

Discussion Series on Market Shaping in the Assistive Technology Sector: Webinar 4

Assistive Technology and International Trade

Webinar Transcript in English

This document captures the English transcript of the Webinar on Assistive Technology and International Trade held on 27 May 2026, 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 and has not been edited or proofread after the event.

>> And the captioning is also ready?
>> Yes, the caption is all ready.
>> And the Streamtext, I see that it is working. So I think we can start letting people in. And then, Satish, it will be up from you when you want to kick it off.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Hello, everybody. We will just give a minute for everybody to join in.

Okay.
Good morning, good afternoon, everybody. We'll just give a minute more as people are joining in. And then we can start.
Okay.
Yeah, I see still people are joining in.

>> SATISH MISHRA: People who are joining in now, we are just giving a little time.

>> (AUTOMATED VOICE) Recording in progress

>> SATISH MISHRA: As people are joining in so almost all of the

people are there so we can start.

Okay. I think we should. Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening to all of you joining from different parts of the world. I'm Satish, the head of program for ATscale. A warm welcome to you for

this 4th webinar, focused on the market shaping in the assistive technology sector. And we began this series on the market shaping in the aspect of assistive technology and the different aspects that influence market shape in the space of assistive technology.

In today's webinar, the topic which we'll cover today is one of the aspects of market, which is generally neglected and it's around international trade. The questions, which we'll try to answer today is how does trade matter in accessing assistive technology?

How can trade policies be shaped to ease access to assistive technology?

No today's webinar, we will also launch the research findings on assistive technology and international trade. As well as launch the policy brief, which has practical recommendations and actions, which can be done at the country level to strengthen trade policies for assistive technology.

For today's webinar, we would also like to particularly thank our partner's European Union on their partnership were advancing healthy technology markets and the partners on the forefront of the research, the Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine Institute of the University of Sao Paulo medical school in this work.

Before we begin some housekeeping notes. The webinar is for 60 minutes and we hope to finish by 5:00 p.m. central European summer time. Please keep your microphone muted. The webinar is in English and is translated live in French, Spanish, and Portuguese. And click on the interpretation button on the bottom of your Zoom screen to access those live translations.

Closed captioning is also available in all UN language, English, U.S., Russian, French, Arabic, Chinese.

Please click on the list posted in the chatbox to access the closed captioning.

The webinar will be recorded and will be shared publicly after the event.

For any questions you may have during the webinar, please use the chat function, we have team members who are monitoring the chat and

they will respond in realtime or during the question and answer session which we planned towards the end of the webinar.

If we are unable to answer any question during today's session, we will follow up individually after the webinar. Please also use the chat function to provide general comments or feedbacks you may have

as

we progress. We would like to hear my feedbacks you may have. Lastly, it will be great to have a virtual photo, if possible. If people can switch on their camera for a moment so that we can take a screenshot of all the people and the beautiful faces we have on the screen.

I'll have like 30 seconds to do so. And I'll give maybe 10 seconds for people to switch on their camera, if they can. And if they want. And we should be -- we should be ready by now. So here we go, 3, 2, 1. I think we should be able to capture most of the faces who are here. So thank you very much for doing that. In today's webinar we will hear opening remarks and ATscale and European Commission. And this will be followed by the presentation of the findings of the comprehensive assessment done on the trade environment affects the access to assistive technology.

This will be followed by input from colleagues from partners who are engaged on the aspect of international trade, tariff structures and national taxes and policy environment affecting access to quality and affordable assistive products to publish especially in low income countries and settings

We had a representative from the Kenyan government who was supposed to join but we heard just before the webinar there's been a family emergency. So we will see if she can join or not.

At the end of the webinar we will have some dedicated time for questions and answers.

Without taking further time, let me invite our chief executive officer at ATscale, pascal, for his opening remarks and setting up the stage why we are here today.

And why this works and scaling up to assistive technology to those who need it the most, over to you, pascal, thank you.

>> PASCAL: Thank you, Satish, friends, colleague it's a pleasure to welcome everyone to this webinar on the market shaping in the assistive technology sector. And I think this topic is particular will I relevant in today's day and age as the world goes through multiple geopolitical and economic upheavals.

, you know, in part related to trade. So I think this is really very topical and timely.

Um, in parallel to those massive changes we have seen over the last year or two on the trade scene, there's been a growing global demand for assistive technology, particularly in low and middle income countries.

Despite this growth, today, still, as probably many of you know, on average, only 1 in 10 persons who need assistive technology in low-income countries have access to the devices they need or the services they need

And in several surveys that have been carried out when they are asked what the primary challenge to access is, the answer is nearly always unanimously, affordability.

Of course one of the key drivers of affordability are trade related barriers. So what we want to talk about today and what we want to focus answering today are why does trade matter so many for access to AT? What are the current trade volumes and tariffs and tax structures that we are seeing out there?

And what can we do to effect positive change to take AT more affordable? We've been working together on partners on this research for over a year now and we are really excited to be able to share the findings with all of you today.

This technical report on assistive technology AT and international trade takes a critical evidence driven step towards demystifying the world of tariffs and taxes.

And it impedes the flow of affordable and supportive assistive products to those who need it most.

And it tries to present the findings in a way that's easy to understand and hopefully apply. As Satish mentioned, let me reiterate our facts to our thanks to the European Union for supporting this work and for their continued commitment to this sector. We also want to thank the Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine Institute of the University of Sao Paulo medical school general hospital for this in depth research on this topic.

Also important to thank members of the technical advisory group and the Interagency Working Group on Disability and Trade for their invaluable feedback and guidance throughout the development of this study

And last but not least I want to thank the speakers and contributors and the peer reviewers of this study. It is really all of your efforts that made this work possible.

So in conclusion, I think if there's one message that really we want everyone to take home from today's discussion is assistive technology is not just a health matter or social issue, it's not just a human right. It is also a fundamental trade issue.

And we need to look at it from that perspective as well. So we are eager to hear from all of you today about practical ideas and commitments to further collaborate on this important agenda. This makes this the start of an ongoing dialogue on international trade and assistive technology. And thanks again, and back to you, Satish.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you, Pascal and thank you for the emphasis on the importance of demystifying the complexities of trades and tariffs and taxes as this understanding does significantly influence access to assistive technology.

With this, I would like to also invite Laure for her opening remark. Laure is the team lead for social equalities and productions and rights for people of disabilities at international partnership at the European Commission. Over to you, Laure.

>> LAURE: Thanks, you can hear me well?

>> SATISH MISHRA: Very well.

>> LAURE: Perfect. Colleagues and ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining this webinar. It's a pleasure to see so many of you with us today.

Disability inclusion is a core part of the European Commission internal and external action.

Earlier this month the European Commission adopted the communication enhancing the strategies for the rights of the persons with disabilities up to 2030 with an external chapter I will put the link in the chat. In case some of you want to have a look. This communication has the objective to step up the ambition of the strategy with a strong and stronger even focus on implementation. Delivery on the ground.

And real impact for people's lives. Reading the report launched

today, I am convinced all of us here share this intention to deliver and have impact. So that's why I wanted to mention this new piece, this new communication.

Disability inclusion is under the user obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Peoples with Disability and on 2030 Agenda particularly the central one of leaving no one behind.

In our international partnerships, disability inclusion is not treated as a separate or as a marginal topic, that's I object integral to how we work on human development, government, sustainable growth

and

the green and digital transformations.

And assistive technology are essential to making this reality.

For many persons with disabilities, access to assistive technologies, wheelchairs and prosthetics and hearing aids and devices and digital solution, et cetera, is what enables participation in school, in work, in community life, and in democratic processes.

Assistive technologies are enablers of autonomy, dignity, and equitable opportunities yet access remains deeply unequal as we just heard from Pascal. The result is that millions of persons with

disability, particularly women and girl, people in rural areas and those living in poverty are left without the tools they need to realize their rights in practice.

From the perspective of the European Commission, assistive technologies are not only a social or a health issue, but also a development, economic, and trade issue. And here I echo what Pascal said said again. This lies at the intersection of human rights and inclusion growth and innovation.

Their social impact is undeniable but allowing their users to contribute to economic growth they also play a key role in proving that investing in the rights of persons with disability is not only a cost but a real investment.

With not only a societal but also an economic return.

You may have heard about the global gateway. It's the European Union strategy to support sustainable and trusted connections with our partner countries. Within this strategy, we are working to mobilize quality investment, to promote fair transitions and fair economic transformations

We seek to integrate the social and economic agendas by combining hard investments in infrastructure with soft ones in regulatory framework, environmental and social standards, training, and within

this framework, we really see a stronger opportunity to support ecosystems that can expand the availability and affordability of assistive technologies in partner countries.

The reports being launched today speaks directly to this opportunity. It looks how trade related policies and taxation and related procedures and practices influence access to quality assistive products. It helps us to better understand where the bottlenecks are in tariff risks and non-tariffs trade barriers and in regulatory environments and information and practices. For the European Commission this information is valuable because it identifies where targeted action can make a real difference. This will inform our policy dialogue with our partner governments and partner organizations.

And we retain particularly the following elements. To reduce unnecessary barriers in essential assistive products. To integrate assistive technologies into broader health, education, social protection, and digital strategies. To support the access to markets of assistive technology producers and providers, including European ones but also strengthening local and regional manufacturing and service capacities.

And ensure that representative organizations of persons with disabilities are meaningfully involved in all stages of this work. And now allow me to emphasize this last point. Nothing about persons with disabilities should be decided without their full and effective participation. This principle must also guide our efforts to expand access to assistive technologies from policy design to implementation, monitoring and evaluations for the whole project cycle. I would like to warmly thank ATscale and also colleagues based in Brazil and the whole team behind this report. And all the stakeholders who contributed with their expertise and experience.

Your work helps us move from political commitments to concrete and evidence-based action. I encourage all of you today to use today's webinar to engage critically with the findings and so share country experiences and to highlight opportunities for collaboration. In the European Commission we are interested in identifying together with you how we can accelerate progress and ensure that persons with disabilities in low and middle income countries have access to the assistive technologies they need to fully participate in

society and in the economy.

Thank you very much.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you very much, Laure, and thank you, and thank you for emphasizes the policy for priority for the commission on the disability inclusion as well on the importance of assistive

technology and trade. And how trade can make a difference between access or and limited access or no access.

Also thanks for identifying and elaborating on the EU financial mechanisms. And opportunities which can strengthen assistive technology markets.

Thank you very much, Laure. Now, let me invite Vinicius. And Natalia. Vinicius is 2 executive director and Natalia is the associate A the Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine Institute at the university Sao Paulo medical school general hospital

That's a long one.

And Vinicius and Natalia led the research team on the report will present the key findings as well as the practical recommendations stem stemming out from that work to open. And share those findings and recommendations with us. And Vinicius and Natalia, the floor is yours, please.

>> VINICIUS: Thank you, it is indeed a long name and it's nice to highlight we have a WHO collaborating centre on assistive technology and this is why we've been inside the hospital have a research group that's going outside the health, per se, spectrum. And looking at other aspects of access to assistive technology.

And I'll present a introductory section on the studies and the methods we used. And Natalia will present on the study results and I'll be back again to highlight some of her key recommendations. For the Laure and Pascal have already made a great point on what this is an issue. And Natalia, if you can change. Thanks. So the big -- the need for assistive technology is huge. We have low levels of access. And affordability is a big part of this. And when we lack local manufacturing and this is actually the rule not the exception, it implies that imports are key to having products available. And that people can then access them. And for that, we have multiple layers of barriers that go from the trade potential and the agreements that might be established to try to make this potential greater and for countries

to benefit more from that.

And also the tariffs applied at national level they are also regulated nationally. The taxes. And the logistics aspect of having this product coming from ports to the retailers. What we have concentrated in this work is how to tackle all of those barriers, considering that manufactures are often concentrated in a few countries. And many other countries in the world will rely on importations to have access to them.

The scope of our study was in focused on a few products, assistive products. These are hearing aids and orthotics and prosthetics and specks calls and wheelchairs
This is often the products we are looking at. And it was relevant we are focusing on those too because of the way that we can track information internationally. And we did this using the harmonized system codes that is what we use internationally to track any product that's traded internationally.

And we are looking at this later to say how these are coded and how these products are coded it's really relevant from the level and quality of information that we can get. It was a study. And in some aspects of the this we look at trade flows. And some of the tariff levels across the region

But we had a particular focus on Chad, Egypt, Kenya and Mozambique and the Republic of Congo. When we get into detail of those countries and you have more information in the technical report that was published.

And here is only a general overview of our findings. It's also important to highlight that we haven't looked at the entire supply chain. This would be a huge study. So we are focusing on the import to distributor aspects of this.

It's part clearance, nationalization, and distribution. We are not looking at one end the manufacturer costs and all of those other implications. And also at the retailers end. So we are looking at the middle of this process and how the international trade aspect of this are highlighted.

So to conduct the study we used a mix methods approach. So we had both a quantitative trade analysis, and data analysis on the trade the hard data on trade flows and also qualitative analysis for the

national legislations and the international agreements that exist
And a literature review on access to health products in general.
And assistive county products in particular, where these were
available. And we had an analytical framework that allowed us to make
comparisons across countries and consolidate this findings. And this
is what you find in our technical report. And we tried to make this as
Pascal mentioned before, a more of a participatory approach. And
having more 40 experts consulted either through interviews or through
our technical working group and the peer reviews that went after that.
So we as I mentioned before, much of this work was based on the
harmonized system codes to know how we can track and identify these
products.

And Natalia will be showing you next how it looks like at the end
breakdown right now.

>> NATALIA: Hello, I'm one of the researchers on this study and
I'll be presenting some of the key findings we have with our project,
starting with an overview of the AT trade flow in Africa the first
aspect we want to highlight is the African share is the smaller parts
of the 18 parts so the we have the hearing aids and prosthetics and
wheelchairs and speck calls is over \$6.5 billion USD. So on the left
we have the share of the global imports and the share of the global
population and we have that Africa sits at the bottom of the list with
1% of the share of the global AT imports.

At the same time, we have the African content relies on external
markets for most of the assistive products in part. Between 2016 and
2023, international trade accounted for only 3.6% of total imports of
the AT product this is the African continent. And the figure on the
right we have that Denmark is the leading market for hearing aids for
the African countries and United States is the leading import for

prosthetics. And China is the main exporter for speck calls and
wheelchairs to the African continent.

The second aspect I would like to highlight is in terms of the
tariff regime for assistive technology Africa. We have that tariffs on
speck calls is spectacles can reach up to 30%.

While most countries have tariff exceptions for hearing aids and
protheft sis and wheelchairs, there's many tariffs on spectacles and
frames that can reach up to 30%.

On the left we have the average import tariff for the four
targeted assistive products. 1.4% for hearing aids.

1.6% for prosthetics. 1.8% for wheelchairs. And 8.4% for spectacles. So a much higher value for import tariffs.

The main reason for that is spectacles are still classified a customer or luxury goods in many countries. Among our five select countries tariffs on hearing aid and prosthetics and wheelchairs range from 0 to 5%. While the average tariffs on spectacles can go up to 26%. On the figure on the right of the presentation, we have the average tariffs for hearing aids, protheft significance and wheelchairs. And for the top 15 African countries with the highest tariffs and we can see the figure illustrates how the average tariffs for spectacles is much higher than the tariffs for the remaining assistive products.

And now we move on from a broader view of the African continent of a whole to a more focused more our five select countries. In terms of the AT tax structure we have the treatment of assistive technology under the VAT the value added tax regimen remains inconsistent. So the AT systems follow a broadly similar architecture with rates complemented by extension, zero rated for priority goods But the VAT treatment for AT is much more inconsistent. So the figure on the right of the presentation illustrates the standard way and main VAT mechanism for the five select countries. It shows while hearing aids and prosthetics and orthotics is exempt, spectacles and frames are subject to the full VAT.

When we unpack the cost of all this import related tariffs and taxes and fees, we see they together can drive the product price. So 1.6 times the factory price.

For example, if the same tariff and tax exceptions currently applied to hearing aids, prosthetics and wheelchairs in Kenya, one of our select countries were extended to spectacles the tax burden for import tariffs and VAT would be zero.

So on our figure on the left of the presentation we have, for example, the cost per spectacles and imports to Ken Kenya and the price after custom clearance. So we have the ex-factory price and on top of that is the 25% of logistics fee A 10% import tar river. And a 16% VAT fee

We have in this scenario the price after customs and clearance is 1.6 times the x-factory price.

On the on the other hand on the figure on the right of the

presentation we have the cost for hearing aids imports to Kenya. In this scenario we have on top of the exfactory price only the 25% logistics share of the import cost. In this scenario the price after custom clearance and nationalization is 1.25% times the exfactory price.

In our country we also looked at the role of preferential trade agreements or PTAs in improving access to assistive products in the African continent

So PTAs are trade agreements among partner countries that can lead to reduced tariff and taxes on selected negotiated items.

So we found in our study 12 applicable VTAs that address tariff on the products of the African component.

And the PTAs come from the majority come from the Republic of the Congo. And Congo showed a significant increase of the import from the African free trade area or the AfCFTA member countries since 2019 the figure on the right is two scenarios the first scenario is between 2014 and 2018.

Before the AfCFTA trade agreement gap in effect.

So we have the imports of assistive products coming from partner countries to Congo represented only 2.4% of imports in Congo.

However in the following five years so after that remain took place and the effect between 2019 and 2023 the same share of imports from the partner countries to Congo of existing country jumped too 26.1%

Finally in our study we have a few examples of African countries that were able to advance access to assistive products by reducing import tariffs and taxes applied to the import of AT.

Our main example comes from Zimbabwe, the properrization of AT. For this specific case study for Zimbabwe, it started when the Ministry of Health created a AT multisector working group with partners within the country.

The first test of this working group was to develop a national strategy in a priority in this with products, assistive products that were relevant to the national context. They developed a 55 product national APL list with 50 products coming from the WHO the World Health Organization list, this plus 5 contact specific items selected by the working group.

And at the same time, we had Organizations of Persons with Disabilities or OPDs highlighting the tariff and tax impacts on the access to assistive products in the country and during the budget consultations.

As a result of this advocacy in the work of this AT working group, Zimbabwe revenue conducted a revenue impact assessment and concluded

that revenue coming from tariffs and taxes applied to assistive products could be foregone. And this would be manageable within the fiscal context of the country.

And this exemption would align with broader social welfare objectives. As a result, regulations for amended and the government eliminated import taxes on priority assistive products for registered OPDs.

This is the main findings and results we have on our study along with some key case study examples that help illustrate the data that we have shown. And of course once we look at the report, we have the broader analysis behind our data and our findings. But these are some of the key numbers that we wanted to bring to you today. So thank you very much.

>> VINICIUS: Thanks, Natalia, for sharing the highlights of results. As Satish mentioned in the beginning we tried to do this as action oriented as possible. And this is why we had constricted the key recommendations with the support of our experts that were collaborating with our work. And the first recommendation like Zimbabwe did was having a cost benefit analysis of the revenue foregone and how it's worth it that you have a larger benefit for the population than you have giving up on that revenue for the country.

The second recommendation is about making the existing exceptions actually effectively applied.

They are often existent on paper but not in reality. And there are strategies to try to come up with solutions for that.

It's also relevant as I mentioned in the beginning that we have better harmonized system codes that are more accurate and that reflect the assistive products that are on the market.

And that we can track this information just as a quick example. There's only one harmonized system code for hearing aids. There's

three for wheelchairs. There are a few more for orthotics and prosthetics and even more for spectacles and frames.

When there's there are when there are many sometimes they are discriminatory or they are not existent or it's hard to make it to the country.

It's important we take the work of the work customs union, for example, to make these codes more relevant across countries and used across countries.

It's also important that we have assistive products as essential goods. That we create priority lists to benefit from cross sector and whole of government efforts to increase access to assistive products.

We should as our fifth recommendation, train officers and officials to identify assistive products and ensure as we have mentioned before that the exemptions are effectively applied and this depend on the capacity of officers and officials working in the field with customs clearance.

We shall -- and this is a very large probably one of the largest scope in terms of our our key recommendations. Align our trade policies with the national or regional protection of AT. This is how we combine access and access through assistive products through importations to the local industry. And how often times we want the local industry to deliver on these products as well.

So the way that we wok with preferential trade agreements and common tariffs across countries and create a regional or national or regional approach to push for local manufacture but also gain scale from having countries working together as a regional level.

It's important that we have awareness raising for private sector actors because this implies and distributors and retailers that need to be aware of these mechanisms. But also society at large for so that final users know how this works and can also benefit. Because often times the extensions and benefits rely on end users and not only from retailers, depending on how each country organize it.

And to complete, it's also relevant because we are managing all of the different stakeholders in this field that we are able to coordinate among these actors and have users participating in this. This is relevant for prioritization. This is relevant for clarity in this process.

And if we only benefit the entire tack system we have the different stakeholders participating in all of those efforts that are needed to have these recommendations in place.

So this I hope we were able to share everything that we have done throughout the work. And of course we will be available through the questions and answer section as well. Thank you.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you Vinicius and thank you very much Natalia. And thank you for presenting the assessment findings and the recommendations to make assistive technology more affordable. And also on your point on the importance of ensuring that existing exceptions exemptions are applied at the country level and the importance of awareness raising in this space.

The study was of course based in select countries in Africa but the earnings and guidance and the recommendations which stand out from

it, can be applied to any country who is interested in scale up for assistive technology access.

It's now a good time to invite the stakeholders relate odd with the assistive technology ecosystem and different partners who are engaged on creating tariffs.

And with that I would like to invite UN trade and development on intergovernmental agency the centre of the developing policies on trade as well as the related governance.

This is a pleasure to invite Ralf and UN Conference on Trade and Development and Ralf is on the division of the international trade and commodity. Ralf, it would be wonderful if you can help us and brief us on the efforts being done with regards to the trade.

As well as any any other lessons you see other sectors and gender or public health or other related sectors that which can help us to reduce taxes and tariffs in the space of assistive technology.

And we can learn from them. That would be also beneficial. Over to you, Ralf.

>> RALF: Thank you very much. And let me begin by congratulating the team behind the technical report and the policy note. This is a

highly valuable contributions that have more disability inclusive trade from concept to actionable policy. I would like to make three points.

My first point is efforts of international organizations. We are seeing a clear shift across the international system from treating disability inclusion as a social issue to recognizing as a core trade and development priority.

At the outset, it is important to underline that disability inclusion in trade remains a relatively new area of work for many international organizations. While progress has been made such of the conceptual and policy groundwork is still to be established. In this context, it is particularly encouraging that the latest mandate agreed in October of 2025 in the Geneva consensus marks a major milestone. For the first time in UNCTAD history it includes a paragraph on disability inclusion in trade reflecting clear recognition of UN member states

This is it is a decision by our member states of course. But I would like to recognize here the amazing work done by my colleague, Graham in the here in the meeting and the secretariat to support the member states.

And the international organizations bring distinct comparative advantages to this agenda. First through evidence and analytical work. A key example is a the ongoing work to improve product specification and data availability. Including a comprehensive map of assistive products against HS codes using the WHO product list. This work will improve the completeness of trade analysis helping to quantify barriers and inform policymakers.

Through, through expertise, UNCTAD has a role in tar risk measure, MTM and while tariffs declined over the years for reverses it's the non-tar risk measures like procedures and hearing aids that shape trade outcome.

Looking ahead, we begin to work how these to assess how the barriers affect trade in assistive technology. Where the impact may be even more significant than tariffs.

Third, through technical cooperation, supporting countries to improve data gathering, customs procedures, regulatory frameworks and policy alignment.

Overall the direction is clear. Trade is increasingly understood as a tool for inclusive but one that requires more comprehensive analysis and coordinated action.

My second point is on the Interagency Working Group, which has been established in 2023. By UNWTC and ILO. This work on trade and disability inclusion brings together a growing number of organizations

to move from fragmented efforts to coordinated strategic action
It's important to go well beyond coordination alone. First, it strengthens policy coherence across institutions. Helping to address fragmented government structures in this area. By aligning approaches and priorities it ensures that disability inclusion is integrated more consistently across trade related work.

Second, it enables practical collaboration and joint delivery
A number of joint sessions and events have already been organized under the working group, bringing together expertise from across organizations and raising the visibility of the issue. Third, it enhances communication and knowledge exchange.
This is particularly important in a field where data gaps and conceptual challenges remain. The working group provides a platform to share methodologies, experiences, and emerging evidence.

Helping to build a common understanding. Fourth, it supports the development of forward looking work programs. We are now moving beyond
dialogue towards the preparation of joint project proposals with a view of scaling up technical cooperation and impact
Fifth, it strengthens engagement with member states, which is essential to ensure this work translates into policy change at national and regional levels.
Importantly, cooperation is essential particularly in the current context of constraint financial and human resources across organizations.

By working together, we can maximize impact, I avoid duplication and advance a coherent and effective work program. While still in its

early stages the working group has strong potential to become a central platform for advancing disability inclusive trade globally.

Let me come to my third and last point. And Satish, you mentioned this. The lessons from gender and public health and emerging evidence. There are strong lessons from gender equality and public health that can inform this agenda. As a relatively new field, disability inclusive trade has benefited significantly from expertise that at the intersection of gender trade, including work by Sofie Notria and Fantana [sounds like]

Their work helped establish a foundation for this emerging area. Several key lessons stand out. First, distribution (?)

disabilities affect consumers with disabilities through the availability of goods and by workers through access of employment in participation in value chains.

Second, accessibility itself can act as trade barrier. In assess standards certifications or digital platforms can exclude participation while inclusive design can expand markets and opportunities.

Third, from public health, we know that essential goods such as medicines are zero tax or tariff rated

We heard from the report spectacles are treated as consumer goods facing tariffs up to 30%.

Data metrics.

Fourth, data drives policy. Significant gaps remain in how assistive products are classified and measured in trade statistics.

Limiting effective policymaking.

And finally, progress depends on the whole of government coordination, bringing together, finance, health, and social sectors along with engagement with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities.

So let me conclude. With a simple point. If we are serious about inclusive trade then we must be equally serious about removing trade barriers

Both tariff and non-tariff. That prevent people from accessing the tools they need to participate in the economy.

We increasingly have to evidence the tools. The question is whether we will act on them with the coordination and vision and

urgency required.

Because ultimately a trading system that excludes persons with disability is not only unjust it's economically incomplete. Thank you very much.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thanks a lot, Ralf, and thanks for also explaining on the work being done by the working group on disability and trade.

I will ask (audio breaking up) in tariffs and tax and an important point of a tool for inclusion to ensure that everyone who needs assistive product can assess them as well as the also reemphasizing (audio breaking up).

So thank you very much for those insights.

Now let me invite our good friend and colleague Fernando from UNICEF. Fernando is responsible for assistive technology and is has a

key role in scaling up the assistive technology in the countries. And he's joining from us Nairobi in Kenya. And Fernando UNICEF along with its partners which includes civil society, international and national non-governmental organizations are at the front line with the government to improve access to assistive technology. In all those situation UNICEF and its partner needs to get assistive products across the border, which is where the national taxes and tariffs gets applied. If you can brief the participants of this webinar on what role UNICEF along with its partners are planning and doing to address tariffs and non-tariffs barriers at the country level in the space of assistive technology. Over to you, Fernando, please.

>> FERNANDO: Thank you so much, Satish. And thank you as well to Pascal and the entire team at ATscale. As well as to Vinicius and Natalia and the entire team at the University of Sao Paulo. The contribution we made of this work is extremely valuable. A lot of it confirms our experience. A lot of us reminds us of things we already knew. But now it gives it a solid basis that is derived from research.

So thank you so much. I was particularly what came to mind as especially valuable, and this confirms our experience at UNICEF is the importance of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities at the existence of a coordinating body that brings together different ministries.

So you make it cross sectorial not just with the government but you make it cross sector across society. So you bring in the private sector. And OPDs and other users of AT.

There's also really wonderful to see the emphasis you have given to costs that are related to logistics. That are related to transportation. And just complexity. We tend to whenever we are coming from the perspective of wealthy countries we tend to underestimate how big of an area that simple complexity.

That's perhaps not the best construction but just complexity can have on the provision of assistive technology.

And this is where some of the experience I had I can share because I think it complements and enforces what you have highlighted in this study in this work.

We looking at this we immediately we have questions about so much

more to do we would like to know about other areas of assistive technology, and other industries. And this is a natural reaction. I think we need to emphasize here there was a lot of value that we already have and a lot of understanding that we can derive from this work that we can call low hanging fruit that we can act on immediately.

We do not need to know everything about every sector of AT to start making a difference. So for example, the need for simplification of importation and procedures. The need for better training. The need for involvement of users of assistive technology. Because a lot of knowledge is contextual. A lot of knowledge is based on the needs on the specific circumstances of each country. And the best persons to help a government prioritize what needs to be done first, how things

could be simplified, a lot of local knowledge with inevitably be best sourced from those that use assistive technology.

Now, I want to warn and I think this is already something that comes through in your work that simplistic approaches are never effective. What do I mean by that? Any generic rule like let's bring all tariffs to zero in assistive technology. That's when it's been done. And hasn't been sufficient.

So we need to have a sophisticated view because it's not only about trade it's also about the balance between what has to be done locally and what has to be imported and what has to be a mix.

For example, we need to carefully consider in the difference types of assistive technology what's the market size? Is there a trade area agreement with other countries that could make it viable to produce locally?

Also never under estimate the complexity of producing locally. Make sure you the government you the user, you the coordinating body of assistive assistive in the country consult other countries that have successfully brought production in.

Sometimes this is just assembly of products and other times it's more come complete than that. But you have to make sure that you look at it in a systemic way and consider the market size and the cost of the item and whether it's perfect to bring

And what elements of that supply chain should be brought into the country? That's a big, red flag for me. Any over simplification of the process. But I think the ultimate approach has to be you stick very firmly to your principles.

Principles such as let's maximize the benefits, the number of people getting access to assistive technology. Let's have a cross sectorial approach. Let's bring in all the knowledge we can from the health sector. From the education system. From the social protection system. From the private sector. From the Organization of Persons with Disabilities and other relevant authorities

But you have flexible in your implementation. Each industry may mire a different approach. And you cannot have generic rules that will work perfectly well across multiple segments of the assistive technology sector.

So I think this is a wonderful piece of work. I think you are leading by example by bringing all of us, bringing the UN system to this discussion. Reaching out to many segments of this sector in your research. And I want us to continue in this style and this approach. We have to act on what we know.

And be humble because the advantage is great. But with reward is immense. As a user of assistive technology I can tell you first time it does change lives. Thank you so much.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you, thank you very much, Fernando. Um, we are right on the hour. And we can take a couple questions, so (audio skipping) in the interest of time.

There's one question or a few questions which are very interesting (audio skipping).

To give people individually and to reach out to them individually. A few questions which I want to pick up, Vinicius. One is related with local manufacturing. And how does, you know, in the research work was there any findings which also illustrated the importance of local manufacturing in the sense that the products of the parts of the assistive products were imported and local manufacturing being done?

How did that have an impact with trades and tariffs and barrier?

>> VINICIUS: Thanks, Satish. And first, this is this is one of the examples how hard it is to track information when we do not have a specific codes. So like we cannot count on raw materials that are specific for assistive products because they can be used for other products as well. So we cannot be specific to this.

But it is important when you look at national legislation

systems. And how they make spare parts and assistive products

components also exempted not only the entire products but also the parts and accessories.

As Fernando also mentioned, sometimes assembly is first step with local manufacturing. And striking this balance how you rely on international trade and rely on your local industry to provide for your user

You may have a regional agreement where you have different countries working together to build this not only this scale for it will demand side by also the industry and the supply side. And you can organize your system to make the trade among these countries easier. And also with no tariffs so that you can manufacture these products locally and trade them between these countries so that you have both demand and supply happening at regional level. And this already happens with many other countries in many regional markets. And we could have this for assistive products as well.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you, I was told probably my voice is not clear? Is it audible?

>> VINICIUS: Better now.

>> SATISH MISHRA: It's better now. Apologies for that. And Fernando, I see your hand and while you will complement to Vinicius I have a one question for you and to Ralf. One question to Fernando in addition to what we want to complement to Vinicius's earlier remark is focused on how do we engage with the national governments? To reduce or get examples and relief from taxations. What should be the right process of engaging with the national governments? Over to you, Fernando?

>> FERNANDO: Well, like this areas this is specific to your circumstances. But what I have seen is that something that's universally valuable to countries are changes that cost later that have a great benefit to them.

So the type of analysis that you have done with this work is very crucial because you are showing that with very little revenue impacts you have a tremendous social impact. So this is precisely the kind of

argument that is very very much welcome by most national governments. What I wanted to also bring up is this balance between local production and the international trade or importation. We have seen recently a disruption to trade caused by the pandemic. Now we are going to see another very significant one caused by the energy crisis.

And we have seen in the past a periodically in many, many countries disruptions caused by currency change fluctuation and different policies

So when we look at the strategies we want to adopt we need to look at the immediate impact and the long-term impact on the supply and the which I that we choose. Thank you.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you very much , Fernando. And I'll take one more question that was in the chat. And this is it would be great, Ralf, to have your perspective on that. How do we research regional mechanisms likes the African union or African CDC and other governmental mechanisms to address the trade

and

tariff related issues.

>> RALF: Thank you, it's important to engage with all groups and the tar risk is a national decision. It's the nations that canned on decide on the tar risk except if there's a custom unit they have the same common standard tariff. But I think it's good if we use all blocks to support the work. And we are at very early stages here I think. So I think we are at a stage where we do awareness raising and show them what other consequences of having higher tariffs on these assistivedevices. Once we have done more work on this then we can work with all regional blocks like the ones you mentioned in Africa to inform member stateses about a situation

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you, Ralf. I see one hand. And please go ahead but it would be great if you can keep it brief.
>> Yeah, thank you. Just for your information we are working on a program. And the challenge between India and is the cost and barriers. And that's the reason that government of Japan has given this economy because they are cost effective and how we could have a synergy. And you talk about regional mechanism. So I think that's one. And a second like on the (off microphone) on the but not specifically but this is starting the same. And any pressure or any

policy on the ESC thing where AP pools or funds can be there for the contribution. That's beneficial for that.

I met AT start ups in the master countries and they have all facing the challenge of scale up. And other products. So thank you.

>> SATISH MISHRA: Thank you. So how would CSR can support in this process. I think that's the point which you are making. And thank you for also highlighting the study which is being done on the Japan and India AT market. We will certainly connect with you to learn more on that.

We have gone over the time. And my apologies for that. The technical report and the policy brief for assistive technology and international trade is available online. And we will have the links in the chat.

The webinar recording will be also shared publicly. And will be available at the ATscale website as well as on social media.

The next webinar in this market shipping series on assistive technology is expected oned to focus on assistive product market platform. And everyone will be invited for that also. And invitations should come by the next month.

We hope to continue working on this -- with those present here.

And to continue this conversation on how to build healthier assistive technology markets. And breakdown barriers globally.

Have a great day or night ahead depending on where you are. And thank you very much for joining. And thank you very much for your time.

>> Thanks, everyone, thanks, everyone, thanks, Satish.

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you, everyone.