

Sightsavers policy influencing 2024 global annual summary

Key achievements in policy influencing

Contents

Introduction.....	3
West Africa	3
Benin.....	3
Cameroon	3
Ghana	4
Guinea Bissau.....	4
Liberia	5
Mali	5
Nigeria.....	5
Senegal.....	6
Sierra Leone	6
East, Central and Southern Africa	7
Kenya.....	7
Malawi.....	7
Tanzania	7
Uganda	8
Zambia	9
Zimbabwe	9
Asia	10
Bangladesh	10
India	10
Pakistan	11

Introduction

This report is a summary of the key successes in policy influencing in 2024, achieved by Sightsavers' country offices, with support from the Policy and Global Advocacy team, Campaigns team, Global Technical Leads as well as other teams. The summary aims to provide an overview of the most significant achievements, although it is not exhaustive and there are many other examples of progress made towards our policy influencing goals which have not been included in the interests of keeping the summary at a manageable length. The report does not include all instances of policy change achieved in the countries where Sightsavers has a presence, and only includes those in which Sightsavers played a contributing role. However, it is important to note that these achievements are not solely attributed to the input of Sightsavers. We recognise that policy change generally requires long-term investment from multiple actors including government, civil society and international NGO partners. For a comprehensive overview of Sightsavers' work on policy and advocacy in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 please refer to the [Policy Influencing Data Hub](#).

Key achievements in 2024

West Africa

Benin

Progress towards ratification of the Marrakech Treaty

In 2024, the Ministry of Social Affairs completed the Marrakech Treaty adoption process. This was an important milestone, as Sightsavers has engaged in a campaign for ratification of the Marrakech Treaty since 2022, in collaboration with the Federation of Associations of People with Disability in Benin (FAPHB). The Marrakech Treaty facilitates access to published works for persons who are blind or visually impaired through the removal of copyright barriers which prevent the sharing of books and printed materials in accessible formats. Sightsavers will continue its advocacy work in 2025 to encourage formal ratification of the treaty by the government of Benin.

Cameroon

Political validation of the inclusive education policy

Following in the technical validation of the inclusive education policy by the Ministry of Basic Education in 2023, the policy was politically validated in October 2024. The inclusive education policy contains new provisions for the needs of children with disabilities, and the political validation paves the way towards its implementation. This is a landmark achievement following advocacy from Sightsavers and organisations for persons with disabilities over many years. Beyond this, Sightsavers supported the Ministry of Basic

Education in its effective implementation of the inclusive education policy through developing resources such as an inclusive teacher's guide, which was finalised in 2024.

Review of the Education Sector Plan

Another important development in 2024 for the education of children with disabilities in Cameroon was the launch of a revised Education Sector Plan. In response to on-going advocacy from Sightsavers and partner organisations, the new Education Sector Plan has greater emphasis on disability inclusion, and allocates an additional 90 million CFA Francs, approximately £120,000 to inclusive education for the 2025 budget.

Ghana

Launch of the Financial Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities Directive

In 2024, Sightsavers supported the Bank of Ghana in launching the Financial Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities Directive for financial institutions in Ghana. The directive applies to financial institutions that are regulated by the Bank of Ghana. The directive establishes a framework for financial service providers to create policies, procedures and facilities to ensure that persons with disabilities can access a range of financial products and services. Sightsavers has been a key partner in this process through providing technical assistance, and involvement will continue in 2025 as part of the economic empowerment portfolio.

Development of an employment equity framework

Advocacy for the government of Ghana to adopt an employment equity policy has continued for many years. An employment equity policy would ensure equity in employment for all other minority groups, not just persons with disabilities. In 2019, the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations (GFD) submitted a draft employment equity policy to the government for consideration. However, the government did not take action. To accelerate the advocacy process, in 2023, Sightsavers supported GFD in developing an employment equity framework, which provided guidance to all stakeholders about how to engage the government on employment equity policy. This action enabled GFD and other stakeholders to engage the government on different occasions, emphasising to them why an employment equity policy is necessary and what challenges the disability community has been facing regarding employment. Significant progress was made in 2024 as officials from various government agencies drafted a new employment equity policy which considers some of the recommendations made in the previous policy. Sightsavers will continue its work in 2025 to advocate for the formal adoption and implementation of the policy.

Guinea Bissau

Integration of NTD indicators into the DHIS2

Sightsavers made progress in 2024 towards the goal of integrating indicators on Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) into the DHIS2 national health reporting system in Guinea Bissau. Sightsavers had positive engagements with the National Health Institute and other health authorities and facilitated a workshop in which the NTD indicators were reviewed, and these are now pending integration into the DHIS2, with a timeline for this to be done in 2025.

Liberia

Inclusion of county level eye care costs in the national operational plan

In 2023, five counties in the southeast (Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Maryland, Grand Kru and Sinoe) introduced a budget line for eye health into their respective county budgets. In the two remaining counties where the project is active (Nimba and Bong), eye care is delivered by private rather than government partners. In 2024, the funding for the county eye health budgets was integrated into the national operational plan. This is an important step forward for the sustainable provision of eye care in Liberia. Sightsavers will continue its advocacy work in 2025 to ensure that government funding is allocated and disbursed.

Mali

Relaunch of the national policy development process for inclusive education

For several years, the development process for an inclusive education policy had been put on hold, partly due to the security situation, political instability and the change of government. In 2024, following pressure from partners such as Sightsavers, the Ministry of Education (MoE) relaunched the policy development process. The MoE set up a technical working group and a restricted editorial committee which developed the roadmap, action plan and budget for creating the national inclusive education policy. In December 2024, the MoE presented the new roadmap to its technical and financial partners and asked them to support the development of the inclusive education national policy in 2025.

Progress towards the establishment of a committee for monitoring implementation of the UNCRPD

Mali was the 20th country in the world and the sixth country in Africa to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). However, implementation of the CRPD is inconsistent, and one of Sightsavers' advocacy goals in Mali has been the establishment of a committee for monitoring compliance. In 2024, Sightsavers was one of the few INGOs to be invited by the Ministry of Health and Social Development to participate in the drafting of a decree to set up the committee. The decree was submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval and signature in 2024, and advocacy will continue in 2025 to follow up on the process.

Nigeria

Implementation of the National Policy on Inclusive Education

In 2023, Sightsavers facilitated a comprehensive review of the National Policy on Inclusive Education, and the National Council on Education approved and adopted the revised National Policy on Inclusive Education at the end of the year. In 2024, Sightsavers supported the Nigerian Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) in developing a Standard Operating Procedure to guide the implementation of the policy. Sightsavers is part of a working group inaugurated by the Honourable Minister of Education to oversee the implementation of the inclusive education policy and will continue to participate in this process in 2025.

Launch of a Nigerian access to work scheme

Sightsavers advocacy work in Nigeria reached another milestone with the development of an access to work scheme. Sightsavers supported the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) through an OPD partner, The All-Rights Foundation (TAF) Africa, in developing the access to work scheme, which has since been launched and disseminated. This provides a framework to guide private sector companies in the employment of persons with disabilities, to understand and overcome the barriers, and promote their economic empowerment.

Senegal

Development of an eye health budget

In 2024, the Ministry of Health took an important step forwards with the development of a draft budget for the promotion of eye health services in Senegal. The process involved collaboration between the ministries of health, education and finance, and Sightsavers played a role in facilitating the input from civil society groups and Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). The development of the draft budget reflects the commitment to finance eye care on the part of the Ministry of Health and paves the way towards the funding and implementation of the national eye health strategy.

Technical validation of the inclusive education policy

With the support of Sightsavers, 2024 saw the technical validation of the inclusive education policy. Sightsavers supported the Ministry of Education in this process, bringing together teachers' unions, civil society organisations, Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and parents' associations, to review and approve the new policy. This was an important step towards full institutional validation of the policy, one of Sightsavers' key advocacy goals for 2025.

Sierra Leone

Revision of the Disability Act

Sierra Leone passed a Disability Act in 2011, which enshrines a range of rights and protections for persons with disabilities in law. However, gaps have been identified in some of the articles and there is a need to update the legislation. Together with project partners, Sightsavers facilitated input from Organisations for Persons with Disabilities to the revision of the Disability Bill. In 2024, the revisions were completed and validated by the committee, an important step towards parliamentary approval, which Sightsavers will continue to advocate for in 2025.

Launch of the human resources for eye health plan

Sierra Leone's human resource for eye health plan was validated and approved in 2024, and is now in use. The Human Resources for Eye Health plan supports the deployment and effective eye health delivery all 16 of Sightsavers' project districts. In addition to ophthalmic nurses and ophthalmic community health officers, optometrists and optometrist technicians have also been deployed across most districts. With support from Sightsavers, an

ophthalmology residency training programme was launched during in 2024. Once this is implemented in the coming years, the cost for training will be drastically reduced as it will no longer be necessary to fund training overseas, thus increasing the resources available for human resources for eye health in the country.

East, Central and Southern Africa

Kenya

Launch of an inclusive farmer recruitment policy

Through the Global Labour Programme, Sightsavers is advocating for the development of inclusive policies among employers, to promote the recruitment and retention of persons with disabilities in the workforce. In 2024, a key partner in the programme, East African Breweries Limited (EABL), introduced measures to make its farmer recruitment policy disability inclusive. The policy now targets farmers with disabilities during their farmer onboarding process, prioritising marginalised community members, including people with disability, to join their supply chain. This is an important step forward in advancing the economic empowerment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Kenya.

Finalisation of the national eye health policy

Sightsavers has led the National Eye Health Working Group in drafting a national eye health policy for several years, and development of the policy was largely completed in 2023. In 2024, a further important step was taken with the completion of Rapid Assessments of Avoidable Blindness (RAABs), and the Ministry of Health shared the data from these surveys. The next step will be the incorporation of the RAAB data into the national eye health policy so that it can be finalised and launched.

Malawi

Development of an inclusive Early Childhood Development policy

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy was reviewed in 2023 and submitted to ECD management under the Ministry of Gender for review. In 2024, another step towards the launch of the policy was taken as the document was submitted to the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) for review. Once it is finalised, it will go to the Secretary for Gender and ECD for final vetting. After it is signed off, the strategic plan and the budgeting will be reviewed. When it is launched, the inclusive ECD policy will be instrumental in providing a legal basis for the inclusion of children with disabilities in government initiatives focusing on childhood development.

Tanzania

Review of the disability policy

In 2024, Sightsavers supported a review of the 2004 disability policy, facilitating the input from Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and advocating for revisions to

promote compliance with the 3% disability quota in public and private sector recruitment. This would include insertion of an affirmative clause in job advertisements and introducing tax rebates to incentivise compliance by employers. Various stakeholders actively participated throughout the process, ensuring the policy addresses the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities across different sectors. Sightsavers supported the review process, from the initial assessment to stakeholder engagement, drafting revisions, public consultation, and finalization. The policy is currently awaiting official endorsement. Once signed, Sightsavers will advocate for its implementation to enhance the employment rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Domestication of the Marrakech Treaty in Zanzibar

The government of Tanzania ratified the Marrakech Treaty in 2019. This allowed exceptions to be made to the standard copyright laws, paving the way for more books to be published for people with visual impairments. However, domestication has been inconsistent, and in the case of Zanzibar, this is the responsibility of the semi-autonomous government. Sightsavers has therefore been advocating for the full domestication of the Marrakech Treaty in Zanzibar, and in 2024, progress was made with the review of the existing copyright laws. It was agreed that the entire Zanzibar copyright law is outdated and that merely amending the existing law would not sufficiently address the outdated provisions. Consequently, a new bill for the Zanzibar copyright system will be drafted and presented to the House of Representatives of Zanzibar for enactment into law. The review of the copyright bill is still ongoing, and Sightsavers will continue to support the process in 2025.

Progress towards ratification of the African Disability Protocol

In 2024, the Prime Minister's Office initiated the process for the ratification of the African Disability Protocol (ADP), marking a significant step towards enhancing the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities in alignment with the African Union agreement. The launch of the process also helped to raise awareness of the ADP among decision makers as well as the general public, and raised the profile of disability rights. Sightsavers will continue to push for the ratification of the ADP and support the Prime Minister's Office throughout the process.

Uganda

Ratification of the African Disability Protocol

In 2024, Sightsavers engaged with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, advocating for the ratification of African Disability Protocol (ADP), the legal framework based on which member states of the African Union are expected to formulate disability laws and policies to promote disability rights in their countries. The ministry was very receptive, and the ADP has since been ratified and deposited at the African Union.

Progress towards implementation of the Marrakech Treaty

The Marrakech Treaty was ratified by the Ugandan government in 2018. However, Sightsavers continues to engage with government stakeholders on the domestication and implementation of the treaty. In 2024, The Ugandan National Association of the Blind (UNAB), the lead OPD in promoting implementation of the Marrakech Treaty, consulted the Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB) on treaty domestication. URSB gave

guidance that for domestication to take place other treaties such as the Berne Convention, World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) convention, WIPO performance and Phonograms Treaty, and Beijing Treaty also need to be considered to facilitate a consolidated parliamentary review. Stakeholder consultations are currently ongoing for other treaties. Sightsavers will follow up on domestication as a priority for 2025.

Zambia

Launch and implementation of the National Eye Health Strategic Plan

2024 marked the finalisation and launch of the 2022 – 2026 National Eye Health Strategic Plan. Sightsavers supported the development process and participated in the technical review committee, facilitating input from OPDs, and ensuring the inclusion of a focus on the collection of disability disaggregated data. Crucially, the Ministry of Health has committed to financing 65% of the budget to deliver the plan, with partner organisations financing the remainder. This is a huge step, as previously, 100% of the eye health budget had been covered by partner organisations. Sightsavers has also been involved in discussions around implementation of the strategic plan, following up on the commitment to increase the provision of human resources, and leading to the recruitment of four additional ophthalmic staff at district level.

Zimbabwe

Launch of the Parliamentary Caucus on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Sightsavers facilitated the launch of the Parliamentary Caucus on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The launch follows the development of the strategic workplan for the caucus in September 2024, which Sightsavers supported. The launch event was successful, with over 100 people attending, including the Speaker of Parliament who was the guest of honour. The strategic plan is now in place and includes a focus on the African Disability Protocol as a key priority area.

Enactment of the Disability Bill

On 9 February 2024, the Parliament of Zimbabwe gazetted the Persons with Disabilities Bill. This is a huge step forwards, paving the way for the responsible minister to introduce the bill before parliament. Sightsavers has been advocating for the passing of the Persons with Disabilities Bill for several years, supporting the engagements of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities and other relevant stakeholders. The bill is at the third reading stage and Sightsavers will continue to support the process in 2025.

Asia

Bangladesh

Drafting of a Small and Medium Enterprise policy

As part of the Futuremakers project, in 2024 Sightsavers supported the publication and dissemination of two studies on Bangladesh's Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) policy, together the SME Foundation, Ministry of Industries, and the central bank of Bangladesh. Building on the findings of these studies, the SME Foundation initiated the drafting of revisions to the SME policy, and Sightsavers was invited to share further recommendations to strengthen the provisions for people with disabilities. The draft policy is now at the review stage in the Ministry of Industries. In addition to this, the Bangladesh Bank has initiated a revision of the Cottage, Small and Micro Enterprise loan policy, where Sightsavers also strongly recommended considering persons with disabilities through reduced interest rates and flexible collateral and mortgage criteria for certain loans.

Launch of the Bengali Braille Guidelines

Sightsavers has forged strong strategic partnerships with the JPUF (National Foundation for the Development of the Disabled) and Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW). The JPUF is the key agency that upholds and coordinates initiatives to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities, as per the Rights and Protection for Persons with Disabilities (RPPD) Act 2013 and the National Action Plan on Disabilities. Sightsavers organised a two-day residential workshop on finalising the Bengali Braille Guidelines in partnership with the JPUF and the MoSW in May 2024, attended by the Honourable Minister of Social Welfare, along with representatives of OPDs, campaign partners, and disability organisations. This workshop provided the necessary understanding among MoSW officials and paved the way for approving and gazetting the long-awaited national braille guideline. Following the workshop, the draft guidelines were published on the JPUF website to seek final feedback and stakeholder recommendations by the end of June. Finally, the guidelines were approved through official directives from the MoSW on 25 September 2024.

India

Integration of glaucoma screening into state level blindness prevention programmes

Sightsavers facilitated four high-impact consultations across Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka, engaging Health Ministers, policymakers, and over 100 stakeholders from health, civil society, UN agencies, pharma, and media. State Health Ministers and key Government Health Authorities pledged policy action, recognizing glaucoma as the third leading cause of blindness. The governments of Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh have committed to integrating glaucoma screening and management into their blindness prevention programmes, starting with government referral centres. This coordinated policy action and institutional engagement mark a major step toward preventing avoidable blindness and integrating comprehensive glaucoma care into India's public eye health system. A national level consultation is planned in 2025 in which all insights, suggestions and findings from the state consultation would be presented

to the national stakeholders towards policy and institutional reforms around glaucoma management in the country.

Introduction of measures to make elections disability inclusive

Following advocacy from Sightsavers and partner organisations, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has directed all states and union territories to make polling booths physically accessible for persons with disabilities. Together with Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), Sightsavers provided technical assistance to develop inclusive guidelines, involving the provision of ramps, railings, and accessible entry and exit points at polling stations. Additionally, the ECI provides wheelchairs at polling stations to assist voters with mobility impairments. Persons with disabilities were given the right to vote via postal ballots in certain circumstances, such as being unable to visit polling stations due to mobility constraints. This initiative was further enhanced with provisions allowing persons with disabilities to cast their vote via absentee ballots, ensuring their participation without physical presence at a polling booth. In partnership with OPDs and disability organizations, the ECI has initiated awareness campaigns to inform persons with disabilities about their electoral rights, the voting process, and the importance of their participation in elections. These programmes include creating accessible voter literacy materials and running campaigns in multiple languages and accessible formats. These efforts were instrumental in the 2024 national elections, in enabling persons with disabilities to exercise their right to vote both at polling stations and from their homes, fostering true inclusivity in India's electoral process.

Development of a national guideline and implementation framework on equitable and inclusive education

In 2024, Sightsavers supported the development of a national guideline and implementation framework (NGIFEIE) on equitable and inclusive education, to inform the delivery of inclusive education initiatives to be taken at state, district and local level. The NGIFEIE operationalises the 2020 national education policy to ensure accessible, equitable, and inclusive education for marginalized groups, including children with disabilities. The guideline was launched by the Ministry of Education after a series of stakeholder consultation held at state and national level organised by Sightsavers India as part of its collaborative advocacy.

Pakistan

Marrakech Treaty comes into force

On 12 June 2024, the Marrakech Treaty came into force in Pakistan. This marks an important step forward for the rights of persons with disabilities, as the treaty facilitates access to published works for persons who are blind and visually impaired through providing a copyright exception, allowing the sharing of works to people with disabilities without the copyrights holder's permission. Sightsavers played a key role in reaching this achievement, through initiating the discussion for ratification of the Marrakech Treaty with key stakeholders, including the Intellectual Property Organisation (IPO), publishers' association, ministry of human rights, ministry of planning, development and special initiatives and OPDs. The treaty was ratified in December 2023, came into force in 2024, and the next step will be for Sightsavers to advocate for the implementation of the treaty.

Publication of the first census report with disability disaggregated data

A census was carried out in 2023, for the first time incorporating the Washington Group Questions on disability. This was a landmark achievement, following many years of advocacy on the part of Sightsavers and partner organisations. In 2024, the census report was published, providing disability disaggregated data at the national level, which government institutions are now able to use in the planning and allocation of resources and services to ensure sufficient provision for persons with disabilities. Sightsavers was able to analyse the data and application of the Washington Group Questions, to assess the roll out and provide recommendations on how the delivery of the census can be improved in future. Beyond this, Sightsavers signed a Letter of Understanding with the Pakistan Institute of Education, under which Sightsavers will support the integration of the Washington Group Questions on disability into the annual school census.