



## JSW Foundation, Standard Chartered Bank and Sightsavers India Join Hands to Reduce Prevalence of Blindness in Raigad District

**13 March 2024, Mumbai:** JSW Foundation, Standard Chartered Bank and Sightsavers India have come together to launch a Rural Eye Health Program in Raigad District, Maharashtra.

The three-year project is designed to cater to the specific eye care needs of Raigad's estimated population of 2.6 million. The project aims to reduce the prevalence of blindness in the district to less than 0.3% in three years. Primary objectives include ensuring accessible and affordable primary and secondary eye care services for the population and fortifying the health systems in the district for eye health care.

The RAAB study conducted by AIIMS<sup>I</sup> in Thane district, Maharashtra, highlights alarming statistics - 2.09% of individuals aged 50 and above are blind, with 12.98% experiencing visual impairment. A subsequent internal assessment for Raigad District uncovered a backlog of 6,014 cataract cases, underscoring the pressing need to address eye health in the area.

The implementation of this unique project in Raigad district of Maharashtra is poised to yield significant outcomes, including the establishment of seven vision centres, conducting a remarkable 292 camps, and screening 124,360 individuals. Moreover, the project aims to provide 23,862 dispensed prescription glasses, addressing the critical need for visual aids. Additionally, it plans to perform 16,870 cataract surgeries, a vital intervention for those suffering from this prevalent condition. These numbers underscore the project's commitment to improving access to eye care services and enhancing the quality of life for thousands in need.

This collaboration aims to mitigate the substantial prevalence of visual impairment in the region while expanding Sightsavers India's rural eye health program into a previously unexplored geography.

JSW Foundation, under its Health and Nutrition program, has been supporting communities by conducting vision screening camps to help detect refractive errors and correct them with prescription glasses and also conducting free cataract surgeries. Under this program, in addition to vision screening and correction camps, government vision correction centres will also be established along with equipment support.

As part of its enduring commitment, Standard Chartered Bank, through its 'Seeing is Believing' initiative, has been a steadfast collaborator with Sightsavers India for over two decades, actively participating in eye health programs nationwide. With the continued support of Standard Chartered Bank, Sightsavers India has successfully fortified eye care services in various regions, including the Sundarbans and Kolkata urban slums.

The "Seeing is Believing" programme embodies Standard Chartered's core values of social responsibility and global impact. Through strategic partnerships and innovative solutions "Seeing is Believing" has made remarkable strides in providing crucial eye care to underserved communities worldwide since 2003. In India, from establishing 500 vision centres with 50% run by women, to establishing 3 eye care academies, the programme's holistic approach has touched the lives of millions, bringing clarity and vision to those in need.

**Karuna Bhatia, Head of Sustainability, India, Standard Chartered Bank & Global Business Services (GBS), said,** "Recognising the pressing need for a resilient eye health system tailored to meet the demands of our identified areas, we acknowledge the imperative for a comprehensive strategy to curtail blindness prevalence. The Rural Eye Health Programme launch in Raigad District, Maharashtra, is strategically designed to address the existing backlog of blindness within the project's three-year timeframe. We aim to make a tangible impact on the prevalence of visual impairment, contributing to the overarching goal of creating a robust and sustainable eye health system in Raigad District."



**Ashwini Saxena, CEO, JSW Foundation said,** “The vision screening intervention serves the most at-need communities under JSW Foundation’s comprehensive healthcare services. We conduct vision screening camps and provides free spectacles for refractive errors and conduct free cataract surgeries to avert permanent blindness. This collaboration broadens the horizon of healthcare accessibility for underserved communities. With our combined efforts, expertise and resources we will be able to scale our efforts and ensure that communities have access to quality healthcare for a better tomorrow.”

**RN Mohanty, CEO of Sightsavers India, said,** “In alignment with the World Health Organisation's Health Systems Strengthening framework and steadfast support of the National Eye Care Plan and Vision 2020 priorities of the country, our initiative is set to redefine eye health in collaboration with the government, not-for-profit organisations, and local eye hospitals. Our collective aim is clear: to significantly reduce the prevalence of avoidable blindness and elevate access to essential eye care services for the underserved population. We are poised to make a lasting impact through strategic partnerships and a commitment to strengthening health systems and ensuring quality eye care.”

In adherence to Sightsavers India's allegiance to inclusivity, the core strategy of this project mirrors the organisation's ethos. Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda of 'leave no one behind,' the project will be implemented in the intervention district with a steadfast focus on inclusion. From identifying beneficiaries to screening and outreach programmes, the initiative is dedicated to ensuring the active participation and inclusion of people with disabilities, with a particular emphasis on women and girls with disabilities. The project ambitiously targets a minimum coverage of 50% of women through eye screening services via camps and vision centres.

Operating in six strategically selected blocks in Raigad District, the project collaborates with a selected not-for-profit organisation and the local government. Sightsavers India will be a crucial technical and knowledge partner, overseeing quality control, monitoring, reporting, donor compliance, financial oversight, networking with the government, and overall system strengthening. These objectives seek to raise awareness, facilitate diagnoses, and provide treatment for visual impairments, significantly reducing avoidable blindness and visual impairment in the region over the next three years.

The collaborative efforts of Sightsavers India, Standard Chartered Bank, and JSW in Raigad District epitomise a shared responsibility to instigate sustainable change in eye health and address the needs of the local population.

#### **About Standard Chartered Bank:**

Standard Chartered Bank has been operating in India with a continuous presence of 170 years making it one of the oldest foreign banks in the country. The Bank has a network of 100 branches across 42 cities. Key business segments include Corporate, Commercial and Institutional Banking and Consumer, Private and Business Banking. For more information, visit <https://www.sc.com/in/>

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#### **About JSW Foundation:**

JSW Foundation is the social development arm of the US\$ 23 billion JSW Group, one of India's leading business houses. It has a long track record and a rich legacy of empowering rural communities to enrich their lives since the last three decades. JSW Foundation’s focus areas are Health and Nutrition; Education; Water, Environment and Sanitation; Waste Management; Agriculture and Allied Livelihoods; Skills and Livelihoods; Sports Promotion and Art, Heritage and Culture. Through a strong field presence, it operates across 33 locations in 15 Indian States.

**About Sightsavers India:**

Sightsavers India is a development organisation that has been working in India since 1966 to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote equality of opportunity for people with disability. Our work has enabled thousands of people to lead lives of independence and dignity. Sightsavers India focuses on collaborating with various departments of the state governments to scale up operations for eye health, inclusive education and social inclusion – our three core areas of work. A large population of our country still resides in villages. Netra Vasant (Rural Eye Health Programme) aims to improve vision-related quality of life through strengthened eye health systems in rural areas of India. The programme aims to achieve universal coverage vis-a-vis eye health services in rural communities of the 116 selected districts by reducing blindness prevalence, providing equitable coverage, and financial and programmatic sustainability.

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<sup>i</sup> National Blindness Survey RAAB 2015-19: District Reports

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