

Focus

Your magazine from  Sightsavers Spring 2023



Time to celebrate!

Malawi has triumphed against trachoma,
thanks to help from supporters like you

We did it!

Together, we've helped Malawi eliminate trachoma, protecting millions of people's sight

We love sharing good news with you, and Malawi's great achievement shows that, with sustained effort, trachoma can be beaten. So, in your spring issue of Focus, we're looking at what it takes to eliminate trachoma and the other neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) we're determined to beat – river blindness, lymphatic filariasis, intestinal worms and schistosomiasis.

We're also introducing some of the people you've helped free from the disease, such as youngsters Paiyaton and Lanoi, who you can meet on page 7. Plus, we're celebrating the incredible individuals at the forefront of fighting NTDs, who are doing all they can to ensure communities are screened and treated.

Without trachoma surgeons like Samson and community case finders like Maryamu, people would lose their sight and NTDs would continue spreading. We're indebted to them, and to you, our brilliant supporters, and I hope you enjoy reading about what you've helped achieve.

My very best wishes,



Ella Pierce

Ella Pierce
Global Director
of Fundraising



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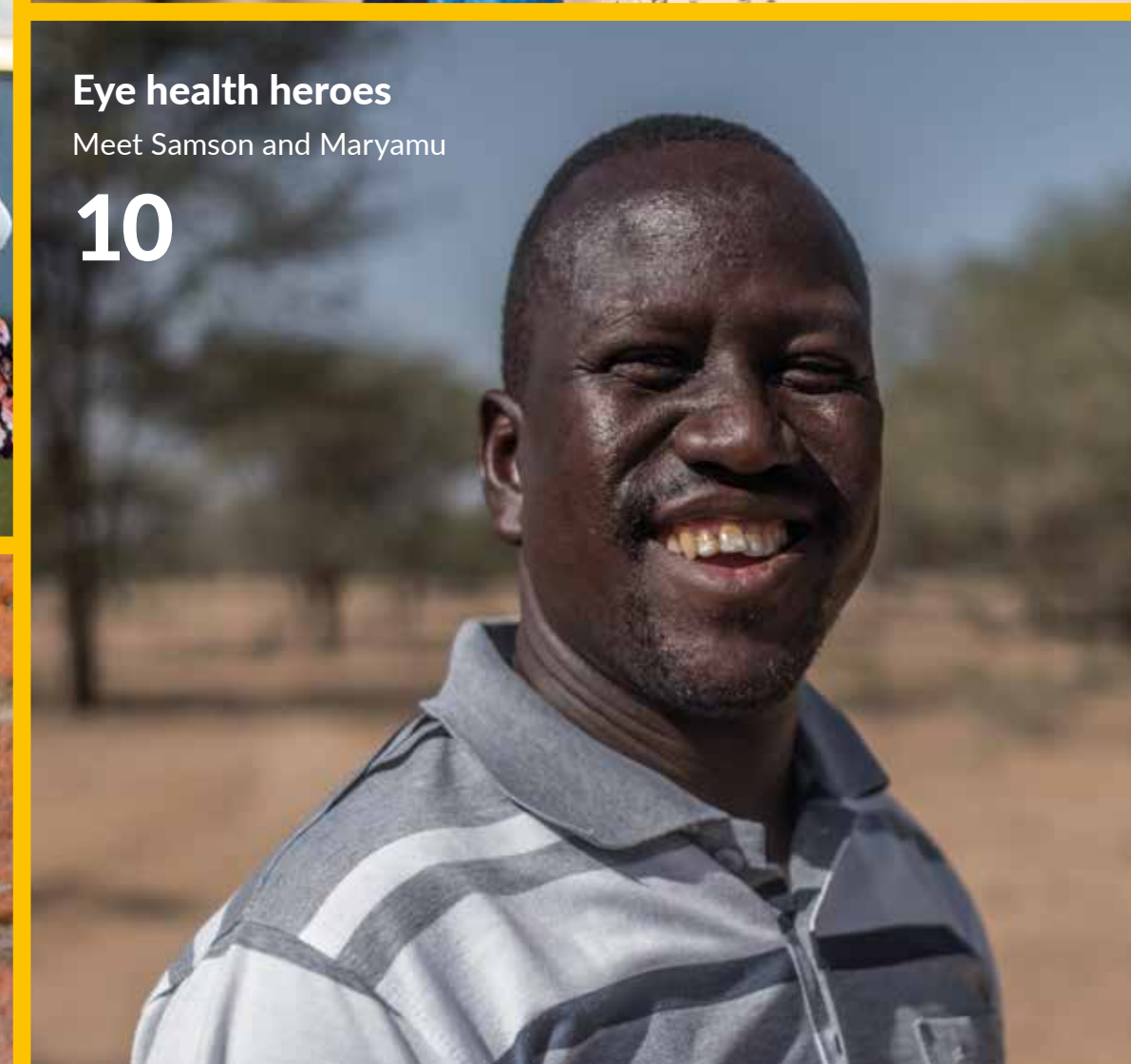
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Malawi milestone

You've helped free millions of people in Malawi from the threat of painful, blinding trachoma



My name is Bright Chiwaula, and I'm the country director for Sightsavers in Malawi. I'm so happy that future generations will not suffer from trachoma in my country. I want to share this good news with the world and to thank you for the big part you've played in making it happen!

Eliminating a disease on this scale is a massive achievement for Malawi. Thanks to the hard work, commitment and collaboration of the government, health workers, community volunteers, Sightsavers and our partners, 9.5 million Malawians are no longer at risk of losing their sight to trachoma. And we couldn't have done it without amazing supporters like you.

Sightsavers helped launch Malawi's Trachoma Elimination Programme in 2014. We've been working to treat, control and prevent the disease ever since, by implementing the World Health Organization's SAFE strategy.

SAFE stands for surgery, antibiotics, facial cleanliness and environmental improvement. As well as ensuring people receive the treatment they need, it helps tackle the issues of poor sanitation and lack of access to clean water – which allow trachoma to spread.

With our WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) partners, we've helped install and improve fresh water sources in communities and schools. We've also raised awareness about the importance of washing hands and faces, and many schools now have WASH champions, such as Saphira, who help inform fellow students and communities.

Malawi's triumph provides encouragement to our neighbours still working to eliminate trachoma. To these countries I say the strategy we are using works. Keep going!

Bright



Now 19 years old, Saphira is studying agriculture at Bunda College, where she continues to spread the message about preventing trachoma.

Photos: © Sightsavers/Alyssa Mariner



above) and wash with soap. After that, I saw lots of people washing their hands and faces."

During her time as WASH champion, Saphira met people in her community who were suffering from trachoma and saw how much it affected them. "A member of the community had advanced trachoma, where the eyelashes turn inwards," recalls Saphira. "She wasn't able to do her chores or tend her fields, and in our area we depend on agriculture."

Seeing her country achieve elimination has given Saphira hope for the future. "Now I have peace of mind because the disease that tormented our country has been eliminated and we are free. I want to celebrate with my sister, and we will continue to educate people on how to prevent trachoma."

Classroom campaigners

WASH champions such as Saphira are inspiring better hygiene, which is crucial in eliminating trachoma

Saphira became a WASH champion at primary school, encouraged by her teacher, Mr Vanda.

"At the school WASH club, my role was to inform my friends on how to prevent trachoma, a dangerous disease," explains Saphira. "I showed them how to use a tippy tap (a simple hand-washing station, as pictured

"I'm very happy that trachoma has been eliminated, my country and my people are free. We have peace of mind."

Saphira

82-year-old grandmother Achiwa (far right with her granddaughter and great granddaughter) used to cut off her eyelashes to stop them scratching painfully against her eyes. After her trichiasis surgery she was able to care for her family again.



© Sightsavers/Alyssa Marriner

Pressing on

Malawi's triumph brings us another step closer to beating trachoma, but we still have much to do

Trachoma is a terrible disease that has caused pain, misery and blindness for at least 10,000 years. It's blighted people's lives for far too long and, with your amazing support, we're determined to help wipe it out in all the countries where Sightsavers works.

So much has been achieved, with Malawi being the latest country to reach elimination, following the success of Ghana and The Gambia. Yet 44 countries still count the disease as a health problem, and 125 million people are still at risk of losing their sight.

It takes a global village of care and expertise to beat neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), such as trachoma; from ministries of health, scientists, and pharmaceutical companies to eye health coordinators, ophthalmic surgeons and volunteer case finders. Thanks to you, we'll continue to coordinate all those involved, and ensure they're equipped with the skills and information they need. With your support, we'll keep striving until we can finally consign trachoma to the history books – leaving people like Achiwa free to live their lives.

Why it's vital we succeed

In Kenya, more families urgently need trachoma treatment. You can help us reach them

Naiteoi has been caring for her two granddaughters since their mother passed away and their father suffered a debilitating accident. But every morning, 10-year-old Paiyaton used to wake with sore, streaming eyes, leaving this proud, hardworking grandmother desperately worried.

Paiyaton had trachoma in both eyes, and the sticky discharge from them attracted flies, which swarmed all over her face. Naiteoi discovered that without treatment Paiyaton could eventually lose her sight and face the same fate as Naiteoi's own mother. "My mother was affected by a disease that made her go blind," she told us.

In the same district, four-year-old Lanoi (pictured right) was really suffering. Her eyes were red and painful and, like Paiyaton, her face was covered in flies. She looked visibly uncomfortable. But thankfully, help was on the way.

Both children and their families received treatment in the form of eye ointments and

antibiotics provided free by pharmaceutical company, Pfizer. With the help of Sightsavers and our partners, this medicine is being distributed in their communities by volunteer case finders, whose training you help support. And the families will be encouraged to keep washing their hands and faces as much as they can, to prevent the disease from spreading.



© Sightsavers/Sam Otieno

Following treatment, Paiyaton and Lanoi are trachoma-free. But thousands more families are still suffering. Please, if you can, send an extra gift today to help us reach them and continue fighting this terrible disease.

2.8 million
people in Kenya are at risk of going blind from trachoma and around 67,253 need trichiasis surgery

© Sightsavers/Sam Otieno



Naiteoi, with Paiyaton (left) and her baby sister.

Eye health heroes

Meet Samson and Maryamu, two of the amazing people who are making trachoma elimination possible

Samson was the first trachoma surgeon in Turkana, North West Kenya and has operated on more than 4,700 people.

“I started working in eye care in 2007, and that’s when I found out there wasn’t any attention being placed on trachoma in the area,” Samson explains. “People had this belief that there was no trachoma in Turkana. I became the first trachoma surgeon in the county.”

In 2010, we supported surveys across Kenya to determine how widespread trachoma was. “The findings were extremely alarming,” Samson says. “Turkana was the leading trachoma-endemic district in Kenya.” Turkana is a remote county and the dry, dusty conditions

coupled with a lack of water and sanitation had allowed trachoma to spread. It’s home to nomadic communities who move around to graze their livestock and live far from the nearest health centres. Often, they’re not aware that help is available, so Samson and his team take health services to them. But this brings its own challenges.

“Getting to isolated communities can be dangerous,” says Samson. “There are often no roads, or there is thick jungle you have to cut through. I’ve lost count of the number of times my car has been stuck in mud or sand. But you can do this surgery almost anywhere, as long as the quality of the surgical procedure is up to standard.”

“The best part of my job is when I reach someone with trichiasis who is willing to have the surgery and I am able to save their sight.”

Samson



© Sightsavers/Tobin Jones



Maryamu (right) examines a woman's eyes for signs of trachoma.

© Sightsavers/Naomi Jatau

Opening doors

Following her own trichiasis surgery, Maryamu was inspired to become a case finder and help save the sight of others.

Maryamu knows what trichiasis (advanced trachoma) feels like. She endured the stabbing pain of her eyelashes scratching at her eyes with every blink, and she struggled to see clearly as her vision deteriorated.

Thankfully, Maryamu heard about free Sightsavers-supported surgery from a neighbour in Kano, Nigeria, and she got the help she needed. “I am happy, very happy,” she told us. “I couldn’t see very well before; I was almost losing my sight. I can now do things I previously had difficulty doing and can see very clearly.”

Following her surgery, Maryamu trained as a trachomatous trichiasis (TT) case finder, to help others in her community. She now goes

from house to house, checking people’s eyes for signs of the disease. “If I find anyone suffering from the condition, I will tell them my story and convince them to come for surgery,” says Maryamu. “People in the community are happy for me to visit them. I have no challenges doing the work.”

As well as making an immense contribution to her community, Maryamu is helping to overcome a huge barrier many women face when it comes to accessing health care.

In some Nigerian communities, certain religious and cultural beliefs prevent men from entering households unless the man of the house is present – so family members can get missed in door-to-door eye screenings. Women case finders like Maryamu face no such restrictions and can see everyone in the household, ensuring no one is left behind.

Recipe for elimination

With our partners, we're taking all the ingredients needed to banish neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) for good, and combining them in one sight-saving mix

1 Conduct initial surveys

Knowing where and to what extent an NTD is present is vital. We support comprehensive government surveys to identify endemic areas within a country, so treatment can be targeted.

In Mozambique, we supported the first and largest river blindness mapping to date. More than 10,200 people were surveyed across seven districts.

3 Manage the burden of disease

Helping people manage the symptoms and effects of NTDs is really important. We support surgery and training that can help improve their wellbeing, reduce the stigma they can face, and lessen the overall burden on health systems.

Sightsavers-supported local healthcare worker Surajo helps show Salifat how to manage the swelling caused by lymphatic filariasis. Since receiving training, her walking has improved, and she can do things she was unable to before.



2 Roll out treatment programmes

The best way to eliminate most NTDs is by providing preventative medicine. We work with hundreds of thousands of local volunteers to distribute millions of donated drugs to protect people from disease.

In 2020, GiveWell-funded projects supported the distribution of over 6.5 million treatments for schistosomiasis and intestinal worms.

Over 5.6 million school-aged children were treated across six countries.



4 Carry out research

High-quality research is a vital part of NTD programmes. It can help organisations to find solutions and add to global knowledge about elimination.

Sightsavers holds independent research organisation status, and we use the evidence we generate to shape our programmes.

Left to right: © Sightsavers/Rey Bhyre, Carielle Doe, Ruth McDowall, Solomon Tamerat

5 Leave no one behind

The poorest and most marginalised are often most at risk of contracting NTDs. We help the elderly, people with disabilities and others who are marginalised to access medical care, and we analyse data to assess whether communities are missing out on treatment.

7 Conduct more surveys

Before a country can have NTD elimination validated by the World Health Organization, it needs to show that the disease is no longer a public health risk, that mass drug administrations can stop, and that individual cases can be managed by the country's health system. We support large-scale surveys to determine these crucial factors.

9 Improve local healthcare

Proving a country's health system is equipped to manage any remaining cases is another crucial step towards NTD elimination. We help train and equip eye health teams such as Samson's (page 8) so they can reach people needing help.



6 Work across sectors

Effective partnerships are crucial to beating NTDs and one great example is our collaboration with the water, sanitation and hygiene sector (WASH), as shown on pages 4 and 5.

In schools across Kenya and Ethiopia, students have started playing an education board game called Captain Clean. It's a fun way of learning how good hygiene can be integrated within their daily activities – which the children can share with their friends and families.



8 Improve data collection

Ensuring data from NTD programmes is included in a country's national health information system is vital to eliminating NTDs.

In 2015, we developed a mobile application called the TT Tracker, which enables trachoma surgeons, assistants and supervisors to collect and analyse important data. They can then determine when and where follow-up appointments are needed.

10 Declare elimination

Reaching elimination is a massive achievement for a country. But the government will need to maintain surveillance surveys to ensure the disease does not resurface, as well as continuing to invest in their health infrastructures and staff training to treat any new cases. We help create robust, accessible, and sustainable health systems, so people can receive good quality health care for generations to come.

Another key ingredient – you!

The success of our recipe depends on you, our brilliant supporters, who help this vital work to continue. You're saving sight and changing lives through your incredible generosity, and we can never thank you enough.

A, B and See!

Our school health screening project in Pakistan is helping children like Zill to see and learn

"I sit in the second row and could only read when words were written in large letters in the book or on the board, but when written in the small size then I faced problems reading" Zill tells us. "I also had trouble playing cricket, which made me feel angry and I felt like crying, and sometimes the other children laughed at me."

Sadly, Zill is not alone. Thousands of children like him are struggling at school due to undiagnosed eye conditions, leaving them anxious and discouraged. A simple pair of glasses could transform their lives, and that's where SHIP comes in.

SHIP, which stands for Schools Health Integrated Programming, takes health and eye care into local schools, revealing issues that could otherwise go undetected.

Through the programme, teachers are trained to screen their students for conditions such as cataracts, and refractive error including long- and short-sightedness. They then refer any children with vision problems to mobile optometric technicians who carry out further tests, provide free glasses and arrange treatments such as cataract surgery.

For Zill, having his eyes tested by his teacher changed everything. "I had never had an eye test before, but when my teacher screened my eyes, I learned I had an issue with my vision and this was why I was having problems, and she told me that I needed glasses," he explains. "When I told my parents, they said it's a good thing. I hope the glasses will help me perform better in exams."



© Sightsavers/Saiyna Bashir

13,924

children have been screened
so far in Pakistan

Steering the SHIP

In 2016, we helped pilot SHIP in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana and Senegal, which led to more than 57,000 children being screened for eye problems. In 2018, we helped roll out the programme in Liberia and Pakistan. On 29 November last year, our generous supporters raised more than £70,000 for our Giving Tuesday appeal, which featured SHIP in Pakistan. We're extremely grateful to everyone who donated.