

# Training

Lady health workers in Pakistan receive training in basic eye care

## The issue

One of the most challenging aspects of eye care is the severe shortage of trained staff. Ophthalmologists tend to be based in the larger cities, while isolated rural communities have extremely limited access to eye health. The shortage of trained ophthalmologists, especially in Africa, has meant that alternative approaches must be sought in providing eye care to communities.

Jamshyd Masud/Sightsavers

## Sightsavers solution

**Training staff** - Since the 1980s, Sightsavers has been tackling the shortage of eye care personnel by working with local partners to train staff at all levels. Every year we train over 50,000 people to become community volunteers, specialist teachers, nurses and cataract surgeons.

**Building skills** - We focus on building up the skills of mid-level eye care workers, such as eye nurses, so they can conduct minor operations as well as provide pre-operative and post-operative care to patients. Not only does this allow the eye surgeons to concentrate on more complex cases, but also helps motivate the nurses, and provide a platform to help them move onto the next stage of their career.

**Community volunteers** - In West and East Africa, our local partners train community volunteers to distribute the drug Mectizan® that will prevent river blindness. Volunteers are taught how to determine the correct dosage of the drug, as well as how to keep a record of the distribution. Our partners also train village workers to spread simple eye care messages among their community.

**Skill sharing** - We try to integrate eye care into existing health and education systems. Our partners give health workers basic training in eye health enabling them to identify and treat common eye conditions, or refer people on for further treatment. We also support training for teachers to enable them to identify children in their class with eye problems.

### FACT FILES

#### Training

- One of the most challenging aspects of eye care is the severe shortage of trained staff. In Africa, on average, one eye surgeon serves one million people.
- Every year, 70,000 qualified African healthcare workers leave their home countries to work abroad.
- Sightsavers believes that health education training and community involvement are key to dealing with the shortage of trained eye care staff, and we work with local partners to facilitate training at all levels.

After completing his training Luciano Jackeys will return to his district of Uganda and work as an eye nurse.

"I'm from one of the areas most disturbed by the civil war," he says. "The nearest referral unit is 57 miles away so the area is really underserved and there is a desperate need for an eye worker."

By training nurses like Luciano, Sightsavers is ensuring that millions of people across Africa are no longer forgotten when it comes to eye care.



## Making a difference

Kerstin Hacker/Sightsavers



## Reaching the community

Augusta Eyongme is a community eye health nurse in Cameroon. Working long hours five days a week, her role involves preparing patients for operations, assisting with surgery, as well as administering the aftercare. Another essential part of her job is outreach work, such as screening school children for signs of eye problems and refractive error. "I talk to them and their teachers about the importance of looking after their eyes and ask them questions to check they understand," she says.

Suzanne Porter/Sightsavers