

# press release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Standard Chartered and Friendship join hands to tackle avoidable blindness in *char* communities**

**Dhaka, 4 AUG 2018** – Standard Chartered Bank Bangladesh and Friendship has recently announced a partnership to tackle avoidable blindness in hard-to-reach, marginalized *char* (river island) communities in northern Bangladesh.

The project aims to contribute in the reduction of avoidable blindness in the target communities by delivering quality eye healthcare services to the river islands through Lifebuoy Friendship Hospital (LFH). This floating hospital will be providing quality eye care services as well as cataract surgeries in four northern areas: Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Bogra and Sirajganj.

The scope of the project will extend beyond the floating hospital through Friendship Community Medic Aides who will create awareness on eye care and services, and increase the improved health seeking behaviour of the communities. This initiative follows a similar project undertaken earlier in the year, which targeted coastal communities in southern Bangladesh.

Mr. Naser Ezaz Bijoy, CEO, Standard Chartered Bank and Ms. Runa Khan, Founder and Executive Director, Friendship signed an agreement on behalf of their respective organizations.

This project is being undertaken as a part of the Bank's global Seeing Is Believing (SiB) initiative. This year Standard Chartered is celebrating 15 year of the SiB initiative, which has helped over 150 million people by funding 160 eye-care projects in under-privileged communities globally. The Bank's global flagship community initiative, SiB began its journey in 2003 right here in Bangladesh with the building of an operation theatre and a Children's Ward at Ispahani Islamia Eye Institute & Hospital.

Mr. Naser Ezaz Bijoy, CEO, Standard Chartered Bank said, "Since we opened our doors in 1905, Standard Chartered has always worked to ensure that its core business of banking supports the amazing growth story of Bangladesh. Through initiatives such as Seeing Is Believing, it has also been our privilege to positively impact every level of our communities, beyond the economic and commercial sphere."

"Previously we had partnered with Standard Chartered Bank's 'Seeing is Believing' project to support cataract surgeries for those living in the islands bordering the Bay of Bengal. The impact was huge. The Northern chars are equally deprived and Standard Chartered and

Friendship has agreed to expand the scope of this vital partnership, reaching out to these communities. Bringing sight to an individual is bringing a new life and hope,” said Runa Khan, Founder and Executive Director, Friendship.

Avoidable blindness is one of the major public health problems in Bangladesh. The country has one of the highest reported rates of untreated cataract in the world. Cataract is avoidable or treatable through simple and cost effective surgical interventions.

The Bank’s global ‘Seeing is Believing’ program, which originated in Bangladesh, works to tackle avoidable blindness. By December 31, 2017 in Bangladesh, the Bank had provided cataract surgeries to 62,943 beneficiaries, 1,139,597 individuals had received screening services, 106,313 of whom received corrective refractive services. The Bank also provided training to 5,914 ophthalmologists, eye care nurses and other healthcare workers to build a sustainable workforce.

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**About Friendship**

Friendship is a needs-based organization nurturing the dignity and hope in vulnerable communities in Bangladesh. The organization began by working in close collaboration with the local communities to understand their needs since 2002. With their 15 years of day-to-day experience they have developed an integrated development model, which includes health, education, Disaster Management and Infrastructure Development, Good Governance, Sustainable Economic Development and Cultural Preservation.