

10th ATscale Board Meeting - 5 & 6 March 2024

Decisions, next steps, timelines

- The board approved the proposed country portfolio and allocated resources in principle, with no legal and financial commitments to be undertaken until the grant agreement with Reaching the Last Mile is completed.
- The paper on ATscale's role in humanitarian settings was noted and the Secretariat was asked to move ahead - in consultations with partners - with recommendations 1 (pre-positioning), 7 (advocacy) and 6 (financing). Recommendation 6 is applicable on a case-by-case basis when there is donor interest and support.
- The board approved for the Secretariat to go forward with the suggested approach towards implementation research for novel fitting technologies for prostheses while the exact focus will be established during the consultation process.
- The board invited Jon Lomoy and Phyllis Heydt to serve a second term when their first term ends in October 2024.

Welcome, attendance, adoption of agenda and minutes of the last board meeting

Jon Lomøy welcomed participants and established that the necessary quorum was reached. The Chair especially welcomed Mussa Chiwaula who was participating for the first time. Sarah Goulding, Assistant Secretary, Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Branch, DFAT was welcomed as an observer for the first part of the meeting. She shared with the board DFAT's intention to fund ATscale and potential interest in joining the board. The draft agenda was adopted. The minutes from the board meeting held on 15 & 16 November 2023 - which had already been accepted through written process with minor changes - were reconfirmed as adopted.

General update

Pascal Bijleveld provided an update on ATscale activities and developments since the previous board meeting. Highlights included the global campaign "Unlock the Everyday" launched at Davos with an event that included the First Lady of Pakistan and the team's participation in the UN Conference on Climate Change in Dubai. Progress on the joint study with Google and GDI Hub focusing on smartphones was presented at the Zero Conference in Vienna. Participation in regional meetings in Ethiopia and Brazil organized by WHO and UNICEF brought countries together and allowed, among other things, to socialise the forthcoming calls for expressions of interest. A virtual signing ceremony for a partnership agreement with CHAI and the China Assistive Devices and Technology Center for Persons with Disabilities (CADTC) to cooperate on the next AT market report took place the same day as the board meeting. Programme pace in the

first-wave countries is picking up, and an initial cross-country learning workshop is planned for March.

Pascal Bijleveld provided an update on resource mobilization, mentioning ongoing discussions with the Sonova Foundation and the Qatar Fund for Development. He also noted progress in discussions with DFAT. The Secretariat is in the advanced stages of recruiting for several positions, including a communications specialist, an M&E specialist, and a programme assistant. ATscale ended the year with a budget of \$14.5 million, surpassing the initial projection of \$12.5 million.

Report on 2023

Pascal Bijleveld presented the 2023 financial report, noting a 82% delivery against the budget and significant savings on the management fee. “Spent or committed” in this context means that the funding is either disbursed or there is a contractual obligation meaning that this “committed” funding is blocked for an ongoing project. While significant new funding is expected from three new sources totaling \$41m, cash flow will be an issue if tranches do not start being received by Q2 2024. Out of eight first-wave countries, six are on track with their implementation despite some delays in Kenya and Cambodia (due to a transition in responsibilities between ministries). Progress in the 12 pipeline countries varies but a general learning is that 12 months is too short a timeframe to lay the foundations for AT programmes. Out of the 16 global public goods in the 2023 operational plan, four are delayed while the majority is on track or completed. Lastly, significant work has been done to raise political will on AT through various events and communication efforts, including significant growth on social media.

Pascal Bijleveld gave an update to the M&E framework. Secretariat indicators have been met or exceeded, e.g. seven focus countries against a target of six, cumulative funding target exceeded, securing 76 million instead of 50 million attracting five new donors. However, there was a shortfall in board members' engagement in advocacy and resource mobilization and a delay in setting up an AT user group.

Discussion

Penny Innes informed the board that FCDO will be able to honour its initial commitments to ATscale through 2026, increasing its annual tranche. Zeinab Gura clarified that governance and coordination structures had to be developed first and assessments were needed to establish the focus of activities which meant a slower start in Kenya. This is likely the case elsewhere, and learnings from this first ATscale programme country have been built into the call for expressions of interest and revised country approach, which allows for an inception phase. Board members emphasized the importance of including AT users in the Secretariat staff and asked UNOPS to make efforts to support recruitment efforts in this regard. The need to capture impact at country-level in more detail and with better links to the overall M&E Framework was also raised.

Country Portfolio Review

Satish Mishra presented the selection process for the vision and hearing screening and provision programme for school-aged children. 48 countries from across various regions had been eligible in the call for expressions of interest. The call for Expression of Interest (EOI) was published in English, French and Arabic and widely promoted with email exchanges with several hundred individuals and two public webinars. 34 expressions of interest were received with many of great quality, which exceeded expectations. This means 70% of eligible countries submitted EOIs, and these came from the office of the president or prime minister, inter-ministerial groups, or different ministries. 11 countries have been shortlisted for scale-up or foundational support, and additional funds will be mobilized for Palestine. The size of suggested funding depends on the population size, estimated need and co-funding commitments. Based on the learnings from the pipeline countries, the proposed foundational support is for a longer timeframe - 300K over two years. Satish Mishra also highlighted the involvement of various stakeholders and discussed the resource allocation process for the selected countries.

Following the approval by the Board of the proposed 11 countries, the calls for proposals will be launched to select in-country implementing partners and define country programmes scopes. The aim is to complete the final approval, including a no-objection review by the board, by October so the programmes can start by November 2024.

In addition, the Secretariat launched a lessons learned survey shortly after receiving the EOIs which included reaching out to countries that had not submitted an expression of interest. Responses were overwhelmingly positive with concrete suggestions for improvements which will be considered for future EOI processes, e.g. clarifications on the co-financing aspect.

Discussion

The board congratulated on the higher than hoped-for response rate. Strong expressions of interest which could not be shortlisted due to funding limitations will be used in discussions with other potential donors to mobilize more resources so that more countries can be supported.

Clarifications were sought on the process in humanitarian contexts where the partner can be an international organisation instead of the government (but which was maybe less well known) and on how humanitarian components could be included in other programmes. The importance of the participation of AT users in all processes was highlighted. A hope - which the Secretariat shares - was expressed for greater diversity for in-country implementing partners beyond those with whom ATscale has been working to date. The Secretariat is aiming for at least four different partners. The in-country collaboration that was triggered in the preparations of the EOIs will be useful in this regard. One board member expressed doubts as to whether a competitive call for expressions of interest is the right approach for all regions.

The board approved the proposed country portfolio and allocated resources in principle, with no legal and financial commitments to be undertaken until the grant agreement with Reaching the Last Mile/Abu Dhabi is completed. The Secretariat will communicate with the selected countries and take the next steps.

Executive Session - unaffiliated board members

As the first term of two unaffiliated members will come to an end by the November board meeting, the board met - as suggested by the Board Seat Selection Group - without the two concerned members to discuss whether to invite them back for a second term based on exceptionally strong performance. Criteria included contributions to the overall vision and strategy of ATscale, resource mobilization and advocacy, governance, board deliberations and other aspect. Both Jon Lomoy and Phyllis Heydt were invited to serve a second term.

Executive Session - CEO performance review

A second closed session was held to discuss the CEO's 2023 performance without the participation of the Secretariat.

Updates from partners

Kylie Shae provided updates from WHO's work in Assistive Technology. She presented the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on assistive technology which plays a role in the normative work and highlighted the need for diverse representation and expertise. A call for expressions of interest was active at the moment and the board was asked to support its wide dissemination. She also provided an update on a UN General Assembly resolution led by Pakistan, emphasizing its importance for the SDGs. The pace had unexpectedly picked up and while board members welcomed the progress, they also suggested that more consultations with partners could benefit the resolution and lead to an even stronger one if the lead agreed to this. Kylie Shae will keep interested board members updated.

Jose Viera updated the board on the findings of an investigative review at IDA commissioned by a key donor, which identified areas for improvement in governance, decision-making processes, financial and internal control systems, and HR policies. In response, the IDA Board, along with the Secretariat, has implemented measures to address these issues, including an early election of the Executive Committee, the appointment of an interim executive director, and work on developing policies in response to the review's findings. He highlighted the need for transparency, accountability, and commitment. The board expressed their hope that IDA can successfully implement these changes and come out stronger.

ATscale's approach in humanitarian settings

At the last board meeting, the board had asked the Secretariat to take a more strategic look at ATscale's possible role in humanitarian contexts. The Secretariat presented a paper to the board which was not intended to be a technical document on AT in humanitarian situations and or a detailed plan, but to provide strategic directions for potential future actions, based on extensive consultations with over 40 stakeholders from partner organizations, experts and the AT user group. When presenting the paper, Satish Mishra emphasized the rising need and challenges faced in accessing assistive products and services in humanitarian situations. The position paper identifies challenges, gaps, and opportunities in providing assistive technology, offering eight recommendations aligned with ATscale's strategic framework.

Discussion

The board agreed on the need for more emphasis on assistive technology in humanitarian settings. The importance of focusing on preparedness and providing better guidance, as well as on the integration of AT in the humanitarian response overall as a main objective for ATscale's work were also highlighted. It was clear that ATscale has a role in the advocacy for this (ref. Recommendation 7) but that there was space to define this advocacy more clearly. There was consensus that ATscale should only be involved in supporting implementing partners for direct AT response if a donor explicitly requests ATscale to be a channel for such funding (ref. Recommendation 6). It was suggested to make it clearer that AT is a multi-sectoral issue - whereas it was felt that health was maybe given too much space in the paper. More focus on the inclusion of OPDs was also suggested, e.g. in the principles. The Secretariat invited further written reactions to the paper.

The board noted the paper as a whole, and the Secretariat was asked to move ahead - in consultations with partners - with recommendations 1 (pre-positioning), 7 (advocacy) and 6 (financing). Recommendation 6 is applicable on a case-by-case basis when there is donor interest.

Implementation research - novel fitting technologies / prosthetics

At the last board meeting, the board had asked the Secretariat to provide further detail on the planned implementation research for novel fitting technologies in prosthetics. Satish Mishra presented the background paper developed in response to this request. He discussed the challenges of scaling innovations in prosthetics, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. The proposed implementation research will contribute to finding evidence-based solutions. Collaboration with experts will be critical for the step-by-step roadmap for implementing the project, aiming to provide the evidence that will allow to scale up promising innovations.

Discussion

The board emphasized the need to simplify the service delivery model for prosthetics in LMICs without compromising quality, noting that in these contexts, qualified personnel is often a bottleneck. A possible focus on socket technology was suggested while others thought it was important to look not only at lower limb but also at upper limb prostheses or to look at comparable challenges in advanced sitting fitting for wheelchairs.

There was a consensus on the need for a consultative process to define the research's scope. Supporting simplified service delivery should be the guiding principle of the research. The board approved the Secretariat's proposal to take forward the proposed intervention within the 2024 Operational Plan.

Participants

Organization	Representatives and delegates
CDPF	ZHANG Hongtao HE Weije (interpreter)
FCDO	Penny Innes Sam Bullen
IDA	Jose Viera Jarrod Clyne
Kenya	Zeinab Gura (Day 1)
Private Sector	Shona McDonald
SAFOD	Mussa Chiwaula Ashllah Mmusi
Unaffiliated Board Seats	Jon Lomøy Ana Lucia Arellano Phyllis Heydt
UNICEF	Gopal Mitra Dennis Soendergaard
UNOPS (ex-officio)	Andrew Kirkwood
USAID	Michael Allen
WHO (ex-officio)	Kylie Shae
<i>Excused representatives</i>	<i>Patrick Amoth Kristoffer Gandrup-Marino Laurel Fain</i>
ATscale secretariat	Pascal Bijleveld (ex-officio member) Barbara Goedde (note taker) <i>Satish Mishra</i> <i>For part of the meeting:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Ceridwen Johnson</i> ● <i>Elaine Zameck</i> ● <i>Eduardo Sanchez Mera</i> ● <i>Anil Kashyap</i> ● <i>Kinley Wangmo</i> ● <i>Henri Bonnin</i>
Guests	Sarah Goulding, Assistant Secretary, Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Branch, DFAT - for the opening session