

Policy and advocacy achievements of 2023

Bangladesh

June 2024

Introduction

This report is a summary of the key successes in policy and advocacy achieved in Bangladesh in 2023, led by the country office, with support from the Policy and Global Advocacy team, Global Technical Leads and other teams. The report 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 Sightsavers' policy and advocacy goals which have not been included in the interests of keeping the summary at a manageable length. Sightsavers recognises that policy change requires long-term investment from multiple actors including government, civil society and international NGO partners, and it is important to note that these achievements are not solely attributed to the input of Sightsavers. For a comprehensive overview of Sightsavers' work on policy and advocacy in 2021, 2022 and 2023 please refer to the [Advocacy Outcomes Dashboard](#).

Social inclusion

Integration of the Washington Group Questions into the Labour Force Survey

In 2023, the Washington Group Questions were integrated into the Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh. This is an important step forward, providing disability disaggregated data in the national statistics on employment for understanding inclusivity in the labour market, and ensuring that no one is left behind in the implementation of the employment policy. Sightsavers worked with the International Labour Organisation and OPDs, facilitating consultations, providing technical support and raising awareness to support this initiative.

Domestication of the Marrakech Treaty

Following the accession of Bangladesh to the Marrakesh Treaty in December 2022, Sightsavers has been active in advocating for its implementation. The treaty facilitates access to published works for persons who are blind and visually impaired, providing a copyright exception which allows the sharing of works to people with disabilities without the copyrights holder's permission. Sightsavers coordinated with Visually Impaired People's Society, jointly organising a consultation meeting with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs on 'Marrakech Treaty Accession—Progress and Way Forward'. The Minister of Cultural Affairs endorsed the consultation and officials from the Copyright Office of Bangladesh took part. The consultation was crucial in maintaining the momentum towards full implementation of the Marrakech Treaty. A draft Copyright Act has been approved by the Cabinet Division, which incorporates two relevant clauses of the Marrakech Treaty that ensure the importation, reproduction and application of the items for persons with print disabilities. The government placed the bill before the National Parliament in 2023 but it has not yet been passed. Sightsavers will continue its advocacy efforts following the elections in January 2024.

Increase in disability allowance

In July 2023, the government of Bangladesh approved the budget for the fiscal year. One of Sightsavers' key advocacy asks was an increase in the disability allowance. Following on-going engagement, the government increased the disability allowance in spite of a difficult economic climate in which other social protection schemes did not see an increase, thereby indicating the effectiveness of Sightsavers' advocacy work.

Inclusion of provisions for persons with disabilities in the election manifesto

In 2023, the Sightsavers conducted a series of dialogues with the major political parties through the Equal Bangladesh campaign. Sightsavers engaged with the Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Bangladesh Communist Party, with the specific ask to commit to the effective implementation of the Disability Act to be referenced in their manifestos scheduled for 7 January 2024. In December 2023, the governing Awami League published its election manifesto, which stipulates the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the social protection scheme and economic empowerment initiatives.

Inclusive education

Introduction of an allocation of funding for children with disabilities within School Level Improvement Plans

Primary schools in Bangladesh typically have a School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP), entailing a funding range of 50,000 to 80,000 taka. However, existing government guidelines for SLIP implementation often overlook students with disabilities. Sightsavers assessed SLIP fund allocations, utilising the findings to advocate for the inclusion of children with disabilities. Following the assessment, the consortium successfully influenced district and upazila-level education officials to allocate a portion of the SLIP funds for children with disabilities. As a result, 60% (27 out of 45) of Government primary schools have now incorporated this allocation. Notably, two out of three upazila education officers have issued a government order for all schools in their jurisdiction to allocate and utilise a portion of SLIP funds for children with disabilities in 2024.

Inclusive eye health

Development of a national eye care plan and district disability committees

A National Eye Care (NEC) operational plan was drafted in 2023. Sightsavers provided technical assistance through the INGO forum, of which it is a co-chair, sharing data and recommendations to the NEC for development of the plan. The INGO forum will share the plan for consultation in 2024, and ensure that eye health is integrated into the new Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Programme. Beyond this, Sightsavers and its partners

supported the development of a comprehensive district eye care plan, and coordinated with district administrations to ensure that District Disability Committees are functional across 16 programme districts.

Cross-cutting

Inclusion of eye health medicines into the essential drug list

In 2023, Sightsavers actively advocated for the integration of disability into the national priority indicators (NPIs) of the SDG reporting dashboard. We have collaborated with the SDG wing at the Prime Minister's Office, UN Development Programme, International Labour Organisation and other UN offices in various consultations and provided technical support. The collaboration between UN agencies, Sightsavers, and disability organisations highlighted a unified commitment to advancing the rights, inclusion, and well-being of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh and globally. The event served as a catalyst for renewed efforts and partnerships to achieve the SDG goals on disability. The Government committed to take forward the necessary measures to incorporate disability indicators into the SDG reporting framework of Bangladesh.