

Focus

Your magazine from  Sightsavers **Autumn 2026**

Thank you

Your support is giving children like Zayn clearer sight, greater confidence and a brighter future



Welcome

Making change happen

Working for Sightsavers in Malawi, I don't just get to hear about the impact of your support – I witness it first-hand. I see lives changing in the communities we work with, and I also see the incredible dedication of my colleagues across the world, who are helping to make that change possible.

That's why I'm proud to share this issue of Focus with you. Inside, you'll discover how your kindness is creating brighter, more independent futures for people facing some of life's toughest challenges.

One of those people is Ruth (pictured right), who I had the privilege of meeting through our work here in Malawi. As you'll read on page 8, Sightsavers and our partners helped Ruth gain new skills, grow in confidence and start her own business. Seeing her determination, and the difference that opportunity can make, has stayed with me ever since. Today, Ruth is able to earn a living and provide for her family with pride and independence.

Stories like Ruth's are unfolding every day across the countries where Sightsavers works – helping to save sight, eliminate devastating diseases and open doors to opportunity and equality. Thank you for making these incredible moments possible.

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My warmest wishes

Benjamin

Benjamin Zalira
Sightsavers' Economic
Empowerment Officer in
Machinga district, Malawi



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Breaking down barriers

Through her ingenuity, Sightsavers' co-founder, Lady Jean Wilson, transformed river blindness awareness and treatment

In 1950, while standing on the banks of the river Sisili in Nakong, Ghana, surrounded by swarms of biting blackflies, Lady Jean saw the suffering river blindness causes.

were covered in painful, intensely itchy lumps caused by bites from the flies. Shocked at what she saw, Lady Jean was determined to raise funds for treatment but knew the name would be a stumbling block.

"It's no good calling this thing onchocerciasis," she told her husband, Sir John Wilson. "If I can't pronounce it or spell it, I certainly can't raise funds for it. It comes from the river, so let's call it 'river blindness'."

In that one small moment Lady Jean changed everything. The name river blindness immediately caught on, inspiring people to give and support millions of treatments. Today, together with our partners and local communities, we're determined to eliminate the disease in every country where Sightsavers works, by treating whole communities with the antiparasitic drug, Mectizan®. This includes Susan's village in Sierra Leone.



Most villagers over the age of 12 had lost their sight to the disease – officially named onchocerciasis – and both children and adults

Continuing their vision

We're proud to honour the late Lady Jean and Sir John Wilson's work and achievements through the recently created Wilson Scholarship.

The scholarship supports the training of a health professional in one of the countries where we work. The first is Dr Juliana Lahai (right) from Sierra Leone, who is training to be an ophthalmologist.

Currently there are only six ophthalmologists in Sierra Leone. "I am committed to using the knowledge and skills gained to make a meaningful impact," said Dr Lahai.



© Sightsavers/Dr Juliana Lahai

River blindness in numbers:

2nd most common source of infectious blindness globally, after trachoma (World Health Organization)



703.4 million treatments have been supported worldwide, as of December 2025

1.1 million people are blind due to river blindness



7.9 million people are estimated to be at risk of river blindness in Sierra Leone

Protection and prevention

For Susan and her community, help arrived in the form of treatment and practical knowledge to reduce the risk of river blindness

Susan and her family live on the banks of the Rokel river. Blackflies are everywhere, and everyone gets bitten. Like many people, Susan's young son, Yusif and her teenage niece suffer severe reactions, with large lumps that turn into painful, itchy boils leaving permanent scars.

Thankfully, help came when a Sightsavers-supported team arranged for Susan's community to be treated. They also shared ways to prevent bites, including covering exposed skin, wearing bright colours, and protecting children with mosquito nets. Knowing her family would be treated and that she could also take preventative action was a huge relief for Susan.

We've come so far – let's keep working to beat river blindness

No one should have to endure the pain and suffering river blindness causes, and we need to keep treating communities like Susan's while reaching others still at risk. Will you help us, by sending an extra gift today? Your kindness can help free more people from this terrible disease. Please donate now at sightsavers.org/focus



Leaving no one behind

To eliminate trachoma, we're striving to reach and treat people, no matter where they are

In the vast, unforgiving desert landscape of Turkana, Kenya, this means finding nomadic communities like Namoite's, who move from place to place to graze their cattle. Limited access to water and people's close proximity to livestock create the perfect conditions for flies to breed and transmit this painful disease. But thanks to supporters like you, community volunteers and mobile health teams are going the extra mile to deliver treatment where it's needed in all the countries where we work – and to show people how to stop trachoma from spreading.

Namoite herself had trachoma and was treated with antibiotics. So far, more than 6.4 million doses have been provided across Turkana, helping to significantly reduce the disease. With your help, we won't stop until every community is reached and every person is treated. Together, we can help ensure that more children like Namoite grow up free from trachoma's shadow. Thank you.



“Disability doesn’t mean inability”

In Malawi, your support is helping women with disabilities to strengthen their livelihoods and be financially independent

For Ruth, this support has been transformational. A farmer and widowed mother of three, she lost her sight as a teenager and has faced stigma as well as struggling to earn a living. Today, she runs several businesses that are benefitting her family and community – and she shares her story with you.

“I acquired my disability in 2006 and since then my life has been quite challenging. I have been sad and crying because it felt like my life was meaningless, and I wouldn’t do anything profitable. But since the programme, that story has changed.

“The training I’ve received has equipped me with knowledge and skills on modern farming methods, which I did not have at the beginning. I am now part of a group that manufactures glycerin and soap. I’ve also grown a lot of millet and have made a profit.

“I’ve used some of the profit to invest in another business, making scones, called ‘mandazi’, that I sell. My children and my whole family are benefiting. Having soap is not a challenge, having food is not a challenge. The community is quite impressed because I’ve harvested a lot of millet and other farm

“Previously, I looked down upon myself. I felt like since I cannot see it was impossible for me to live an independent life. But having joined this programme, I have changed my thinking.”

Ruth

produce that will last me the whole year. This has not happened to many people because of the bad rain we experienced. But I have been able to achieve that.

“I am a woman with a disability, I have children. My husband passed on. But with all that, I’m able to participate in activities, live an independent life and make profit from my businesses. So that makes me really happy and excited.

“These programmes are very good for women with disabilities because they give support for their day-to-day lives and empower them not to depend on other people. So, I encourage Sightsavers and other organisations to continue their support.”

8

communities in Machinga are currently participating in the programme



Opening doors to opportunity

Sightsavers’ Economic Empowerment Programme officer, Benjamin Zalira, tells you more.

“With our partners, we provide free training in modern farming methods and help people get their products certified and find markets in which to sell them. We also introduce them to village loan and savings schemes to help fund and upscale their ventures – something people with disabilities were previously excluded from. It feels good to see people becoming more independent and self-reliant because of the programme.”



Glasses can reduce the odds of a child failing in class by **44%**

“Thanks to the team, our children can read, write, and dream. We feel hope again. We can imagine a future where they succeed.”
Masuma

A, B and See!

A simple classroom eye test improved Zayn and Saira’s sight and enhanced their studying

When Zayn and Saira began falling behind at school in Gilgit-Baltistan, their mother, Masuma, didn’t know they had eyesight problems.

“They would come home from school and say ‘Ammi, we can’t see properly, we can’t study.’ I thought they were making excuses to avoid studying,” Masuma explained. “They had difficulty seeing in the dark, going outside and attending school. Each time, they complained that they could not see properly.”

Masuma was concerned about Zayn and Saira, but the family lives far from specialist services and is unable to afford the costs of eye care.

Thankfully, support came from the children’s teacher, who’d been trained to carry out eye tests through a Sightsavers’ programme.



“Many times, the children told us that the Sightsavers team had visited their school,” said Masuma. “Later, the teacher called me to the school and explained that my children had eyesight problems and were falling behind in their studies because of it. She advised me to get their eyes checked and treated.

“After that, the team provided my children with glasses. Once they started wearing them, their eyesight improved significantly. They began studying properly and completing their homework on time. Now my children can read, write, and study well.”

Top class collaboration

The School Health Integrated Programme (SHIP) in Gilgit-Baltistan is a partnership between Sightsavers and the department of health and education. It offers basic eye care for children in school, ensuring no one misses out on education for the sake of a pair of glasses.



Scan the QR code to watch an inspirational video about the programme and how it’s helping children to see and thrive.



Photos: © Sightsavers/Ibex Productions 2025

Impact in action

Creating positive change starts with raising awareness – helped by brilliant sight-savers like you!

Tony's marathon milestone

For his ninth (and last) marathon, Tony Adams chose to run for Sightsavers. Here, he tells you why.

"I'd watched the very first London Marathon in 1981 but had never run it. So, I decided that, at 70 years old, this should be my last race and that I'd raise as much as I could for a charity that really makes a difference. I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience. A huge thank you to everyone who helped me raise £3,000 for the fabulous Sightsavers charity."

Congratulations and thank you Tony, and a big shout out to everyone who's running to help save and protect sight this year. We can't wait to hear your stories.

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"My advice if you're considering a marathon? Train well, post on social media, and run for Sightsavers. You'll never regret it!" Tony

Want to get involved?

By raising money for Sightsavers, you really can change lives. Find some great ideas and advice now, at www.sightsavers.org/fundraise



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A garden for everyone

The Sightsavers garden at Chelsea Flower Show created an accessible, immersive space designed for every sense and for everyone.

Inspired by our mission to protect sight, eliminate disease and champion disability rights, this glorious garden was designed and created by Barker Langham and Ostara Garden Design in partnership with Belonging Forum. Alive with sounds, scents and textures, it has since been moved to Chailey Heritage Foundation in Sussex, where the children and young people the charity cares for can enjoy it for many years to come.

Sensory plants such as lamb's ear, thyme and rosemary were displayed in brick containers, decorated with colourful hand-painted designs by Sightsavers staff and celebrity supporters.



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