

Bringing crucial eye health services to the most marginalised

The impact of COVID-19 for people with sight loss in Africa and Asia is devastating. While many have been unable to spend time with those closest to them, the pandemic has also prevented them from accessing life-changing eye health treatments. Globally, 2.2 billion people have a visual impairment, but for at least one billion people it could have been prevented or can still be treated.

Whilst many of our programmes were suspended last year due to COVID-19, we continued to deliver emergency eye health services and ensured people with disabilities were included in our response. It has been essential for us to not only restart our eye health programmes quickly and safely, to provide much needed eye health services, but also to work flexibly to respond to the ongoing health crisis and build back stronger healthcare for the future. We have also adapted our disease elimination programmes to help with efforts to prevent and contain COVID-19. We have implemented new protocols across all programmes, to ensure our staff, health workers and communities are safe.

COVID-19 prevented us reaching many of those in need during 2020 and we are eager to ramp up work this year. **We need your support so we can continue to scale up services and reduce the backlog of patients desperately in need of cataract surgery and other eye health services.**

Why eye health is a priority

Access to good quality eye health is vital for people to be able to live independent lives. It enables them to earn a living, support, and care for their families, and significantly increases their quality of life.

Sightsavers' aim is to prevent avoidable blindness and save the sight of some of the world's most vulnerable people. Sight saving and sight restoring interventions, like cataract surgery are some of the most cost-effective public health interventions. However, COVID-19 has further exacerbated the problem of avoidable blindness. Restrictions in countries across the world meant that all but emergency eye health care was available. There is now a growing backlog of people waiting for treatment due to the pandemic.

COVID-19 has implications for the number of people we can treat. There are increased costs due to essential training for health workers and volunteers, and protective equipment to keep everyone safe. Restricted patient flow in hospitals and clinics due to social distancing and extra precautions, means eye screenings and surgeries take longer.



Azimunnisa struggled with limited sight for six years. Thanks to an eye screening camp organised by Sightsavers, she was able to have her eyes examined and referred the same day to hospital to receive her sight-saving cataract surgery.

Communities' need for eye care is still just as great – and so is our determination to help.

COVID-19 prevention messaging reaching millions in Africa

To help combat COVID-19 in Africa, Sightsavers has joined forces with M&C Saatchi World Services to produce new awareness campaigns that will reach millions of people.

The COVID-19 prevention messaging appears in nine West and Central African countries on radio, television, and social media and on billboards and leaflets. It aims to combat misinformation as well as focus on the need for hand washing, physical distancing and wearing masks.

The messaging is being produced in collaboration with national ministries of health and in partnership with local non-governmental organisations and local media partners.



Amelia Nehwon (far right), community volunteer for a COVID-19 awareness campaign, speaks to community volunteers in Tondin, Nimba County, Liberia.

Your support can have huge impact

These are challenging and difficult times for charities now. The impact of COVID-19 and the UK aid budget cuts will have huge consequences for the world's poorest and will result in people not accessing vital health care services.

It costs just £30 to transform an adult's life and £90 to transform a child's life with sight restoring cataract surgery. Please continue to help us this year, your gift will make a significant impact to some of the most marginalised people in the world:



£500 could protect or treat 75 people in Africa from a blinding or disabling NTD.



£1,500 could enable 300 community health workers to be trained in primary eye care.



£3,000 could restore the sight of over 100 adults with cataracts – restoring their independence and enabling them to provide for their families.

Our work remains flexible to respond to the ongoing health crisis and our expertise in building stronger healthcare for the future is more critical than ever. This year, we will continue to raise awareness on the importance of eye health and aim to reach over 7.3 million people, dispense 500,000 pairs of glasses, and deliver over 450,000 life changing surgeries.

With resources more stretched than ever due to the extra challenges posed by COVID-19, we really do need your support to reach more people like Rebecca – and save them from a lifetime of blindness.

Your support makes an incredible difference to some of the world's most marginalised and vulnerable people. We hope you will continue to support Sightsavers' work this year.

Should you have any questions please do contact Anna Gritt directly on 01444 446770 or via email on liions@sightsavers.org.