

9th ATscale Board Meeting - 15 & 16 November 2023

Decisions, next steps, timelines

- The board endorses the financial ambition for the scale-up phase 2024-2027 of 150m.
- The board takes note of the modified country engagement approach which had already been accepted via written process prior to the board meeting.
- The board approves the Operational Plan and overall budget for 2024, including the activities where an implementing partner has been indicated (ad hoc selection) and accepts the justifications submitted for these. The funding sources recorded their no-objection to this.
- The board takes note of the updated secretariat structure as well as the possibility of adding additional staff if there are further positive developments regarding the funding situation.
- The board approves two items in the Operational Plan as placeholders while requesting to receive more detail: implementation research on novel fitting technologies and funding/prepositioning of AT kits (humanitarian response).
- The board asks the secretariat to table the structure for evaluating country programmes as a topic in 2024; and inform the board of the effects of a potentially lower management fee on the 2024 budget and plans for programming the cost savings
- The 2024 board meetings are planned for 5&6 March (virtual), 4&5 June (tentatively in Geneva) and 19&20 November (aiming for a programme country)
- The Secretariat will clarify issues around potential conflicts of interest relating to information in the Operational Plan.
- The board seat selection committee will reconvene, and IDA will join to address the filling of remaining open seats.
- The Secretariat will set up an archive with relevant documents that board members can access.
- A meeting to discuss collaboration on joint fundraising is to be set up including the ATscale Secretariat, WHO, UNICEF and a donor (USAID).

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

Jon Lomøy thanked the host USAID for inviting ATscale to Washington and the team that prepared the meeting. He welcomed participants and established that the necessary quorum was reached. The Chair especially welcomed Shona McDonald who was participating for the first time as the Board representative for the private sector. The draft agenda was adopted. The minutes from the board meeting held on 21 June 2023 - which had already been accepted through written process without changes - were reconfirmed as adopted.

Mr Anka Lee, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Head of Office of Development Cooperation (ODC) and Communications team in the Bureau for Planning, Learning and Resource Management (PLR), USAID, welcomed the board members on behalf of the host. USAID focuses on inclusive development, and therefore ATscale's work and its mission to ensure 500m more people are reached with assistive technology fits very well. The chair thanked USAID for being a most reliable partner in the challenging process of moving from an idea to having ATscale fully operational. He emphasized the role that governments can play as part of the ATscale partnership in elevating the advocacy for AT in international fora and with other global partners such as GAVI or the Global Fund.

Ms Tala Ismail Al Ramahi, Director, Office of Strategic Affairs, Presidential Court of Abu Dhabi had been invited to address the board. She situated the commitment towards ATscale of USD 35m over three years within the overall philanthropic strategy and activities of the Presidential Court. The funding is committed within the Reaching the Last Mile programme. Initiated by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan its main focus is on ending preventable diseases that affect the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities such as Guinea worm and river blindness. Having hosted the Special Olympics in 2019, Abu Dhabi has become increasingly interested in inclusive systems. This new commitment shows their trust in ATscale and its vision.

Board members enthusiastically welcomed the commitment and encouraged the Presidential Court to join the board in one of the donor seats and to help further leverage their connections but emphasized that the secretariat and the board would work closely with the Presidential Court regardless of whether they chose to become a board member. In response to questions, Tala Ismail Al Ramahi confirmed that reaching hard-to-reach children should be a part of the programmes that ATscale will engage in with the additional funding in parallel to what their "reaching the last mile" initiative stands for with a focus on community health workers. She then presented the new philanthropy strategy which focuses on reducing the burden of preventable diseases, building resilient health systems and promoting inclusive healthcare as well as cross-cutting enablers for these areas of which assistive technology is one.

General update

Pascal Bijleveld provided an update on ATscale activities and developments since the previous board meeting. Despite the difficult international situation, there have been successes in mobilizing new funding. The Presidential Court of Abu Dhabi will be providing funding under the Reaching the Last Mile Initiative. The European Union will fund a couple of specific global public goods under the MAV+ funding which hopefully indicates the beginning of a relationship. And USAID has decided to increase its funding through the Leahy War Victims Fund.

Given that most would be discussed later in the context of the 2024 Operational Plan, the update did not focus on country engagements or global public goods. Some bandwidth issues in the already lean secretariat (one departure and two staff on paternity leave) have caused some delays in delivery, but with the new Heads of Programmes and Markets and the further additions, the capacities will increase.

Despite progress, advocacy and communications are still much needed to raise awareness, mobilize domestic and international resources and bring about policy change. In 2023, the secretariat has worked with partners to increase visibility at events and coordinate activities and has grown ATscale's digital presence. ATscale co-organized a series of well-attended, high-impact events at COSP 16, the SDG Summit, and the World Health Summit, before the Remarkable Tech Summit and shortly after the board meeting at COP28. The participation of users of assistive technology from low- and middle-income countries has been possible in all events which provided a platform for their voices to be heard. The Advocacy and Communication Task Team meets monthly to coordinate for these events and other joint activities.

The social media presence has increased with 'themed weeks' (wheelchairs in August and prosthetics in November) which attract a new following and are a good way to engage partners. A recent blog from Susie Rodgers in particular attracted a lot of attention.

The board expansion continues with a private sector representative and a board meeting has taken place for the first time in a country with an ATscale-supported programme (Georgia). Engagement with important groups has begun and/or increased, such as with AT users, the Advisory Technical Group and the private sector through the private sector provider network which already has 163 members on a LinkedIn group.

Updates from partners

WHO presented an update on the multi-country workshop Accelerating Access to assistive technology in Indonesia which had been organized with UNICEF and supported with funding from ATscale. They are also working on one platform combining WHO online training targeting PHC-level personnel for Assistive technology, Eye and ear healthcare, Rehabilitation, Healthy ageing and the school vision and hearing screening interventions for the ATscale supported countries. In the Pacific region, an 18-month strategic planning process is underway to establish an AT resource facility/supply chain hub that will support national services and workforce.

UNICEF reported that Pakistan has ordered 10'000 hearing aids through the supply catalogue - a great development. There is a lot of support for AT in the organization and an increasing focus on demand generation.

Operational Plan I - ACCESS & DELIVERY – global public goods

Before presenting the details of the 2024 Operational Plan, Pascal Bijleveld asked the board to endorse the **phases of ATscale's development** which had been adjusted from the February 2019 strategy overview. After an initial Inception Phase, from 2018 to 2021, following the announcement of the creation of ATscale at the Global Disability Summit, the Start-up Phase lasted from the start of the hosting arrangement in late 2021 to 2023 and led to ATscale becoming fully operational. 2024 now signals the start of a third phase, the **Scale-up Phase from 2024 to 2027**. The aim is to grow the resource base to a total of US\$150 million for the 2024-2027 period of which a third is already secured.

The secretariat will develop a **multi-year strategic plan** for this phase to present to the board. Guided by this strategic plan, the annual workplans/budgets which the board would approve would then focus on the details of the plan's implementation - with opportunities to course correct if necessary. The board endorsed the phases and the level of ambition put forward by the secretariat and welcomed the development of a strategic plan.

Pascal Bijleveld also pointed out that while the pillars of the 2024 Operational Plan remain the same, the **strategic objectives have been adjusted** (1. Raise awareness, grow political will, and mobilize investment; 2. Strengthen policy, systems, and service delivery at country level to increase access to high-quality, affordable assistive technology; 3. Invest in interventions at global level to overcome supply and demand-side market barriers to build and shape assistive technology markets.) The board raised no objection to this change.

So far the basis for ATscale's annual Operational Plans has been the priorities identified in the five product narratives and logical follow-up from on-going work enriched by extensive discussion with relevant partners. The process for developing the 2024 Operational Plan involved 13 meetings with institutional partners, a group of 5 AT users and 16 independent experts, as well as incorporating written feedback. In the course of this process, in certain cases, the secretariat suggests the **ad-hoc selection of partners** with a clear mandate for normative work or another clear reason as laid out in the Guidelines on the selection of implementing partners for grants approved in March 2023. Some board members observed that the absolute number - though not the share - of ad-hoc selections has increased and that a number of these will be awarded to the UN organizations on the board. While it is clear that these have the normative mandate to undertake these activities, it was put up for discussion whether as a part of the partners' contributions to the ATscale partnership, some of these necessary activities within the mandate of the UN organizations could not be implemented with funding from sources other than ATscale. On the other hand, it was raised that interest in an area is not immediately equal to resource allocation and that while core and unearmarked funding are decreasing there is very little funding explicitly for assistive technology which also affects the UN organizations. It was agreed to have a conversation around this between the ATscale secretariat, WHO, UNICEF and USAID as a core donor.

There were some questions about specific Global Public Goods. It was clarified that the **AT resource hub** will link to important resources such as TAP (training on assistive products), guidelines from WHO, UNICEF and other trusted partners and that there will be a plan for its ongoing maintenance including its being a part of the job description of the MEL Specialist that will be recruited in the ATscale Secretariat.

There was a discussion on whether the **technical briefs linking AT to other areas of international development** should be demand-driven or whether they should instead target areas of donor interest to show how AT contributes to those and thereby provide arguments for tapping into funding for those areas - including potentially working on them with relevant big actors and looking at opportunities for joint dissemination. Several additional areas to explore were flagged for their importance such as climate change, inclusive education, employment,

social protection, ageing and long-term care, community inclusion, humanitarian assistance, inclusive peace and security.

The pros and cons of a **pre-qualification process for hearing aids** were discussed, e.g. the lack of generally recognized quality criteria while there are some product specifications, how this links to the range of hearing aids included in the UNICEF and WHO catalogues, and whether this would open the market beyond the “big 5” producers of hearing aids.

The board appreciated the openness in presenting the work so far on a possible **credit facility** for mobility AT in Africa and the conclusion that the market is not yet mature enough for this opportunity. However, it welcomed the shift to look at other regions or other products to explore whether a business case can still be made for such a facility.

Given the amount necessary for **implementation research on novel fitting technologies**, the board would like to see a more detailed briefing. This should for example consider whether the issue is to encourage leapfrogging technology in a situation where there are not enough trained professionals for the large unmet need in LMICs.

The board agreed to the **Global Public Goods** proposed, with the exception of the Implementation research on novel fitting technologies which it would like to see more detail at the next meeting and which was therefore only agreed as a placeholder.

Operational Plan I - ACCESS & DELIVERY – country level

Including the USAID programmes in support of ATscale, ATscale now has programmes in 20 countries across all regions. Of the larger programmes, Kenya and Cambodia have shown modest starts due to a variety of reasons and might require no-cost extensions. The programmes in Rwanda and Georgia/Tajikistan/Azerbaijan are on track while the one in Senegal is only just starting. A complementary proposal for the hearing sector has cleared a first round of reviews at Hear the World Foundation which would be a great addition to the Senegal programme. The 12 pipeline countries where NGOs have won the call for proposals have mostly started, and in many of the first coordination calls, there was a great presence from government counterparts. If no new funding had materialized, ATscale would not have been able to expand beyond this first wave of countries.

The **modified country engagement approach** which had taken the comments from the previous board meeting into account had been approved by written process prior to this meeting. The board reaffirmed the importance of the review of the country portfolio at board level and clarifications were provided on a few points. While direct funding to governments is possible, in this early stage of ATscale’s operations both the fiduciary oversight capacity for this is lacking as well as the time that it would take in most cases to set up the arrangements with national governments - ATscale will therefore continue to operate through in-country partners for the time being. Once the portfolio of countries is confirmed by the board, calls for proposals for the implementing partner will be done country by country. Government representatives are invited as an observer to the panel selecting the implementing partner and their opinion is taken into account.

The two upcoming **calls for expressions of interest** (EOI) were then discussed. With the new contribution of US\$35m over 3 years, ATscale can support the scale-up of vision and hearing screening and access to eyeglasses and hearing aids for school-aged children in 6-7 countries. The call for EOI will be limited to certain regions and include thresholds for government funding as matched funding and while sustainability cannot be achieved in 3 years, progress towards it needs to be shown. To elicit good responses, ATscale is reaching out including through partners such as WHO and UNICEF which is especially useful as coordination with the ministries of both health and education will be important. Given the size of the programme and the focus on provision, pooled procurement might become an element of its implementation. A second call for EOIs will be issued early in 2024 focusing on Latin America.

The board asked for a clear vision of **entry points for ATscale in humanitarian settings**. While it acknowledged that the early reaction supporting AT in Ukraine had been valuable beyond its direct impact both by showing ATscale as active and by encouraging others to also fund the AT kits, for a general approach to humanitarian situations, the board would like the secretariat to undertake some further conversations with partners and develop its thinking further for a follow-up discussion of the proposed way forward at the next meeting.

Operational Plan II - VISIBILITY & MOBILIZATION

Ceridwen Johnson presented the work on **advocacy and communications** to the board. Like in all of ATscale's work, partnership is crucial for this area. The Advocacy and Communications Task Team, established in 2023, meets regularly to coordinate on events and shared messages. The visibility and awareness of AT has been increased across a broad range of initiatives and sectors through partnership events with meaningful participation of AT users. Engagement rates across social media have also been significantly increased - with high-quality content. In 2024, ATscale will launch a global campaign that seeks to reach new audiences and thematic areas, support WHO and leading member states towards the adoption of a UN General Assembly resolution on AT, focus on sharing stories of impact (using video, graphics, and photography) and prepare communications materials for local advocacy efforts. The last was especially welcomed by the board and board members offered to support efforts in their respective geographic regions.

Grayling, the company that had won the contract for the **global campaign** - which in reaction to the discussions at the previous board meeting has no fundraising component - presented draft messages that had taken into account the feedback from extensive initial consultations. The board discussion centred on how to find the right balance between a simple enough message able to reach a large audience and oversimplification of what is in essence a complex issue. Examples include whether it is acceptable to focus on devices as the most tangible part vs trying to show the accompanying services and system strengthening or similarly to show one device to symbolize AT or whether the range of products has to be reflected. Showing individuals overcoming barriers risks reinforcing the common perception that it is up to the individual to find their way to integrate with society. The campaign needs to make sure that the social and human rights models of disabilities are translated into its messaging so that it is clear that it is society's duty to remove barriers. Going forward, the secretariat will establish an advisory group for the

campaign and ensure these useful reflections from the board meeting are integrated. Measuring the impact of the campaign will also be a task that is taken up.

Elaine Zameck gave an update on **resource mobilization** including plans for 2024. The Resource Mobilization target for 2023 is near to being met. ATscale has been in contact with 175 potential partners and donors (stage 1), is in discussions with 6 potential donors (stage 2) and has submitted proposals to another 4 (stage 3). 41 million USD have been mobilized from 3 new donors, some of these are multi-year commitments.

The board welcomed these developments and discussed the Global Disability Summit (GDS) 2025 as an opportunity to encourage commitments to the AT sector and potentially also ATscale given its links to the first GDS in 2018. The co-host Germany would like to launch a new initiative. IDA as co-host has suggested some areas (humanitarian action, data and disability, climate action, gender and diversity) but also emphasized that the commitment to a new initiative needs to be very sizeable and to consider supporting existing initiatives. The ATscale secretariat is also in contact with the relevant partners at the German ministries and with IDA.

Operational Plan III - SUSTAINABILITY & EFFICIENT OPERATIONS; IMPACT

Further consolidation of the **ATscale board** in 2024 will include filling remaining vacant seats, notably those for programme countries while aiming for regional balance. As the first unaffiliated board seats reach the end of their first term, a process for how a decision for renewal for a second term is arrived at will be established. The board seat selection committee will be reconvened and IDA volunteered to join this group.

The ATscale Advisory Technical Group which has already provided input to the development of the 2024 Operational Plan will be consulted systematically throughout the year and contribute to the 3-year strategic plan that ATscale will work on. The increased engagement with AT users will continue in 2024, including the launch of a global network. Engagement with the private sector will grow through thematic work with the LinkedIn-based network and exploration with a few major companies.

To deliver the increased budget, the **secretariat** will be slightly reorganized and grow. Work on programmes and market shaping will be under Satish Mishra who joined ATscale in November. At least, four Senior Programme Managers in this team will allow for expanded language skills and regional knowledge and even distribution of the portfolio of countries and Global Public Goods. The addition of an M&E specialist will also increase the secretariat's capacity to evaluate the impact of the first wave of investments as the board had suggested at various points during the meeting.

Operational Plan IV - Budget

Pascal Bijleveld presented the draft 2024 budget which will more than double compared to 2023. Indirect costs and secretariat costs will be reduced as a share of the total while the share of funding going to country-level investments will increase significantly.

The budget line related to the preposition of AT kits for humanitarian response was approved as a placeholder in the interim. The same applies to the implementation research on novel fitting technologies for prosthetics.

AOB

Conflict of Interest for Private Sector Seat

In the preparations for the board meeting, the question of whether or not the board member representing the private sector can share the draft Operational Plan with their constituency (Private Sector Core Group) had come up. In particular, whether knowing of upcoming calls for proposals in the case of grants and requests for proposals in the case of service contracts and their respective funding envelopes would constitute an unfair advantage should any of the companies/entities that members of the Private Sector Core Group work for want to submit a proposal. ATscale's Operational Plans could also be made publicly available to avoid any impression of an unfair advantage. The Secretariat will clarify this issue against UNOPS rules.

Board composition

IDA will join the board seat selection committee which will reconvene to discuss the composition of the board - especially regarding new programme country seats and level of engagement of board members.

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Participants

Organization	Representatives and delegates
FCDO	Penny Innes (online) Sam Bullen
IDA	Jose Viera
Private Sector	Shona McDonald
SAFOD	Ashllah Mmusi
Unaffiliated Board Seats	Jon Lomøy Ana Lucia Arellano Phyllis Heydt (online for part of the meeting)
UNICEF	Kristoffer Gandrup-Marino
UNOPS (ex-officio)	Andrew Kirkwood
USAID	Laurel Fain Michael Allen
WHO (ex-officio)	Kylie Shae
<i>Excused representatives</i>	<i>Patrick Amoth (Kenya)</i> <i>Zhang Hongtao (CDPF)</i> <i>Mussa Chiwaula (SAFOD)</i> <i>Clive Ondari (WHO)</i>
ATscale secretariat	Pascal Bijleveld (ex-officio member) Barbara Goedde (note taker) <i>Satish Mishra</i> <i>Ceridwen Johnson</i> (online for part of the meeting) <i>Elaine Zameck</i> (online for part of the meeting)
Guests	Tala Ismail Al Ramahi (for her presentation) Grayling team working on campaign (for that session)