

## Minutes - 14th ATscale Board Meeting - 18 June 2025

### Decisions, next steps, timelines

#### By written process since previous board meeting

- In a written process concluded on 1 May 2025, the board decided to change the by-laws so that WHO became a voting member effective immediately.

#### At the board meeting

- The Board decided to establish a Strategy, Policy and Programme Committee, with Terms of Reference to be drafted by the Secretariat.
- The Board decided to create a Vice-chair role, to be filled by the IDA Board Member.
- The Board decided to explicitly name UNICEF, WHO and IDA in the by-laws to reflect their core role in the partnership.
- The Board decided that the second OPD seat should alternate, with a proposal to be developed by IDA and the Secretariat and submitted via the Board Seat Selection Committee.
- The Board requested the Secretariat to update the strategy's partnership section and circulate it for no-objection approval.
- The Board agreed to carry out a self-assessment and hold a Board Health discussion at the first face-to-face meeting in 2026 at the latest.
- The Board decided not to renew the mandate of the third current unaffiliated Board Member and to begin a process to identify a new candidate.
- Revive the Resource Mobilization (RM) Committee, including an immediate call on MBZ funding.
- Hold a dedicated strategic session on RM at the next board meeting
- The Board acknowledged and endorsed the Secretariat's pragmatic approach to managing the uncertainties surrounding the 2025 budget, supporting the proposed prioritisation framework.

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

The previous day at the board retreat, Jon Lomøy had welcomed participants and especially board members participating for the first time, namely KONG Deming from CADTC, accompanied by LIU Bofei, Daryl Lloyd from FCDO, and Dwi Alifatul Himiyah (Miya) from Indonesia.

The Chair expressed appreciation to Ana Lucia Arellano, unaffiliated board member, and Ashllah Mmusi from SAFOD, who were attending their final board meeting. Their valuable contributions and commitment to the work of ATscale were acknowledged with gratitude.

It was established that the necessary quorum was reached, and the draft agenda was adopted. The minutes from the board meeting held on 11 March 2025 - which had already been accepted through a written process - were reconfirmed as adopted.

## Governance

The governance session began with a recap from the Board Chair of the previous day's retreat, which had been marked by constructive and forward-looking discussions. Two ongoing processes were noted as closely linked to the governance agenda: a working group which had examined roles within the partnership and continuing discussions of the Board Seat Selection Group.

Key points raised during the retreat - which however did not necessitate a formal board decision - included the suggestion to publish a clear explanation of the selection process for implementing partners on the website and to develop principles guiding information-sharing practices with core partners WHO, UNICEF and IDA during the country engagement process. A short survey will also be conducted to gather feedback on Secretariat support to enhance Board operations. It was agreed that filling currently vacant Board seats is not a priority until the Board has had an opportunity to review how the new committee structures function in practice.

The board then moved to turn the outcomes of discussions at the board retreat into concrete decisions.

### **1. Establishment of a Strategy, Policy and Programme Committee**

The Board decided to establish a Strategy, Policy and Programme Committee to strengthen strategic alignment, policy coherence, and programme oversight. The Secretariat will circulate draft Terms of Reference based on the conclusions reached during the Board Retreat. The committee's purpose is to review and advise on the implementation of ATscale's multi-year strategy, and to support the development of the annual work plan in collaboration with the Secretariat. It will also provide strategic input on programme and policy materials prior to Board meetings, review performance monitoring, and advise on the effectiveness and impact of ATscale's investments.

The Committee will meet at least once in advance of each Board meeting, with additional ad hoc meetings as needed. It will be supported by the ATscale Secretariat, specifically the Head of Programmes and the Strategy and Coordination Advisor. The committee reports to the Board and does not replace or replicate Board functions. It will not be responsible for the development of ATscale's next multi-year strategy; for that a distinct, ad hoc committee would be created as needed. The committee will also not be involved in the selection of implementation partners in competitive processes (such as review submissions in response to calls for proposals (CFPs) or request for proposals (RFPs)) nor through non-competitive processes, or governance-related policy.

The Committee will be composed of board members or alternates from two UN agencies, two donors, IDA and one partner country. Committee members may identify alternates, but only one person per organisation may attend meetings. Select individuals of the technical expert and AT user rosters, as well as partner organisations may also be invited to contribute to specific

discussions, as required. The Committee will select its own lead; while the Terms of Reference will not stipulate restrictions, there was consensus that the lead for the first iteration should not be from a UN agency. The Committee's initial term will be one year, after which its composition and performance will be reviewed.

## **2. Creation of a vice-chair role**

The Board approved the creation of a Vice-chair position, to be filled by the IDA Board Member. A Terms of Reference will be developed, including relevant competencies for the role. This decision reflects the importance of strengthening inclusive leadership within the partnership.

## **3. Explicitly name UNICEF, WHO and IDA in the by-laws**

To better reflect the role of UNICEF, WHO, and IDA within ATscale, the Board agreed to explicitly name these entities in the by-laws.

## **4. Alternating the second OPD seat**

The Board endorsed a proposal to alternate the second OPD seat, with IDA and the Secretariat to develop a recommendation for the Board Seat Selection Committee which will then put the decision to the board. The aim is to ensure most relevance to the assistive technology agenda (e.g. inclusion of representatives of blind or deaf persons) and improve geographic diversity. The term for this seat will be three years. The Board also noted the need for future consideration of how to support OPD participation and how to enable meaningful representation of older persons on the Board.

## **5. Update of strategy's partnership section**

The Secretariat was requested to revise the partnership section of the strategy based on board retreat conclusions and to circulate the updated version for a no-objection approval.

## **6. Board self-assessment**

The Board agreed to carry out a self-assessment exercise, to be followed by a discussion on Board health at the first face-to-face meeting in 2026 at the latest. This process is intended to ensure ongoing effectiveness and accountability of Board operations.

## **7. Third unaffiliated board seat**

The Board decided not to renew the term of the current unaffiliated Board Member, Ana Lucia. Members discussed the need to develop the profile of who should fill this seat (based on what is already in the by-laws). Suggestions included for this seat to strengthen ATscale's resource mobilisation capacity and public profile and that the next candidate should therefore have high visibility and strong networks, including with high-net-worth individuals. The board seat selection group - joined by Phyllis Heydt - will meet to discuss the profile and initiate a search. The aim is to discuss a shortlist at the next Board meeting.

## General update

Pascal Bijleveld shared updates since the last board meeting. ATscale reviewed its country portfolio due to financial constraints, leading to some adjustments and a pause on new work in Latin America - governments were informed. Proposal evaluations continue for the Pacific portfolios, with programme design advancing. At the World Health Assembly, ATscale held several high-level bilateral meetings with government representatives.

New Global Public Goods (GPGs) are mostly on hold, while finalisation and dissemination of key tools continues. Recent finalized products include the Guidance for Market Entry, Assistive Product Market Report, and a Policy Brief on AT and Employment - all feeding into the UN taskforce on disability-inclusive trade. A key milestone was the WHA launch of a WHO handbook and tools for school-age vision and hearing screening, developed with ATscale support.

On advocacy, ATscale published its 2024 Annual Review and organised an AT exhibition at the Global Disability Summit, alongside the launch of the “Me and My AT” challenge. The team was active at major events (e.g. COSP, Skoll Forum, DATE Forum). World AT Day reached over 41 million so far on social media and included a rapid call for proposals, resulting in SAFOD-managed microgrants in 10 countries.

On resource mobilisation, the USAID partnership has formally ended. In response, the team has intensified outreach and concept development and is recruiting experts. New leads are emerging, including engagement with Grand Challenges Canada, KS Relief and IFC. The AT expert roster has also been refreshed, with 30 experts soon to be engaged across key technical areas.

## Annual review 2024

Pascal Bijleveld presented ATscale’s 2024 results, structured around the Results Framework and its three strategic pillars. The Board welcomed the progress report and appreciated the detailed disaggregation of results by gender and age, noting Kenya as an example where, through ATscale support, such disaggregation was initiated and resulted in policy reforms. Members emphasised the importance of verifying whether individuals screened but not provided with products truly did not require them, or whether there were unmet needs. They encouraged further clarity on how budget resources are allocated to gender-responsive work and noted the ongoing development of a gender and AT brief to help identify gaps. Finally, the Board suggested exploring ways to quantify government buy-in beyond absolute financial commitments, such as through percentage increases or policy measures like tariff reductions.

## Update on resource mobilization

Elaine Zameck provided an update on ongoing fundraising efforts. While no new funding has been confirmed, several promising leads are in development and were presented, including a strong collaboration with the IFC. In light of reduced unearmarked donor contributions, efforts to engage private philanthropy, HNWIs and public donors need to be ramped up.

The Board commended the Secretariat’s efforts to diversify funding sources and acknowledged the progress made in cultivating new donor leads. Members expressed strong interest in

supporting further resource mobilisation efforts, including the proposal to revive the Resource Mobilization (RM) Committee. There was consensus on the value of holding a dedicated strategic session on RM at the next board meeting to collectively generate ideas, including opportunities similar to the IFC collaboration and approaches to support localisation.

Several members offered concrete suggestions and support. DFAT highlighted the increased contribution linked to engagement from its Pacific team and expressed willingness to explore additional core funding. FCDO shared that while the budget review exercise has not yet concluded, it seems likely that for this fiscal year the originally budgeted planned contribution would be maintained. Other members stressed the importance of evidence and success stories to strengthen fundraising pitches. There was also discussion around mobilising high-profile allies, including the Director General of WHO and a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, to support future pledging efforts.

The importance of adapting to the evolving donor landscape was underscored. Members recognised that leveraging mechanisms such as the IFC partnership could benefit the sector even if they do not immediately increase ATscale's own budget and recommended developing clearer methodologies to account for such contributions.

## Mid-year review 2025

The Secretariat structured the update according to ATscale's three strategic pillars. Satish Mishra reported on Pillar 1, highlighting country progress, including in Cambodia, Rwanda, Georgia, and Tajikistan, alongside delays in Kenya and Senegal and the closure of the Zambia programme. He also noted progress on pillar 2 (global enablers) such as the Made AT Kenya initiative and digital AT tools, with many activities from the 2025 plan on hold however pending funding. Ceridwen Johnson covered Pillar 3, focusing on communications, events, and advocacy, including publication of the Annual Review, a revamp of the website, and global campaign reach. Eduardo Sanchez Mera provided the financial overview, explaining the projected income and funding uncertainties, which have resulted in the tiering of activities based on resource availability.

Next steps include updates on FCDO's spending review, potential Abu Dhabi contributions, and other funding leads. A revised financial and implementation plan will be shared later this year.

The Board acknowledged and endorsed the Secretariat's pragmatic approach to managing the uncertainties surrounding the 2025 budget, supporting the proposed prioritisation framework. Members praised the breadth of work undertaken and encouraged greater coordination to reduce potential overlaps between partners; one particular area flagged was around humanitarian pre-positioning. There was interest in leveraging the UN Security Council resolution on disability in humanitarian crises, to enhance political momentum on issues like tariffs. The importance of accessible communications was also highlighted, such as easy-read versions of key documents, such as the annual report executive summary. It was suggested to engage partners earlier in campaign planning for World AT Day so they can maximize their contribution.

## Updates from partners

Jon Lomoy handed over the chairing of the meeting to the newly designated vice-chair, Jose Viera.

UNICEF presented the latest developments in its assistive technology and disability portfolio, reflecting both progress on deliverables and internal organisational challenges. The completed eye and vision care tender resulted in the first procurement order from Peru, while a comprehensive digital AT tender - covering 68 products across communication, learning, hearing, motor skills and vision - will soon be added to the catalogue, with three orders already received. Ongoing tenders include an ATscale-funded hearing health tender (delayed due to complexity), an incontinence tender with approximately 30 products, and an inclusive education and child trauma tender for around 50 products. The portfolio now comprises over 180 products (up from 24), including critical items like spectacles, diagnostic tools, AAC devices, braille displays and low-cost hearing aids, whose prices were further reduced via secondary bidding. Peru's \$5 million investment in hearing diagnostics demonstrates how governments can leverage UNICEF's procurement systems across sectors. UNICEF plans to share a list of products and countries using the catalogue with the board which will support dissemination to encourage uptake, with interest from WHO and others in supporting procurement workshops, particularly in under-resourced regions like the Pacific.

Despite these achievements, UNICEF is facing major structural reforms that may affect its AT work. A 29% staff reduction is underway as part of a global reorganisation aligned with a new four-year planning cycle. AT products will remain in the catalogue - an important political win. However, concerns were raised by board members about the relocation of staff with disabilities to areas lacking adequate support services, prompting reflections on how UNICEF can continue to model inclusive practices. The board offered support, exploring ways ATscale could help reinforce UNICEF's capacity, build demand for the catalogue, and replicate successful procurement models, such as Peru's cross-sectoral use of the system for medical and hospital equipment.

WHO updated the board on the ongoing re-structure at WHO with a 40% budget cut and a focus on realigning around core functions. The new structure began operating the week of the board meeting, with changes to the Access to AT (ATA) team expected to be minor. The Secretariat was asked to respect the channel of communication through the ATA team, to support effective and efficient coordination, in particular during the re-structure, with a commitment to provide further updates on communications in the coming months.

Looking ahead, WHO will be sending out a questionnaire in quarter 3 2025 to Member States for response to ten indicators on improving access to assistive technology. Responses will support reporting on resolution WHA71.8 (on assistive technology) at the World Health Assembly in 2026. WHO has an informal target of responses from 100 countries. The WHO Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for assistive technology continues their work on the first update of the WHO Priority Assistive Product List (APL). Of 300 ISO products, 200 were shortlisted for evidence and price review. Of the 50 products currently on the APL, a couple have been retired following discussion with the TAG. The draft APL update includes approximately 60 products. Smartphones/tablets are included throughout the list, but only as an integral component of assistive product solutions, not as a stand-



alone assistive product. Following six regional and one global open online consultations (including approximately 350 people from diverse backgrounds including Government), further feedback on the draft is being collected through a survey.

WHO and UNICEF are jointly developing a high-level global roadmap in response to Member State calls for an action-oriented strategy to implement the Global Report on Assistive Technology. This roadmap will present a shared vision for universal access and outline priority actions across sectors. An open public hearing was held in December-January, and online consultations on key topics hosted in May. An initial draft is now underway through the development team, and this will be circulated for external review when the draft is complete. WHO also highlighted progress in the Pacific Assistive Technology Project and growing synergy with ATscale investments supported by DFAT. WHO is placing increasing emphasis on digital technology to drive access to assistive technology, including leveraging digital health interventions and digital public health infrastructure. WHO has convened a TAG focused on the use of digital technology to improve access to assistive technology, to assist in prioritising investment in this area. Country implementation projects including in a new programme beginning in Bhutan, will be testing specific ideas.

Board members raised questions around the positioning of smartphones within the APL. WHO acknowledged the political and technical dimensions of product inclusion and encouraged partners to complete the feedback survey, and are also encouraged to reach out directly to the ATA team for more information.

## Lessons learned from foundational countries

ATscale's Foundational Support Countries initiative, funded by USAID through UNOPS, aimed to accelerate AT system development in 12 low- and middle-income countries (June 2023 - October 2024). It focused on creating a pipeline for long-term investment, building government and partner capacity, and broadening the implementing partner base. Four competitively selected partners (CHAI, Helen Keller International, HelpAge International, and Momentum Wheels for Humanity) delivered tailored support, including policy development, data collection, and awareness-raising.

Key achievements included forming or revitalising multi-sectoral technical working groups in 10 countries, generating baseline data using rATA and ATA-C tools in all 12, and developing APLs and strategies in several. Successes included Zimbabwe removing import taxes, local production advances in Mozambique, and integration of AT into Nepal's emergency planning. Three countries (El Salvador, Indonesia, Tanzania) secured scale-up funding.

Challenges included short timelines, political instability, and limited early engagement, which hindered ownership and delayed government endorsement. Nonetheless, the initiative confirmed that foundational support can drive long-term systems change. Future efforts will be 24 months, include earlier stakeholder involvement, and link to scale-up opportunities to maintain momentum.

The Board welcomed the lessons learnt paper and congratulated the team on producing a thoughtful and comprehensive analysis, particularly given the departure of the donor concerned. Members appreciated the continuation of this reflective practice, following previous reports on the EOI and CFP processes. They recommended that the final version of the paper include details on



key informants, highlight also what did not work, and reflect on gender dynamics. The Board acknowledged the complexity of measuring policy change and encouraged ATscale to consider capturing pre-conditions for systemic transformation - such as multi-stakeholder dialogue and inclusive coordination - as part of its monitoring framework.

In discussion, the Board noted that progress may continue even after the formal programme ends, as change sometimes unfolds organically within government systems. However, concerns were raised around long-term sustainability, with a call to maintain relationships and position ATscale as a long-term partner. Suggestions included establishing a community of practice and strengthening links to other partners and initiatives. Members encouraged earlier engagement with local donors, noting the example of health-sector foundations in Tanzania, and supported the idea of using events like the donor dinner before the board meeting in Nairobi last November to build these relationships. Opportunities for collaboration such as with the MOSAIC initiative with IFC were raised, as was the value of closer coordination with WHO regional offices to support government buy-in.

The Vice-Chair closed the meeting thanking participants and organizers.



## Participants

Organization	Representatives and delegates
CDPF	KONG Deming LIU Bofei
DFAT	Kathleen Bombell Helena Woods ( <i>online</i> )
FCDO	Tessa MacArthur ( <i>online</i> ) Daryl Lloyd
IDA	Jose Viera
Indonesia	Dwi Alifatul Himiyah (Miya)
Kenya	Rebecca Kiptui ( <i>online</i> )
SAFOD	Ashllah Mmusi
Unaffiliated Board Seats	Jon Lomøy Ana Lucia Arellano Phyllis Heydt
UNICEF	Dennis Soendergaard
UNOPS (ex-officio)	Andrew Kirkwood ( <i>online</i> ) Jean Francois Laurent
WHO	Deus Mubangizi Kylie Shae
<i>Excused representatives</i>	<i>Shona MacDonald</i>
ATscale secretariat	Pascal Bijleveld (ex-officio member) Barbara Goedde (note taker) Satish Mishra