BETTER LIVES FOUNDATION

TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE PERIOD ENDING 31st MARCH 2024

MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

We have continued to leverage our dedicated volunteer base to provide unwavering support for the medical, social, and educational needs of Yonibana. Our robust network of local staff and international volunteers plays a pivotal role in sustaining and advancing our mission. The team brings diverse expertise and a shared commitment to community development, enabling us to address the evolving needs of the region.

International volunteers, in particular, remain integral to our efforts. They collaborate closely with the staff at Yonibana Sai Hospital (YSH), sharing their skills and knowledge to enhance the hospital's operational efficiency and service delivery. Through their contributions, we continue to foster an environment of professional growth and innovation within the institution.

To ensure effective communication and continuous capacity-building, we have implemented regular virtual training sessions and meetings using Zoom and WhatsApp platforms. These sessions have facilitated seamless coordination among teams and have provided opportunities for staff development and the introduction of best practices. Topics covered include patient care protocols, advanced medical techniques, and management strategies to optimize hospital operations.

Our governance structure emphasises transparency and accountability, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively and that initiatives align with our strategic objectives. This collaborative approach has enabled us to strengthen the hospital's infrastructure, improve healthcare delivery, and expand our impact in Yonibana.

By maintaining a strong focus on management and governance, we continue to build the foundation for sustainable growth and long-term success in addressing the medical, social, and educational needs of the community.

Operational and Administrative Efficiency

The Heads of Departments across all wings of the hospital have had an exceptionally productive year, marked by continuous growth, innovation, and progress. Working

closely with their teams to identify opportunities for optimisation, address challenges proactively, and implement best practices that drive measurable outcomes.

Their leadership and commitment to excellence have been instrumental in streamlining hospital operations, improving service delivery, and fostering a culture of accountability and efficiency throughout the organisation. Regular inter-departmental meetings and collaborative planning sessions have further enhanced coordination, ensuring that all teams are aligned with the hospital's mission and objectives.

A key pillar of our operational success is the rigorous control and meticulous management of administrative costs. By maintaining these costs at a minimal level, we ensure that the majority of resources and donations are efficiently channelled directly toward the hospital project and its programmes. This approach maximises the impact of contributions and demonstrates our unwavering commitment to financial stewardship and accountability.

Operational efficiency has been enhanced through the adoption of digital tools and automated systems for managing workflows, patient records, and resource allocation. These technologies have reduced redundancies, improved accuracy in record-keeping, and allowed staff to focus more on patient care, service delivery and administrative burdens.

A culture of continuous improvement is fostered through regular performance evaluations and feedback mechanisms. This has resulted in improved patient satisfaction, better utilisation of resources, and the overall strengthening of hospital operations.

By maintaining a strategic focus on operational and administrative efficiency, we uphold the trust of our donors and stakeholders and also ensure the long-term sustainability and growth of the hospital's programmes and services. This ongoing commitment enables us to deliver high-quality healthcare while building a resilient and impactful institution for the Yonibana community.

Governance and Strategic Planning

Regular trustee meetings are conducted online to evaluate the status and progress of the hospital project, ensuring that decision-making remains timely and informed. These meetings serve as a platform for transparent discussions on the hospital's operations, financial performance, and strategic direction.

Incorporating careful consideration of the dynamic global economic environment, trustees actively address challenges such as inflationary pressures in Sierra Leone and their potential impact on project costs and resource allocation. This proactive approach enables us to adjust strategies as needed, ensuring that the hospital continues to thrive despite economic uncertainties.

Through diligent governance and forward-thinking strategic planning, we remain steadfast in our commitment to advancing the hospital's development. Our focus on adaptability and long-term sustainability ensures that we can continue to meet the healthcare needs of the Yonibana community effectively, even in the face of external challenges.

Expansion Plans and Budgetary Considerations

Plans for the hospital's expansion, aimed at enhancing services and training across various medical wings, remain under continuous review. This includes the construction of new units to better serve the community's needs. Budgetary requirements for these initiatives are reassessed regularly to adapt to evolving economic conditions and ensure feasibility.

Through the tireless efforts of our volunteers, staff, and trustees, we are steadfast in our mission to support Yonibana Sai Hospital. Despite global and local challenges, our focus on delivering sustainable and impactful healthcare services to the community remains resolute.

Collaboration with our architect, surveyors, and constructor has continued, with Construction Company in Freetown actively engaged in producing Eco-Friendly interlocking bricks and commencing the construction of the party wall. A comprehensive Eco-Friendly Concept Plan has been finalized, detailing the establishment of a Neo-natal Maternal Wing, Dental Wing, Eye Wing, Pharmacy, Radiology Centre, full Laboratory Services, and a Library.

Individual committees for each wing, including Optometry, Gynecology and Obstetrics, Pharmacy, and Dental Teams, convene regularly to finalize plans and develop teaching/training curricula, consistently updating the Trustees on their progress.

The overarching goal of the expansion program is to enhance community service and bolster human resources in Sierra Leone, responding to the increasing demand for services from farther regions.

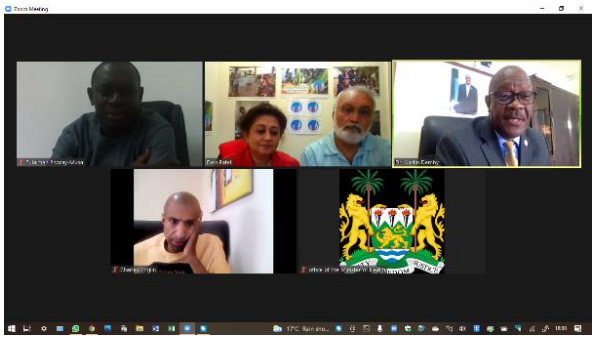
Overall our hospital saw an increase of 12% of patient ailments treated compared to the previous year.

CHARITY ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

Unwavering Dedication to Excellence in Service

Better Lives Foundation remains resolute in its commitment to delivering the highest standards in healthcare, sociocare, and educare. This dedication is reflected in every aspect of our work, from providing compassionate, patient-centred care to implementing innovative solutions that address complex social and educational challenges.

Guided by the principles of service, innovation, and collaboration, the foundation continually seeks to enhance its impact through partnerships with local and international stakeholders. These partnerships empower us to harness diverse expertise and resources, enabling us to develop sustainable programs that meet the unique needs of the communities we serve.



Our unwavering focus on excellence drives transformative change in the lives of individuals and families, fostering healthier, more resilient communities in Sierra Leone and beyond. Through our ongoing efforts, we aim to set a benchmark for quality and integrity, ensuring that our mission of improving lives continues to be realised on a global scale.

Expanding the Reach of Healthcare

The collaboration between international and local volunteers has strengthened the hospitals reach from serving patients within 15-mile radius to 51-mile radius. These partnerships have strengthened the hospital's capacity to deliver high-quality, accessible medical care, ensuring that even the most vulnerable populations receive the support they need.

The local communities' confidence has increased steadily. BLF's message and results of offering safe, high quality medical care is reaching vulnerable communities further afield.

This remarkable growth highlights both the heightened reliance on and the increasing demand for the foundation's free medical services. Communities that once had limited access to healthcare now benefit from lifesaving treatments and holistic care, delivered with compassion and professionalism.

This expansion underscores the foundation's ongoing commitment to breaking barriers to healthcare access. By continually extending its reach and enhancing service delivery, the Yonibana Sai Hospital is transforming lives and empowering communities across a broader geographical area.

Addressing Maternal and Infant Mortality

In response to Sierra Leone's alarmingly high maternal and infant mortality rates, the foundation has made addressing this critical issue a top priority by focusing on the development of vital healthcare infrastructure. A targeted fundraising campaign has been launched to enhance the Neonatal and Maternity Wing at Yonibana Sai Hospital, ensuring the availability of essential medical assistance, life-saving equipment, baby supplies, and hygiene products. These upgrades aim to provide expectant mothers and new-borns with a safe, supportive environment for care and recovery.

In a monumental milestone, Yonibana Sai Hospital successfully performed its first caesarean section in September 2023. This landmark achievement highlights the hospital's growing capacity to deliver comprehensive and specialised maternal healthcare services. It represents a significant step forward in improving health outcomes for mothers and infants in the region, offering hope to families who previously faced significant risks during childbirth.

This progress reflects the foundation's unwavering commitment to reducing maternal and infant mortality through a combination of enhanced infrastructure, skilled medical personnel, and community-centred care. By continuing to prioritise maternal health, the foundation is paving the way for a healthier and more resilient future for the people of Sierra Leone.

Highlights of Achievements and Initiatives

Everest Base Camp Climb

Volunteer Usha Patel, a dedicated nurse, achieved the extraordinary feat of reaching Everest Base Camp in August 2023. Through her remarkable efforts, she raised an impressive £3,462.50, contributing significantly to the foundation's initiatives.

This incredible personal accomplishment not only showcased Usha's determination and resilience but also brought international awareness and support to the foundation's mission. Her journey served as a powerful symbol of global solidarity, inspiring others to unite in advancing healthcare, education, and social care in Sierra Leone.

Usha's achievement demonstrates how individual actions can make a profound collective impact, rallying communities around the world to support the foundation's vision of improving lives through compassion, dedication, and collaboration.

Support for Local Leadership

The foundation's sponsorship program has provided invaluable support for Dr. Foday Fofanah, enabling him to pursue advanced studies in medicine and surgery at King Ceasor University in Uganda. This investment in Dr. Fofanah's education underscores the foundation's commitment to fostering local leadership and empowering individuals to drive sustainable change in their communities.

By nurturing local talent, the foundation is not only enhancing the professional expertise of key leaders but also building the foundation for a stronger, self-sustaining healthcare system in Sierra Leone. Dr. Fofanah's ongoing development represents a critical step toward equipping the nation with the skilled professionals needed to meet its unique healthcare challenges, ensuring long-term benefits for the community.

This initiative exemplifies the foundation's broader vision of capacity-building and self-reliance, demonstrating how strategic investments in education and leadership can create lasting impacts on both individual and systemic levels.

Advocacy for Mental Health

In October 2023, at a prestigious House of Lords event titled "*The Role of Dance in Health and Wellbeing and Community Cohesion,*" our Patron Renu Gidoomal delivered a heartfelt and impactful speech advocating for the transformative power of music in addressing mental health challenges, including dementia and depression.

Speaking to an audience of distinguished guests, including The Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie, on behalf of the Sanskruti Centre for Cultural Excellence, Renu emphasized music's profound ability to uplift spirits, foster emotional healing, and promote social connection. Drawing on compelling examples, she highlighted how music not only alleviates mental

health struggles but also strengthens community bonds, creating a shared sense of purpose and belonging.

Her passionate advocacy resonated deeply with attendees, garnering widespread acclaim and shining a spotlight on the critical role of creative arts in health and wellbeing. This event served as a powerful platform to advance the foundation's mission of integrating innovative approaches to mental health care and community development.

Shoe Donation to Robanka School

Thirty pairs of shoes were donated to the pupils of Robanka Community Preschool and Primary School, addressing a basic need and fostering better access to education for young learners.

Fundraising and Sustainability Efforts

Diwali Fundraising Campaign

The festive season of Diwali provided a meaningful opportunity to raise substantial funds to support medical care for underserved patients. This campaign exemplified the spirit of unity, generosity, and shared purpose, enabling the foundation to extend its reach and impact. By leveraging the cultural and communal significance of Diwali, the initiative inspired donors to contribute toward life-changing healthcare services and strengthened the foundation's connection with its supporters.

Tree Transformation Project

A towering tree near the hospital's guesthouse, which posed a safety hazard, was creatively repurposed into durable benches for the hospital's waiting area. This innovative project not only mitigated a potential risk but also exemplified the foundation's dedication to sustainability, resourcefulness, and patient comfort. The new benches have significantly enhanced the hospital environment, offering a more welcoming and practical space for patients and their families.

General Fundraising Initiatives

Supporters were encouraged to request donations in lieu of gifts for special occasions, with all funds directly channelled into life-saving treatments, surgeries, and educational programs. This initiative allowed individuals to celebrate milestones while making a meaningful impact on the lives of others. These collective efforts have made a lasting

difference, transforming the lives of countless individuals and families who benefit from the foundation's services.

Among the standout initiatives was an exceptional event hosted by Atmashpere Events at The Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan in Kensington, London, which successfully raised over £5,500. This event generated crucial funds for the foundation and offered invaluable exposure to a broader network of potential donors. Many of these new supporters have since become regular contributors, further strengthening the foundation's ability to continue its work.

In addition, our dedicated volunteers organised a sponsored walk with over 40 sponsored volunteers at Virginia Waters, which raised over £4,900. A sponsored walk was held in Richmond Park, with volunteers participating followed by a picnic. The walkers, united in their cause, completed a total distance of 10 kilometres under sunny and warm conditions, demonstrating incredible enthusiasm and community spirit. These efforts reflect the growing commitment of our volunteer base and the profound impact of grassroots fundraising activities.

Easyfundraising Partnership

Through its partnership with Easyfundraising, the foundation empowered supporters to turn everyday online shopping into meaningful donations. To date, 66 supporters have raised an impressive £513, further fuelling the foundation's life-changing projects. This initiative represents an accessible and sustainable way for supporters to contribute, seamlessly integrating philanthropy into daily routines.

The foundation strengthens its reach and builds a sustainable funding base by diversifying its fundraising efforts and engaging supporters across various regions. This approach ensures it can continue advancing BLF's mission.

Advancing Medical Care

Life-Saving Surgery

During the December Surgery Camp, Yonibana Sai Hospital successfully performed 126 surgeries, to individuals who otherwise may not have had access to essential lifesaving treatment. One of the most notable procedures was a life-saving hernia operation performed on seven-year-old Dauda, whose condition had been left untreated due to financial and logistical barriers. This surgery, along with many others, highlights the foundation's pivotal role in delivering critical healthcare to underserved communities, alleviating suffering, and restoring hope to patients and their families. These free surgeries underscore the foundation's unwavering commitment to providing high-quality medical care to those who need it most.

Dental Teaching Hospital Initiative

Led by Dr. Bijal Shah-Sisodia, the Director of Dentistry, a ground-breaking effort is underway to establish Sierra Leone's first dental teaching hospital. This initiative is a collaborative effort with King's College Hospital (London), the WHO Oral Health West Africa, and the Medical Council of Sierra Leone. The project aims to transform oral healthcare across the region by creating a sustainable model that focuses on education, capacity-building, and access to high-quality dental care. This dental teaching hospital will not only serve as a centre of excellence for oral health but also train the next generation of dental professionals in Sierra Leone, ultimately strengthening the healthcare system and improving oral health outcomes for future generations.

Dental Outreach

In addition to the establishment of Sierra Leone's first dental teaching hospital, a significant dental outreach program was launched to address urgent oral health needs within the community. This program provided free dental care to both adults and children, focusing on treating acute oral health issues such as infections, tooth extractions, and preventive care. The outreach efforts not only helped alleviate immediate pain and discomfort for patients but also raised vital awareness about the importance of oral hygiene and regular dental care. By reaching

underserved populations, the programme ensured that individuals who may have had limited access to dental services could benefit from essential care and education.

The outreach initiative also played a crucial role in preparing for the upcoming dental teaching hospital, acting as a foundation for its success. By addressing the community's immediate dental needs and fostering a culture of preventative care, the program set the stage for sustainable improvements in oral health. These efforts will have both short- and long-term benefits, as the growing emphasis on education and awareness will contribute to better oral health outcomes for future generations in Sierra Leone.

In November 2023, an international dental team consisting of three esteemed professionals, including Dr. Bijal Sisodia-Shah (Head of BLF Dental Team), Dr. Keval Shah, and Dr. Ruchika Rupchandani, visited Yonibana Sai Hospital (YSH) to provide expert dental care. Over the course of five days, the team performed more than 530 extractions, helping to address the backlog of urgent dental cases in the region. Their visit was focused on direct patient care and also included strategic collaboration with the Medical and Dental Council of Sierra Leone. During this visit, the team liaised with the Council to gain insight and seek approval for the final dental therapy course curriculum.

In addition to their clinical work, the dental team delivered in-house training to the hospital's staff, improving their skills and providing them with the latest techniques in dental care. Staff assessments were also conducted to ensure that the hospital's dental

department is equipped to provide high-quality care moving forward. The collaboration between the international team and local healthcare providers strengthens the foundation's ongoing efforts to build a sustainable and self-sufficient dental healthcare system in Sierra Leone.

Empowering Healthcare Professionals

BLF Training Centre

BLF continued to strengthen its partnerships with Yangadie Institute of Community Health Science and Technology. Trained ten nursing students to complete a comprehensive two-month practical training programme at Yonibana Sai Hospital. This hands-on experience provided the students with access to fully functioning set of instruments and equipment giving them invaluable clinical skills. Gaining confidence in learning bed side manner when treating patients with dignity and care. By working alongside experienced professionals, they gained practical knowledge in infection control, hospital operations, record keeping and effectively preparing them for successful careers in healthcare. This programme is an integral part of the Foundation's broader efforts to build a well-trained, locally sourced healthcare workforce that can drive lasting change within the community.

Maternal Child Health Aides Training

Representatives Fatmata Kanu and Esther Joy Fartoma embarked on specialised training at Njala University, focusing on maternal and child health. This advanced training is designed to enhance their ability to deliver quality maternal care, supporting the foundation's commitment to improving maternal and child health outcomes in Sierra Leone. The skills and knowledge gained through this programme will significantly strengthen the capacity of Yonibana Sai Hospital to provide dedicated, evidence-based maternal healthcare services, addressing critical needs in the region.

Training in Maternal and New-born Care

As part of their comprehensive education, Fatmata and Esther underwent rigorous training in managing postpartum haemorrhage, providing antenatal care, and implementing safe delivery practices. These critical areas of expertise are essential for reducing maternal and infant mortality rates in Sierra Leone, where such conditions remain prevalent. Fatmata and Esther will bring back their knowledge to Yonibana Sai Hospital, where they will directly apply their training to improve the quality of care provided to mothers and new-borns. Their work will play a pivotal role in ensuring that women and children receive the necessary support throughout the pregnancy, birth, and postpartum periods, addressing one of Sierra Leone's most urgent healthcare challenges.

Special Recognitions and Events

Patron Recognition

The foundation's Patron, **Renu Gidoomal**, was honoured with the Dharma Dubey Special Award for Community Service, a prestigious accolade recognizing her outstanding contributions to healthcare, education, and community welfare. Renu's tireless advocacy for the foundation's mission, combined with her leadership and vision, has had a transformative impact on the lives of countless individuals. Her recognition with this award highlights not only her personal dedication but also the broader efforts of the foundation in addressing key community challenges. This honour is a testament to her ongoing commitment to improving lives through service, collaboration, and innovation.

In the New Year's Honours list, Our Patron **Alimatu Dimonekene** received her MBE for Advancing the Rights of Women and Girls through Equality Now and OpEd Project. She was presented the award at Buckingham Palace from Prince Of Wales, Prince William.

Alimatu is an experienced advocate with over 30 years in global human rights, specialising in gender-based violence (GBV) prevention, female genital mutilation (FGM)

advocacy, and community empowerment. Recognized with an MBE for her contributions to women's rights, her work spans multiple countries, including Sierra Leone, the UK, and the U.S. She's the Founder of A Girl At A Time, where she leads initiatives that empower young people to address violence and promote gender equality.

Charity of the Year Nomination

In 2024, the foundation received a nomination for the coveted "*Charity of the Year*" category at The Family Network UK's National Recognition Business Awards. This nomination is a significant achievement, acknowledging the collective efforts of our donors, volunteers, and staff who work tirelessly to transform lives and build stronger, healthier communities. It reflects the foundation's growth and impact over the years and serves as a reminder of the deep commitment shared by all those involved in advancing its mission. The nomination underscores the importance of collaboration and highlights the foundation's continued journey toward sustainable and meaningful change.

Remembrance Service

On 18th February 2024, a poignant remembrance service was held to celebrate the life and contributions of Vimlaben Patel, a beloved member of the foundation community. The service provided an opportunity for the community to come together in gratitude and reflection, honouring Vimlaben's unwavering support for the foundation's work. Her dedication to service, her compassion for others, and her efforts to improve lives left an indelible mark on the foundation's mission. The remembrance service united individuals from all walks of life, ensuring that Vimlaben's legacy of generosity and kindness continues to inspire future generations.

Urgent Needs and Challenges

Hospital Roof Damage

A significant structural issue had emerged at Yonibana Sai Hospital, with damage to the roof that posed an urgent risk to the hospital's operations and patient safety. Given the approaching rainy season, this issue had become even more pressing, as heavy rainfall could worsen the existing damage and jeopardize the hospital's ability to function. The roof's integrity is crucial not only for protecting the building but also for ensuring the safety and comfort of patients, staff, and visitors. The hospital's services could be severely disrupted if immediate repairs were not carried out. As such, securing urgent funding was critical to carry out the necessary repairs. Timely intervention helped preserve the hospital's capacity to provide uninterrupted, life-saving care, prevent further structural deterioration, and protect the facility's essential infrastructure. Without prompt action, there was a serious risk of operational setbacks, which could significantly impact the community that relies on the hospital for medical care.

Fire Damage

During the extreme dry season, a series of fires broke out on our neighbour's land, fuelled by the arid conditions and strong winds. The fire quickly spread beyond their property, sweeping across our boundaries with devastating speed. The flames consumed all our wooden fencing, leaving the perimeter of our property exposed and vulnerable. Tragically, the fire destroyed our newly planted remembrance trees, which had been a significant investment of time, effort, and resources. These trees were intended to provide shade, beauty, and ecological benefits for years to come. The damage caused by the fire has left a lasting impact, requiring extensive efforts to repair and rebuild what was lost.

CEO's Christmas Message

In her Christmas message to all the volunteers, supporters and friends, Devi Patel, the CEO of the Better Lives Foundation expressed heartfelt gratitude to the generous donors, supporters, and volunteers whose dedication has been integral to the foundation's success. Her message highlighted the tremendous impact of their collective efforts in advancing the foundation's mission across healthcare, education, and clean water initiatives. She also emphasised that the work is far from complete. The foundation continues to face significant challenges, and there is a critical need for sustained engagement and support to fund the ongoing operations and expansions of these essential services. The CEO called for continued commitment to addressing urgent needs such as the hospital's roof repair and the sustainable development of the hospital's facilities. She reminded supporters that their contributions play a direct role in the betterment of communities, and that with their help, the foundation can continue to provide life-changing services for the vulnerable we serve. The message underscored the importance of collaboration and a long-term vision to address both immediate and future challenges.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The charity's main sources of income include philanthropic donations, institutional, individual grants, and fundraising efforts led by volunteers. Donations and grants form the bulk of the funding, supplemented by revenue generated through community-driven events. While some medical equipment is purchased directly, a significant portion is obtained through in-kind contributions from donors and supporters.

Philanthropic support remains essential, funding various operational needs such as medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) materials. Additional expenditures cover salaries for staff in Sierra Leone, hospital infrastructure, maintenance, utilities, food supplies, and patient transportation. A large part of the transportation costs relates to shipping medical supplies and equipment from the UK, with rising global logistics expenses significantly impacting sea freight charges. The Sponsored Education Program has expanded, supporting more students, while ongoing professional development continues for key medical personnel.

Investment in solar energy infrastructure has led to notable cost savings by reducing reliance on auxiliary power sources and lowering fuel expenses. To minimize banking fees and improve foreign exchange efficiency, the charity has diversified its financial

transactions, using multiple platforms to reduce costs associated with international remittances. Financial processing costs also include fees for credit and debit card transactions, as well as digital payment services.

The Dental Team's mission to Sierra Leone in late 2023 took place amid economic instability, marked by rising inflation. This resulted in increased costs for essential medicines and higher travel expenses due to the logistical challenges of reaching remote medical sites.

The trustees uphold strong financial governance, ensuring accurate and transparent record-keeping in accordance with regulatory requirements. This commitment to accountability reinforces trust and provides a clear picture of the charity's financial health.

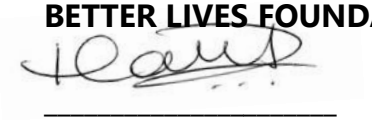
STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees are maintaining accurate records of the charity's income and expenditure, providing a transparent depiction of its actual financial standing in compliance with The Charities Act 1993.

ACCOUNTANT

The financial statements have been prepared by an independent accountant of the charity.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees
BETTER LIVES FOUNDATION



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Mrs. Hina Patel
Trustee
29th January 2025