

# Policy Breakthrough After Blind Children in Senegal Excel in Mainstream School

*Project enabling visually impaired children in Senegal to attend mainstream school leads government to commit to inclusive education nationally*

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- A pilot project enabling blind and visually impaired children in Senegal to attend mainstream school has led to a breakthrough government commitment to introduce inclusive education throughout the country.

Senegal has more than 700,000 blind and visually impaired people, including thousands of school-aged children.



Before the pilot, education for children with visual impairment and other disabilities was entirely segregated, and with only one state special-needs school in operation the vast majority of children were missing out.

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*Salimata Bocoum, Country  
Director of Sightsavers  
Senegal*

In 2011, Sightsavers Senegal and the Senegalese Ministry of Education began enrolling blind and visually impaired children into mainstream primary schools in Dakar. By 2016, 187 had been enrolled in three schools.

The programme's first cohort of blind and visually impaired children took their end of primary exams in July 2016, with the vast majority passing the requirements to continue to secondary education. In addition, fully sighted children in integrated classes are consistently achieving better exam results than non-inclusive classes in the schools involved.

Those working on the programme say this may be due to the social-impact of the buddy scheme as well as the fact that more time is being spent on lessons.

Salimata Bocoum, Country Director of Sightsavers Senegal, said: “What the programme has done is allow the government to have a clear view of an inclusive education model that works. Before, a lot of initiatives were going on but they did not have a clear understanding in government of how to include children with disabilities in inclusive education. Sightsavers Senegal has brought that guidance and created an understanding of the possibility.”

The project's results have been deemed so compelling, the government has officially committed to bringing inclusive education in across Senegal.

A government budget to support inclusive education has been created and the Ministry of Education is currently working with Sightsavers Senegal and other civil society partners to develop a national policy for inclusive education at primary and secondary level, which it plans to release by the end of the year.

The programme has also been extended to two further regions in Senegal, funded by Sightsavers and Irish Aid.

It is hoped the pilot will act as a blueprint for other countries looking to address the lack of education for children with disabilities. UN figures suggest around a third of the 60 million children worldwide who do not go to primary school are disabled.

Through its Put Us in the Picture campaign, Sightsavers is calling for children and adults with disabilities to be included in all aspects of development work, including education. For more information visit [www.sightsavers.org/what-is-put-us-in-the-picture](http://www.sightsavers.org/what-is-put-us-in-the-picture)

Hester Phillips  
Sightsavers  
00447786926907  
[email us here](#)

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