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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **New Vision Programme Will Test the Sight of 47,500 Rural Zambians**

- VisionSpring, Live Well (a CARE International social enterprise) and the Council of Churches Zambia will correct the vision of 12,600 Zambians with eyeglasses in 2023.
- 3 out of 4 people needing eyeglasses will be acquiring their first-ever pair.
- The programme will improve income and well-being, unlocking \$2.5 million (ZK 52.5 million) in new income earning potential in the first year.
- The innovative model will bring basic eyecare to rural and low-income communities and has been introduced from Uganda and Bangladesh

**28<sup>th</sup> June 2023, Lusaka, Zambia** - Today VisionSpring, Live Well (affiliated with CARE International) and the Council of Churches Zambia (CCZ) officially launched the *Reading Glasses for Improved Livelihoods* (RGIL) programme in Zambia. This year the programme will test the sight of 47,500 rural Zambians and 12,600 people are expected to acquire the reading glasses they need to see clearly – most for the first-time ever.

Reading glasses are one of the most underutilized, low-cost, high-impact tools available to boost economic and social outcomes for individuals vulnerable to poverty. For the working age adults who will gain clear vision through the programme, eyeglasses are projected to unlock more than \$2.5 million (ZK 52.5 million) in income earning potential at the household level.

In Zambia currently there is 1 optometrist for every 2,000,000 people. To extend vision services to people who live far from one of the countries' few optometrists, VisionSpring is training Live Well and CCZ's community health entrepreneurs to conduct basic sight tests; identify blurry near vision; sell subsidized, low-cost reading glasses; and refer people with other eye conditions for higher level care.

Based on initial program data, the organizations expect that 75% of Zambians screened through the RGIL programme will need vision correction – 58% reading glasses and 20% higher level care including distance glasses, cataract, trachoma treatment, etc.

Commenting on the launch, Ella Gudwin, CEO of VisionSpring said: "We are honoured to collaborate with Live Well and CCZ to build healthy, prosperous communities. With each pair of glasses, individuals will sustain their livelihoods

and increase earnings; experience greater safety and well-being; and more easily participate in mobile banking and the digital economy.”

Live Well’s Lusaka Hub Manager, Ricky Phiri, added that, “already 400 Live Well community health entrepreneurs are serving communities in the Eastern, Muchinga, Lusaka and Luapula provinces. With CCZ, services will expand to the Central, Copperbelt, Northern, North-Western, Southern, and Western provinces, growing the program’s reach to all 10 of the country’s provinces.”

In 2024, the organizations plan to expand the program to reach 110,000 Zambians, helping more than 30,000 people to wear reading glasses.

According to the World Health Organisation, one billion people worldwide do not have access to the eyeglasses they need to see clearly, and this problem is greatest among people living in poverty in rural areas.

To address this need, VisionSpring pioneered the RGIL program with BRAC in Bangladesh in 2006. Since then, 2 million people have acquired reading glasses through the program and 1.6 million people have been referred for higher level eyecare.

Through support from National Vision, Inc., Zambia joins a limited number of countries that are deploying a similar model in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Uganda, Rwanda, and Liberia.

The RGIL program, as well as VisionSpring’s other eyeglasses initiatives, support the Zambian government’s growing efforts to improve eye health.

Find out more about the *Reading Glasses for Improved Livelihoods* programme [here](#).

**Ends**

## **About VisionSpring**

Founded in 2001, VisionSpring is the social enterprise accelerating the use of eyeglasses in emerging and frontier markets. Our mission is to increase lifelong earning, learning, safety and well-being through eyeglasses for people vulnerable to poverty. We believe in the wonder of clear vision for everyone and envision a world in which all who need glasses will have them to see well and do well by 2050. As of 2022, VisionSpring corrected the vision of more than 10 million people living on less than \$4 per-day, unlocking more than \$2 billion in income earning potential. VisionSpring has received honours from the Skoll Foundation, Aspen Institute, World Bank, Duke University, and Tribeca Film Festival, among others. Their work has been covered by [BBC](#) | [The New York Times](#) | [The Economist](#) | [The Lancet](#) and more.

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