

Policy influencing 2024 annual summary

Key achievements in West Africa

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Introduction

This report is a summary of the key successes in policy influencing achieved across West Africa in 2024, led by the Sightsavers country offices in Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone with support from the Policy and Global Advocacy team, Campaigns 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 influencing 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 influencing in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 please refer to the [Policy influencing data hub](#).

Benin

Progress towards ratification of the Marrakech Treaty

In 2024, the Ministry of Social Affairs completed the Marrakech Treaty adoption process. This was an important milestone, as Sightsavers has engaged in a campaign for ratification of the Marrakech Treaty since 2022, in collaboration with the Federation of Associations of People with Disability in Benin (FAPHB). The Marrakech Treaty facilitates access to published works for persons who are blind or visually impaired through the removal of copyright barriers which prevent the sharing of books and printed materials in accessible formats. Sightsavers will continue its advocacy work in 2025 to encourage formal ratification of the treaty by the government of Benin.

Cameroon

Political validation of the inclusive education policy

Following in the technical validation of the inclusive education policy by the Ministry of Basic Education in 2023, the policy was politically validated in October 2024. The inclusive education policy contains new provisions for the needs of children with disabilities, and its

political validation paves the way towards its implementation. This is a landmark achievement following advocacy from Sightsavers and organisations for persons with disabilities over many years. Beyond this, Sightsavers supported the Ministry of Basic Education in its effective implementation of the inclusive education policy through developing resources such as an inclusive teacher's guide, which was finalised in 2024.

Review of the Education Sector Plan

Another important development in 2024 for the education of children with disabilities in Cameroon was the launch of a revised Education Sector Plan. In response to on-going advocacy from Sightsavers and partner organisations, the new Education Sector Plan has greater emphasis on disability inclusion, and allocates an additional 90 million CFA Francs, approximately £120,000 to inclusive education for the 2025 budget.

Development of inclusive local development budgets

Cameroon is currently going through a process of decentralisation, with some areas of policy on education, health and infrastructure delegated to the level of local councils. Over several years, Sightsavers has been provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINDDEVEL) to ensure that disability inclusion is considered in the local development process. With the support of Sightsavers, MINDDEVEL developed an Inclusive Local Development guide to provide capacity building to council authorities on how to mainstream disability inclusion in local development initiatives. In 2024, the Minister for Decentralisation and Local Development signed an official letter to all 360 councils and 10 regional councils, recommending that they develop inclusive budgets using the inclusive local development guide. The 2025 budget preparation circular letter jointly signed by the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development and the Ministry of Finance has for the first time explicitly mentioned disability inclusion to be taken into consideration.

Ghana

Launch of the Financial Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities Directive

In 2024, Sightsavers supported the Bank of Ghana in launching the Financial Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities Directive for financial institutions in Ghana. The directive applies to financial institutions that are regulated by the Bank of Ghana and establishes a framework for financial service providers to create policies, procedures and facilities to ensure that persons with disabilities can access a range of financial products and services. Sightsavers has been a key partner in this process through providing technical assistance, and involvement will continue in 2025 as part of the economic empowerment portfolio.

Development of an employment equity framework

Advocacy for the government of Ghana to adopt an employment equity policy has continued for many years. An employment equity policy would ensure equity in employment for all other minority groups, not just persons with disabilities. In 2019, the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations (GFD) submitted a draft employment equity policy to the government for consideration. However, the government did not take action. To accelerate the advocacy process, in 2023, Sightsavers supported GFD in developing an employment equity framework, which provided guidance to all stakeholders about how to engage the government on employment equity policy. This action enabled GFD and other stakeholders to engage the government on different occasions, emphasising that an employment equity policy is necessary and what challenges the disability community has been facing regarding employment. Significant progress was made in 2024 as officials from various government agencies drafted a new employment equity policy which considers some of the recommendations made in the previous policy. Sightsavers will continue its work in 2025 to advocate for the formal adoption and implementation of the policy.

Establishment of a national coordination mechanism on disability rights

Sightsavers continued our advocacy for the establishment of a national coordination mechanism on disability rights. Following sustained engagement with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and in collaboration with the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO), a commitment was secured to set up a multi-stakeholder mechanism. Efforts are underway in planning a robust follow-up on the Convention of Rights for Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) concluding observations to Ghana, since the change in government.

Guinea Bissau

Integration of NTD indicators into the DHIS2

Sightsavers made progress in 2024 towards the goal of integrating indicators on Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) into the DHIS2 national health reporting system in Guinea Bissau. Sightsavers had positive engagements with the National Health Institute and other health authorities and facilitated a workshop in which the NTD indicators were reviewed, and these are now pending integration into the DHIS2, with a timeline for this to be done in 2025.

Liberia

Inclusion of county level eye care costs in the national operational plan

In 2023, five counties in the south-east (Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Maryland, Grand Kru and Sinoe) introduced a budget line for eye health into their respective county budgets. In the two

remaining counties where the project is active (Nimba and Bong), eye care is delivered by private rather than government partners. In 2024, the funding for the county eye health budgets was integrated into the national operational plan. This is an important step forward for the sustainable provision of eye care in Liberia. Sightsavers will continue its advocacy work in 2025 to ensure that government funding is allocated and disbursed.

Development of eye health indicators

As part of the A Better World programme funded by Irish Aid, one of Sightsavers' advocacy objectives is to ensure that data on the cataract surgical rate and other eye health indicators is collected and reported through the Health Management Information System (HMIS). In 2024, the Ministry of Health took some important steps forward, reviewing 20 proposed eye health indicators, designing the ledger and developing new reporting and summary forms to be used. The integration of the indicators into the HMIS is due to take place in 2025, and further advocacy work will continue to ensure that the reporting mechanism for the HMIS is fully operationalised.

Mali

Relaunch of the national policy development process for inclusive education

For several years, the development process for an inclusive education policy had been put on hold, partly due to the security situation, political instability and the change of government. In 2024, following pressure from partners such as Sightsavers, the Ministry of Education (MoE) relaunched the policy development process. The MoE set up a technical working group and a restricted editorial committee which developed the roadmap, action plan and budget for the elaboration of the national inclusive education policy. In December 2024, the MoE presented the new roadmap to its technical and financial partners and requested their support to the development of the inclusive education national policy in 2025.

Progress towards the establishment of a committee for monitoring implementation of the UNCRPD

Mali was the 20th country in the world and the sixth country in Africa to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). However, implementation of the CRPD is inconsistent, and one of Sightsavers' advocacy goals in Mali has been the establishment of a committee for monitoring compliance. In 2024, Sightsavers was one of the few INGOs to be invited by the Ministry of Health and Social Development to participate in the drafting of a decree to set up the committee. The decree was submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval and signature in 2024, and advocacy will continue in 2025 to follow up on the process.

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

Investment in eye care in Plateau State

The Plateau State Eye Health committee, supported by Sightsavers and the Christian Blind Mission International (CBMI) engaged stakeholders to advocate for the creation of a dedicated budget line for eye health with appropriate funding successfully approved at the state level. Beyond this, the Plateau State Ministry of Health confirmed that they would post human resources for eye health across all senatorial zones of the state, while ensuring ongoing rotational visits from ophthalmologists.

Adoption of national accessibility regulations

In 2024, Sightsavers supported the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) in developing the National Accessibility Regulation. This is based on Sightsavers' accessibility standard for which the institution was a lead provider of technical assistance. The regulation was officially launched and disseminated by the Honourable Minister for Humanitarian Affairs, and going forward, all public buildings will be supported to conform to this regulation.

Launch of a Nigerian access to work scheme

Sightsavers advocacy work in Nigeria reached another milestone with the development of an access to work scheme. Sightsavers supported the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities through an OPD partner, The All-Rights Foundation (TAF) Africa, in developing the access to work scheme, which has since been launched and disseminated. This provides a framework to guide private sector companies in the employment of persons with disabilities, to understand and overcome the barriers, and promote their economic empowerment.

Implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty

Nigeria ratified the Marrakesh Treaty in 2017, and it came into force in 2018. The treaty aims to make it easier for people who are blind or visually impaired to access published work. However, implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty remains inconsistent and people with

disabilities continue to face difficulties in accessing reading materials. To address this issue, in 2024 Sightsavers supported the Nigeria Association for the Blind in organising an operationalisation workshop on the Marrakesh Treaty, for key stakeholders including relevant ministries and publishers to discuss the challenges and opportunities in promoting accessible reading materials. Through these types of actions, Sightsavers is continuing to advocate for the full implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty.

Implementation of the National Policy on Inclusive Education

In 2023, Sightsavers facilitated a comprehensive review of the National Policy on Inclusive Education, and the National Council on Education approved and adopted the revised National Policy on Inclusive Education at the end of the year. In 2024, Sightsavers supported the Nigerian Commission for Persons with Disabilities in developing a Standard Operating Procedure to guide the implementation of the policy. Sightsavers is part of a working group inaugurated by the Honourable Minister of Education to oversee the implementation of the inclusive education policy and will continue to participate in this process in 2025.

Roll out of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights policy in Kaduna State

Following the sign-off of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) policy in Kaduna State in December 2023, Sightsavers supported the state Ministry of Health with the dissemination and roll out in 2024. The Honourable Commissioner for Health in Kaduna State launched and disseminated the validated document. Moreover, a costed implementation plan has been included in the state's Annual Operational Plans. Building on the success in Kaduna State, Sightsavers is looking to expand its work on SRHR policy in other states, and there may also be an opportunity to engage on the national level SRHR policy.

Senegal

Development of an eye health budget

In 2024, the Ministry of Health took an important step forward with the development of a draft budget for the promotion of eye health services in Senegal. The process involved collaboration between the ministries of health, education and finance, and Sightsavers played a role in facilitating the input from civil society groups and Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). The development of the draft budget reflects the commitment to finance eye care on the part of the Ministry of Health and paves the way towards the funding and implementation of the national eye health strategy.

Technical validation of the inclusive education policy

With the support of Sightsavers, 2024 saw the technical validation of the inclusive education policy. Sightsavers supported the Ministry of Education in this process, bringing together teachers' unions, civil society organisations, Organisations for Persons with Disabilities

(OPDs) and parents' associations, to review and approve the new policy. This was an important step towards full institutional validation of the policy, one of Sightsavers' key advocacy goals for 2025.

Sierra Leone

Revision of the Disability Act

Sierra Leone passed a Disability Act in 2011, which enshrines a range of rights and protections for persons with disabilities in law. However, gaps have been identified in some of the articles and there is a need to update the legislation. Together with project partners, Sightsavers facilitated input from Organisations for Persons with Disabilities to the revision of the Disability Bill. In 2024, the revisions were completed and validated by the committee, an important step towards parliamentary approval, which Sightsavers will continue to advocate for in 2025.

Launch of the human resources for eye health plan

Sierra Leone's human resource for eye health plan was validated and approved in 2024 and is now in use. The Human Resources for Eye Health plan supports the deployment and effective eye health delivery all 16 of Sightsavers' project districts. In addition to ophthalmic nurses and ophthalmic community health officers, optometrists and optometrist technicians have also been deployed across most districts. With support from Sightsavers, an ophthalmology residency training programme was launched in 2024. Once this is implemented in the coming years, the cost for training will be drastically reduced as it will no longer be necessary to fund training overseas, thus increasing the resources available for human resources working on eye health in the country.