Sightsavers/Andrew Esiebo.
Photo credits for page 3, clockwise from top left: ©Sightsavers/Sima Diab, ©Sightsavers/Thomas Triebel, ©Sightsavers/Zinyange Auntony, ©Sightsavers/Graeme Robertson, ©Sightsavers/Atul Loke.