

# Minutes - 15th ATscale Board Meeting - 26/27 Nov 2025

## Decisions, next steps, timelines

### *By written process since the previous board meeting*

- Change to the ATscale by-laws (August 2025)
- Before this board meeting, the **Pacific Disability Forum** was confirmed as a new board member by written process.

### *At the board meeting, the board...*

- Approved the **indicative overall budget for 2026** and **provisionally approved the management budget** lines.
- Recognised that, even if income assumptions prove accurate, reductions to ATscale's operating costs, including Secretariat staffing, might be required during 2026.
  - Requested the Secretariat to submit, for approval, a **cost-saving plan by mid-January 2026** based on income scenarios as of end-December 2025, to take effect on 1 April 2026.
  - Requested a further updated cost-saving plan by mid-July 2026 based on income scenarios as of end-June 2026, to take effect on 1 January 2027.
- Agreed that the Secretariat should proceed with the proposed interventions, either through competitive selection of implementing partners or, where justified, through ad-hoc selection processes, within available funding and UNOPS granting and contracting procedures.
  - Raised no objections to the justifications for non-competitive selection regarding the Assistive Technology Selection and Decision Tool - Phase 1 (UNICEF), Boosting AT User Engagement and Knowledge, Globally and Locally - Phase 2 (IDA), simplified tool for diagnostic audiometry (WHO), and to restart the programme in Zambia with existing partners (Sightsavers, Clinton Health Access Initiative, Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations)
- Understood that the budgets indicated for each intervention were indicative and could change during finalisation, and granted the CEO flexibility to manage these while remaining within the approved overall budget.
- Requested the Secretariat to keep the Board informed during the year on any new programming resources and how these would be prioritised.
- Agreed in principle to the proposed change to JHA, subject to confirmation by the current funding agencies.

- Decided to move to **two Board meetings per year** and asked the Secretariat to suggest the respective amendment to the by-laws for written approval; and discussed that ad-hoc meetings can be added as needed.
- Authorised the Secretariat to approach potential candidates for the **third unaffiliated Board seat**, in line with the agreed profile and selection process.

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

Kemi Williams, Deputy Director for Gender, Equalities and Rights, extended a gracious welcome to the ATscale board on behalf of FCDO, underscoring the transformative role that technology can play in improving people's lives. She highlighted the remarkable innovation underway across the sector and commended the strong momentum the partnership has built.

Board chair Jon Lomøy welcomed participants and especially board members participating for the first time, namely Siti Nadia Tarmizi from the Ministry of Health, Indonesia, Sainimili Tawake from the Pacific Disability Forum and Manfred Stoifl, representing the private sector.

It was established that the necessary quorum was reached and the draft agenda was adopted. The minutes from the board meeting held on 18 June 2025 - which had already been accepted through a written process - were reconfirmed as adopted.

## General update

The CEO reported that ATscale maintained strong momentum despite a challenging external environment. Resource mobilisation advanced on several fronts, with the MBZFH agreement close to signature, encouraging engagement with Mastercard Foundation and the Messika Foundation, and FCDO confirming funding for 2025/26 though the 2026/27 outlook is tighter. ATscale's footprint has grown to 37 countries, including seven new Pacific Island programmes, with Phase II discussions progressing in several settings. KPI data to end-August indicate solid growth in reach, training and systems strengthening, particularly in Senegal, Rwanda, Kenya and Central Asia. Humanitarian pre-positioning supported Gaza in July, though a subsequent deployment to Sudan could not proceed due to stock constraints. Progress on global enablers included the launch of ATconnect, expanded market-shaping tools and several policy briefs, alongside continued visibility in global advocacy spaces. Governance, partnerships and user engagement also advanced through SPPC's launch, refreshed technical adviser rosters and an expanded microgrant programme.

Andrew Kirkwood briefed the Board on the UN80 Initiative, launched in March 2025 as a system-wide reform agenda. Under Workstream 3, which focuses on structural and programme realignment, one of the proposals being examined is a possible merger of

UNDP and UNOPS intended to “create a stronger engine for sustainable development, with greater reach and scale.” The Board noted that the two entities currently have distinct but complementary mandates: UNDP holds a broad development mandate centred on policy, governance and country-level capacity, while UNOPS operates as a self-financing implementation arm with strengths in infrastructure, procurement and project management. Some members questioned whether merging the two could blur the clarity of mandate and independence, and what this might mean for hosted partnerships.

As ATscale is hosted under UNOPS, the discussion focused on safeguarding continuity of operations. It was proposed that a “sign-and-assess” clause be added to the Joint Hosting Agreement to ensure that all existing obligations would remain in force in the event of institutional restructuring. A further suggestion was to incorporate indirect cost provisions directly into the hosting arrangement to protect financial sustainability should the hosting entity change.

The Board took note that the merger proposal is still under assessment within UN80, with preliminary findings expected in early 2026.

## Operational Plan 2026

### *Pillar 1 - Supporting country plans*

In 2026, ATscale will begin with nine active scale-up programmes across the Pacific Island countries and in Kenya, Senegal and Rwanda, while programmes in Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Georgia and Tajikistan conclude. Key achievements include Senegal’s expanded government commitment and strengthened regional coordination; Rwanda’s rapid progress in screening, hearing-aid fitting and workforce development; Kenya’s continued growth in AT reach; and Cambodia’s strengthened service-delivery systems. Eleven additional countries are expected to move from preparation to implementation in 2026, with several more contingent on new funding. The Zambia programme is planned to restart using Norway Telethon resources, enabling continuity through the same implementing partners. New opportunities emerging include deepened engagement with CIDCA and an upcoming AT-and-employment initiative with the Mastercard Foundation.

The Board’s discussion on Pillar 1 focused on several clarifications and forward-looking considerations. Members welcomed the re-initiation of the Zambia programme and asked about numbers of eyeglasses dispensed. The Secretariat confirmed that they were low because the programme had been halted before dispensing could begin. The Board noted the importance of connecting ATscale’s work with wider global initiatives - such as the World Bank’s efforts to consolidate public and private resources - and raised the need to assess implications of the new US global health strategy. Finally, members discussed approaches to strengthening domestic financing beyond current

ATscale-supported countries, recognising that progress requires sustained government engagement; the Secretariat is preparing a co-financing strategy for the next Board meeting, including reflections on what realistic benchmarks might look like given wide variation even among high-income countries.

### *Pillar 2 - Strengthening Global Enablers*

The 2026 Global Enablers portfolio was refined through extensive consultation, prioritising work that can realistically proceed under current funding. A small number of global public goods will move forward—such as the toolkit on selecting affordable assistive products with UNICEF and WHO’s simplified diagnostic audiometry tool—while most additional initiatives remain subject to resource mobilisation. The AT Expo in Africa is expected to begin partially with external interest. In financing, ATscale will launch the policy brief on AT financing and finalise an MoU with the African Union on a continental AT strategy; microfinancing was presented as a complementary but limited option within broader domestic-financing efforts. In digital AT, the 2025 policy note on smartphones will continue to be disseminated, with further work dependent on new funding.

The Board discussed several aspects of Pillar 2, with emphasis on market shaping, innovation and hearing-related interventions. Members supported the AT Expo in Africa as a useful platform for connecting global and regional manufacturers, while noting practical considerations such as exhibitor selection and alignment with AU and Senegal, who has offered to host. They also recognised the importance of ensuring coordination between the joint ATscale-IFC MOSAIC initiative and other related efforts in a context where few AT companies are investment-ready.

The Board held an in-depth exchange on hearing aids, service delivery models and standards. Members highlighted tensions between maintaining quality and allowing context-appropriate solutions in low-resource settings, and noted challenges related to local production and competition with inexpensive imports. They emphasised that products must be accompanied by appropriate services, including early fitting, classroom listening environments and task-shifting where feasible. Emerging technologies, such as Bluetooth-enabled microphones, were welcomed as part of the updated APL.

The Board reiterated that the 2026 plan should remain flexible and responsive to new opportunities as they arise.

### *Pillar 3 - Advocating for Change*

Advocacy efforts in 2026 will focus on maintaining visibility through resource-efficient approaches, leveraging existing digital platforms, strengthened social media engagement and targeted dissemination of global enablers. The redesigned ATscale website will serve as a hub for updated content and country-level results, complemented by increased documentation of impact stories. ATscale will continue



leading the ACTT, aligning advocacy across the partnership around major policy moments and the forthcoming UNGA resolution on assistive technology. The “Unlock the Everyday” campaign will expand through the small-grants programme and deeper partner involvement, while customised toolkits will support national advocacy. The Goodwill Ambassador will continue to enhance outreach. Additional country-level advocacy activities may be pursued if new funding becomes available.

The Board encouraged greater focus and clearer measurement of ATscale’s advocacy work. Members asked for stronger learning from current activities and more targeted outreach, noting the difficulty of assessing returns from major global events. They emphasised the need to define advocacy objectives, focus on platforms that broaden ATscale’s influence, and track impact more systematically. Strengthening ATscale’s digital presence and engaging selectively in high-visibility fora such as APEC, UNGA and the G20 were also encouraged.

### *Operational Excellence*

The Secretariat presented the 2026 budget, comprising an anticipated US\$7.8 million carryover and US\$18.2 million expected from donors, resulting in total projected income of US\$26.1 million and a planned expenditure of US\$22.8 million. The budget distinguishes between core 2026 activities and additional interventions contingent on new resources. Assuming the planned income is realised, secretariat operating costs will remain below 20%, reflecting stable staffing levels and the predominance of programmatic rather than administrative expenditures. The approach aims to safeguard essential functions while enabling flexibility should income projections shift during the year.

The Board commended the Secretariat’s continued engagement despite financial uncertainty and discussed major cost drivers, noting that staffing and travel remain the most significant. Travel needs to be clearly linked to programme oversight and resource mobilisation. There was substantial discussion on the appropriate size and role of the Secretariat, with different views on what proportion of the budget it should represent and recognition that this depends on its mandated functions.

Members agreed on the importance of scenario planning should expected contributions not materialise. Given the loss of USAID funding and the expected reduction in funding from FCDO, the Board requested the Secretariat to submit, for approval, a cost-saving plan by mid-January 2026 based on end-December income scenarios, to take effect on 1 April 2026, and a further updated plan by mid-July 2026 based on end-June projections, to take effect on 1 January 2027. Several expressed openness to convening ad-hoc meetings if funding assumptions change, and some suggested that a finance committee could support more detailed oversight.

The Board reiterated the importance of flexibility in managing indicative budgets and requested regular updates on new programming resources and their prioritisation.

## Updates from partners

WHO outlined ongoing work to support national decision-making on local production and translating AT data into policy. Members noted the value of guidance to help countries assess when local production is viable and welcomed continued collaboration.

UNICEF reported progress in expanding access to AT, including large-scale child screening and an initiative to tokenise service delivery to strengthen local markets and enhance transparency. Members saw potential for greater user empowerment and improved service tracking.

FCDO briefed the Board on internal restructuring and a shift toward mainstreaming disability inclusion rather than funding dedicated programmes. **FCDO plans to use their role as co-chair of the GLAD network to raise awareness on the importance of assistive technology and for ATscale.** Members discussed how to ensure mainstreaming translates into meaningful outcomes and noted broader pressures on development spending globally.

## Resource Mobilization - strategic discussion

The Secretariat outlined the need to recalibrate ATscale's resource mobilisation approach in light of a tightening ODA environment and the increasing difficulty of securing unrestricted pooled funding. The revised strategy emphasises rebuilding core resources while diversifying the donor base across institutional, corporate, foundation and high-net-worth individuals, alongside expanding programme funding through country-level opportunities. Donor mapping now includes 86 active prospects, with 28 priority donors at various stages of engagement, and a shift towards thematic alignment in areas such as education, employment and humanitarian response.

A strengthened focus on country programmes and regional budgets was highlighted, including partnering with NGOs to co-create interventions or integrate an assistive technology lens. Philanthropic outreach will also be supported by ATscale's new Goodwill Ambassador, while public fundraising campaigns - enabled through a recently signed agreement with the UN Foundation - will open pathways to non-institutional giving. The presentation underscored that adequate budget and dedicated resourcing for resource mobilisation will be essential in 2026, with the ability to scale efforts contingent on securing additional funding.

The Board welcomed the updated resource mobilisation strategy and commended its breadth and ambition. Suggestions included sharpening the articulation of ATscale's value proposition when engaging potential partners, including clearer messaging on ATscale's unique contribution, demonstrated impact, and the balance between global

and country-level work. Further emphasizing the links between assistive technology and health, as well as employment generation can be a way of tapping into funding beyond disability programmes. In response, the Secretariat stressed that pitches necessarily remain highly tailored to each donor, and that ATscale’s multi-sectoral mandate provides flexibility to adjust emphasis and align with varied agendas.

Members also enquired about plans to deepen engagement with the private sector. The Secretariat confirmed that private sector pathways are being actively explored and will form a growing part of the diversification strategy.

## Governance

The Board considered three governance matters: the number of Board meetings per year, the proposed “successors and assigns” clause to be added to the Joint Hosting Agreement, and the process for selecting the third unaffiliated Board member.

### *Number of Board meetings per year*

The Board agreed to move to two formal Board meetings per year, recognising the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of this arrangement. Members noted, however, that 2026 may be an unusually challenging year and emphasised the importance of retaining the option to convene ad hoc meetings should circumstances require.

In discussing timing, it was suggested that meetings could potentially be linked to other events, for example holding the in-person meeting in the week following COSP, and the Secretariat was encouraged to examine the advantages and drawbacks of such alignment.

### *Proposed successors and assigns clause*

The Board discussed the proposal to add a successors and assigns clause to the Joint Hosting Agreement to ensure continuity of operations and governance in the event of institutional restructuring within UNOPS (e.g. a merger with UNDP). The Secretariat clarified that the purpose is to safeguard ATscale’s governance arrangements, fee structure and uninterrupted functioning, given that donor agreements are binding legal instruments requiring continuity. All 14 hosted partnerships within UNOPS have expressed interest in some form of protective provision.

The Board agreed in principle to proceed, while requesting confirmation from current funding agencies, who will need to consult their legal teams before any amendment is finalised.

### *Third unaffiliated Board member*

The Board reviewed the proposed shortlist and authorised the Secretariat to approach candidates to confirm interest and availability. Members emphasised the importance of leveraging candidates’ networks to strengthen ATscale’s visibility and outreach. They

thanked Phyllis Heydt for her outstanding engagement in bringing together this shortlist.

The possibility of establishing an Advisory Board was briefly raised as a complementary mechanism to engage high-profile individuals and cultivate longer-term relationships.

## Future of ATscale and strategic considerations

The Board welcomed the Secretariat's request for strategic guidance and reflected on several longer-term questions. Members agreed that the three strategic pillars remain interdependent and that weakening one would undermine the others. They supported revisiting the Theory of Change through the SPPC and noted that a mid-term review of the strategy could help clarify priorities in a constrained funding landscape.

On funding and the operating model, members acknowledged the importance of private-sector engagement while noting potential tensions between commercial incentives and equity. They discussed ways to stimulate demand, including microfinancing in specific contexts, and highlighted ATscale's role in influencing markets, shaping products and encouraging investment in LMICs. Members agreed that non-traditional donors have been difficult to mobilise, and stability from major funders remains important.

The Board also considered future hosting arrangements, noting both the advantages of UN hosting and potential limitations for private-sector engagement. Members reflected on the evolving role of the Board in an environment of increasing earmarking, suggesting that its value may shift further toward advocacy, alignment and strategic influence.

## Participants

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Representatives and delegates</b>
CDPF	HE Weijie (Tracy)
DFAT	Kathleen Bombell ( <i>online</i> )
FCDO	Tessa MacArthur Daryl Lloyd
IDA	Jose Viera Jarrod Clyne
Indonesia	Siti Nadia Tarmizi
Kenya	Rebecca Kiptui ( <i>online</i> )
PDF	Sainimili Tawake ( <i>online</i> )
Private sector constituency	Manfred Stoifl
Unaffiliated Board Seats	Jon Lomøy Phyllis Heydt
UNICEF	Kristoffer Grandrup Marino Dennis Soendergaard ( <i>online</i> )
UNOPS (ex-officio)	Andrew Kirkwood
WHO	Kylie Shae
ATscale secretariat	Pascal Bijleveld (ex-officio member) Barbara Goedde (note taker) Satish Mishra