

Policy and advocacy achievements of 2023

Global summary

June 2024

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Introduction

This report is a summary of the key successes in policy and advocacy in 2023, achieved by Sightsavers' country offices, with support from the Policy and Global Advocacy team, Global Technical Leads as well as other teams. The 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 and advocacy 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 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 and 2023 please refer to the [Advocacy Outcomes Dashboard](#).

Key achievements in 2023

West Africa

Benin

Progress towards ratification of the African Disability Protocol and Marrakech Treaty

Sightsavers has engaged in a campaign for ratification of the African Disability Protocol and Marrakech Treaty since 2022, in collaboration with the Federation of Associations of People with Disability in Benin (FAPHB). In other countries which have ratified these international frameworks, a committee was established to lead the process. However, Benin did not have a structure such as this to guide the process. Sightsavers therefore provided support to set up a committee with various associations representing people with disabilities such as the Paralympics group, the FAPHB and regional groups, and supported the committee in requesting meetings with the government stakeholders such as the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance (MASM) to discuss the ADP and Marrakech Treaty ratification process. The ADP process is overseen by the MASM, but ratification also required approval of the MoJ and MFA. Engagement from Sightsavers and the committee raised the profile and level of prioritisation given to the ADP by the MASM in 2023. As the same ministries are the focal points for ratification of the Marrakech Treaty, Sightsavers and the committee are engaging on both processes at the same time.

Burkina Faso

Revision of the examination process in schools to make it more disability inclusive

Following a long process of advocacy led by OPDs with the support of Sightsavers, the Burkinabé Minister for Education adopted a decree in 2023, outlining specific measures for candidates with disabilities in school examinations and tests. Sightsavers funded and facilitated a workshop for education stakeholders to discuss ways to improve the inclusion of people with disabilities in end-of-year examinations. The aim was to identify specific measures to be taken during school examinations. These measures were then codified in the decree. The decree is in line with article 24 of the CRPD, which affirms that ‘States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education’.

Cameroon

Technical validation of the inclusive education policy

An important milestone was reached in 2023 with the technical validation of the inclusive education policy by the Ministry of Basic Education. Sightsavers provided technical assistance and support over many years to ensure that the inclusive education policy contains sufficient provisions for the needs of children with disabilities. In order to reach political validation and the launch of the inclusive education policy, it will be necessary to obtain feedback from other key ministries to give their approval. Sightsavers will continue to support the Ministry of Basic Education through this process in 2024.

Introduction of a module on inclusive education in teacher training curriculum

In September 2023, a letter signed by the Cameroonian Ministry of Secondary Education officially instituted ‘inclusive education’ as a training subject for student teachers in general teacher training colleges as from the 2023-2024 academic year. The inclusion module of the education policy has been officially released and is now compulsory within the 62 teacher training colleges across the country. Sightsavers’ long-term advocacy for inclusive education played an important role, contributing to the development of a strategic plan for the education and training sectors, providing technical assistance and ensuring that disability inclusion was integrated.

Côte d’Ivoire

Domestication of the provisions for inclusive employment as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Côte d’Ivoire ratified the UNCRPD in 2014 but implementation remains an issue. To address this, Sightsavers engaged with OPD and government partners to establish a technical working group and draft a decree for the implementation of the UNCRPD. The decree sets out specific measures for the application of the UNCRPD, for example setting out standards of accessibility for public buildings, revision of the housing code to address the needs of people with disabilities, and measures to create employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. The decree was submitted to the Prime Minister’s Office in 2023. Efforts will continue in 2024 to advocate for its approval and implementation.

Ghana

Revision of the Persons with Disabilities Act in Ghana

The Persons with Disabilities Act, 2006 (Act 715) has been under review since 2015 to ensure it conforms to the UNCRPD, including provisions on inclusive employment and access to the built environment. In 2023, the Attorney General reviewed a draft bill, raising key issues to be addressed. Sightsavers supported the National Council on Persons with Disability and Ghana Federation of the Disabled, to organise a workshop for the technical committee to address the queries raised by the Attorney General's department. A validation workshop was organised to present the revised bill to key stakeholders and approve the changes. The next step will be to submit the bill to parliament.

Guinea

Introduction of a section on inclusive education in the teacher training curriculum

Together with local OPDs, Sightsavers has been advocating for many years for the introduction of a section on inclusive education in the national teacher training curriculum. Before 2022, Guinea's teacher training programme did not have any focus on disability inclusion. Following the advocacy efforts of Sightsavers and partners, a section on inclusive education was incorporated into the teacher training programme for the first time in 2023.

Liberia

Launch of a new eye health policy

In September 2023, the Ministry of Health in Liberia unveiled the new National Eye Health Policy and Strategic Plan. In addition, the Ministry of Education integrated screening for refractive error into school health plans, so that children receive routine eye tests as part of their schooling. These have been key advocacy goals for Sightsavers for many years. Sightsavers provided technical assistance in reviewing draft eye health policies and plans, trained OPDs and civil society organisations to strengthen their capacity to advocacy for inclusive eye health, and convened meetings between government and civil society partners to facilitate dialogue. Further advocacy efforts are needed to ensure that the government provides sufficient funding for the implementation of the school health plans. Once they are rolled out, this will transform access to eye care services for children in Liberia.

Mali

Allocation of a budget for inclusive education by Fana council

Following a workshop led by Sightsavers, the council of Fana, a town 110 km from Bamako, set aside a budget for inclusive education within its overall 2024 budget. This builds on the local development plan, which was revised in 2022, with support from Sightsavers, to integrate inclusive education. In addition, the council established a committee to monitor the implementation of budgetary commitments, chaired by the local government representative.

Mali makes national commitments on disability inclusion at the SDG summit

Sightsavers supported the participation of the Malian federation of OPDs and the national council of civil society during the process of developing Mali's national commitments on the SDGs to include a focus on disability. As a result of these efforts, Mali's political declaration on the implementation of the SDGs in Mali included the issue of disability at the world summit on the SDGs in 2023. Sightsavers also supported civil society organizations to develop their own alternative report on the SDGs. As a result of these actions, there is an awareness among the Malian authorities of the need to include OPDs in the SDG monitoring committee to report on progress towards disability inclusive development.

Nigeria

Domestication of the National Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights policy in Kaduna State

2023 saw the domestication of the National Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights policy in Kaduna state. Sightsavers initiated collaboration with OPDs through the Inclusive Family Planning (IFPLAN) project to pool resources and advocacy efforts in influencing key stakeholders in the health sector and ensure that the National Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights policy was domesticated and addressed the needs of persons with disabilities. Sightsavers began the process with stakeholder mapping and engagement, followed by a policy development workshop with government decision-makers, culminating in the sign-off of the policy document by the Permanent Secretary and Commissioner of Health on 5 December 2023.

Ratification of the African Disability Protocol

On 13 February 2023, the President of Nigeria signed the African Disability Protocol (ADP). This was a key milestone, but Sightsavers conducted further follow-up calls and visits to the Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities to ensure the ADP was kept on the agenda and maintain the momentum towards full ratification. On 21 May 2023, approval was given for the ratification, and on 19 October 2023, the ADP was ratified.

Senegal

Progress towards the finalisation of the inclusive education policy

In Senegal, Sightsavers supported the Ministry of Education in drafting the inclusive education policy. The Ministry of Education shared a draft policy document with Sightsavers and other stakeholders for their technical input. Sightsavers facilitated engagement between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Community Development, bringing together the key stakeholders to provide input to the content and policy development process. This was an important step towards technical validation of the policy, following which political validation will be needed to formally launch the inclusive education policy.

Sierra Leone

Establishment of district eye health committees

In Sierra Leone, 2023 saw the establishment of district eye health committees across 14 districts, to oversee the delivery of eye health services at the community level. Crucially, people with disabilities are represented on the committees, ensuring that they are involved in the decision-making process, the identification of needs and allocation of resources. Sightsavers played an important role in advocating for these changes through the Irish Aid ABW eye health project, providing technical assistance to government and OPD partners.

Togo

Progress towards Ratification of the African Disability Protocol

Sightsavers supported the presentation of the UNCRPD report in March 2023. This process also provided opportunities to influence the political process of ratification of the African Disability Protocol (ADP). Sightsavers is leading the ADP ratification campaign in Togo, with support from the Togolese federation of OPDs (FETAPH), and the committee for ADP ratification, which is funded by the African Union. Before the launching of the campaign by Sightsavers, the ratification process was led by the committee. Since the start of the campaign, Sightsavers has joined the committee and boosted the profile of the ratification process. Sightsavers has contributed funding to support the process, increased communication around the ADP, and facilitated meetings with government stakeholders. The ADP has been reviewed in parliament, but the final decision to announce ratification during a plenary session is still pending. Elections are expected in April 2024, and further progress will not be made until then. However, the ADP is on the list of presidential priorities.

East, Central and Southern Africa

Kenya

Development of a National Eye Health Policy

Over the past few years, Sightsavers has been supporting the Ministry of Health to develop a National Eye Health Policy. Sightsavers led the National Eye Health Working Group in drafting this policy, designed to run from 2022 to 2030, through a validation process by key stakeholders. This document was largely finalised in 2023, and will guide the national and county governments in enhancing eye care services in Kenya. We are awaiting the inclusion of data from a Rapid Assessment of Avoidable Blindness (RAAB) which will be ready in March 2024. Approval by the Council of Governors and launch of the policy is due by the end of 2024.

Enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Bill

As part of Sightsavers' advocacy work under the Global Labour Programme, we commissioned a researcher to review the extent to which Kenya's laws are consistent with the provisions of the UNCRPD. The assessment recommended a review of the Persons with

Disability Act of 2003, to ensure compliance with UNCRPD and other legal rights frameworks. Following this process, we organized a multi-stakeholder forum to discuss these reforms, with a view to agreeing on a clear roadmap for finalization of this policy which has been under review for many years. The 2023 Persons with Disabilities bill has passed its first and second readings in Parliament. A third reading is due to take place in 2024, after which the bill can move forward to be signed into law.

Malawi

Persons with Disabilities Bill passed in Parliament

In 2023, the Malawi National Assembly passed the Persons with Disabilities Bill, a law which has consolidated the Handicapped Persons Act of 1972 and the Disability Act of 2012 and is aligned with the UNCRPD. This is a landmark achievement and the culmination of an advocacy campaign running for more than ten years, led by a coalition of stakeholders including the Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA), and international NGOs including Sightsavers and World Vision. The final push came in December 2023, when Sightsavers, World Vision and FEDOMA facilitated consultations with the parliamentary committee on community development and social welfare to advocate for the passing of the bill. The new law will improve access to health care, education and other services for persons with disabilities, and the law stipulates that the construction of new buildings will have to be disability-friendly. The new law also provides for the establishment of a Disability Trust Fund to help implement activities that fulfil its objectives in upholding the rights of persons with disabilities.

Ratification of the African Disability Protocol

The day after the passing of the Persons with Disabilities Bill, Malawi ratified the African Disability Protocol (ADP), a human rights treaty that addresses discrimination affecting people with disabilities living in African countries. Together with FEDOMA, Sightsavers was a key driver of the campaign for ADP ratification and facilitated consultation with the ministries of gender and foreign affairs, the two key government stakeholders whose approval was necessary to take it forward.

Mozambique

Harmonisation of the ophthalmology training curriculum in line with the regional standard

At present, the training curriculum for ophthalmologists in Mozambique is outdated and does not conform to the regional standard. In 2023, Sightsavers contracted two ophthalmologists as consultants to work on the harmonisation of the Mozambican ophthalmology training

curriculum in line with the regional standard set by the College of Ophthalmology for Eastern, Central and Southern Africa (COECSA). This will involve updating the training curriculum, improving its quality and enabling the recognition of Mozambican ophthalmology qualifications across the region. Longer term, the updated training curriculum will translate into improved ophthalmology services for patients in Mozambique.

Tanzania

Revision and implementation of the eye care strategic plan

Sightsavers engaged with government and OPD partners to revise the National Eye Care Strategy. The Ministry of Health took measures to involve eye health partners in assessing the existing strategy, identifying the gaps and developing an updated version. Sightsavers met with decision-makers at the national, regional, and district levels to advocate for an increase in the eye health budget, provision of medicines and ophthalmic equipment, in line with the eye care strategic plan. These advocacy efforts translated into an increase in the allocation and disbursement of funds to purchase eye care equipment for ten district hospitals in Tanzania.

Uganda

Ophthalmologists integrated into the human resources for health structure

Following long-term advocacy efforts from Sightsavers and other organisations, ophthalmologists were integrated into the human resources for health (HREH) structure. Hospital directors were requested to include these positions in their requests for human resources at their hospitals, to ensure that the positions were filled. Sightsavers engaged with the Ministry of Finance to advocate for the allocation of resources to pay the salaries for the new positions.

Integration of eye health consumables into the standard drug list

Sightsavers held meetings with the National Eye Care Coordinator and facilitated a review of the national health procurement services' standard list. A revised standard list has been released, which incorporates eye health consumables. Further engagement is needed to ensure that the provision of intra-ocular lenses (IOLs) consistently meet the necessary specifications, and Sightsavers' advocacy work will continue in 2024.

Zambia

Development of the National Eye Health Strategic Plan

Even though it has technically expired, Zambia still uses the 2017-2021 National Health Strategic Plans. The Ministry of Health has been working with stakeholders involved in eye health including, universities, civil society groups and OPDs, and has developed a draft 2023-2028 National Eye Health Strategic Plan (NEHSP). In 2023, Sightsavers supported the development process, facilitating input from OPDs, ensuring the inclusion of a focus on the

collection of disability disaggregated data, and contracting a consultant to finalise the NEHSP. The Ministry of Health has committed to launching the NEHSP, although this has not yet been done, and to financing 65% of the budget, with partner organisations financing the remainder. This is a huge step, as currently, 100% of the eye health budget is covered by partner organisations. Sightsavers will continue to be involved in 2024 to work on the official launch and implementation of the NEHSP.

Zimbabwe

Development of provincial level eye health plans in Zimbabwe

As part of the Inclusive Eye Health Project, Sightsavers facilitated and supported the formation and sitting of the first Provincial Prevention of Blindness Committee (PPBC) in January 2023. Sightsavers coordinated all partners involved in eye care at provincial level in one forum to discuss eye care activities and plans. Additionally, a committee was nominated to coordinate the different aspects of eye care services. The Provincial Medical Directorate within the Ministry of Health was nominated as the chair, while other partners such as Zimbabwe National League for the Blind, Imvelo trust and Council for the Blind took up other roles. The creation of the PPBC has resulted in the province developing specific eye care plans annually and including eye care in the overall provincial health budgets which are submitted to national level.

Asia

Bangladesh

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.

India

Commitments made on disability inclusion at the G20 summit

Sightsavers India organised three policy consultations in Bhopal, Ranchi, and Bhubaneswar to deliberate and address critical issues related to gender equality and disability, with participation from 40 OPDs. The recommendations from these consultations encompassed crucial topics such as disability disaggregated data, adaptive social protection measures for persons with disabilities, STEM education for children with disabilities, employment, entrepreneurship opportunities, livelihood enhancement for women with disabilities, and the

mainstreaming of gender and disability. These policy recommendations fed into the political declaration which was presented and voted on at the Bhubaneswar Gender Equality & Disability Working Group Summit held in April 2023. As a result of these impactful policy consultations, two policy recommendations were recognised in the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration:

1. Ensure equal access to affordable, inclusive, equitable, safe and quality education from early childhood through higher education to lifelong learning and support the greater enrolment, participation and leadership of all women and girls, including those with disabilities, in STEM fields and in emerging digital technologies.
2. We commit to addressing skill gaps, promoting decent work and ensuring inclusive social protection policies for all. Towards this aim, we aim to achieve sustainably financed universal social protection coverage and consider the portability of social security benefits through bilateral and multilateral agreements.

Launch of an inclusive National Curriculum Framework in India

The Indian Ministry of Education announced the development of a new National Curriculum Framework in September 2023. Sightsavers India reviewed the draft, and presented recommendations to ensure it included provisions for children with disabilities and visual impairment. The original draft had many gaps in this regard. Sightsavers engaged at state level with the teacher training and curriculum development directorates, and at the national level with the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the nodal agency for the development of the National Curriculum Framework. As a result of these engagements and dialogues, Sightsavers ensured that recommendations on inclusive pedagogy, accessibility and inclusive learning opportunities were included in the final version of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education.

Pakistan

Incorporation of eye health indicators into the HMIS

Following long-term engagement from Sightsavers and other partners, five districts in the provinces of Sindh and Punjab have included an indicator on eye health into the District Health Information System (DHIS2). Sightsavers initiated a discussion with the district health authority of Khanewal to introduce an eye health indicator into the DHIS2, as the eye care services have been established and functional at all rural health centres of Khanewal district under Sightsavers' Inclusive Eye Health project. After rigorous follow-up meetings with the officials of the district health authority, eye health indicators have been added to the system. Now data is being captured at the rural health facility level and compiled at district level along with visibility at provincial level.

Introduction of the Washington Group Questions into the census

In the 2023 census, the Washington Group Questions on disability were used for the first time. While the findings are not yet available, this marks an important milestone in generating national level data on disability, which can be used for government planning

purposes and reporting on progress towards the SDGs. Sightsavers played an important role through its advocacy work over many years, in engaging with government stakeholders on the need for disability data, and advocating for the integration of the Washington Group Questions into the census.

Integration of the Washington Group Questions into the Labour Force Survey

After advocacy efforts led by Sightsavers and partners, the Washington Group questions have been integrated into the Labour Force Survey. This is an important step forward, providing disability disaggregated data in the national statistics on employment, which can then be used for the purposes of determining the needs for economic empowerment and support for people with disabilities in accessing jobs.

Ratification of the Marrakech Treaty

In December 2023, the government of Pakistan ratified the Marrakech Treaty, to facilitate access to published works for persons who are blind and visually impaired. The treaty provides a copyright exception, allowing the sharing of works to people with disabilities without the copyrights holder's permission. This is a landmark achievement, with Pakistan joining over 120 member states which have now ratified the treaty. It was Sightsavers who initiated 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, facilitating the partnerships and coordination which delivered this milestone.