

# Focus

Your magazine from  Sightsovers **Autumn 2025**

**75 years of  
sight-saving!**

You've helped transform millions  
of people's lives and given children  
like Chisomo the chance to go to  
school and thrive



# Thank you for caring

I'm really thrilled to bring you this issue of Focus, marking 75 years of saving sight and changing lives together

Back in 1950, Sir John and Lady Jean Wilson set out to achieve their vision of a world in which no one should be needlessly blind, and where the rights of blind people in Africa be advanced through social inclusion, education and training. This was the beginning of Sightsavers.

Over the years, we've reached out beyond Africa to help more people in more countries. But the strong foundations of Sightsavers remain the same. We're here to save sight and change lives. And we couldn't do it without supporters like you.

**There is something special at Sightsavers. People are extraordinarily dedicated to what we do**

One of the things that impresses me most is the huge level of teamwork we have, both here in the UK and in all the countries where Sightsavers works. We're like a family, where everyone pulls together to reach as many people as we can, and to leave health care systems stronger and better able to support themselves long after our programmes have ended.



Thanks to you, more children are gaining an education, cataract surgeries and glasses are restoring more people's sight, and more communities are being protected against painful, blinding diseases.

You're part of that family too, and along with our staff, the governments, partner NGOs, health teams and communities we work with – you're helping to transform the lives of the most marginalised people – not just by the million but one by one.

**You help make a lasting difference to people's lives**

Many of you support us because of a personal link to a country where we work, or because you or someone you know has had a sight problem. Some of you love the tangibility of what we do, whether that's restoring a child's sight through cataract surgery, protecting a whole community against river blindness, or helping people with disabilities access education, employment and health services.

Whatever your reason, I see the huge difference you make when I meet some of the people you support. And I defy anyone not to be moved by the joy on a person's face when

they can see again or are free from pain after years of agony from trachoma.

**I hope you'll help us face the challenges**

Sadly, we live in an unstable world, and conflict, political upheaval, economic instability, and climate change are just some of the ongoing issues we're up against. The recent cuts in aid by governments are another challenge and are already affecting health and disability programmes in the countries where we work. But we can't and won't stop now.

**Let's keep up the momentum**

Together, we've been saving sight, tackling blinding diseases, and championing the rights of people with disabilities for 75 years, and that's something to be proud of. With your continued support, we can keep working to reach more people – so they can live their lives to the full. Thank you.





# Achieving a vision

## An accident at school changed Sir John Wilson's life and led to the Sightsavers we know today

In 1932, 12-year-old John Wilson was taking part in a school chemistry experiment when it exploded and blinded him in both eyes. He quickly accepted his sight loss, referring to it as nothing more than a “confounded nuisance”, and continued with his education.

After gaining a law degree at Oxford University, Sir John got his first job at the National Institute for the Blind. In 1946, he took a nine-month tour of Africa and the Middle East and was shocked at the scale of blindness and the conditions blind people were living in. He returned to the UK determined to do something about it and, in 1950, founded the British Empire Society for the Blind with his wife, Lady Jean Wilson.

We're now called Sightsavers, but 75 years later, Sir John's vision still holds true. 'Education, medical research strategically

directed to the points at which it can produce the greatest possible results, medical care supplied with the greatest possible speed and economy, and a proper emphasis on the needs of the rural blind' were the main themes of the organisation in the 1950s and they remain so today.

### Lifetime dedication

Sir John campaigned for the cure and prevention of blindness until his death in 1999. Lady Wilson remains closely involved in Sightsavers' work in her role as vice president. So, what are her hopes for Sightsavers' future?

“Medically, my number one would be to get rid of trachoma. A focus on rural communities also remains important. There is still work to be done to ensure that people living in rural communities get the help they need when it comes to eye health and inclusion.”

“Globally, I'd love to see more people who are blind in leadership roles in their countries. Doors open for others to follow.”

Lady Jean Wilson

**1950**

Sir John founds the British Empire Society for the Blind – focusing on education, rehabilitation and welfare.



**1957**

The organisation is given royal status by Queen Elizabeth II – becoming the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind (RCSB) a year later.



**1986**

Children's TV programme Blue Peter launches its **Sight Saver** appeal, raising more than £2 million for eye care across Africa. The RCSB subsequently adopts the title Sightsavers.



**1969**

An RCSB team climbs Mount Kilimanjaro, accompanied by seven blind men from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Through their achievement, they aim to encourage blind children to go to school.

**2012**

Sightsavers helps set up the Global Trachoma Mapping Project, using mobile phones to gather data on the spread of trachoma.



**2013**

Sightsavers launches Put Us in the Picture, calling for global development to be inclusive of people with disabilities.



**2018**

In June, Ghana becomes the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to eliminate trachoma, paving the way for other countries to follow.



**2017**

In December, Sightsavers celebrates its one billionth treatment for neglected tropical diseases.

**2020**

Sightsavers helps develop Covid-19 prevention campaigns in West and Central Africa as part of the Ascend programme.



**2021**

More than 21,000 supporters of our Equal World campaign sign an open letter calling on G7 leaders to meet their commitments on inclusive education for children with disabilities, particularly girls.



**2024**

Pakistan becomes the sixth country to eliminate trachoma, following Ghana, The Gambia, Malawi, Mali and Benin.





Health information you supported means that Germem, Joaquim, Jacqueline and Domingas know how to keep trachoma at bay by washing hands and faces.

**Success in numbers**  
**3,838,223** trachoma treatments have been given and **6,034** trichiasis surgeries performed in Guinea Bissau since we first started work there in 2009.

# Triumphing against trachoma

More countries where we work are getting closer to eliminating the disease – helped by your amazing support

Few things exemplify the life-changing difference your support makes more than our progress against trachoma. After centuries of suffering, we're eliminating it day by day, country by country.

Eliminating trachoma wouldn't be possible without the governments, our partners and the local teams we work with, including dedicated trichiasis surgeons such as Dr Braima (right). In Guinea Bissau they've been supported by our Accelerate programme, other funding partners, and brilliant sight-savers like you.

And each treatment given, every surgery performed frees another family like Jacqueline's from excruciating pain and the risk of sight loss.

**"Knowing that my children and grandchildren will not have to experience the same eye problem as me, this is wonderful."**

**Joaquim, Jacqueline's husband**

## "The pain is gone"

After years of debilitating pain and sight loss, Jacqueline and her family are free from trachoma's shadow

"I started feeling the symptoms in 1996," Jacqueline told us. "It got worse all the time. In the past it used to be one eye, but now it's both."

Jacqueline's husband, Joaquim was suffering too, along with their 18-year-old daughter, Germem, and Jacqueline's mother, Domingas. When our case finders checked their eyes, all four were found to have trichiasis, the advanced stage of trachoma – putting them at risk of losing their sight.

Germem and Domingas accepted free surgery in 2021, but Jacqueline and Joaquim initially said no. "I thought it was the kind of surgery that meant going to the health centre almost every day," explained Joaquim. "If I had to do that, I wouldn't have been able to work and sustain my family. That was the reason I refused."

Community volunteers explained how surgery works, and when they saw how quickly Germem and Domingas recovered, Jacqueline and Joaquim agreed to have it. With their pain gone and their sight saved, life feels better, and they're relieved that their children and grandchildren are now protected.

Photos: © Sightsavers/Alyssa Mariner



Following surgery, Dr Braima examined Joaquim's eyes, while a nurse removed Jacqueline's bandages (below).



## Man on a mission

For Dr Braima, eliminating trachoma has been a long-held ambition. He's travelled far and wide to treat as many people as he can, and he's delighted at the progress that's been made.

"There are hardly any cases now," he told us. "This work we're doing is more to make sure that the cases are really low. For me, when trachoma is eliminated from Guinea Bissau, I will be happy to be part of the people who have worked towards its elimination."





# More sight-saving surgeries

Thanks to you, thousands of people like Margaret have had their sight restored and can build a brighter future

Imagine the distress of being a parent and having your sight fade away because of cataracts. Then think of how worried you'd be if your child had cataracts too. That's the reality Margaret in Malawi faced every day. Until you helped us reach her.

Margaret's vision began deteriorating four years ago, forcing her to leave her job and return to her home village with her 12-year-old son, Chisomo. Born with cataracts, he'd never been to school, and both mother and son struggled, needing to hold hands to find their way around.

"I couldn't go to the farm or do house chores properly," Margaret told us, her voice heavy with emotion. "Some days, I even lost my way home."



Photos: © Sightsavers/Malumbo Simwaka

**Every day was difficult for Margaret and Chisomo. But then Margaret heard that a Sightsavers-supported eye screening camp was visiting, and she seized the chance to get help.** At the camp, Margaret was immediately scheduled for cataract surgery. When her bandages were removed, she was elated and ran to hug Chisomo. "I can't believe it – I can see again!" she cried.

Chisomo needed further assessment and was referred to a team of specialists at Kamuzu Central Hospital, in Malawi's capital city, Lilongwe, with all his travel and treatment costs taken care of. A few weeks later he too had surgery and saw the world like he never had before.

Receiving cataract surgery was a real turning point for Margaret and Chisomo. Margaret went straight back to work and Chisomo is going to school. "I feel like we've both been given a second chance," Margaret said with tears of joy. "Now, I can take care of my son, and he can finally have a brighter future."



"It's like  
I've been given  
a new life."  
Margaret



## Your amazing impact

Last year, sight-savers like you supported **1,664** cataract surgeries and **11,701** eye screenings in Malawi. You also helped train **98** community health workers to help find people with cataract in rural villages.

**Please keep supporting Sightsavers, so we can reach more families like Margaret's.**



# Championing eye health for all

## With your help, people with disabilities in Pakistan are getting better access to eye health care

Many people in Pakistan have sight loss due to common eye conditions that can be treated or prevented with the right medical care. But a lack of ramps, braille signs and other aids, as well as eye health facilities being too far away, are huge barriers to people with disabilities or who live in rural communities.

Through our INSPIRE programme, we set out to provide more inclusive and accessible eye health care, making it easier for everyone to have eye tests and receive glasses and other treatments.

Improving access to existing healthcare facilities is key, and we've supported accessibility audits for 15 rural health centres which led to structural improvements. Working with our partners, we also helped establish accessible, environmentally friendly Green Optical Shops within government health centres. They offer a range of affordable optical services under one roof, including high quality yet low-cost glasses.

### The bigger picture

Our overall eye health programme in Pakistan seeks to extend eye health services to underserved and rural areas by integrating them into primary healthcare facilities. In 2024 alone, over **300,000** eye screenings were conducted and thousands of people received essential care through our outreach programmes and partnerships. We also helped train over **3,500** healthcare professionals and schoolteachers in eye screening and equipped over **40** primary health facilities with eye examination tools.



After receiving her new glasses, Aasiya is continuing her own studies and helping to teach her sisters.

## Beating barriers

Aasiya's moving story highlights the importance of making eye health care more accessible

Once an active child, Aasiya lost her ability to walk due to polio and now relies on her family for mobility. Limited wheelchair access at her school forced her to stop attending, but she continues to educate herself, teaching her younger siblings and writing poetry in her diary.

Two years ago, Aasiya's eyesight began deteriorating, making reading difficult. But lack of wheelchair access at her nearest health centre stopped her from getting help. Thanks to INSPIRE, the building was fitted with ramps and other modifications. This meant Aasiya could have her eyes tested and she was prescribed glasses, making her life much easier.

Though she still faces challenges, such as navigating unpaved streets, Aasiya's resilience shines through. She feels more positive about her prospects and is determined to maintain her education. "Initially, I was reluctant to wear glasses," Aasiya told us. "But they have significantly improved my quality of life. I no longer suffer from headaches, and I can see and read clearly. I felt a great sense of relief and happiness to see everything so clearly."



Photos: © Sightsavers/Jamshyd Masud



# Showing your support

After 75 years, your incredible fundraising efforts never cease to amaze us – just look at Pratik, Sadiq and Taofeek

© Pratik Shah



Pratik

## Long-distance legend

Pratik cycled across India to raise funds in memory of his much-loved father, Dhiren Shah

“Dad had a positive impact on many people and was always willing to help, including volunteering for several charities. He even hiked Everest Base Camp in support of a school building project in Nepal. I decided to support Sightsavers as I felt the funds would impact the lives of hundreds of people across India and Africa and be a fitting tribute to dad’s legacy.”

## Tell us your story

Running, cycling, bake sale, quiz night? We’d love to hear how you’ve been raising money to save sight and change lives. Call our friendly fundraising team on **01444 446 600**, email [events@sightsavers.org](mailto:events@sightsavers.org) or visit [www.sightsavers.org/fundraise](http://www.sightsavers.org/fundraise)

## Marathon marvels

Sadiq and Taofeek ran the London Marathon to support sight-restoring surgeries, help tackle blinding diseases and much more

Sadiq grew up in Uganda and Pakistan. Seeing the hardship people with sight loss can face there spurred him on to help.

For Taofeek, the motivation to run a marathon for Sightsavers was also about helping others. “I’m aware of the amazing work you do across Africa especially in Nigeria. I’d like to raise money for you to continue doing this work, raising awareness and providing support so young children won’t have to struggle.”



Sadiq



Taofeek

“As someone who has been wearing glasses for several years, I know how important my sight is and also how different life can be without having proper vision.”

Sadiq

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