



Sightsavers

Sightsavers India

Right to sight

Extending eye services to the least served areas, Sightsavers India is enabling people to live lives of independence and dignity



*R N Mohanty
CEO
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RN Mohanty has spent more than three decades in the social sector with assignments involving programmes, finance, and enabling fundraising for various social and economic causes. RN, as he is fondly addressed by his peers, has held leadership positions at various development sector organisations. Prior to helping operations at Sightsavers India, he worked with Care India as its Chief Operating Officer. Health and education are key areas wherein Mohanty would like to bring about a change. For Sightsavers, his immediate vision is of transforming 100 districts in the country in the arena of eye health and disability. Mohanty brings to the table a rich experience of strengthening and managing teams and raising their capabilities.

Sightsavers' vision is of a world where no one is blind from avoidable causes, and where people with disabilities participate equally in society. A large number of People with Disabilities (PWDs), especially those who suffer from visual disability, are reeling under poverty, economic and educational deprivation, and are concentrated in the most under-served parts of the country. Sightsavers in India, through its thematic portfolio of Eye Health, Inclusive Education for visually impaired children and Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities, aims to have a significant impact on the lives of the economically and socially marginalised communities and also seeks to influence the policies and practices with regard to disabilities in India.

Systemic social work is at the core of Sightsavers as a not-for-profit organisation. We are committed to building sustainable programme models, which

have been endorsed and adopted by the government in our states of operation. Sightsavers focusses on collaborating with various departments of the state governments to scale up operations for its programmes.

Target Population & Geography

Blindness is an important cause and the effect of poverty. We work with poor and marginalised communities. Sightsavers has supported the treatment of millions of people with eye disorders. We have educated, counselled, trained and rehabilitated people who are visually impaired or blind, and helped extend the reach of eye services to the least served areas of India. We work with disabled people and others to promote equal rights and opportunities.

Sightsavers India works in 14 states, extending eye services to the least served areas and enabling people

to lead lives of independence and dignity. Our Priority States consists of Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The Learning States are Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu.

Scale of Impact

These figures would help one understand how Sightsavers positively impacted the lives of people.

Impact (Jan 2019-Dec 2019)

Eye Health	
Number of Spectacles Dispensed	4,69,899
Number of People Refracted	21,01,375
Number of Eye Screenings	54,30,647
Sight Restoration Surgeries	2,79,219

Inclusive Education	
No. of blind / LV or other disabled children who received assistive devices	6,995
No. of blind/LV or other disabled children who received education materials	5,724
Number of Teachers trained	90,130
Social Inclusion	
Number of SHGs engaged in livelihood activities	680
PWDs trained on their rights & entitlements	12,989
PWDs attended livelihood or vocational training	6,327
No. of PWDs of DPO	11,084

SDGs Covered

Much of Sightsavers' work directly contributes to achieving the Global Goals also known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example:

- We ensure people stay healthy so they can work and support themselves and their families (Goal 1: No poverty)
- We are helping to provide eye care in some of the world's poorest countries (Goal 3: Good health)
- Our education programmes aim to ensure every child is able to go to school (Goal 4: Education)
- We strive to make our programmes gender-equitable, right from the planning stages (Goal 5: Gender equality)

- We are working to eliminate neglected tropical diseases by promoting good hygiene (Goal 6: Clean water)
- Our disability rights campaign promotes equality for people with disabilities (Goal 10: Reduced inequalities)
- Our work is carried out in partnership with local, national and international organisations (Goal 17: Partnership)

Implementation & Sustainability

Sightsavers in India has two kinds of partners -

'Implementing Partners' and 'National Strategic Partners' – which include the governments, NGOs and private organisations. Implementing Partners are primarily focussed at grassroots implementation. National Strategic Partners, while implementing grassroots programmes supported by Sightsavers, have the capacity and the desire to contribute to Sightsavers' national strategy and vision. They provide expertise, implementation assistance, conceptual leadership, strategic thinking, research support, advocacy leverage, etc.



RAAHI

RAAHI – National Truckers Eye Health Programme is one of the biggest eye health programmes in the country for the overworked truck drivers' community

In September 2017, one of the country's biggest Eye Health Programmes for the truck drivers' community was launched. The programme seeks to reach out to 500,000 truck drivers and helpers of the laborious 9 million truck drivers and transporters community present in India. These 9 million truck driving community transports 65% of national cargo by road.

Sightsavers realises the importance of eyehealth for the overworked truckers' community in ensuring road safety. The occupation predisposes them to a multitude of risk factors such as prolonged sitting and motor vehicle driving, tight running schedules, reduced rest breaks, traffic congestion, and the sedentary nature of job, and resultant physical,

psychological and behavioural problems.

Research over the past few decades has addressed the role of vision in driver safety (motor vehicle collision involvement) and in driver performance. Visual Acuity, Visual Field, Contrast sensitivity, Eye movements and other parameters are considered to be vital in assessing visual function in drivers. Since drivers can't get to eye care services, Sightsavers in India have created a system which takes the services directly to them. RAAHI – National Truckers Eye Health Programme is one of the biggest eye health programme in the country for the overworked truck drivers' community.

The programme is ingenious: there are over 30 sites around India's 'golden quadrilateral', which covers the

main long distance haulage routes across the whole country. Some are permanent vision centres, others pop-up outreach camps, but all are in locations where drivers stop as part of their usual route to rest or unload cargo. Drivers' details are digitally uploaded using tablets so they can take the QR code ID card they're given to any site along their route and pick up their treatment where they left off, even choosing where to have custom made glasses sent to. At the pop-up camps local partner eye care teams literally set out their kiosks and begin screening in a matter of minutes. The programme is remarkably efficient – the busy drivers complete the whole process in about 15 minutes and if they have no problems they are given a certificate of clear vision.



The unit of intervention for Sightsavers in India's high focus states is the District, for greater and more sustainable change, to better influence the government, and so that the experiences and recommendations have greater potential to influence collaborations, planning and policies in line with Sightsavers' objectives. Besides mobilizing the community for participation and orientation of parents, Panchayati Raj Institutions and local administration is sensitized on related laws and regulations for building capacity of community monitoring systems on equity of access, pedagogy, community support, etc.

Challenge & Mitigation Approach

Most of the learning that occurred was at experiential level, but effort was made to share these learning through different forums, review meetings, cross programme visits, sharing at national and international forums. During the implementation trajectory, we found that every district has its own local issues and complexities ranging from local administrative leadership to varied form of HR, infrastructure, local priorities and political complexities. As a result, strategy grounding took some time to create district vision.

Technological Innovation

Sightsavers being a young organisation, the team has natural connect with technology and IT. Thus, the

team thought of using “tech for good” and we came up with an innovation to educate the blind children using information technology. Under our Inclusive Education Programme, we introduced children with visual impairment to make use of devices such as laptops/ smart phones and tabs. This has really been a ‘game changer’ in inclusive education ensuring the children are able to study well and participate in the class. Teachers find it easy to teach the visually impaired children which helps in learning outcome of children showing an upward curve, improvement in attendance and a fall in “dropout” rates. In fact, the organisation bagged prestigious ‘HCL Award for innovation under Education’ in 2018.

The Way Forward

Sightsavers is governed by a strategy to which we agreed to in 2015, and we seek to impact the lives of people in 100 districts in our eight priority states of work through our three thematic areas – eye health, inclusive education and social inclusion. Sightsavers is currently undergoing a strategy revisit, which is essentially a consultative exercise including staff and various stakeholders to take account of the immensely successful initiatives and few of those which need not continue. In the next strategy, essentially what will also change are few districts in the states where we currently work—a phased exit from some and entry into newer terrains with our programmes.

