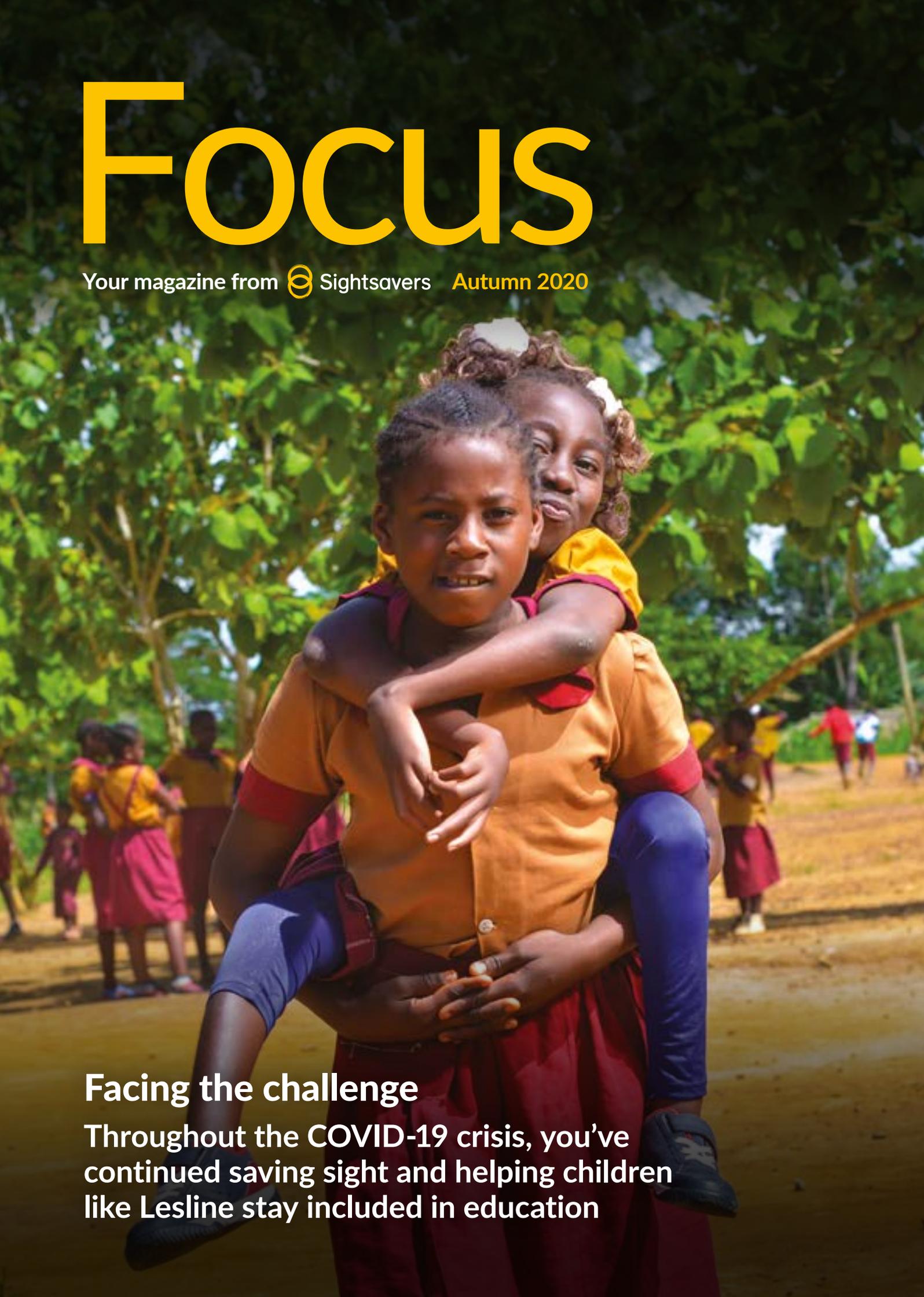


Focus

Your magazine from  Sightsovers Autumn 2020

Facing the challenge

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, you've continued saving sight and helping children like Lesline stay included in education



You're standing with us through the health crisis

Together we're helping the most vulnerable in the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 has highlighted more than ever the plight of people in the world's poorest countries, especially those with disabilities. Not only are many at increased risk if they have an underlying health condition, people with disabilities are likely to be forgotten or ignored when it comes to health, education and employment decisions. But you're standing up for them.

Thanks to your amazing support, we're working as hard as ever to save and protect sight, enable people with disabilities to stand up for their rights and give them the practical help they need to get through this health crisis. As you can read on page 6, community volunteers like Neha and Nomesha are providing vulnerable families in West India with food, face masks and other essentials, as well as ensuring they can access their pensions and benefits.

You're also enabling children with disabilities to continue their education. On page 8, you can read about the brilliant work you're supporting in Cameroon, Central Africa. Then, on page 10, meet amazing nurse and trichiasis surgeon Babacar, from Senegal. With your help, he's been fighting on to save sight and eliminate trachoma and he's doing a fantastic job.

This is a challenging year for all of us, but through your kindness and generosity you're still saving sight and transforming people's lives in some of the poorest parts of the world. You're making sure that no one is left behind in this pandemic, and I can't thank you enough.



My very best wishes,

Caroline Harper

Dr Caroline Harper
Global CEO

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With your help, we can do it



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We've adapted our community eye health messages to explain how washing hands and faces (as Kebby from Zambia is doing here) can help prevent the spread of trachoma and COVID-19.



Keeping our focus

With your support, we've acted quickly in the COVID-19 crisis. We've mobilised resources and adapted our programmes to continue reaching and helping as many people as possible, without putting communities, our partners, or our teams at risk

Adapting programmes

Thanks to you, we're adapting our programmes to include critical COVID-19 messaging and safeguards. Together we can help protect health workers and communities, and prevent the virus from spreading.

We're supporting national government response plans in numerous countries where we work. Activities include mass media communications on COVID-19 symptoms and prevention, tailored to different audiences. We're training community volunteers, leaders and school health coordinators to reinforce these messages, and working with disabled people's organisations (DPOs) to reach out to those most at risk. We're also training health workers and contact tracers, to help strengthen national surveillance.

Raising awareness



In Sierra Leone, Sightsavers-supported community workers are delivering COVID-19 related messaging to people in 16 districts, reaching marginalised groups such as the elderly and people with disabilities



218 children with visual impairments in Jharkhand, West India, are now receiving distance learning lessons



© Sightsavers/Javier Acebal

Upholding education

You're enabling us to train teachers in distance learning, ensuring students can continue their lessons from home. You're also helping to provide essential equipment such as Braille books, laptops, tablets and mobile phones.

In Cameroon, we've supplied mobile phones to families of children with disabilities, enabling students to continue their lessons and complete their exams. You can read more about our work in Cameroon on page 8.



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Reinstating vital services

Together we're creating safe working and eye health care environments in hospitals and communities, enabling eye screenings, treatments and surgeries to resume safely.

We're providing PPE, sanitary and cleaning supplies to health workers and hospitals, as well as laboratories engaged in case management. In Liberia for example, we've supplied Phebe Hospital with PPE and sanitising equipment, allowing essential services to continue. Meanwhile, our Eye Health System Strengthening project in Senegal now provides PPE, hand sanitiser, sampling kits, infrared thermometers and medicines to hospitals, eye clinics and ambulances.



Resuming MDA

A risk assessment tool we helped develop has been piloted in Cameroon to determine when and how we can safely restart distributing treatments for trachoma



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Preparing for the future

We're getting ready for what will be a huge backlog of people needing eye screening, treatment and cataract surgery once health restrictions are lifted. Plus, we'll be ramping up our efforts to eliminate blinding diseases such as trachoma and river blindness. Crucially, we'll continue working with our partners, governments and international aid agencies to strengthen health systems.

COVID-19 has highlighted the need for resilient, co-ordinated health systems, equipped to respond effectively in any emergency. Our focus on achieving this is now stronger than ever and, with your help, we'll do it.



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Community champions

You're supporting the extraordinary volunteers who are helping people with disabilities through the health crisis

When states across India suddenly announced lockdown due to COVID-19, many people, including those with disabilities, were unprepared. Some didn't even have time to obtain basic food supplies, and with home carer visits suspended, there was little chance of getting any help. Until the amazing DPOs you support stepped in.

Prompt assistance

DPO stands for disabled people's organisations. Led by and made up of people with disabilities, they offer a lifeline for others, by standing up for their rights and providing a vital support network. During the pandemic, DPO leaders and members such as Neha and Nomesh have been identifying families at risk and liaising with government authorities to provide free food, face masks and other essentials. They're also ensuring people receive the financial support they're entitled to, such as helping them apply for benefits, and organising advance pension payments when necessary. They couldn't do it without you.

Listening and acting

In Jharkhand, West India, Neha is enabling people to stay connected, making a huge difference to their lives.

Neha (far left) has found that being isolated from their families in lockdown is leaving many people – particularly women – feeling scared and stressed. Thankfully she's there for them.

To provide an easy way of staying in touch, Neha created a WhatsApp group. Its members phone in free and share their problems, feelings and emotions about the health crisis in a friendly and supportive environment. As well as listening and advising, Neha conveys people's issues to the local authorities, helping to inform health and social care interventions. She also provides group members with regular government COVID-19 updates and health information, which they might otherwise miss out on. At a time when so many are lonely, this caring, hardworking young woman is bringing people with disabilities together, and making their voices heard.

"I believe if we can become a helping hand for each other, then this time of hardship shall pass" Neha



Supporting his community

Big-hearted Nomesh is going the extra mile to help people with disabilities in Chhattisgarh.

Nomesh (pictured above, far right) has sickle cell disease – an inherited red blood cell disorder in which there aren't enough healthy red blood cells to carry oxygen throughout the body. Yet despite his own challenges he's emerged as a true DPO leader in the health crisis.

Outstanding efforts

During lockdown, Nomesh helped identify 160 families who were severely affected and got them vital food supplies and ongoing support. He inspired people to donate money to buy cloth for making face masks, and stitched 350 masks himself – giving them to health workers, policemen and labourers. Plus, he's distributing food packets to migrant families and delivering medicine to sickle cell patients.



Nomesh is now educating people on how to protect themselves from COVID-19 and reduce the chances of transmission.

"If nothing else, this is my small contribution for the people of my country" Nomesh



“I like to learn while at home, because I like school. Mama helps me through the WhatsApp lessons. I study with my brothers and sister”

Zambo

© Sightsavers/Rodrig Mbok



Lockdown lessons

In Cameroon, central Africa, you're enabling children with disabilities to keep up their education

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to school closures and disrupted learning in over 190 countries. With most students in lockdown and studying from home, it's vital that distance learning is accessible to children with disabilities. Otherwise, the long break from lessons could mean they're left behind when schools resume.

You've funded crucial work to involve parents in their children's education and provide teachers with the skills and technology to reach all their students, including those who have difficulty seeing, hearing, moving, understanding and communicating.

Classroom connections

Prior to the health crisis, we'd already trained some teachers as 'inclusion champions', able to teach children with disabilities alongside other students. You've supported additional training, enabling them to deliver individually tailored lessons via WhatsApp. The inclusion champions stay in touch with the students' parents, helping them to access assignments, assist their children and monitor progress. These inclusive, accessible lessons are keeping children like Zambo and Lesline (pictured below and on the front cover) involved and eager to learn, setting them in good stead for when schools can fully reopen.



Star student

Thanks to you, Zambo, who has spina bifida, is keeping up with maths, his favourite subject

Zambo is nine years old and lives in the central Province of Cameroon. "I like to play dodgeball and other games with my friends," he tells us. "I like to colour in and to sing and dance."

During lockdown, Zambo's teacher has been sending his lessons via WhatsApp, so he can continue studying at home. He's really enjoying the experience, and his mother, Antoinette, is delighted with his progress: "It is good," she says. "Since Zambo is not strong in maths these lessons enable me to help him catch up."

When he grows up, Zambo wants to be a teacher or a doctor. Your support means he has every chance to realise his ambitions.

Eye health hero

Babacar Top is at the frontline of the health crisis in Senegal, and his patients are his number one priority

As part of the team working to eliminate trachoma, Babacar shoulders many responsibilities, and COVID-19 has added to them. But this kind and dedicated man is determined to continue his fight against trachoma.



Inspiring example

Babacar is head nurse and trichiasis surgeon at Thiawéne health post, in Senegal's Touba district. He was inspired to enter eye care by his beloved older brother, who was

also a nurse and trichiasis surgeon. His brother sadly died soon after Babacar graduated, and to honour his memory, Babacar decided to devote his own life to saving people's sight.

Although current health restrictions mean fewer patients can be seen, Babacar is still performing as many consultations and operations as he can. In May alone he carried out 576 consultations and 36 trichiasis operations. Yet with eye screening camps temporarily halted and longer waiting times for patients, he worries people may turn to traditional healing, risking their health and their sight.

Active influencer

To encourage people to keep visiting his health post and to raise awareness about COVID-19, Babacar talks to them about the importance of good hygiene and wearing face masks. Everyone working at or visiting the health post must wash their hands regularly with soap and hot water, use hand sanitiser and wear a mask.

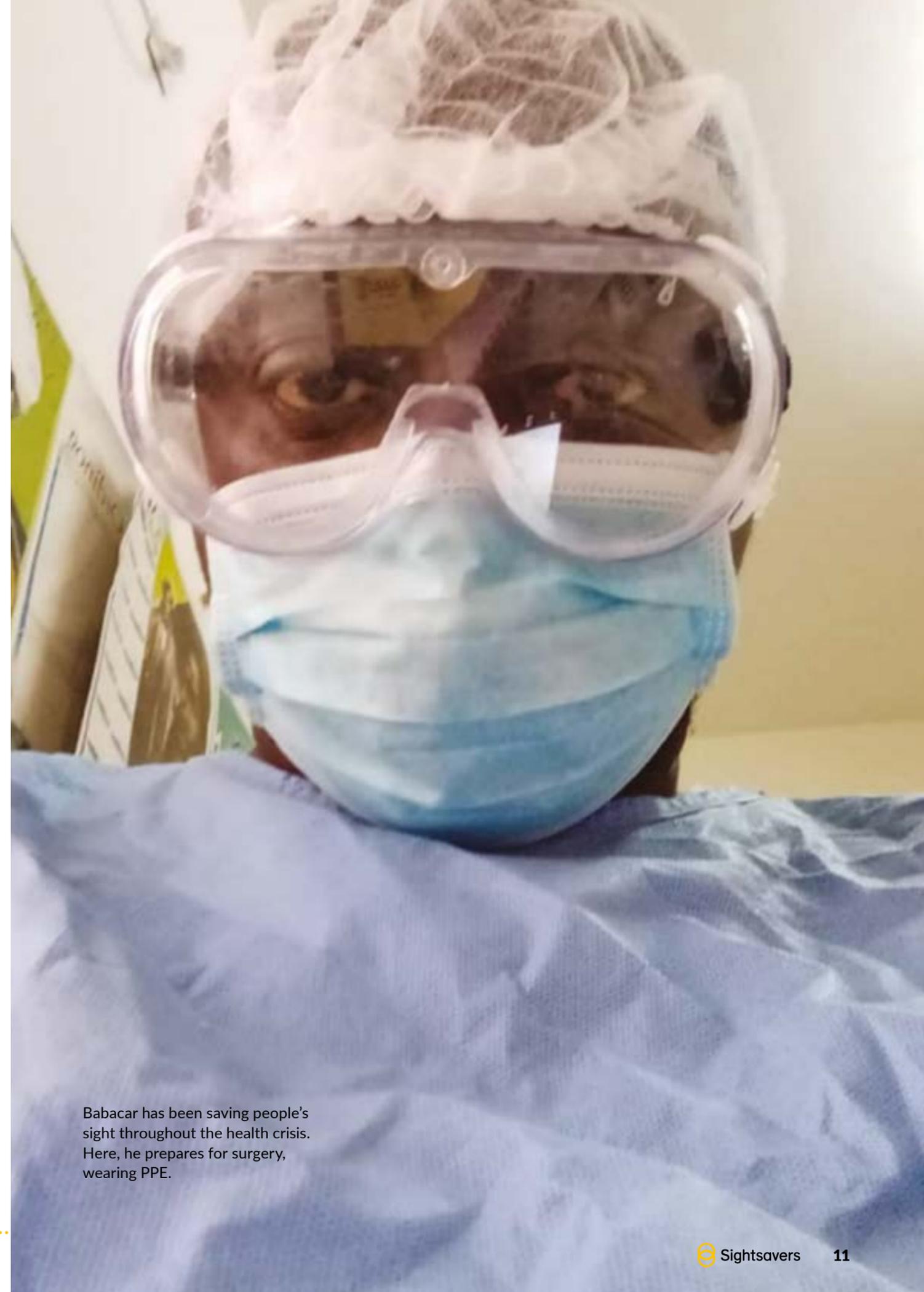
As well as preventing COVID-19, good hygiene is also vital in stopping the spread of trachoma and other infectious diseases, and Babacar hopes the positive behavioural changes people are making will continue long into the future. He's motivated by many things; saving sight and freeing people from terrible pain; feeling useful to his country and his community; and keeping the memory of his brother alive. Babacar is a true eye health hero, and you're helping to support him. Thank you.



Photos: © Sightsavers

“Whenever I treat a trichiasis patient I feel a great sense of satisfaction, because it gives me the feeling of being useful for my country and my community”

Babacar



Babacar has been saving people's sight throughout the health crisis. Here, he prepares for surgery, wearing PPE.

Staying determined

Our eye screenings and mass drug distributions may have been halted during the pandemic, but the end is still in sight for trachoma

Thanks to generous supporters like you, we've made great progress in countries such as Benin, West Africa, where trachoma was once rife. You've saved the sight of millions of people, including Orou, below. But we can't stop now.

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Ready to dance

Free from pain and with her sight restored, Orou is embracing life again

Orou was a leading traditional dancer until trachoma affected her sight in the most excruciatingly painful way. As the disease advanced her eyelids turned inwards, making her eyelashes scratch her eyeballs with every agonising blink.

It's hard to imagine enduring pain like that for five minutes, yet Orou suffered for 40 years. In desperation she tried cutting off her eyelashes, but they always grew back. As her eyesight deteriorated she could no longer collect nuts to make butter, which was her only form of income. When we found her she was close to losing her sight completely. Today, she's a different woman.

Following straightforward surgery to correct her inturned eyelids, Orou is pain free and raring to get on with life. Now she can dance again.

Together we can do it

We're ready to help more people like Orou once health restrictions are lifted. In fact, we're planning to redouble our efforts to eliminate this painful, blinding disease in all the countries where we work by 2025. Please support us if you can, by sending an extra gift today. Thank you.

£44

is all it cost for Orou's sight saving surgery. Your gift today could help free more people like her from terrible pain and the risk of losing their sight

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