12th ATscale Board Meeting - 20 & 21 November 2024

Decisions, next steps, timelines

Strategy

- Agreed changes to the strategy include:
  - Integrating humanitarian interventions into other strategic pillars.
  - Retaining microfinancing as a concept but removing targets until a study is conducted to explore options.
  - Strengthening civil society partners, particularly OPDs, through increased resource allocation, contingent on a baseline analysis of current funding to determine the implications of a specific percentage target.
  - Including an external evaluation at the end of the strategy period.
  - Strengthening language around partnership building.
  - Refining language regarding building local markets to include aspects like lifecycle costs of assistive products, with local production being one part.
- The Secretariat will revise the strategy document based on Board discussions and circulate it for a written non-objection process within 2–3 weeks.

2025 plan

- UNICEF, WHO and ATscale to coordinate on global pre-positioning efforts for humanitarian response to avoid duplication.
- Secretariat to consult with relevant partners on knowledge product development planned for 2025.
- Secretariat to reconsider focusing on one scale-up country instead of two for the USD 2m envelope
- Secretariat to develop a lesson learned paper on completed foundational countries.

Governance

- Secretariat to organize a Board retreat in March 2025 immediately preceding the board meeting to discuss partnership roles and responsibilities. [This has to be adjusted and the board retreat is planned for June 2025]
- Secretariat to form a working group with UN agencies, IDA, donors and Secretariat to prepare for the Board retreat discussion.
- WHO expressed interest to be a voting member in the board. Secretariat to propose necessary changes to by-laws and prepare steps for adoption at the next board meeting.

Dates for 2025 board meetings:

- 11 & 12 March - virtual board meeting
- 3 & 4 June - in-person, Geneva; 3 June board retreat, 4 June board meeting

- 11-13 November - board meeting - in-person, ideally hosted by a partner country or board member, including site visits on day 1

Lessons Learned on Country Calls for Proposals
- Secretariat to consider increasing the number of external evaluators
- Secretariat to explore ways to secure more applications from new partners and from consortia in future calls for proposals.

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 the board members from Indonesia who participated for the first time.

The draft agenda was adopted. The minutes from the board meeting held on 4 & 5 June 2024 - which had already been accepted through a written process - were reconfirmed as adopted.

General update

Pascal Bijleveld provided an update on ATscale activities and developments since the previous board meeting. ATscale has made significant strides across its initiatives, demonstrating resilience amidst a challenging global context. Efforts in partner countries have led to over 100,000 additional individuals accessing assistive technology, particularly in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Kenya, alongside a successful lesson exchange workshop and improved reporting mechanisms to measure impact. Globally, the launch of the Global Market AT Report has catalyzed discussions with governments and international organizations, while humanitarian initiatives like the prepositioning of AT10 kits ensure rapid response capabilities. Advocacy campaigns, such as the impactful World AT Day and events during UNGA, have reached millions, amplifying the importance of assistive technology and fostering new partnerships. Strategic engagements at events like the World Health Summit and the G7 Ministerial Meeting on Disability have solidified ATscale's position as a leading voice in the AT sector. Visibility has grown significantly, with innovative campaigns and social media efforts achieving millions of impressions. That two additional AT users are about to join the Secretariat was applauded by the Board.

The CFP for 11 new country programmes resulted in WHO selected in Egypt and Pakistan, UNICEF in Jordan, Palestine, Tanzania, and Rwanda, CHAI in Ethiopia and Indonesia, Sightsavers in Nigeria and Humanity & Inclusion (HI) in Chad and Togo. In some cases, consortium arrangements have been established. For example, CHAI partnered with MPKS in Indonesia and formed a larger consortium with CBM, SPHMCC, FEAPD, and OSELF in Ethiopia. Sightsavers will partner with CHAI and CBM in Nigeria, WHO with UNICEF and Sightsavers in Pakistan and UNICEF with Sightsavers and R4D in Tanzania. In other countries where no formal consortium has been established, the implementation will involve further partners nonetheless. The expansion of actors engaging in AT, including mainstream actors such as R4D, was noted as a positive trend that should be reinforced in future.

ATscale Multi-Year Strategy (2024–2027)

The Board had a detailed discussion about the draft strategy for 2024–2027, including its theory of change and strategic pillars. The changes and improvements between the first and second draft were acknowledged, especially the increased focus on aiming to increase depth of supported programmes by expanding to more functional domains and age groups.

The importance of disaggregating data on assistive products by age, gender, and type of product was emphasized. The Board also stressed the need to support countries in routinely collecting this type of data for long-term sustainability. Board members agreed that the language around ATscale's commitment to disability inclusion needed to be strengthened. They acknowledged the need for clear language on how to resource the objective of strengthening OPDs and other representative civil society organizations. While the idea of setting a 5% funding target was proposed, the Board decided to analyze baseline funding before committing to a specific target. [The baseline was provided when recirculating the revised strategy document after the board meeting.]

The Board also discussed the focus on alternative financing mechanisms, such as microfinancing, while assessing potential risks and benefits and concluded that it was first necessary to see the results of the study starting in 2025 before advancing further. Members further discussed the importance of focusing on sustainability and system development, considering readiness and success in engaging with countries, and deliberating on the expansion of the partnership to new countries. Pillar 3 (Advocating for Change) was to be further strengthened, including considering the targeted resource allocation towards this Pillar, which was felt to be too low. The discussion concluded with agreement on the need for a nuanced approach to strengthening ecosystems and a commitment to revisiting the strategy with these considerations in mind.

The Board deliberated on the respective roles of the Board and the Secretariat, emphasizing the need to manage the partnership's growth while avoiding conflicts of interest and potential misunderstandings. Members agreed to dedicate a separate discussion to governance and roles, potentially during a Board retreat, to clarify the partnership's structure and strengthen alignment. They also highlighted the importance of a well-defined partnership strategy and the need for clear role definitions to support its implementation.

2025 Annual Plan

Pascal Bijleveld introduced the 2025 operational plan, outlining key priorities for each of the three pillars and operational excellence. He noted efforts to streamline activities and ensure alignment with existing resources while emphasizing flexibility for future funding opportunities.

Regarding Pillar 1 ATscale's current portfolio includes foundational and scale-up countries. For foundational countries transitioning out, the focus will be on capturing learnings and exploring opportunities for continued support through new funding sources. It was proposed to allocate USD 2 million to select two countries from the foundational group for scale-up support, based on criteria such as government commitment and demonstrated progress - this was revised to one country following the Board discussion. Implementation will begin in 2025 for newly onboarded

countries, with a focus on quality implementation and monitoring. Towards the end of 2025, ATscale will review the progress of initial scale-up countries that are nearing the end of their three-year grant period to assess the potential for continued support. The discussion highlighted the need for a more strategic approach to country selection. Board members emphasized the importance of clearly defining readiness and success criteria for country programs. Political will, co-financing commitments, and engagement from civil society were highlighted as critical factors.

Satish Mishra presented the plans for the five [now four] priority intervention areas under Pillar 2. The second iteration of the Global Market Report will be launched, including new demand forecasting and moving to a digital platform. Efforts will focus on addressing market entry challenges and promoting policy reforms at the country level, specifically targeting issues like taxes and tariffs. A comprehensive toolkit will be created to support policymakers in financing assistive technology. ATscale will also work with the African Union to develop a regional strategy for AT, which is scheduled to be presented at the 2026 AU Summit - this was appreciated by the board. A new landscape analysis on digital assistive technologies will start and a smartphone financing RFP will be launched to address accessibility challenges. Advocacy on the inclusion of AT in emergency preparedness plans will be strengthened, with a focus on integrating these into existing country preparedness plans. A clearer theory of change was proposed to better illustrate how these activities contribute to tangible outcomes at the country level. Board members suggested earlier and more structured consultations with partners during project design phases to ensure alignment, e.g. with established UN guidelines and standards and maximize effectiveness.

Ceridwen Johnson highlighted the need for targeted advocacy efforts to increase awareness of assistive technology needs among policymakers and donors. The "Unlock the Everyday" campaign will be scaled up to influence both global and local stakeholders. Efforts will be made to amplify ATscale's impact stories and broader messaging. Barbara Goedde outlined ongoing initiatives to improve internal processes. Monitoring and evaluation systems are being enhanced to ensure better tracking of outcomes and impacts across programmes.

Lessons learned from Call for Proposal processes

Satish Mishra presented the lessons learned from the Call for Proposals (CFP) Process for the joint vision and hearing programme and AT provision for school-aged children. The CFP process, a cornerstone of ATscale's demand-based and bottom-up approach, was designed to select in-country coordinating partners for the joint vision and hearing program, along with assistive technology provision for school-aged children. Launched in April 2024 the process was well-received, with 91% of surveyed participants expressing satisfaction with the CFP content, guidelines, and submission process. ATscale ensured clear communication through multiple channels, including government focal points, the ATscale website, and social media, which effectively reached potential partners. However, stakeholders emphasized the need for innovative strategies to engage smaller local organizations, particularly those in rural areas, to foster broader participation.

ATscale provided robust support throughout the CFP process, including pre-submission information sessions and in-country consultations, both of which were highly appreciated. These sessions enhanced collaboration among stakeholders, aligned expectations, and strengthened government ownership of programs. Key learnings from the process highlighted the effectiveness of detailed submission guidelines and the importance of government focal points in proposal development. Challenges included difficulties for smaller local NGOs in accessing government support and the need for clearer co-funding expectations. Going forward, ATscale aims to refine its communication strategies, increase capacity-building for local organizations, and enhance the accessibility of its CFP processes to ensure continued inclusivity and impact.

Board members emphasized the need for clear guidelines and enhanced support for local organizations to participate effectively.

Updates from partners

Kylie Shae, WHO, provided an overview of its efforts to strengthen assistive technology systems globally. This included progress in developing normative guidance for AT, piloting the Assistive Technology Assessment (ATA) toolkit in additional countries, and building technical capacity in low- and middle-income settings. WHO also highlighted its work on integrating AT into universal health coverage frameworks and fostering inter-agency collaboration to address gaps in policy and implementation.

Dennis Soendergaard, UNICEF, presented its ongoing initiatives to enhance AT access for children, particularly in education and early childhood development programs. Key highlights included scaling up procurement mechanisms for affordable AT devices, developing inclusive learning environments, and partnering with local organizations to ensure culturally appropriate interventions. UNICEF underscored the importance of collaboration with governments to integrate AT into national child-focused policies and strategies.

Participants

Organization	Representatives and delegates
DFAT	Helena Woods (online)
FCDO	Sam Bullen (online)
IDA	Jose Viera
Indonesia	Siti Nadia Tamizi Resti Dwi
Kenya	Alexander Kisyanga
Private Sector	Shona McDonald
SAFOD	Ashllah Mmusi
Unaffiliated Board Seats	Jon Lomøy Ana Lucia Arellano Phyllis Heydt
UNICEF	Dennis Soendergaard
UNOPS (ex-officio)	Andrew Kirkwood
USAID	Kalene Resler Michael Allen Linda Thumba
WHO (ex-officio)	Deus Mubangizi Kylie Shae
Excused representatives	*ZHANG Hongtao*
ATscale secretariat	Pascal Bijleveld (ex-officio member) Barbara Goedde (note taker) *Satish Mishra* *Ceridwen Johnson*