

Summer 2008

# sightsavers news

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## Saving sight in Africa's smallest country



**ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:**

Blind games in Kenya | Disability & International Development Week | Education for all

**sightsavers**  
INTERNATIONAL



# Welcome

**W**elcome to the summer edition of Sightsavers News. In our cover story we journey with our own Grace O'Brien to Africa's smallest nation, The Gambia, where she learns exactly what it can mean for people to have their sight restored.

You can also read about an exciting sports tournament for children with disabilities in Kenya, which features blind children such as William, who we support to go to school. The dynamic photos show just how much the children enjoy the chance to participate in sporting events (page 8). Sadly, such opportunities are rare for people with disabilities in the developing world.

As part of our work to help build such opportunities, Sightsavers was delighted to welcome Minister Power, who has taken over responsibility for Overseas Aid, to launch the first Disability and International Development Week. The week was a great success and helped to bring together national disability organisations and overseas development agencies to share learning around disability and development (page 11). We hope to make this an annual event. You can read about our new project in Liberia funded by Irish Aid on page 10, where you can see some of the challenges faced in delivering eyecare in one of the world's poorest countries.

Thank you once again for supporting Sightsavers' work. Every three seconds our partners prevent someone from going blind or restore someone's sight. Together we can continue to make a huge difference in the world.

**John Fleming, Head of Sightsavers Ireland**

## SUMMER 2008

### Sightsavers International

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### About Sightsavers

Sightsavers is the country's leading charity combating blindness in the developing world. Sightsavers' vision is of a world where no-one is needlessly blind.

We work with partner organisations in the poorest and least-served communities to help establish and support permanent activities that prevent and cure blindness, restore sight and provide help for people who will never see.

**Donation hotline (24/7)**

**1850 50 20 20**

**Website**  
[www.sightsavers.ie](http://www.sightsavers.ie)

# sightsavers

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# Saving sight in Africa's smallest country

Nfamara's life was transformed by a simple cataract operation



**Sightsavers' Grace O'Brien visited Africa's smallest country, The**

**Gambia, to see Sightsavers' sight-saving work firsthand.**

**T**he first thing that hit me as soon as I arrived through the colour and chaos of Banjul airport was the magnitude of the poverty in clear sight everywhere I looked. In the days that followed I had the chance to learn more about this beautiful West African country and the Gambian people who benefit from the help of Sightsavers' generous supporters.

Although there are a number of causes of blindness in The Gambia, cataract accounts for nearly half of all cases. I met Juldeh Bah at Soma Hospital, one of Sightsavers' partners. At only 40 years of age, she had been completely blind for two years with bi-lateral cataracts, which means she had cataract

*Please turn over* ►



## 'I am very happy that the operation has been a success and one eye, now I'll be able to pound the rice and look

in both eyes. Diagnosed by a local community health worker, she had been brought to the clinic by her younger sister, Mariam Jallow, for a cataract operation to restore her sight. They had walked about 10km to get to the hospital. Juldeh's blindness had devastating effects on her life. Unable to afford the cataract operation (only about €25), her husband left her and she was forced to become completely dependent on her family.

'She needs to be escorted everywhere, even the toilet' said Mariam.

I was amazed at how quick and simple the cataract operation seemed – 20 minutes to change Juldeh's life completely. I was really looking forward to being with Juldeh the next day when she had her bandage removed. Everybody gathered around while Abdoulie, the cataract surgeon gently removed the bandage. As Juldeh slowly realised that the sight in one of her eyes had been restored she beamed with joy. Her first comment was how lovely her sister's dress was, as she started to pick out all of the different colours. She seemed like a different person and looked ten years younger. She immediately asked about getting the sight restored in her other eye...

'I am very happy that the operation has been a success and now I have my vision back in one eye, now I'll be able to pound the rice and look after the children again', said Juldeh

Watching someone see after living in darkness for so long is a truly moving experience and I was so overcome I had to step outside of the ward to catch my breath.

We drove Juldeh back to her village where her friends and family were waiting, everyone was pleased to see her and were amazed that she could now see. Her brother, Jadeh Ceesay, who had been supporting her since she lost her sight was overjoyed, 'I am so happy, I give you my thanks and my prayers', he said.

Sightsavers and our partners in The Gambia work tirelessly to identify and treat people like Juldeh. Nfamara Camara is an elderly gentleman of 70 years of age. When he heard we would be visiting his

## one eye, now I'll be able to pound the rice and look



Juldeh realises she can see for the first time in two years

village he wanted to meet us to thank Sightsavers for giving him back his sight and to share his joy. Nfamara had been completely blinded by bi-lateral cataract for nearly 20 years until a couple of months ago when he had been

discovered at an eye screening. He told me how difficult life had been for him and his wife Lisanding Njui after he lost his sight. He had been unable to work his small farm or tend his mango trees. They relied on the generosity of their neighbours and relatives for food.

'I kept getting lost, my wife had to take me everywhere' he said.

Both Nfamara and his wife were beaming with happiness. They were still in disbelief that Nfamara's sight had been restored.

'It is like a miracle' said Lisanding. Meeting someone like Nfamara was fantastic – the joy shown by him and his wife was unforgettable.



now I have my vision back in  
 k after the children again'

What really stood out for me on my trip to The Gambia was the commitment, dedication and sheer professionalism of the Sightsavers Country Office staff, and the partners with whom they work, in circumstances so different from that of wealthy western nations such as Ireland, where health care is taken for granted.

Seeing the personal impact of Sightsavers' work for myself was truly inspiring and meeting people like Juldeh and Nfamara gave me a very real understanding of how supporters' donations are saving sight and changing peoples lives for the better in some of the world's poorest countries.

My trip to The Gambia really made me



proud not only to work for Sightsavers but also to be a Sightsavers' donor.

**Nfamara Camara and his wife Lisanding from The Gambia are both overjoyed after Nfamara had his sight restored through a simple operation after 20 years of blindness**



Juldeh has her sight tested the day after her surgery

AFRICA		THE GAMBIA FACT FILE	
The Gambia	Population	1,688,359	(IRE 4,040,185)
	Land area	11,295 sq km	(IRE 70,270 sq km)
	Under-5 mortality	122 per 1,000 live births	(IRE 6 per 1,000)
	Life expectancy	54 years	(IRE 77 years)

## Cataract factfile

### What is cataract?

Cataract is the clouding of the eye's lens – the part of the eye responsible for focusing light and producing clear, sharp images.

### What causes cataract?

There is no single cause of cataract. A number of risk factors seem to have an impact. There are some risks that can be reduced by a change in lifestyle, and some that can't. Sightsavers is raising awareness of the risks, and providing treatment where possible.

- It is estimated that 18 million people around the world are completely blind from bilateral cataract (Vision 2020).
- Working with our partners last year we helped to carry out 244,909 cataract operations.

# sightsavers Update

All the latest from around the world



## Historic moment for people with disabilities

Sightsavers warmly welcomes the coming into force of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which took effect from 3 May 2008. Negotiated by disabled people and their governments from all over the world, the Convention has been hailed by UN officials as 'one of the fastest to come into force' and is the first international human rights treaty of the 21st century.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has hailed the entry into force of the Convention as 'a new dawn in the fight for the well-being of people with disabilities'. In his address, Ban said 'we must address the glaring inequalities experienced by persons with disabilities. We must counter discrimination and prejudice. We must deliver development that is truly for all.'

It's estimated that there are at least 650 million people with disabilities worldwide, of whom 80 per cent live in the developing world. The Convention will be a powerful tool to ensure that people with disabilities no longer have to accept discrimination, segregation, economic marginalisation and lack of opportunities for participation in social, political and economic decision-making processes.

Countries in which Sightsavers works where the UN Convention has so far been ratified include Bangladesh, Kenya, India, Jamaica and South Africa. In these countries we'll work hard to ensure blind and visually impaired people fully benefit from the changes being made.

**Above India is one of the countries that has ratified the convention, and now has a legal obligation to uphold the rights of people like Thondamani, 16, who has been blind all her life**

## Accessibility victory in India

In a major milestone in accessibility for blind people throughout India, the Reserve Bank, for the first time in its history, has categorically instructed all banks to provide adequate facilities for its visually impaired customers. This is the result of pressure from the community and local organisations, including Sightsavers' partner St Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC), in Maharashtra, for equal access to financial services.

Until recently it was very difficult for visually impaired people to access banking facilities, such as using a cheque book, operating cash machines and lockers. This meant depending on their sighted friends and family members to help them. Being able to conveniently and independently get to their own money plays an important part in allowing disabled people to function confidently in society.

This victory is a step towards one of the ultimate goals of the project we're supporting through XRCVC, which is to get the thumb impressions of blind people recognised and used in the same way as the signatures of sighted people. This project not only seeks to address accessibility issues (on a national level) but also aims to raise awareness and challenge existing perceptions of visually impaired people by the rest of society.

Elizabeth Kurian, Regional Director for Sightsavers India, said: "This is a significant milestone for the banking sector in the country and all of us promoting the inclusion of disabled people, and I'm sure will influence other industries to follow suit. Congratulations to XRCVC, the Sightsavers South India team and all others involved."



**Being able to access their finances is key to helping visually impaired people gain independence**

# Dublin bus pull



osheaphotography.com

Our supporters constantly amaze us with the original ideas they come up with to raise money in support of Sightsavers' work. On 28 June long-term Sightsavers' supporter and Dublin Bus driver Christy Butler led a team of Dublin Bus drivers in a charity fundraiser with a difference – dragging a Dublin Bus over two miles from the Donnybrook Garage to O'Connell Street.

Speaking about the Herculean task, Christy Butler said: *'I'm just an ordinary bus driver from Dublin. It is easier than people think to get involved and make a real difference. It is amazing what a difference the money we raise here today will make to the fantastic work of Sightsavers.'*

Well done Christy and his team of drivers from Dublin Bus!



Children march in Malawi to demand better quality education for everyone

Francis Thawani/Actionaid Malawi

## The World's Biggest Lesson

Today, 72 million children are still missing out on an education – one-third of those children have a disability. Many millions more children are forced to drop out of school before they can complete even a primary school education.

On 22 April over 7 million children, along with many politicians, took part in the world's biggest lesson as part of the Global Campaign for Education's Global Action Week. Ireland's lesson was featured on the Derek Mooney show, and saw a link up with GCE activities in Mozambique. The lesson was held at the Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre, where TDs Ruairi Quinn and Brian Hayes, and Senator Ivana Bacik went back to school.

A lack of quality education for everyone has resulted in 774 million adults not being able to read and write. For people with a

disability the literacy rate is only 3 per cent and 1 per cent for women with a disability. Without literacy, everyone, and most of all those who are vulnerable such as those with a disability, have a greater risk of getting sick, being infected with HIV, earning less, their children dying at a young age, and continuing to live in poverty.

In 2008 the **Global Campaign for Education** is calling upon all governments to invest and commit to Quality Education to End Exclusion. The world has the money and the know how to make sure everyone has a quality education. All governments have a responsibility to make sure it happens.

Organised by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), the lesson was a reminder to world leaders to keep their promise that every child in the world should complete a quality primary education by 2015.s.

## Community corner



Welcome to Community corner. Now that we're well into the summer it's the perfect time to get out and get active; by joining with a group of friends, you can turn any pastime into a successful fundraiser and have fun too!

This year World Sight Day is on the 9 October, why not mark this special day by organising a fundraiser. Just contact us and we will be happy to help and advise you. We will also send you an information pack which includes great fundraising ideas and tips, Sightsavers t-shirts, pens, etc. It doesn't matter whether your event is big or small; working together we can make a huge difference.

Your fundraising is made easy with [www.mycharity.ie](http://www.mycharity.ie) which allows you to create your own unique fundraising page for any event and raise money for charity in an easy, safe and very secure way. For further information visit [www.mycharity.ie](http://www.mycharity.ie)

### Upcoming events

21 September Cork Women's Mini Marathon

27 October Dublin City Marathon

### Festival of World Cultures – Dún Laoghaire

23/24 August 2008 (11am to 5pm)

Please come visit our new offices in Dún Laoghaire during the Festival of World Cultures. We are opening our doors to the public on this weekend with a small photo exhibition showing some of our work. There will also be lots of information to take away, t-shirts and greeting cards to purchase, and Sightsavers staff will be available to answer any questions you may have about our work.

Sightsavers International, 70 Georges Street Upper, Dún Laoghaire, Co Dublin.

**Thank you . . . Liz Coyne, who ran the Flora Dublin Women's Mini Marathon and raised €235 for Sightsavers' work.**

**...to Christy O'Toole and his grandson, who led a team of brave swimmers on a Christmas day swim, in aid of Sightsavers.**

Grace O'Brien

# High achievers

The Kenyan Annual National Games and Sports for Special Schools took place in Nakuru in April, bringing together over 2,000 disabled students. Sightsavers has supported the event, which is organised by the Ministry of Education, for many years, and helps blind and visually impaired children from the 19 education programmes we work with to compete.

Sport is proven to be a wonderful way to help disabled children develop their coordination, mobility, and self-esteem, while developing a sense of camaraderie with other children with similar experiences, and having fun doing so.



**Above** Julius Ngana'a, 16, winner of the high jump

**“ You know I like jumping. I have a dream I will jump even higher. Some people limit your abilities but that isn't the case, we show that we can do something even though we are visually impaired. You interact with so many people of other provinces and go to places you wouldn't visit on your own. ”**



**Above** Members of the Eastern Province volleyball team get into a huddle for a pre-match team talk



**Above** Coast province (blue shirts) and Western province (yellow/orange) battle it out on the football pitch

**Below** Aiming for the ring during a fiercely competitive netball match





**Above** In goalball players with low vision are blindfolded so they are competing at the same level as blind players. The ball has a bell inside so players can identify it.

**Above** Salamoe Wavinya, 14 (white T-shirt), crosses the line alongside her running partner Michael

**|||** *I feel good running and it helps my body become alert. First we survey the field with a guide so that I am familiar. I map where the depression and hills are as I run. I feel with my feet that I am approaching a hill. My guide Michael is a good guide because he has my speed. We came third in the 400 metres. |||*



**Above** Amos Sirari, 18, leaps through the air at the long jump  
**|||** *I like the sports. The way we participate with others, meeting others with sight problems. |||*

**Right** William Kapung'on, 17, Rift Valley Team Captain with the Best Football trophy



# Making a start!

## Developing eyecare services in Liberia with help from Irish Aid

Liberia is currently working to rebuild itself after a particularly long and brutal period of civil war that saw it become the poorest country in the world. According to the World Bank, 80 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. During the war much of the infrastructure was destroyed and this means that in many areas of the country, health services are starting from scratch. The South East Region Eye Care Project will begin to set up comprehensive eyecare services in five counties of the South East Region. Running for one year, the main benefits of the programme will be:

- Over **10,000** people will benefit from eye care screening and free, quality services.
- There will be targeted screening on market days for up to **6,000** children in Maryland County, including up to **1,000** who are out of school (often working as market porters or petty traders).

- **329** elderly people will benefit from cataract surgery services.
- Nearly **6,000** students will benefit from school eye health services.

This one-year project will not only help the people mentioned above, but hopes to lay the foundations for an eyecare service that will be there for the people of South East Liberia into the future.



George Forpoh of Sightsavers Liberia struggles through difficult conditions in South East Liberia

Sightsavers

### LEGACY

# The gift of a lifetime

## Remembering Sightsavers in your will



Zoe Marshall

You may have seen some advertisements on television lately for the 'My Legacy' campaign. This campaign encourages people to think about leaving a legacy to a charity in their will.

Leaving a legacy to Sightsavers has the potential to change lives forever by helping someone see again or even helping someone get an education that otherwise

wouldn't be possible for them. You won't have heard of Zoe Marshall but she is very important to Sightsavers. In life, Zoe Marshall believed that no one should suffer unnecessary blindness, so much so, that she was moved to leave a gift to Sightsavers in her Will. With this one heartfelt decision, she is still transforming the lives and prospects of people in desperate circumstances. That's quite a gift.

So, thank you Zoe, we will never forget your generosity.

If leaving a legacy to Sightsavers is something you are interested in we have a simple step by step guide which we can send to you. If you would like a copy please tick the legacy box on the form on the back page and send it to us in the return envelope you received with this newsletter, alternatively you can call us on

**01 663 7666.**

**Our work is so cost effective that even a modest gift in your will can achieve a huge amount.**

Daniel and Loveness, who are blind, readily join in with their sighted classmates. They featured in the photo exhibition for the week



# First Disability & International Development week

## THE FACTS

**10 per cent of the world's population has a disability - that's 650 million people.**

**80 per cent of people with a disability live in the developing world.**

**It is estimated that 20 per cent of the world's poorest people have a disability.**

**One-third of the 72 million children missing out on the chance to go to school have a disability.**

Disabled people, their families and carers are some of the most excluded and vulnerable people in the world. For many people with a disability in developing countries life involves a vicious cycle of poverty, with little chance of an education or the ability to earn a living.

In June the Dóchas Disability and International Development Working Group chaired by Sightsavers International organised the first Disability and International Development Week.

The week aimed to raise awareness of the importance of disability issues within international development through a series of seminars, a photo exhibition and other events. The week was a great success and we were lucky enough to have it opened by the new Overseas Aid Minister Peter Power TD.

Held in the fantastic new Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre on O'Connell Street, the week brought together people working with disability issues in Ireland and those involved in overseas development work. Sightsavers was proud to sponsor a photo exhibition which depicted the reality for people living with disabilities in the developing world and we also took the opportunity to launch a report into a survey we sponsored into how much work if any international development

agencies did around disability. Sadly, the survey showed that many agencies do not include disability in their programme planning. Sightsavers and the Dóchas Disability and International Development Working Group are hoping to change that. Plans have already begun for Disability and International Development Week 2009. If you or your organisation would like to become involved please contact Sightsavers Communications & Advocacy Manager and Chair of the DID Working Group, Ruth Coleman, on [rcoleman@sightsavers.ie](mailto:rcoleman@sightsavers.ie)



Minister Power gets a tour of the exhibition from Ruth Coleman and John Fleming of Sightsavers International

