



Press release

Standard Chartered Bank collaborates with Sightsavers to bring down prevalence of blindness in remote Sundarbans region of West Bengal

- **Aim to screen 3 lakh people for eye health by end December 2025**

14 March 2022, India: Standard Chartered Bank, India, through its Seeing is Believing project, has partnered with Sightsavers to reduce the prevalence of blindness from the existing 0.7% to 0.3% of the population in the district of South 24 parganas in West Bengal by end of December 2025. The 'High Impact Rural Eye Health Programme' will prioritise work in 20 rural blocks in the remote Sundarbans region.

This initiative aims at screening more than 3 lakh people for eye health while meeting the refraction needs of over a lakh people across 20 vision centres (VCs). It is estimated that under the project, nearly 70,000 or more spectacles will be dispensed and more than 26,000 people will undergo sight restoration cataract surgeries. The patients, on need basis, will be referred for further Diabetic Retinopathy treatment.

This is the second leg of the initiative launched earlier by Sightsavers and Standard Chartered Bank for this region. In 2013, Sightsavers had initiated the Sundarbans Eye Health Service Strengthening Project, which had aimed to address the urgent need for improving eye health in selected blocks in North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas (West Bengal, India). The project was financially supported even then by Standard Chartered Bank. The five years intervention until 2018 resulted in reducing blindness to 0.7% from 1.9% of the population, during the baseline survey. Along with this, Sightsavers India also observed a huge change in perceptions due to constant awareness generation in the field. About 23,55,720 people were reached through various Information, Education and Communication (IECs) and community sensitisation activities.

In the 2013-2018 project the coverage and quality of cataract and refractive error services provided was enhanced by establishing 17 VCs in the blocks covering the most remote and inaccessible parts of Sundarbans. The state provided 12 optometrists in the district, and Standard Chartered Bank supported project enabled additional 11 optometrists to be deployed. The VC's have remained functional and continue to generate income. A total of over 8.5 lakh people which included over 50% children, were screened for eye health under the project. More than 31,000 people underwent sight restoration cataract surgeries in the span of five years.

Karuna Bhatia, Head – Sustainability, India, Standard Chartered Bank said, “The intervention aims at further reducing avoidable blindness to a level where it does not impede day-to-day functioning of the rural population in Sundarbans. This new initiative and existing infrastructure and systems established from our first collaboration with Sightsavers in Sundarbans will help us in realising this vision. At the heart of Standard Chartered Bank’s project is serving communities and making eye health facilities accessible.

So far under the Seeing is Believing programme, the Bank has reached 14 million people in India, conducted 2.58 million cataract surgeries through our network of 265 vision centres across 22 states,” she added.

RN Mohanty, CEO, Sightsavers India said, “We witnessed in Sundarbans, unmet need persists, particularly in the blocks which were outside the scope of the previous project. The current project of Standard Chartered Bank funded programme will bridge these critical gaps that remain in the provision of eye health care needs in the district. Sightsavers is happy to yet again partner with Standard Chartered Bank.”

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About Standard Chartered

Standard Chartered Bank has been operating in India since 1858 and has a network of 100 branches in 42 cities. Key business segments include Corporate, Commercial and Institutional Banking, Private Banking as well as Retail Banking. For more information, visit <https://www.sc.com/in/>

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About Sightsavers

Sightsavers is a global development organisation working with partners to eliminate avoidable blindness and promotes equality of opportunity for disabled people. 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 **Social Inclusion, Inclusive Education and Eye Health**—our three core areas of work.

In the last five decades, Sightsavers has supported treatment for over **36.5 MILLION** patients having potential eye problems and performed more than **5 MILLION SIGHT RESTORATION OPERATIONS**. In little over than the last decade, more than **25,000 visually impaired and blind primary school children** have been supported under Sightsavers’ Inclusive Education programme, and over **15,000 people with disabilities** have received livelihood or vocational training.

To know more about our work in India, please visit us at www.sightsaversindia.in

To have an insight about our day-to-day activities, you can follow us on our social media platforms like [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#)

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