

Autumn 2008

sightsavers news

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Friends of the eye



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

A personal journey to save sight | A blueprint to prevent blindness in Nigeria

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INTERNATIONAL



Welcome

Welcome to the autumn edition of *Sightsavers News*. In the second part of our story from The Gambia, we look at the work of Nyateros, or 'friends of the eye'. These dedicated volunteers generously give up their free time to bring eye care to their local communities. I am constantly amazed by such dedication from volunteers who support our work here in Ireland and in the countries where we work. On page 5 you can read about a remarkable Irish teenager who is also committed to making a difference.

A new survey of blindness and low vision in Nigeria (pages 10-11) supported by Sightsavers has found that nearly half a million adults in the country are in immediate need of cataract surgery. The results of this survey will help us to prevent blindness and save sight in Africa's most populous nation. Read about Rukayya Ibrahim from Zaria in Nigeria, who got to see her grandson Mohammad for the first time, after her sight was restored through a cataract operation.

This month we released our Annual Review for 2007, which shows that we increased our spending on our programmes by an amazing 39 per cent last year. You can download a full copy of our Annual Review from our website www.sightsavers.ie or email info@sightsavers.ie if you would like us to send you out a copy. Thank you once again for helping Sightsavers to make a real difference. Don't forget to consider a Gift of Sight for your loved ones this Christmas. To find out more see the back page or go to www.giftofsight.ie

We hope to launch our new website in November, with lots more information about our work and stories from people all around the world whose lives you have helped to change. In the meantime we would love to know what you think of *Sightsavers News*. Email us with any comments or suggestions at info@sightsavers.ie

John Fleming, Head of Sightsavers Ireland

AUTUMN 2008

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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

sightsavers

Registered Charity Number CHY 15437



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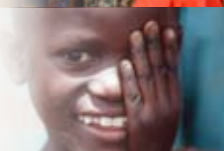
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Front cover: Nyatero Jhebel Touray out in the community by Jenny Matthews/Sightsavers

That's what friends are for

In this second part of our series on The Gambia, we see how the creation of a new eye care worker role in The Gambia is proving to be a real success story in stamping out the painful eye infection trachoma.

The Nyatero (literally 'friend of the eye') is a community-based eye care worker responsible for the eye health of 250 people within their local area. Trained in primary eye care and given basic tools, they liaise between the health services and the community, carrying out eye screenings and basic eye care and referring more complex cases.

The Gambia suffers from a severe shortage of health care workers, with only 4 doctors to every 100,000 people, among the lowest in Africa. Nyateros have helped bridge the gap between the community and available health services, carrying out some of the more basic eye care work, freeing up nurses to concentrate on the more complicated cases, and thus allowing the doctors to work on even more complex cases. The role was trialled in 2006 and has now been rolled out nationwide, with great success.

Chosen by their local community, Nyateros give up their own free time, often after working long days on their farms, to provide eye care for their fellow villagers. Alagie Touray, from Kafuta village, explains his motivation for being a Nyatero: "I love being useful for the community I live with and helping people to prevent eye diseases. It's like a way to carry out my prayers in daily life."

Please turn over ▶

Alagie Touray checks a young person's sight



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)

How Nyateros are helping the community to stay SAFE

Trachoma is a disease of poverty, affecting mainly women and children. Repeated trachoma infections cause trichiasis, where the eyelid turns inward, scratching the cornea and leading to blindness. Sightsavers supports the World Health Organization's SAFE strategy to combat trachoma.

Surgery – training nurses to perform surgery for trichiasis in their community.

Antibiotics – providing antibiotics to treat trachoma.

Facial cleanliness – children with dirty faces may be up to twice as likely to contract the trachoma virus than those without. One of the best ways to prevent the transmission of trachoma is by encouraging face and hand washing – not easy where water is scarce.

Environmental hygiene – the transmission of trachoma by flies can be tackled by reducing the number of flies people come into contact with. Sightsavers' local partners help communities to achieve this by setting up local sanitation committees.



All pictures Jenny Matthews/Sightsavers

Face and handwashing and Environmental hygiene

Challa, a cluster of two villages, is testament to the importance of the Nyatero role, and the commitment of the community itself in making the SAFE strategy a success. The Nyateros educate the villagers about face and hand washing, and organise regular screenings and treatment for trachoma, while a village committee shows people how to maintain a clean environment, ensuring each household keeps their house and garden clean. The villages, which Sightsavers provided with sanitary kits, rakes and a wheelbarrow, also get together for monthly village clean-ups. Village chief Alhagi Gai says: "Trachoma used to be a huge problem and many elderly people were blinded by trichiasis. We first heard about the SAFE strategy ten years ago and since then people's health has improved hugely."



Villagers team up to sweep their environment clean



Stefanie (second from right) with staff and pupils from Sutton Park School

Committed to making a difference

I tended to think of all the wonderful work I would do in the future, when I had left school and was 'older' / 'richer' / 'independent' / 'more qualified' or otherwise 'better positioned' to be of assistance to others. I soon realised that this did not excuse me from my present-day responsibility to get involved.

Being made Head Girl of my school, Sutton Park, provided me with the impetus to get started. I wanted to use my position to do something worthwhile, and began to come up with ideas to allow all of the students to help others, both at home in Ireland and overseas. Sightsavers was one of the first charities I decided we should get involved with. When I really thought about the life-changing work carried out by Sightsavers, a collection for it quickly rose to the top of my agenda. I contemplated what it would feel like to lose my sight. Even as an Irish citizen, such a scenario is terrifying, unthinkable. It became very important to me to support Sightsavers in its mission to prevent people from having to endure such a future unnecessarily, and to make life more manageable for those whose sight cannot be restored.

Sightsavers was a wonderful charity to work with. Ruth Coleman

willingly obliged when I requested a representative to speak at school assembly, despite the fact this meant her presence was required in Sutton at 8.40 on a Monday morning! Ruth's presentation really helped to motivate the staff and students, and 'kick off' our collection. We placed money-boxes around the school and, to date, we have raised just under €300. This is not an astronomical sum, but when we consider that just 27 cent can provide a treatment to prevent blindness from trachoma, it is very significant. Nonetheless, we hope to increase this amount by continuing our collection, with fundraisers such as non-uniform days and bake sales in mind.

While Ruth was at the school, she mentioned Sightsavers' involvement in The World's Biggest Lesson – a Guinness Book of Records attempt. I immediately agreed to arrange Sutton Park's participation. The event took a considerable amount of organisation, but it was well worth it. We had politicians and local media attend in our efforts to raise awareness, and we sent petitions to the Taoiseach and The Minister for Overseas Development, asking them to renew and increase Ireland's commitment to promoting inclusive education around the globe. I think all of

Stefanie Croghan has always had a desire to become more actively involved in charity work, doing something of real benefit to others.

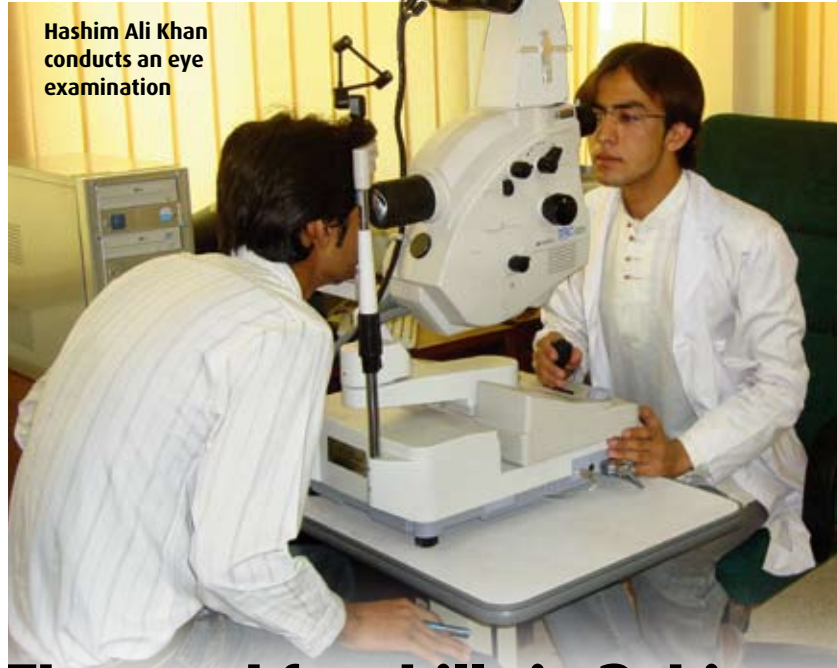
the staff and students enjoyed being part of a worldwide event, and it made us appreciate our easy access to education that bit more. As I reflect at a time of the year when many of us fret, agonise and perhaps despair over our CAO college offers, it is very grounding to remember that over 72 million children do not get the opportunity to get a primary education.

I would strongly encourage other students and young people to get involved with charities like Sightsavers. It is immensely rewarding, and is also a good opportunity to improve organisational and people skills etc. I was initially hesitant as I felt I didn't have a lot to contribute, and I know a lot of other teenagers might feel the same way. However, in a world where nearly three billion people live on less than \$2 a day, in a time where international food shortages, climate change and worldwide economic instability threaten to further devastate the lives of our globe's poorest and most vulnerable people, we need all hands on deck. We must all work to make a difference, no matter how small!

To find out how you can get involved email info@sightsavers.ie

sightsavers Update

All the latest from around the world



Hashim Ali Khan conducts an eye examination

Jamshyd Masud/Sightsavers

The need for skills in Pakistan

A recent study has shown that in Pakistan the commonest form of visual impairment is refractive error – something which can usually be corrected with a pair of glasses. The research, led by Sightsavers, showed that 3.7 per cent of the population have refractive error, and this figure goes up every decade when someone reaches the age of 30.

Over 6 million people are examined for refractive errors in Pakistan every year, and more than 2 million pairs of spectacles dispensed. However this doesn't meet the needs of the population, and Sightsavers is working with partners to provide greater training and deployment of optometrists, and to help establish training programmes for opticians.

Sightsavers supports a number of training programmes in Pakistan. Hashim Ali Khan is a second year student of the BSC Vision Sciences course at COAVS. He is from Gilgit, in the mountainous northern areas of Pakistan, where there is only one hospital with optometry facilities.

It was the lack of eye services in his area that made Hashim decide to pursue a career in optometry. He will have to go abroad if he wants to specialise further, which he hopes to do, to help provide a better service for the people of his home town.

Never too young to make a difference!

Creative 9-year old Andrea spent hours hand-crafting 70 beautiful and unique greeting cards which she then sold to friends, family and neighbours to raise 411.05. Well done Andrea!



Susan Polden



Running to save sight

This summer, Mark McGurnaghan completed the 26th Lisburn Half-Marathon in aid of Sightsavers. Mark had trained for 10 weeks in the run up to the event in June and finished in just 2 hours and 6 minutes. Following his victory, Mark now has his eyes set on the London Marathon in April 2009

Mark has supported Sightsavers for some years now. 'I think it's a wonderful thing to be able to support such a worthy cause and to think that my contribution however small may well have a life changing effect for someone is extremely rewarding' says Mark.

Mark raised nearly €300 through work and customer donations in his local pub (The Plough in Hillsborough Co Down). Mark says 'I would encourage others who may be asking themselves what difference can they possibly make? Is to simply take up the challenge and raise money if they can. Don't just think about it – do it and make a difference. When you are running, the thought that you are doing it to help others who you know you will never meet but who will benefit from your efforts is very rewarding.'

Horsing around!

Susan Polden from Roscrea, Co Tipperary organised and took part in a sponsored horse ride in aid of Sightsavers recently and raised an amazing €3000. Susan is pictured with Naoishe Roantree age 11, who took part along with 50 other riders. When asked how she was inspired Susan said she 'read about Dublin Bus driver Christy Butler who has been raising money for Sightsavers for many years'. Susan is planning another sponsored horse ride next spring in aid of Sightsavers.



Above Susan & Naoishe

Young
entrepreneurs of
the future



Sightsavers

Dunshaughlin sale of work

Rachel O'Riordan, Aisling Cowan, Hayley Reynolds and Lara Reynolds from Maelduin, Dunshaughlin recently organised a sale of work and had a great day selling some of their old books, games and toys. Well done to the girls who raised an impressive €93 for Sightsavers' work.



Jean and Arthur
on their wedding
day

A truly remarkable wedding gift

Imagine caring enough to think about others on your wedding day? Well that's exactly what Jean and Arthur from Co Dublin did when they got married this summer. They asked their friends and family to donate money to Sightsavers instead of buying them wedding gifts. The happy couple raised a staggering €1050 from their special day. Sightsavers would like to wish them a very happy life together.

Jean Brady

Community corner

My name is Wendy and welcome to my first Community Corner. I have been working with Sightsavers International for just over three years now, and I'm still constantly amazed by how generous people can be. But, more importantly, how little it costs to save someone's sight. The gift of sight is so precious and it is an amazing feeling to know that your efforts, however big or small, can really make a difference and save sight.



It is hard to believe that summer is almost over, and lots of you have been very busy making a difference by fundraising. We could not carry out our vital work without the fantastic support we receive from you. Fundraising is a great way to turn something you enjoy into helping others and if you are interested in becoming a fundraiser contact me on 01 663 7666 and I will be happy to pop a fundraising pack in the post to you or simply to give you some advice.

With Christmas just around the corner, why not consider a Gift of Sight for your friends and family. See www.giftofsight.ie

Upcoming event

27 October 2008 – Dublin City Marathon

Good luck...

John Fahy is currently preparing to run for Sightsavers in the Barcelona marathon in March. We wish John the very best of luck in his training and would encourage you to check out his fundraising page on www.mycharity.ie/event/john_fahys_event/

Thank you...

After learning about the work of Sightsavers International, the **Children of the Good News Club** and the **Sunday Club in Terenure** have been busy raising funds throughout the year.

Willie Henry from Waterford, who raised an amazing €2,900 for Sightsavers by organising a Golf Tournament, thanks to everyone who supported Willie's event!

Margaret Flannery, who helped raise €300 with the **Lackagh Summer Bridge Club**, and added €100 from selling her homemade jam.

To all the friends and family of the late **Aileen O'Reagain**, who passed away recently. We have received many generous gifts in her memory. These special gifts will make a huge difference in some of the world's poorest countries.

To all those who came to see us at this year's Castle Palooza music festival held in the magical grounds of Charleville Castle in Tullamore. Sightsavers staff braved the elements of the August bank holiday weekend, to put on a photo exhibition to raise awareness of our vital work.

The photos were then used again during the Dún Laoghaire Festival of World Cultures in Poppies restaurant and coffee shop on Georges Street. Thank you to Poppies and everyone who dropped in to see the pictures. We hope that they inspired you as much as they inspire us.

Wendy Bracken

Wendy Bracken

A personal journey to save sight

Without our partners around the world we would simply not be able to reach the communities who need us most.

Arvel Grant, the executive director of Sightsavers' partner the Caribbean Council for the Blind (CCB), tells us why being able to prevent blindness and restore sight has a very personal meaning.

I was born with some opaque vision but by the time I was nine, I was functionally blind.

I never lost the ability to see light and contrast in one eye. Recognising contrast and variation is a lot when you're blind, so if you see something dark, you might think it's a door.

The first part of my life was very nice. I grew up on a little farm and did everything with my brothers and sisters. I

learned how to plant things and how to tend them while they grew, and to look after animals. I felt exactly like my brothers and sisters. The only difference I remember is that if I didn't wear shoes I'd hurt my feet more than the others so my parents insisted I wear shoes outside.

The struggle to learn

My mother taught me to recognise the print alphabet, by writing big capital letters with a stick in the earth. I could make letters at school on a very large slate, but not in a straight line. At regular primary school, I came last in all my classes. The principal persuaded my parents to send me to a school for the blind 120 miles away when I was 11. My mother took me to the school but I didn't want her to leave and I wouldn't let go of her. I tried to run away on three separate occasions. In each instance I couldn't find the way to the bus station.

I got used to the school eventually. I learned lots of games such as blind cricket, got good grades and learned Braille quickly. Before I knew it, I was coming in the top four in my class and made head boy.

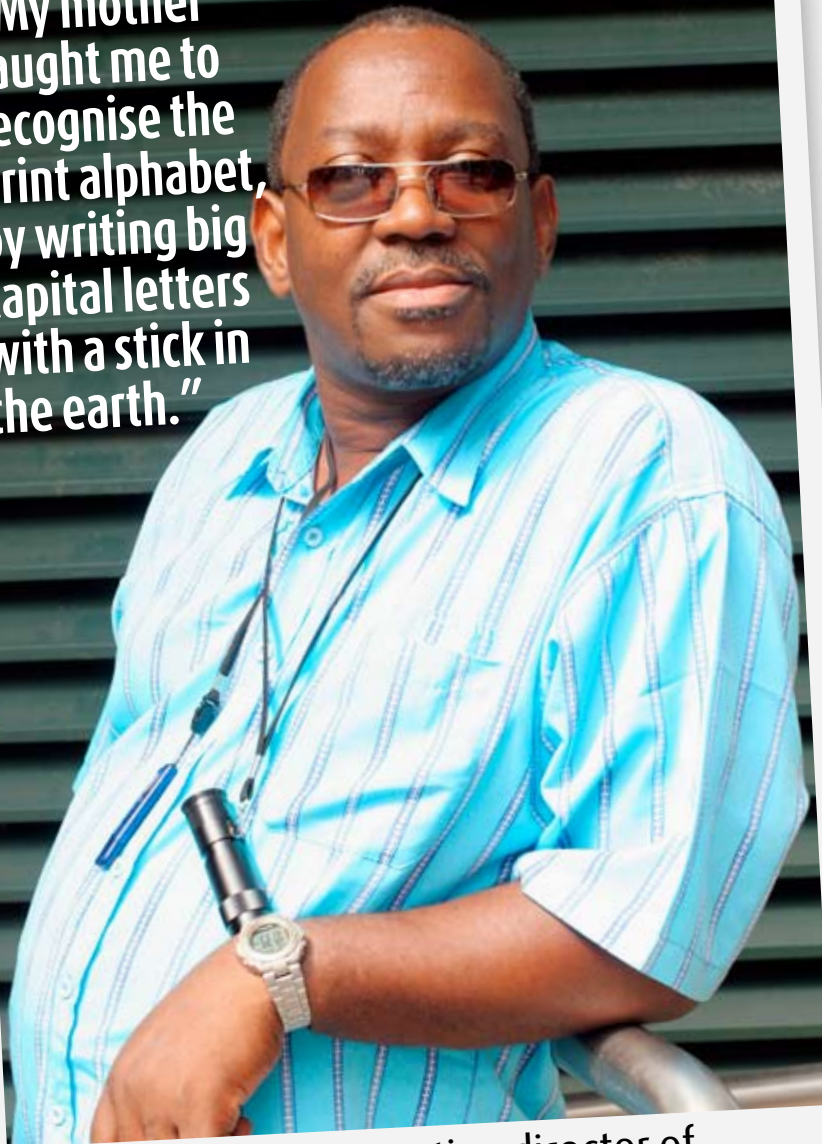
Inclusive education

Having experienced both mainstream and specialist schools, I strongly believe that inclusive education with appropriate technical support is the way to prepare children to live in a sighted society. I learned lots of things with sighted children that I wouldn't have learned at the blind school. I learned social skills, to talk about girls, how to fight. To not educate children in a sighted environment exposes them to the risk of not being able to live and compete in that environment.

My career

When I finished school I trained as a switchboard operator. I worked in the office of then Prime Minister Michael Manley, who arranged special study leave for me to go to university, where I studied social work.

"My mother taught me to recognise the print alphabet, by writing big capital letters with a stick in the earth."



Arvel's Grant, the executive director of Sightsavers' partner the Caribbean Council for the Blind (CCB)

I began working for the CCB as assistant director in 1983. Since 1993 I've been the executive director of the organisation. CCB brings together organisations working in blindness prevention and sight restoration and organisations that provide services to blind people. My job is to make sure that activities are planned and implemented in line with the mission and objectives of the council.

Seeing again

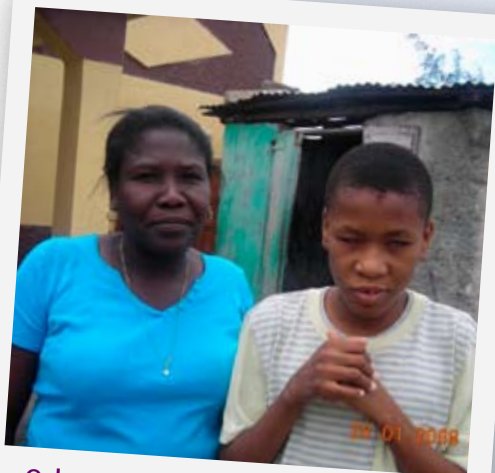
In 2004 I received corneal graft on one eye. The surgery improved my sight for two years. I could see in more detail – I

could look into my daughter's eyes, I could look into my wife's eyes. I could see them smiling at me.

The variation in people is what I found most astounding. They hold their faces differently, they walk differently. As a blind person you don't know there is so much body language. I loved looking around and noticing the difference in people and things. Everything is unique and different.

In my job I get a lot of satisfaction from spending time helping people try to get their sight back. I took that work for granted until I got my own sight back for a time. Now I have a renewed appreciation for what I do.

Successful working with the Caribbean Council for the Blind on the island of Haiti



Odette provides daily living, orientation and mobility skills training and support to Bedson

Haiti remains the poorest and least developed nation in the world outside of Africa. The country has virtually no basic eye care services and so Sightsavers, in partnership with the Caribbean Council for the Blind, provide support to community based rehabilitation workers working with the Societe Haitienne DAide aux Aveugles (SHAA) in the Artibonite and Cap-Haitien regions of the island.

Odette, Pierre Antoine, Dieujuste and Frednel provide daily living, orientation and mobility skills training to people who are blind or have low vision, as well as referring people with eye problems to hospital for treatment.

Many of the children who are blind or have low vision in Artibonite and Cap Haitien do not go to school. Bedson St-Pierre is 15 and lives with his family in Gonaives. Mainstream schools do not have the skills and resources to meet the needs of children like Bedson, and the nearest and only school for children with disabilities is over four hours away in the capital Port-au-Prince.

Odette and the other rehabilitation workers are very dedicated and use motorbikes to travel long distances to find and meet with their clients, often through mountainous areas with no roads. They spend a lot of time working with churches, schools and community groups to create awareness about visual impairment and let people know about the services they provide. Many clients are referred to them through these activities. Spiraling fuel and maintenance costs provide a constant challenge to keeping their motorbikes on the roads and dirt tracks of Artibonite and Cap Haitien.

How Sightsavers Ireland is contributing to preventing blindness on the Caribbean island of Dominica

Dominica is a small island about 29 miles long and 16 miles wide and is the largest English speaking island of the Windward Group. The population is estimated at 72,386, with 30 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. Dominica's mostly mountainous terrain with extensive rainforests makes travel and communication relatively difficult and, in addition, the island experiences hurricanes, land-slides and flash floods.

180 million people have diabetes worldwide and half of sufferers do not know they have it. A person with diabetes is 25 times more likely to lose his/her sight than someone without the disease. In fact, 5 per cent of world blindness is caused by diabetes and the dramatic increase in the disease during the new millennium is greatest in developing countries and the Caribbean region. Diabetic Retinopathy has been identified as a leading cause of blindness in the Caribbean and a priority condition in the Vision 2020 Strategic Plan for Prevention of Blindness in the region.

We are working with support from a major Irish charitable trust on an innovative prevention programme against Diabetic Retinopathy on the island of Dominica. The project aims to save the sight of over 200 people through early detection.



Dominica the neighbourhood in Rosseau with the health clinic

'When I could see I was active and able to go anywhere I wanted. Then I couldn't move anywhere without bumping into things, so I stayed in one room.'

Rukayya sees her grandson for the first time



A blueprint to prevent blindness in Nigeria

A new survey of blindness and low vision in Nigeria has found that nearly half a million adults in the country are in immediate need of cataract surgery.

Initiated by the Federal Ministry of Health, and supported by Sightsavers, the survey of adults aged 40 and above provides important data about the number of people in Nigeria who are blind and visually impaired, and the causes of this. This information has never been available before and will be vital to helping Sightsavers to prevent blindness in Africa's most populous nation.

As well as the 486,000 adults across the country who are in immediate need of cataract surgery, other important

Key findings from the survey

- In Nigeria, over 1,000,000 adults are blind and another 3,000,000 are visually impaired.
- 42 out of every 1000 adults aged 40 and above are blind.
- Overall, two out of three Nigerians are blind from causes which could be avoided, such as cataract, which is the single commonest cause of blindness.
- Blindness is almost three times more common in the dry northern areas (the Sahel) than in southern delta areas.
- Illiterate participants were twice as likely to be blind as those who were literate.
- Sightsavers has been working to prevent and cure blindness in Nigeria for over 40 years, as well as supporting people who are permanently blind and visually impaired.
- Country Director for Sightsavers in Nigeria, Dr Elizabeth Elhassan, said: "Nigerians now account for one in five Africans and the survey indicates the growing and urgent need to increase access to eye care as well as the importance of reaching people who are illiterate."
- An additional benefit of the survey is that the findings are applicable to almost 100 million people who live in surrounding countries that share similar ecological zones to Nigeria such as Benin, Togo and Niger.

Population	137,243,298	(IRE 4,040,185)
Land area	923,770 sq km	(IRE 70,270 sq km)
Under-5 mortality	197 per 1,000 live births	(IRE 6 per 1,000)
Life expectancy	44 years	(IRE 77 years)

causes of blindness were glaucoma (a condition where the optic nerve is damaged, often by high pressure inside the eye), corneal scarring and poor procedures for cataract surgery. River blindness and trachoma together accounted for 5 per cent of blindness.

As in many developing countries, Nigeria suffers from a lack of trained staff and equipment to enable the backlog of cataract operations to be reduced. In this part of Africa, the number of ophthalmologists is less than one per million people.

For Rukayya Ibrahim, from a poor suburb of Zaria in Nigeria, cataract has meant that she has never even seen her baby grandson, Mohammad.

After surgery Rukayya's daughter Daiba stays with her overnight with Mohammad. After her bandages come off, Rukayya, watches him in awe and takes a few minutes before she can talk.

'When I could see I was active and able to go anywhere I wanted. Then I couldn't move anywhere without bumping into things, so I stayed in one room.'

Once Rukayya's eye has recovered she can return to the clinic for surgery on her other eye.

Rukayya leaves the hospital with her daughter and grandson



Rukayya's son Tijani says that 'Blindness affected [his] mother in many ways. We had to call people to help her all the time and she's been in a lot of discomfort and stress. She hasn't seen any of her grandchildren who were born since she went blind.'

Rukayya was delighted to greet various grandchildren for the first time as they are passed to her.

As a direct result of the survey

- over 3500 cataract operations were performed;
- 5800 pairs of reading glasses have been dispensed;
- more than 200 pairs of aphakic glasses (for people who are missing a lens in their eye) have been distributed at no cost;
- and thousands with minor ailments were treated.



Rukayya is examined by Dr Mauza after her cataract operation

