

Discussion Series on Market Shaping in the Assistive Technology Sector: Webinar 1

Guidance for Market Entry in Assistive Technology: Focus on Select African countries

Webinar Transcript in English

This document captures the english transcript of the Webinar on Guidance for Market Entry in Assistive Technology held on 27 May 2025, hosted by ATscale. Please refer to the [report](#), webinar recording, transcript and presentation for full context. This text closely follows the live discussion during the webinar.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Perfect, so, let's start. Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening to all of you, as you join from different parts of the world. I am Satish. I am the Head of Programmes for ATscale. A very warm welcome to everyone on the launch of the Discussion Series on Market Shaping in the Assistive Technology Sector. This is the first webinar on this topic, and today we will focus on Guidance for Market Entry in the Assistive Technology Sector with a focus on select African countries. During today's webinar, we will also launch this guidance document for the market entry in assistive technology.

Before we begin, some housekeeping notes, which I'm sure are very common by now, but just a reminder. This particular webinar is for one hour, and it will end at 12:00 noon Central European Summer Time. Please keep your microphone muted. The webinar is also being translated in French. Closed captioning is available in French and English. The webinar is recorded and will be shared publicly.

For any questions, please drop them in the chat. We have team members who are monitoring the chat, and they will respond to any questions in real time. We will also have a Question/Answer session towards the end of the webinar, and we will also take certain questions there. If you are unable to answer any of your questions, please rest assured that we will respond to them individually after the webinar.

Please use the chat function to provide any general comments or feedback you

may have. In today's webinar, we will hear opening remarks from ATscale Chief Executive Officer Pascal Bijleveld and the European Commission Marianna Lipponen. The European Commission has been our partner in the journey of making this guidance document, which will be launched today. This will be followed by a presentation on the guidance document itself and will be followed by different perspectives from the government, which will be presented from Nigeria, as well as an intergovernmental perspective, which will be represented by the African Union. Following which, we will also hear from the private sector and social enterprise perspectives on the use of this particular guidance document.

At the end, we will also have the time for question-and-answers. So, without taking further time, let me invite Pascal, who is the Chief Executive Officer for ATscale, for his opening remarks and setting the stage on why we are here today and how this work relates with ATscale strategy and plans for the future. Over to you, Pascal.

>> PASCAL BIJLEVVELD: Thank you, Satish, and good morning, good afternoon, good evening, everyone, and welcome to this webinar. It's a real pleasure to launch the ATscale Discussion Series on Market Shaping in the Assistive Technology Sector and to open today's specific webinar on Market Entry in AT, focus on select African countries.

As many of you may be aware on this call, market failures are one of the most critical challenges in access to assistive technology, in particular in low and middle-income countries, which leads to almost a billion people lacking access to basic assistive technology, such as wheelchairs, eyeglasses, hearing aids, prostheses. And of course, sadly, with the increasing trade-related uncertainties that we're facing, we expect further challenges ahead. And therefore, you know, there is a real risk that we won't be able to reach all those who need AT in time, and indeed, that this need will be growing. So, really, I think it's very urgent. Now is the right time to really discuss how market-shaping interventions can address the barriers and promote access to assistive technology in LMICs.

Our strategy that Satish just referred to was launched in December of last year, and it emphasizes one of the key pillars: The importance of building sustainable markets of high-quality, affordable products, closer to the buyers who are most in need.

This Discussion Series on Market Shaping in the Assistive Technology Sector will focus on demystifying and deep diving into different facets of the AT market barriers and proposing constructive, forward-looking solutions. The Discussion Series launches today and is expected to run until the end of 2025. The other topics we have planned are on Estimating Demand, on Taxes and Tariffs, on Local Production, on Guidance on Market Shaping, and others.

Let me just close my opening remarks by thanking all of those who made this possible, especially our partners, the European Union, and for supporting this initiative. We'd also like to thank the speakers from across sectors we have present today. And we're really eager to hear multi-sector perspectives to foster dialogue and start building a community that can build momentum towards collaborative action. And I hope that today can be the start of a long and continued engagement. Thanks again, and looking forward to the conversation. Over.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you, Pascal. And thank you very much for highlighting the importance of Market Shaping in the Assistive Technology Sector.

With this, I would like to invite Marianna Lipponen for the opening remarks. Marianna is the Policy Coordinator on Disability Inclusion at the European Commission and also has been a great partner in developing this particular guidance document and taking this work forward, especially in the African continent. Over to you, Marianna.

>> MARIANNA LIPPONEN: Yes, hello, everybody. Welcome to today's webinar. I'm on behalf of the EU, European Union, very pleased to open this important discussion around the new market entry guidance for AT in Africa. I think this is really a crucial initiative, and we in the European Commission are very happy to be able to support ATscale in this work.

As we know, assistive technologies play an important role in improving the quality of life for people with disabilities, but also for older persons and those with temporary impairments. But we know that there is a significant gap in accessibility, especially in the low and middle-income countries, as we heard also from Pascal. And I find it shocking that about 10% of those in need of AT can access them in many of these partner countries. So, I think this is really highlighting the urgency for collective efforts to address all these issues around the accessibility to AT, and also looking at the different, many factors that contribute to the lack of access to AT. And one of these is, of course, the market entry obstacles that we will be hearing now today a bit more.

Inside the EU, we have long been committed to supporting disability inclusion in different sectors and in different programs, mainstream disability prospects in actions that we do and created thanks to the Disability Marker, we've been able to progress a bit more consistently compared to the past.

But work on assistive technologies is a relatively new topic for the EC external work. While assistive technologies and related services are widely available within the EU for our citizens, how can we do the same and support the availability in our partner countries? That is the work that we have ahead of us, an important goal for our external work as well.

So, what we've been doing in recent years in the Commission, in the national partnership -- so the external cooperation -- is that we've been increasingly working with social protection systems, which are very important for funding AT for persons with disabilities. So, one of the areas that facilitate the accessibility and affordability for assistive technologies for the clients, the people.

We have also developed two innovative financing tools. The first one is manufacturing access to vaccines, medicines, and health technologies in Africa. It's a long name, but shortly, MAV+. It is a Team Europe initiative that involves EU Member States, different banks, and other partners.

And the second investment initiative that we have is the Human Development Accelerator -- HDX, which is a guarantee investment facility, in cooperation with the European Investment Bank and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and it also supports health systems and enhancing manufacturing capacities for health products and technologies.

So, while these two investment tools can also cover AT, by definition, they typically support investment cases that require a minimum of 20 million euros. And this is not very practical for the current needs in AT markets. So, we are, therefore, now seeking and looking for different options and other investment and lending options that might be more suitable for MSMEs and enterprises. So, for instance, looking through the EFSD+, European Fund for Sustainability Development Plus, and the pipeline initiatives that might come through that envelope.

The development of all these innovative tools is a very lengthy process, so it will take time. However, we hope that by end of the year, we will have some more suitable options and additional information on the opportunities within the European Commission to share with you. It's really important call for us to make these life-saving AT technologies more affordable and accessible to those who need them. So, thank you for being here and for your commitment to this important case. Let's make the most of this opportunity to learn, share, and pave the way for a more inclusive future. Thank you.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you, Marianna. And also thanks for sharing the European Union perspective on the assistive technology in Africa, as well as the plans for the future, along with the various investment tools.

Now let me invite Guillaume de Chorivit. I must admit, Guillaume, I had to practice your family name a few times, and I hope I got it right. If not, apologies. Guillaume is Director for Altai Consulting, who led the research team for development of the report. Guillaume, it will be great if you can share with us, what is the purpose of the report? Who are the main audience for that report, and how to best use the report, as well as if you can share some of the findings and limitations of this study. Over to you, Guillaume.

>> GUILLAUME DE CHORIVIT: Sure. Thank you very much, Satish, and hi to everyone. So, over the next ten minutes, I will provide an overview of the report. I will keep a steady pace so that we can have time for questions, hopefully, at the end of the webinar.

So, most of you are familiar with the context. As Marianna reminded, only 10% of people in low and middle-income countries have access to necessary assistive technology. And the challenge is particularly acute in Africa, whose population is projected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050.

The complexity of market entry for industry stakeholders is a key factor limiting access and is exacerbated by fragmented regulatory frameworks, inconsistent quality standards, and also unpredictable taxation policies. So, to respond, the report provides a structure, step-by-step guidance for major stakeholders, such as manufacturers or distributors.

In the document, also, keep in mind that market entry refers to the process, along with the regulatory, legal, and procedural requirements that industry stakeholders must navigate before selling and distributing assistive products.

On the next slide, please, we'll look at the scope. On the product side, it focuses on four assistive products with large need, so wheelchairs, prostheses, spectacles, and hearing aids. The assistive products considered in the report are only the WHO assistive products. On the right side, the report focuses on Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya and South Africa,

selected for their large population, their active assistive technology market, and also relatively stable regulatory environment. And they allow for detailed national examples.

On the next slide, we show our approach. So, to build an evidence base, we combine two methodologies. First, a comprehensive desk review of standard and published research. And 65 informant interviews with international and local manufacturers, distributors, international organizations, NGOs, and government. This covers the four countries and AT products as well as a full value chain to ensure the results are grounded in day-to-day practice.

On the next slide, we show that there are still a few limitations to keep in mind. First, it focuses on four AT products only, rather than encompassing the full range. For instance, it does not include digital assistive technology. The four countries are not necessarily representative of the overall African continent. The 65 informant interviews cannot cover the full range of market entry experience. Typically, it was not possible to get the full perspective of all ministries and regulatory agencies in the four countries. And eventually, the research was conducted between June and November 2024, while the context is rapidly evolving.

So, on the next slide, we start deep diving. We can start with five key prerequisites that facilitate market building, done by enabling industry stakeholders to enter the assistive technology market. One: Clearly defined responsibilities across stakeholders to enhance access to information and ensure accountability. Two: Significant and funded in-country demand, whether from public budget, private insurance, or donor programs. This allows organizations to anticipate demand, assess market size, and establish a sustainable model.

Three: Local capacity to properly fit assistive products. A skilled workforce is essential for fitting assistive products to users and providing after-sales support.

Four: Clear and transparent market processes so players can easily navigate them. The registration procedures, regulation, tax exemption and purchasing mechanism must be predictable and accessible.

And five: Enforced product certification and regulation. This specification ensures quality in public procurement processes and establish legitimate tax exemption. However, in practice, these five prerequisites are rarely met in low and middle-income countries. Also, on top of these five prerequisites, broader factors influence supplier entry, such as infrastructure, security, and accessibility of market information.

One last note on the context. In the four countries, international manufacturers seldom establish local offices or subsidiaries. Only a handful of larger firms make such an investment. They rely mostly on partnership with local distributors. These intermediaries frequently deal with a wide array of medical products with AT representing just a small segment of their broader portfolio.

On the next slide, we show the five key steps for market entry. An uneven understanding of market procedures, which differ across countries and also sometimes within them, is a key factor limiting access to assistive technology in low- and middle-income countries. Such inconsistency hinders scaling of operation while associated time and cost discourage involvement in Africa's AT sector.

When entering a market, industry stakeholders must first secure registration in the relevant country, as an authorized entity permitted to engage in activities related to AT and then follow the five-steps -- product certification, quality assurance, import procedures, duties and taxes, sales and distribution. The sequence outlined in this guidance is indicative, rather than prescriptive, because in practice, certain steps may occur out of order or unfold simultaneously.

On the next slide, so on product certification, which is the process by which an assistive product is certified as performing to applicable product standards. It is often expensive and time-consuming, taking up to two years in some of the four countries. However, the process tends to be faster for products that already meet international standards, such as CE or ISO.

Importers often face particular difficulty when certifying components rather than complete products, as they may not be recognized as medical devices. Certification is typically easier for single-use items, like prosthetic joints, than for multi-use items, like other components of prosthesis.

On the next slide, we look at quality assurance, which is the practical implementation of controls to ensure that the product meets the quality requirements specified in the product standards. In practice, quality assurance is carried out at customs, where inspections are typically conducted in person. These checks are often handled by non-specialized custom agents responsible for a wide array of goods and are conducted with limited expertise and resources. The level of expertise varies markedly, rendering the process inconsistent and difficult to anticipate.

International manufacturers may also be subject in some cases to additional third-party inspections, and so, new entrants should factor in the time and final costs associated with potential delays in each market.

On the next slide, we have import procedures, which is the process governing how a product enters a country, including compliance with documentation and customs, clearance requirements. This step is relatively straightforward, but several points can be highlighted.

The process requires submitting various documents, such as pro forma invoices, product specifications and certification of conformity. External suppliers often work with local clearing agents to speed up the process, but such agents can be hard to find.

Then, some countries impose strict currency regulations, which can affect the importation of high-cost items, such as assistive products. And eventually, import procedures can also vary, depending on whether products are transported by air or by sea.

The next slide is about duties and taxes, which are compulsory imposed by governments, primarily through revenue for expenditure. There can be exemptions for AT products, and these can have a dramatic impact on the price of these AT products. There are two main categories, import duties that apply to goods entering the country. In practice, it depends on the clearing agents' familiarity with assistive products. Then we have consumption taxes. The process to get exemption from these taxes is often unclear. Also, assistive products are often ineligible for customs and duty relief. That relief is

neither automatic, nor uniform.

Finished goods stand a better chance of receiving tax exemption. Also, not all assistive technology are treated equally. For instance, spectacles are frequently classified as consumer items, and thus, less likely to benefit from such relief than a wheelchair, for example.

And eventually, on the next slide, we have sales and distribution, which is the fifth and final step. It is a mechanism to which assistive products reach users in their country, and any after-sales services and support are provided. Several sales channels exist, including public and private procurement. Public procurement accounts for only a small portion of the supply in low and middle-income countries. In the four countries of focus, the public procurement process appears fragmented. And various ministries handle procurement, according to the specific needs, and sometimes also each of them have their own procedures.

Private procurement, whether through direct distribution with manufacturers or indirect distribution via distributors fills the gap. Yet, their purchasing cycles and terms differ.

So, that brings us to the end of the guidance. You can find additional details in the complete report, and I will now leave the floor to Ariane to provide specific examples and recommendations.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you. Thank you, Guillaume. And thank you for clearly explaining the purpose of the report and also alluding on how to use the report to shape and build the market, assistive technology market.

Also on the prerequisites and the steps for market entry, including the product certification, quality assurance, import procedures, duties and taxes, sales and distribution. It was clearly structured, which I think helps to show the different steps involved in market entry in the space of assistive technology.

Now, I would like to invite my colleague, Ariane Laplante-Lévesque, who is Technical Expert at ATscale. Ariane, if you can help us and brief us on some of the successes and challenges you identified during the study and also some of the recommendations which stems out from the study. The floor is yours, Ariane.

>> ARIANE LAPLANTE-LÉVESQUE: Thank you. Thank you. It will be my pleasure to try to illustrate some of the key findings that Guillaume just presented through two national examples and also to go very briefly through recommendations that are also two main ones, so two by two.

So, I'd like to start by sharing the perspectives of two young and dynamic individuals, and that's Sesi Atokey and Husmita Ratanjee-Vanmali. Sesi is from Ghana and Husmita from South Africa. They both have experience with assistive technology provision in their countries. South Africa is one of the four focus countries from the report and Ghana is not, and that's actually intentional. Because as Guillaume said, the countries selected in the report are all quite large and have reasonably mature assistive technology sectors, so I wanted to contrast a little bit one country that is part of the report and one country that is not. So, that's in a way helping to summarize the key findings of the report with South Africa, as well as bringing in fresh perspectives with

Ghana.

So, to very briefly set the scene regarding hearing. The report highlights that around 40 million people in Africa live with hearing loss, and that despite the high prevalence, hearing aid coverage is very low, and there are some estimates saying roughly 3% of those who need hearing aids currently have access to them.

Globally, the hearing aid market is dominated by five major manufacturers. And in resource-limited settings, it's common for people to turn to personal sound amplifiers. Those are devices where the quality is often unknown. And those devices cannot be tailored to the hearing of its users. And that has several consequences. First of all, the devices usually offer limited benefit. They're often not used. And in the worst cases, they might actually cause further hearing damage.

So, let's see Ghana. Ghana is a population of almost 34 million. Sesi reports that in the country there are three large hearing aid manufacturers that are present via distributors, as just introduced by Guillaume. Sesi also reports that recently, local assembly of hearing aids became possible, and that's from components from a Chinese manufacturer. And that's against a context of, in Ghana, no public coverage for hearing aids at all, so it's all borne by user payments. And Sesi identified that repairs are especially problematic because there is no repair capacity in the country, and so, they often, when hearing aids need repairs, they often need to be shipped overseas, where the costs are borne by the users, and which also means significant delays where the users are not able to benefit from their hearing aids.

In contrast, in South Africa, a country of a population of around 63 million, Husmita reports that some providers have created their own distribution networks, so they've moved towards vertical integration to have their own distribution network. So, they're often not offering just assistive products, but also clinics where there's trained providers that are part of those service models. And that's the main hearing device manufacturers, global manufacturers that are doing that. And there are also three large hearing aid manufacturers that are present in the country through subsidiaries, so that means they've created their own national company to be able to distribute the hearing aids in the country.

Public funding for assistive products is available in South Africa. From her experience, Husmita reports that coverage is limited and inconsistent, and she also mentions that there's well-intended policies in place to access government tenders, but those policies can sometimes be difficult for government entities to implement and they can be challenging for business entities to comply with.

So, you can see differences between the two countries, I hope, but there are also many similarities that Sesi and Husmita reported, including two main barriers. They reported limited public awareness of assistive products overall, which really stifles demand, and also a severe shortage of trained professionals. So, those are the two brief country examples that I wanted to share with you, and in the report, you can read much more about the context that's specific to the four focus countries.

And the report also puts forward two main recommendations that I will go through very briefly with you now. The first, the report is recommending that governments

streamline and digitalize their assistive technology market entry process, and that's a way to encourage participation from all industry stakeholders. So, we're talking about local, regional, as well as global industry stakeholders.

If governments are providing clear, accessible guidelines and online resources, if they're considering tax reform to eliminate or at least reduce tariffs on essential medical products that are assistive technology, and if they can improve regional coordination so that industry stakeholders can more easily consider market entry in several countries at once. So, it could be, for example, neighboring countries. Or it could be countries that already have existing trade cooperation mechanisms. These are all things that will stimulate -- measures that will all stimulate stakeholders being interested in entering those markets.

So, the first recommendation, as you could hear, was mostly aimed at governments. And the second recommendation is something that, really, all stakeholders can contribute to, and definitely also industry stakeholders. So, the report is recommending to strengthen the knowledge of distributors and service providers regarding assistive technology so that local capacity is built and that capacity can stay and can grow sustainably within the region.

So, those recommendations are specific to market entry, but we have to remember that those efforts to improve market entry are important, but they're part of a broader set of measures that need to be in place because the assistive technology sector is part of a broader ecosystem. And so, effective interventions are also needed to address areas like policy, like financing and service delivery. As alluded to earlier today by Pascal, market and trade conditions are definitely not static. The global trade enablers, they might appear or they might disappear. And the research in this report was conducted in 2024. And as trade dynamics will change, we can also expect that the assistive technology markets will continue to adapt.

So, I'd like to leave you with this story of Brenda. She is a young girl of primary school age in Uganda. Brenda has a visual impairment, and with the help of her audio player, she can listen to recorded lessons, and that's giving her access to education, a basic human right, on equal footing with her sighted peers.

So, we hope that this research can help spark a conversation, and can help work towards ensuring that more Africans, like Brenda, gain access to life-changing assistive products. Thank you.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you, Ariane. And thank you for presenting some concrete country examples, as well as recommendations for government, as well as industry partners, as well as other organizations who are involved in the space of market shaping on assistive technology.

Both Guillaume and Ariane presented this particular report, which will be launched by the end of the webinar, on Market Entry in Assistive Technology. Although the study was based in selective countries in Africa, I'm sure as I see the different questions and comments coming in the chat, the learning and guidance can be applied to any country across the globe which is interested in the space of assistive technology. So, thanks, Guillaume, and thanks, Ariane.

And I think it's now a perfect time to invite different stakeholders who are part of the assistive technology ecosystem. First, the government. Let me invite Dr. Chimezie Golden Obi-Mgbam from the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Government of Nigeria. Chimezie, great if you can help us and brief us on the steps taken by the Government of Nigeria for easing the entry of new organizations related to assistive technology. And what can governments do to address the barriers of removing the market-related barriers? And also, what requests do you have from the industry partners and private sector to support the expansion of the assistive technology sector? Over to you, Chimezie.

>> CHIMEZIE GOLDEN OBI-MGBAM: Thank you, Satish. And thank you, everyone on the call. Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening. It is a pleasure being here. I have to extend the regards of my bosses at the Ministry of Health. And the other principal officers.

So, the Government of Nigeria has stated, most of the problems we are still having an immature emerging market for AT, though the government has committed to that with our development plan, which has stated that it is expected about 50 million people by the end of this year will have access to AT. And that has been captured to ensure that we have developed -- they are also part of the development and have good economic return in the nation.

And so, with that, the government has put in place some policies that have helped to do this. A part of it is establishing programs, like the National Commission for Disabilities, to encourage the demand generation part of this, and also to help the people who have access to AT devices. So, collaborating with AT international agencies to improve like ATscale -- we have an existing collaboration with ATscale to do that -- it is priority to the Government of the President. In addition to that, we have thought about capacity building for locals. And the government's Ministry of Education has helped to ensure there are increased professionals now. The Ministry of Education is encouraging a lot of professionals to enter into the space of AT technology.

There are many physical therapies being encouraged. Many people are being encouraged to do physical therapy through the Ministry of Education, as well as the optometric and dispensing board, doing that. And so, there has also been a review of the National Health Insurance Authority, so the demand, trying to ensure there is a demand for glasses and hearing aids. So, these are all geared toward demand generation for AT devices so that people can have access to it. And that is covered with the insurance scheme of the country.

And so, policies are already in place, and policies are already going on. However, we also are working towards having a centralized body where easy access to market entry can come into place, coordinated by the Ministry of Trade, Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Attorney General's Office, all the people involved in this AT space. Because in one way or another, they are under these ministries -- the health, education, trade and investment, and others. So, once that is in place, that can help streamline the logistics and make it easier to enter into the marketplace.

Yes, in addressing the barriers, as you asked, Satish, I would like to say that it will

be something that the African government, we also want to partner with everyone on the call. ECOWAS already has a block within the states. So, having a regional manufacturing hub within the ECOWAS can as well help reduce issues of taxation and all that.

Nigeria may be a leading place to do that because of the population. I know that, as we know, we have over 21 million people -- 15 to 21 million expected to have access to AT, but currently see about 20% of them have that, and that is -- so, with the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, there is a lot of bridging the gap towards that, and they are really doing a great job sensitizing the people, in order.

So, addressing the barriers is more or less using AT demand generation aspects and encouraging people to do that. Implementing the policies, ensuring that employment for persons with disabilities are encouraged, and the government has also made policies that had, for the Government of Nigeria, I think, for every employment, about a percentage of it is reserved for persons with disability who turn for that. And even at elections and situations like that, we have had to modify our system to aid accessibility for people with visual, hearing, and other needs for assistive devices. So, investments. So, this brings to the need why there should be a key investment in the AT infrastructure, and then the supply chain development, which the Government of Nigeria is trying significantly to do. And also, enhance the capacity building and training of the AT professionals so that it will be up to date with modern trends.

Now, government, whenever they do the loans, so encouraging public-private partnership to drive innovation on accessibility is something that is key that can address these barriers within the ecosystem of AT. And so, that will help also to ensure that the set standards and regulations which are needed for ensuring that the people in Africa, people in Nigeria get the best of what the manufacturers are offering, and also having an ecosystem where repairs and maintenance is key, because not only purchase of the items, but also having people who are locally on the ground that can help in fixing, repairing it.

One example that has been given in the presentation said you have to wait some time to go and get it back, someone in Ghana. So, that is key to ensuring that sustainability and accessibility is really at the centre of AT services. So, our request to the private sector is simple. We kindly ask for support for the expansion of the AT sector and that we can do when we invest in research and development and create innovative solutions, helping the digital, because we are thinking more now of the physical space. We also know that there is also a digital part of AT devices that help, particularly in the visual impairment axis. So, investing in AT research and development to create innovative solutions, providing funding that can make sure these solutions get to the grassroots and collaborating with government and the engineers increase accessibility and market generation. Then last, supporting efforts to promote awareness and adoption, because the majority of the problem with AT in most LMICs revolve around the social aspect of it. People don't feel like using wheelchairs, people feel using glasses means your vision will worsen even when it's a simple fix by glasses, and people feel that glasses make it worse. So, there's a lot of need for, perhaps a niche method around, a need to look at the quality of what quality of life that gives to everyone and helps to that.

So, often, technical expertise, ensuring that there is research and R&D, supporting efforts geared towards awareness creation, and ultimately, ensuring that there is local capacity for distribution and manufacturing in the supply chain will help ensure that our people get the AT devices they need at that particular time, each individualized specifically for each one. Thank you.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you. Thank you, Chimezie, and congratulations on the work happening in Nigeria. It's certainly an inspiration for many countries, and also thanks for highlighting the role governments can play to address market barriers and facilitate entry of AT companies and organizations to new countries, including yours.

And I think this is a good stage now to listen from an intergovernmental agency perspective. Let me invite Lefhoko Kesamang from the African Union Commission. The African Union has played a leading role in signing the protocol on rights of persons with disabilities and is quite active in the space of disability assistive technology, health, social welfare, labor and trade, among others.

Lefhoko, it would be wonderful if you could brief us. What is the interest in the African Union continent on assistive technology, especially with regards to market building and market shaping? What interventions can organizations like the African Union take to trigger the assistive technology sector? And what are the lessons we can learn from other sectors, like health, social protection, labor, or trade, which can be leveraged in the space of assistive technology? Over to you, Lefhoko.

>> LEFHOKO KESAMANG: Okay, thank you so much, and thank you and good morning, good evening. Good afternoon, everyone. Yeah, my name is Lefhoko Kesamang. I used to work for the African Union Commission. The office was based in Addis Ababa. But I just want to mention that the African Union is made of 55 countries. And the African Union Commission is the Secretariat, so --

>> SATISH MISHRA: Lefhoko, my apologies, but I do hear some disturbance. Yeah, it's -- yeah, I think --

>> LEFHOKO KESAMANG: Okay, maybe -- okay, all right. Thank you. Thank you so much, yeah. Maybe because I was moving my hand on the table. Sorry. All right. No, thank you so much. I just wanted to say that the African Union, which is made of 55 countries, is an organization that is part of the responsibilities, and its focus is to develop policies and treaties related maybe to the subject matter. In this case, of course, there is a strategic framework on disability, which is a policy and a protocol on disability, as well as a plan of action on ending (?)

Of course, there is the strategic plan of action on aging as well as a protocol on aging in a common African position on that. And lastly, there is a protocol on social protection and Social Security, as well as --

>> SATISH MISHRA: I'm sorry, Lefhoko, but I think there is an issue with your mic. Yeah.

>> LEFHOKO KESAMANG: But am I audible?

>> SATISH MISHRA: You are audible, but there is a lot of background noise also happening at the same time. Now --

>> LEFHOKO KESAMANG: Okay, let me try just to go directly to the device...

>> SATISH MISHRA: Probably remove your headset and, yeah --

>> LEFHOKO KESAMANG: Yeah, I'm trying. Is it fine now?

>> SATISH MISHRA: It is certainly better than before.

>> LEFHOKO KESAMANG: Oh, okay, all right. Sorry for that. Yeah, I wanted just to give this short background to say that these policies, they also address issues of accessibility to assistive technology or devices. And they are there for the purpose of moving Africa forward on this issue or the subject matter. And let me also mention that they are adopted by all the Member States. Therefore, these Member States are responsible and accountable to ensure --

>> SATISH MISHRA: I'm sorry, Lefhoko, I'm very sorry, but you know, there is an issue with your mic. Because there is a lot of disturbance, so we can't really hear you at that time. When you don't speak, then it's okay, but as soon as you start speaking, there's a lot of background noise. I don't know what's the issue.

>> LEFHOKO KESAMANG: I'm trying to figure out where it comes from. (Static noises)

>> SATISH MISHRA: Maybe try to reconnect.

>> LEFHOKO KESAMANG: Let me try to do that, reconnect. I don't know where this background noise is coming from, but let me try to reconnect. I'm sorry for that.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Is it also there when I speak? Ranja, if you can give me thumbs up, when I speak it's okay?

>> RANJAVATI BANERJI: Yeah, when you speak, it's fine. Maybe we should move to the next speaker and return to Lefhoko, once he's reconnected?

>> SATISH MISHRA: Yeah, let's do that. So, yeah, let's move and probably to hear the voice from the private sector and industry partners. And with that, let me invite Jerome Lapaire, who is the Founder and CEO of Lapaire. Lapaire is a company which is actively engaged in the space of eyeglasses, especially in Africa. With its effort to reach the unreached. Jerome, as an organization, you have successfully entered many countries in Africa. And if I may add, you also have quite a thriving business. What were the main mantra of your success and what challenges have you also faced in that process? If you have to give one tip to the organizations who are interested in entering markets, what would that be? And what can governments and regional bodies do more to grow the sector? Over to you, Jerome.

>> JEROME LAPAIRE: Thank you, Satish. So, on the first question, so on the success and challenges I think that our organization has faced. The first key steps towards success were, we were at, from the very, very beginning -- so, we started the company a bit more than seven years ago -- we were focused on the patient and the customer. It was all about serving their needs and doing any and everything to serve them. And it was even before government regulation. So, I think we put the customer and the client's needs before anything. And this really helped us because we were really, like, focused on this, and it helped us develop the solution that is suitable for them and that they like and they use.

The second thing is really staying focused. We, from the start, we picked one specific area, eyeglasses, and we stayed focused on that. And I see a lot of organizations

diverting and trying to do other things. And so, what helped us be successful was really, like, to stay in our market segment. So, now our idea was to help people that didn't have access to eyeglasses, to have access to eyeglasses, and quality eyeglasses. And so, we focused on that, and we still are focused on the same problem, and we have developed and improved a solution to solve this.

And then, the third key step towards success was really finding partners that had the same goal as us. And we were very lucky, we found suppliers that had the same goal as us. We had investors, and we had clients that wanted to, yeah, like wanted to solve this problem. So, these are the three key steps that are for me very important to our success.

Then, the challenges. We faced a lot of challenges importing products. We had to and still have to import a lot of the products, from the machinery to actually the frames and the lenses, because of limited local production, and importing is very complicated. There are always new surprises, new fees, taxes to pay, so this is complicated.

Another challenge that we have faced, and we're still facing, is local health care professionals. So, today, we need people that do the eye test, the vision test. And in some countries, we don't have enough. In other countries, there isn't even a school that's actually trained these people, so we need to take people from a different country, and then expatriate them to the country where we operate. So, this definitely has been a big challenge.

Access to capital is another challenge. Today, we have been operating for seven years. Still no banks have lent us any money, and we have been discussing with them since then, so we have been looking to go find private capital, but it was very hard, so access to capital has been a very big challenge.

And then, like a last challenge was really, like, working in a region. Unfortunately, like, we -- so, we work in two regions, East Africa and West Africa, and we really struggled sending goods, equipment, and also machinery, and actually, the actual eyeglasses between countries of a same region without being double taxed. So, this regional approach is actually, like, very complicated and very challenging for us. At the moment.

Then, on your second question. What's like a tip maybe for any organization that would be interested in entering AT. I think it's an extremely niche market, compared to, like, more broad and general health care market. However, it's a very, very high-impact market and it is very fulfilling. So, I think in our team, today, Lapaire has around 450 employees, and everyone is extremely fulfilled by offering sights when we deliver a new pair of eyeglasses to someone that needs eyeglasses to see better.

And I think a more general tip, but this is more for entrepreneurs, is be ready to persevere. You're on your own. There will be ups and downs, and I think the successful entrepreneurs are the ones that are ready to power through the down time. So, yeah, so this is my tip, more general, and this is my more-general tip.

Then the third, on your third question, what could the government or regional bodies do to grow the sector? I think it's have a more collaborative and more open view towards new entrants and disruptors and ready to collaborate, make exception, adapt

local regulation that might be a bit outdated or that might be... yeah, might need to evolve in the future. Thank you very much.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you, Jerome. And thank you for this sharing of your experience on how you navigated the different market-related barriers, and also on your point of the need of having innovators and disrupters. I think that's fantastic. Thank you very much.

I hope now Lefhoko, if you can come back, and we can see if you are audible.

>> LEFHOKO KESAMANG: Am I audible?

>> SATISH MISHRA: Yes.

>> LEFHOKO KESAMANG: Am I fine now?

>> SATISH MISHRA: Yes.

>> LEFHOKO KESAMANG: Thank you! Thank you very much. Let me just rush into this because I've already eaten my time and my opportunity for failing to use this technology. Yeah, no, thank you so much. This is assistive technology.

Let me just say that all the 55 Member States have adopted policies of the African Union, and they have been part of them. And therefore, assistive technology, or devices, is mentioned in some of these policies. Therefore, it is just for Member States, really, to implement these policies. And AIDA reformed or developed the policies. Second, the acts of parliament in relation to this, so that accessibility becomes a human right.

So, let me also mention that there are bodies within Africa, like the Regional Economic communities. They are also organs of the African Union, which can actually be approached and be used as platforms on how to promote the issue of access to assistive technology in the context of Africa.

And lastly, just to mention that there are ministerial meetings. And I'm going to appeal to each one of us here, especially those from Africa and the Member States, that we have got an opportunity to approach your government, especially the ministry that deals with assistive technology, that they send a note to the African commission in Addis Ababa, that in one of the ministerial meetings, in this case, the ministerial meeting also shared develop with employment is next year. So, Nigeria is an example, the ministry responsible through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they can send a document to the African Union to say that one of the themes or main subjects of discussion during the ministerial meeting is access to assistive technology or assistive devices. In that way, we can be able to move forward.

There is also the Ministry of Health, meetings of the Ministry of Health, meetings of the ministry that deals with trade, industry, et cetera. And that is where we can also take advantage of these meetings and be able to discuss this. If a government -- just to conclude -- if any of the governments here, as an example, Nigeria, if you write to the African Union Commission and it's in line with the ethos of the African Union, they will definitely, I can assure you, they will definitely put it in their agenda and be discussed as the main agenda item. And this is how we can harness this.

And also, of course, regional economic communities like ECOWAS, this needs to be discussed even at that level, so that there could be a regional understanding, cooperation, and the way forward, and how to also share the technology and et cetera.

And also, on the manufacturing. For instance, if Nigeria or South Africa or Kenya or Ethiopia can be able to manufacture at a reasonable cost one of these technologies, I want to encourage then Kenya and surrounding countries, they can get this technology from one of those countries. And in that way, they will be able to have access and cheap and available technologies. Thank you so much for listening.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you, Lefhoko. And this was crystal clear, especially with the voice and the audio. And thank you for sharing what's happening in the African continent, especially with regards to the political willingness to make real changes on the ground. And also, thanks for highlighting the efforts done by the African Union in the space of assistive technology.

Let's move very quickly to our last speaker. And my apologies, we will overshoot by five minutes or so for this webinar. Let me invite Masse Niang, who is the Executive Director for the Development Center for Persons with Disabilities or OADCPH, in short. OADCPH focuses on establishing distribution model and technical support on assistive technology invest in Africa. OADCPH is also developing local assembly capabilities in the space of assistive technology.

Masse, if you can briefly share with us some of your concern with regards to growth of your organization. And OADCPH, especially, is a social enterprise organization. If you would like to give one tip to other organizations who are interested in creating their assistive technology sector. And what can governments and regional bodies do more to grow the sector? Over to you, Masse.

>> MASSE NIANG: Thank you very much. It is a pleasure to share this meeting with you. The OADCPH is now 14 years old. And I believe that today we are certain that if OADCPH has lasted 14 years, it is because there is a fusion model that was set up with a buy-in central, and we had the ambition to cover all the AT needs from the beginning in various ways. And this was linked to training, because without training, support, and advice, the buy-in central could not work properly and could not allow professionals to benefit from the efforts of the buy-in central. So, this distribution model, if we think not in terms of countries but at the regional and continental level, it is why OADCPH could support and distribute AT with 100 members in 34 African countries.

And, in order to simplify, the advice that I could give would be advice that may not be the solution, but may be one of the solutions. And this is to have affordable prices, to have good knowledge by the actors in Africa, and to think in terms of region and the continental level, because we were talking about ECOWAS earlier on, but we can talk about other subregional blocs, but the limits that often exist -- and Jerome mentioned them -- customs, et cetera. And the custom pricing is conceived in terms of regional blocs, so this is where we need to raise awareness, and that is where we have to reduce these duties and taxes. So, the economic model of OADCPH is important, because from the beginning, we wanted to position our self as a social enterprise and to speak to different countries, in order to be exonerated from different taxes, including VAT that can be 18%, even, and this is already subtracted from the cost that the end user pays, so we need to maintain affordable pricing.

And the trap can be this status as a social enterprise, because this has limitations.

We don't answer the criteria for traditional financial institutions, that is banks, so we can't get funding from them, and that is why we have to have alternative solutions. And when we looked for alternative solutions, that's where we met ATscale.

And in Africa, there are possibilities. However, constraints remain high. And the first piece of advice I have is to be resilient. Everything is possible, but everything is also difficult. And innovation is also important. For example, in Togo, we were able to set up local productions for English walking sticks or crutches from recycled plastic. And today, our aim is to speak to international suppliers, in order to assemble the production within the African continent. And we are not requesting a technology transfer.

Today, Africa has semi-industry and has the skills to assemble this type of product, and this enables us to escape all the specification and certification issues because products are only assembled, but this also means recognition and loyalty.

Another point, to develop, to raise awareness, and to influence policies, and this is done through disabled peoples organizations that are more legitimate. Yes, efforts have been made. When we look back, the budgets have slightly risen and are available although they are limited. However, African countries have signed many conventions, made many commitments that are not always respected, and it's through collaboration with disabled peoples organizations that we can let this situation evolve. Thank you very much.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you, Masse. And thank you for bringing the perspective of social enterprise. It traditionally has been such an active stakeholder in the assistive technology sector, so thank you very much for bringing that voice and recommendations. Merci mas.

Now it's time for some quick question and answers. And apologies if we will not be able to cover all of the questions. I know I'm seeing that some of the questions are responded by my colleagues. I'll probably take two questions which are related with the report. And if I can ask you, Guillaume, and probably Ariane. Does the report also look at the quality assurance, especially on the quality assurance procedure? Does it also look at the ISO and the CE certification and how that can be made more robust?

And also, if the report looked on the impact or reliance on donated AT imports and how that reliance might be reduced. So, probably to you, to Guillaume, to start. And great if you can keep it brief. And I do confirm that we will respond to each and every question individually also if we can't cover it in today's webinar. Over to you, Guillaume.

>> GUILLAUME DE CHORIVIT: Yeah. So, for the first question on the CE and ISO. Yes. I mean, we -- that's part of the report. Even though the -- yeah, I mean, there is not a whole section on this, but yeah, that's clearly included.

For the second point, regarding the donation, yes, we mention in the report that's something that came up several times during the interview that was an issue, so that's kind of covered, yes. Ariane, I don't know if you want to add some specific point also on this.

>> ARIANE LAPLANTE-LÉVESQUE: No. Thank you, Guillaume. I just want to add that overall, the questions and comments in the chat are all very relevant. Many of the themes and perspectives that people would have liked to have seen covered today are

covered in brief in the report. And so, I just want to align expectations. It's such a complex topic, and there are so many different avenues that could have been explored in the report, so I think that's also food for thought for ATscale in terms of perhaps some of those subtopics could be further investigated through specific other strategies. So, yeah, aspects such as the quality control, tariffs, such as regional approach, such as the impact of donation on the markets are briefly covered, local production as well, are all briefly covered in the report. Thank you.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you, Ariane. And thank you, everybody, and apologies for overshooting and running over the time. As Pascal alluded earlier in the opening remarks, this is the first of many conversations in the space of assistive technology market shaping. We are starting today from the Guidance for Market Entry, and we will be having a series of discussions, including on the demand on market, on assistive technology in the space of assistive technology market, taxes and tariffs, as well as on local production. So, more is coming.

This particular report on Guidance for Market Entry, is available online, and my colleagues will share the web link on the chat. We will have the French and the accessible version of the report also available shortly on the website. The webinar recording will be publicly available on social media as well as on the ATscale website. And we hope to meet many of you again in the next webinar, as part of this Discussion Series, to continue the conversation on how to build healthier assistive technology markets in low and middle-income countries.

The next webinar is planned for 2nd of July from 12:00 to 1:00 Central European Summertime and will focus on the demand side of the assistive technology and that will also be used as a platform to launch the Assistive Technology Market Report. Thank you, everybody. Have a great day or night ahead or afternoon ahead, wherever you are. But thank you very much for all of you, and thanks for your patience and staying with us in spite of us going over the time. Thank you very much.

>> Thank you very much.

>> Thank you and enjoy the rest of your day. Bye.