

Focus

Your magazine from  Sightsavers **Spring 2022**

Staying determined

Despite a multitude of challenges, we're fighting on to free more children like Mwiza from neglected tropical diseases

Welcome

With your help, we can still eliminate neglected tropical diseases

When a person is in constant, debilitating pain it can overwhelm every aspect of their lives, including their ability to work and look after their families. Yet millions of people are needlessly suffering because of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) such as trachoma, river blindness and lymphatic filariasis. Diseases we're determined to help eliminate, supported by wonderful sight-savers like you.

We're facing many challenges. Not least the ongoing logistical impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. On top of that, the recent cut in UK Aid means we've had to close our Ascend programme early and other crucial NTD programmes are in jeopardy, leaving people at risk of missing out on treatments. But, as you can read on page 4, we are not giving up.

With your help, we're determined to continue tackling NTDs and, inside, you can meet some of the incredible people at the forefront of our efforts. Together, we've helped free millions of people from pain and the risk of sight loss, and co-created stronger, more accessible health systems to help keep diseases at bay. There's lots to be proud of, and so much to keep fighting for. Thank you.



My very best wishes,

Ella Pierce

Ella Pierce
Global Director
of Fundraising

In this issue...



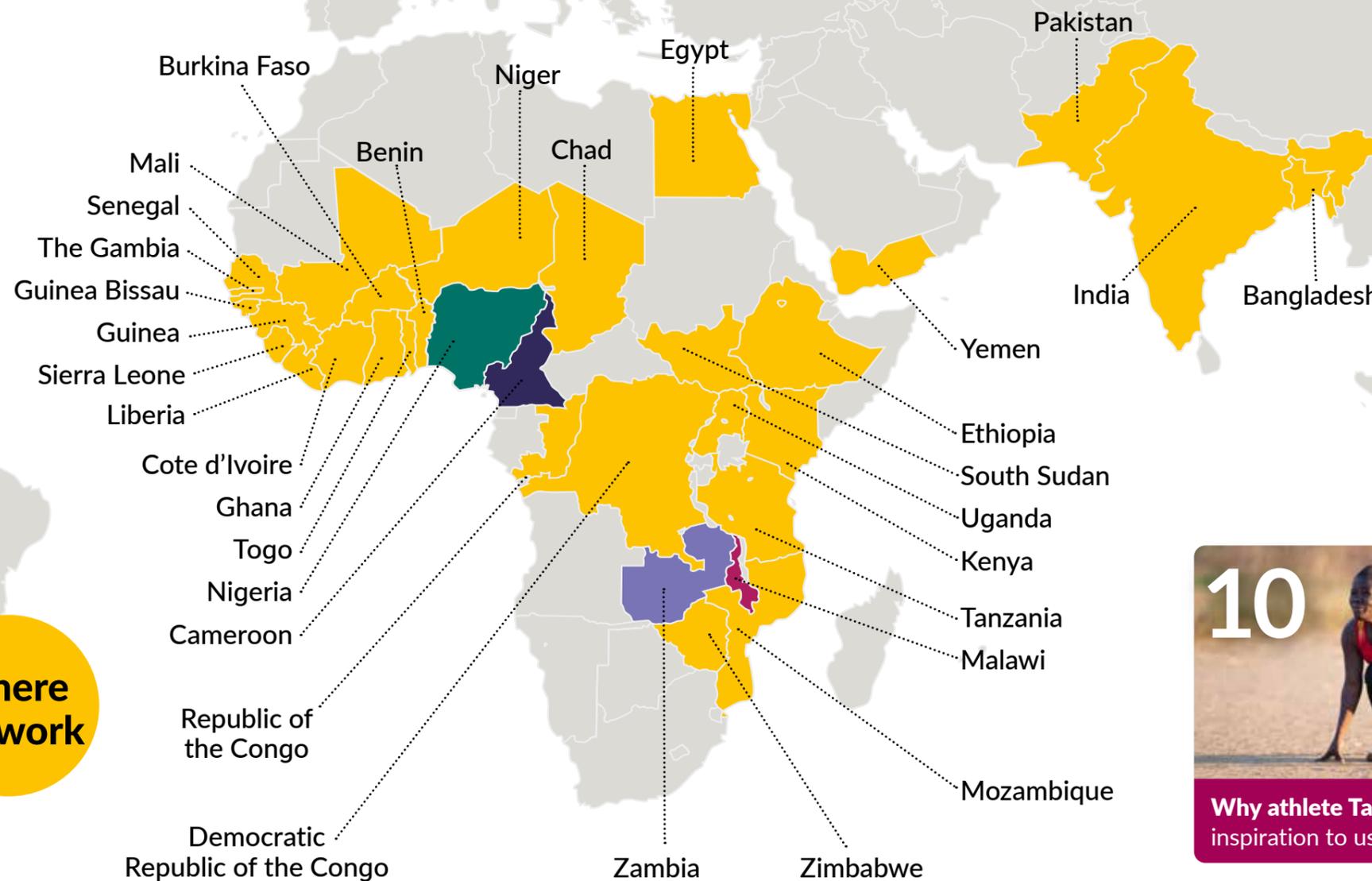
Your update on our efforts to keep tackling NTDs



Surgeon Mr Ndalela explains why he's staying focused



Meet Jacob and his son Moses, two of our amazing community volunteers



Why athlete Taonere is an inspiration to us all

In Cameroon, we're helping protect schoolchildren against Schistosomiasis and soil transmitted helminths.



Shared solutions

By working with communities to tackle NTDs we can keep transforming people's lives

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are called 'neglected' for a reason. They hit the poorest, most marginalised communities the worst, where people have little access to health care and are at risk of being left behind or forgotten. Together, we're changing things.

Prevention and protection

With our partners, we distribute millions of treatments and train local volunteers to check people's symptoms, give out medicine and refer patients for further treatment. We also promote good hygiene and sanitation. Measures such as regular handwashing can help reduce the spread of COVID-19 as well as NTDs like trachoma, and we have adapted our

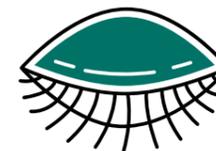
community health communications to include clear and supportive advice.

In Western and Central Africa, we've been making huge progress through Ascend – our largest multiple NTD programme. In just two years, Ascend supported more than 256 million life-changing treatments, trained more than 841,400 community volunteers and teachers and provided more than 11,000 surgeries. But the UK government's cut to foreign aid saw it end eight months earlier than planned, leaving around 100 million people still at risk of diseases such as trachoma and river blindness. Without alternative funding, more than 76 million treatments may not reach those who need them and hundreds of thousands of people could miss out on crucial surgery.

Five in focus

We're currently fighting five NTDs affecting more than a billion people worldwide. They can cause severe and lifelong physical impairments, including irreversible blindness.

Trachoma is the world's leading infectious cause of blindness. It starts off as a bacterial infection that can easily be treated. But over time it can cause the eyelids to turn inwards so the eyelashes scrape painfully against the eye, eventually leading to sight loss. It's thought that 1.9 million people are blind or visually impaired because of the disease.



With your support, we've helped eliminate trachoma in several countries, including Ghana in 2018 and The Gambia in 2021. You can help us do more.

River blindness is a parasitic infection spread by the bite of infected flies that breed near fast-flowing rivers. It causes severe skin irritation and can lead to irreversible blindness. Around 1.1 million people are blind because of the disease. You can help us reach and protect communities at risk.

You helped fund school screening programmes and the training of local volunteers such as Jacob and Moses (see page 8) who distribute medication.



Lymphatic filariasis is transmitted by mosquito bites and leads to painful swelling and enlarged body parts. The debilitating symptoms mean many people are unable to work, and children often miss school to care for family members. Around 120 million people worldwide are infected.

We provided more than two million treatments for lymphatic filariasis worldwide in 2020 alone. With your help, we can provide even more in 2022.



Soil transmitted helminths are parasitic intestinal worms that can cause malnourishment and leave people susceptible to illness. Children aged three to eight are most at risk. A single dose of medicine can treat the disease.



With our partners, we support deworming projects in five African countries, reaching over 8.7 million school aged children.

Schistosomiasis is known as 'snail fever' and caused by parasites released by freshwater snails. At first there may be no symptoms, but it can lead to pain, diarrhoea and death.



In 2020, we helped provide more than 15 million treatments across Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria.

Can you help us?

Thankfully, potential funders are stepping up to address some of the gaps caused by the UK foreign aid cuts, but we really need your support. Please, if you can, will you send an extra gift to help us keep fighting NTDs? You can donate online now at sightsavers.org/focus

Leaving no one behind

As we fight to eliminate trachoma, ophthalmic surgeons like Mr Ndalela are working tirelessly to reach and treat people

It takes a global village to beat a disease – no one can do it alone. So, with your ongoing support, we help train, equip and coordinate the many different people involved in tackling trachoma and other NTDs, enabling them to take crucial eye health services to hard-to-reach communities, which might otherwise miss out.

Mobile medic

Mr Ndalela travels by motorbike to the poorest, most remote villages in Mongu, western Zambia, trying to help as many people as he can. Left untreated, trachoma can rob people of their sight and plunge them into a vicious cycle of pain, poverty and despair, and this charismatic, compassionate man knows exactly what's at stake.

“Children who can't see will almost never be at school, and they won't be able to work or be productive,” Mr Ndalela explains. “This adds to the burden of the family, which adds to the burden of the district, the province, Africa and the whole world.”

The benefits of eliminating trachoma are far-reaching, yet Mr Ndalela continually gets frustrated by the lack of funds and resources that prevent him from doing more. For example, his motorbike is often left parked outside the office because there's no money for petrol. With your continued help, we can support more ophthalmic surgeons like him, so more children such as Mwiza can be freed from this terrible disease.



Photos: © Sightsavers/Jason J Mulikita

Offering hope

Desperate to see Mr Ndalela, Mwiza's family walked over 25 kilometres when they heard he was visiting the nearest clinic

The family's journey may sound drastic, but their only alternative was to make a four-day return trip to Senanga eye hospital, and the costs were way beyond their means. At least now they could see an ophthalmic nurse and have Mwiza's eyes examined.

At the time, Mwiza was just six years old, and had developed sore, weeping eyes that were quickly getting worse. Unaware of what was causing his condition, Mwiza's mother Kamizhi was really worried, and you can imagine her relief when Mr Ndalela confirmed it was trachoma and could be treated with antibiotics. Mr Ndalela also explained the importance of washing hands and faces to prevent the disease from spreading. Weeks later, Mwiza's eyes were clear and had stopped hurting. Two years on and he's still thriving, playing football with his friends and enjoying going to school.



Mwiza's story typifies the plight of many families living in remote communities, far from hospitals and health facilities. It also shows how caring surgeons such as Mr Ndalela are making a huge difference.

“Saving people's sight isn't just a job. It's my calling”

Mr Ndalela

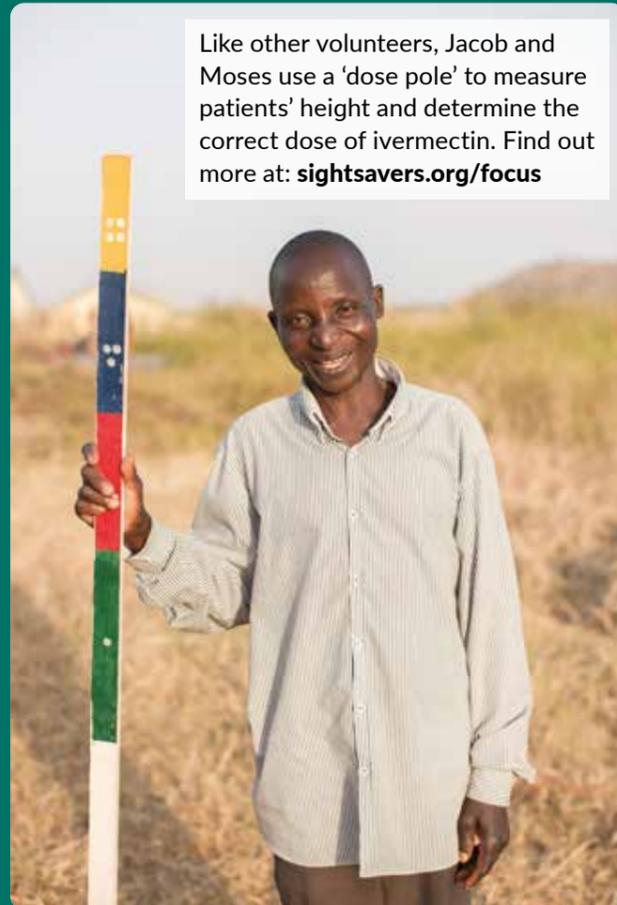


Community heroes

Jacob and his son Moses are two of the brilliant volunteers helping to keep people safe from debilitating NTDs

In Kaduna state, northern Nigeria, generations of people were affected by river blindness, spread by the bite of infected black flies. Fortunately, the disease is now under control, thanks largely to the UNITED programme, led by Sightsavers with support from UK aid. Volunteers such as Jacob and Moses played a huge role in preventing its transmission by distributing the preventative drug, ivermectin. The drug treats both river blindness and lymphatic filariasis – which is still prevalent in Kaduna.

Jacob, a father of five, has been a volunteer for more than 15 years, and recalls the huge impact of river blindness on the community. “I remember when many people went blind,” he explains. “Now it is different. We do not hear about people losing their vision due to the black fly.”



Like other volunteers, Jacob and Moses use a 'dose pole' to measure patients' height and determine the correct dose of ivermectin. Find out more at: sightsavers.org/focus

Photos: © Sightsavers/Graeme Robertson

Positive influence

As Moses grew up, Jacob talked to him about his voluntary work. Recognising the strong impact his father was having, Moses decided to follow in his footsteps and become a volunteer himself. “I did not want my family and my people to become blind,” he tells us.

Jacob and Moses continue to work together to tackle lymphatic filariasis, attending training courses and refresher sessions before going out to help distribute medication. “I am proud that Moses is helping our community in this way,” says Jacob. “I am proud of this work of father and son.”

Breaking the cycle

In Liberia, we're taking a multi-pronged approach to preventing the horrible disease of lymphatic filariasis

Spread by mosquitoes, lymphatic filariasis (commonly known as elephantiasis) is usually caught during childhood. Once a person is infected by a mosquito bite, worms lodge in their lymphatic vessels, producing millions of larvae that circulate in their blood. The disease can cause painful, debilitating swelling that can affect a person for life.

Both lymphatic filariasis and river blindness often occur in the same places, so we coordinate treatments where both are endemic. We also help fund scientific research into how lymphatic filariasis is diagnosed and treated. Determining the presence of the disease is usually done by screening a proportion of local schoolchildren. This is fine in rural areas, but can be challenging in towns and cities, due to the greater numbers of children involved.

Photos: © Sightsavers/John Healey



Improving detection

With Liberia's Ministry of Health, we've been testing a new way of assessing the need for lymphatic filariasis treatment in Moldova urban district

The research team tested children aged from nine to 14 across four health districts of Moldova. They chose children who have lived in the same areas all their lives and, for the first time, they also tested a number of mosquitoes caught locally.



Mosquitoes live for less than three months and tend to stay and breed close to where they hatch. Therefore, if children or mosquitoes test positive, there is a strong indication of local transmission and the need for treatment.

Results from both the children and mosquitoes are being compared, to determine which method to use in urban areas in the future. The findings will enable the Ministry of Health to identify the presence of lymphatic filariasis in Moldova and decide how best to tackle it.

Championing equality

Visually impaired athlete Taonere Banda is showing the world that disability does not mean inability

In 2016, Taonere made history by becoming Malawi's first Paralympian, and last year she competed in the Tokyo Paralympics, where she took part in the Women's 400m and 1500m T13 events, gaining a season's best in the 1500m. Taonere trains around the clock. But in her spare time, she flies the flag for Sightsavers' Equal World campaign, by telling her incredible story and helping to change stigma and misconceptions about disability.

"I want children with disabilities to see me as a visually impaired person competing, travelling and achieving, and see that it can be done," says Taonere. "These children should not look down upon themselves like I was made to do. They should look at me and believe that they can do it too."

Equal World calls for the rights of people with disabilities to be upheld, including asking governments and organisations to show leadership in disability inclusion. Taonere speaks from the heart about this, because of

the difficult challenges she faced while growing up. As a young child, she tried attending school but couldn't see the blackboard – so she was sent home and told to come back when she was older and more literate. "It made me feel like education wasn't for me," she explains.

'Running makes me happy'

At the age of 10, Taonere went back to school and started running. But being visually impaired meant she wasn't allowed to join the sports lessons. Thankfully she was spotted by an organisation called NICE (the National Initiative for Civic Education), which saw her potential. Taonere started competing in athletic competitions at high school. She surprised everyone and was chosen to participate in a local competition – and she won. "After that I started running in national and international races," she says. "It was the President of the Malawi Paralympic Committee, James Chiutsi, who informed me about the games. I then met representatives from Sightsavers who came to my village and said they were going to help me."

Our support for Taonere included helping fund the intensive training camp she attended prior to the 2016 Rio Paralympics. Following this, we helped her prepare for the Tokyo Paralympics by providing further training camp support and supplying personal and household items, so she could concentrate on her running.

Sadly, millions of children, especially girls, are still held back because of negative ideas about gender and disability. With the help of people like Taonere, and with your amazing support, we'll keep working for a more inclusive world in which people with disabilities are respected, included and get the same chances as everyone else.

Supporting people with disabilities has been a vital part of our work since Sightsavers was founded in 1950



Photos: © Sightsavers/Malumbo Simwaka

Meet our marathon marvels

A huge thank you to the six incredible supporters who ran for Sightsavers in the 2021 London Marathon

Together, brothers **Ben and Dr Mat Molyneux** raised an impressive **£5,307**, which could help protect 88 communities against trachoma.



Ben raised **£4,081** and finished the race in 2 hours 55 minutes. Dr Mat raised **£1,226** and his time was 3 hours 1 minute.



Partially sighted runner and actuary **Stevan Manokaran** took part with his guide runner, Agnes, and raised a wonderful **£3,315** to support our work. "I have been able to achieve relative success in my education and professional career," says Stevan. "But I am well aware that very few disabled people are in my position, so am very keen to help inspire others."

This was a first marathon for optometrist **Marriah Sheikh** and she raised a brilliant **£1,085** to help save sight and change lives. "In the UK we are lucky to have access to great eye care, but this is not the case for people in other parts of the world. I want to help Sightsavers bring care to those people."



Intrepid **Mike Conner**, 72, has run 13 marathons so far. Following his success in London, where he raised **£677** for Sightsavers, Mike geared up to support us in two more marathons last year. There's no stopping you, Mike!



Heroic **Rich Mason** bought his own place in the Marathon and chose to run for Sightsavers while recovering from Lyme disease – an achievement in itself! We're really grateful for the **£2,349** you raised Rich and wish you the very best of health.

Would you like to run for Sightsavers?

We still have a few places left for this year's London Marathon on Sunday 2 October. The deadline for applying is 5pm on 31 March, so bag your place now by emailing events@sightsavers.org for an application form. And remember, if you secure your own public ballot place, you can still fundraise for Sightsavers!

