

Provision of Consultancy Services to Develop Guidance on Designing and Financing Mobile Phones as AT Programmes in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

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I. Background

The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) is an operational arm of the United Nations that supports the successful implementation of its partners' peacebuilding, humanitarian and development projects around the world. The UNOPS office in Geneva serves as the hosting agency of the Secretariat of ATscale.

ATscale, the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology (AT), is a cross-sectoral partnership with a mission to improve people's lives through AT. AT is an umbrella term that includes assistive products/devices and associated services. ATscale catalyzes action to ensure that, by 2030, an additional 500 million people in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) receive the life-changing AT they need.

Worldwide, more than 2.5 billion people need one or more assistive products, such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, prosthetics, eyeglasses or apps that support communication and cognition. This figure is set to increase to 3.5 billion by 2050 due to an ageing population and the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases worldwide.

The large and unmet need for AT globally disproportionately affects the poor and vulnerable. Today, nearly 900 million people in LMICs need to use at least one form of AT although they have no such access. In low-income countries, only 10 percent of people have the AT they need in stark contrast to 90 per cent of people in need in high-income countries who do.

Access to appropriate AT enables persons with a loss of function, impairments, non-communicable diseases and the ageing population to participate in education, work, family and community life. Lack of access to AT has significant negative consequences for individuals, their families and society at large. Without AT, individuals may experience isolation and exclusion from education, the labour market and civic life. Lack of access to appropriate AT causes poorer health outcomes, including premature death, deteriorating mental health and increased risk of chronic health conditions and secondary complications, all of which lead to a higher burden on health systems. Increasing accessibility and affordability of assistive technology unlocks unrealized economic potential and provides socioeconomic benefits for individuals, families and countries by increasing productivity and participation in the workforce.

The global context is more challenging than ever, with the world facing a financial crisis, an energy crisis, unprecedented global tensions and climate-driven disasters. Those in need of assistive technology, including persons with disabilities, are generally those most impacted by such upheavals, yet they often remain invisible and neglected. ATscale was established to help address this gross inequity. Its voice and role are more important than ever.

For more information, please check the ATscale website: <https://atscalepartnership.org>

II. Justification for the consultancy

ATscale is seeking support for the provision of consultancy services to develop guidance on designing and financing mobile phones as AT programmes in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). ATscale is a non-profit initiative and 2022 was the first year of significant investments. Akin to a start-up, the ATscale Secretariat is a small team based in Geneva working with modest budgets to realize bold ambitions.

Individuals requiring AT can benefit tremendously from using mobile phones, especially smartphones, as an entry point to digital AT. Accessibility features and applications on a smartphone can provide similar assistance to many traditional assistive devices and/or augment digital assistive technologies. Moreover, smartphones have demonstrated their greater potential in scalability and sustainability than traditional assistive products. The use of digital AT enhances independence and productivity, improves access to the digital economy and democratizes access to information. Furthermore, providing augmentative and alternative communication to young children can prevent learning delays, increase their understanding of language and enhance their future communication ability. Growing evidence and advocacy highlight the impact that mobile phones used as AT has on users.

However, a large digital divide exists among persons with disabilities, particularly in LMICs, where they are unable to access mobile internet connectivity. GSMA's report [The State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2021](#) found that "mobile internet use has been growing steadily year on year in LMICs, which now accounts for just over three quarters of the connected population. However, a digital divide persists, with 93 percent of the unconnected around the world living in LMICs." Moreover, mobile phone ownership among persons with disabilities lags compared to the overall population in LMICs, with the gap in coverage among persons with disabilities versus the rest of the population ranging from 11 percent to 55 percent across the countries surveyed.

A key driver of the digital divide is the high cost of owning mobile phones, while those needing these products have poor access to finance. Although the price of basic smartphones has decreased drastically over the past decade, accessible mobile phones require minimum features that raise the costs. Additional costs of ownership include data, training, software, accessories and updates. Moreover, the lifespan of smartphones is limited to 4–6 years with additional costs of replacement. On the other hand, the purchasing power of those needing such AT is usually lower leading to a significant usage gap. While limited alternative financing options, such as government- or NGO-supported programmes, may be available for traditional assistive products, such as prostheses and wheelchairs, these options are not available for mobile phones. This means that persons in need are unable to access them.

There are limited government interventions for providing access to mobile phones in LMICs as these may not be considered AT due to their multiple usages. There are limited national level policies or programmes related to mobile phone access as AT in LMICs. Unlike other AT programmes, mobile phones are not considered a health or social welfare product. Only a few governments may include mobile phones on their AT priority lists, but these are rarely funded or implemented. Also, unlike traditional health products, mobile phones and the related ecosystem do not fall within the purview of health or social affairs ministries. Moreover, mobile phone designs, prices and other factors are very much driven by the private sector and by global markets and suppliers. While AT programmes in general are under-resourced, a mobile phones programme may similarly experience a dearth of funding and may struggle to integrate within larger national health or social welfare programmes. This presents unique challenges for designing and implementing a national AT programme, and currently there is limited evidence available that provides recommendations to governments of LMICs. It must be noted that evidence is also limited in high-income countries.

III. Objectives

The scope of work is to develop **guidance on designing and financing mobile phones as AT programmes in LMICs.** The primary audience for the guidance will be LMIC governments. The objective of the guidance is to support governments by providing a practical step-by-step approach to developing a national programme on mobile phones as AT. The ultimate aim is to support governments to significantly improve access to mobile phones as AT for those in need.

The work will encompass all persons in need of such AT, not only on persons with disabilities. The work will focus on large-scale, national, systems-level interventions – mostly public sector-related, but may include some private sector interventions with the potential for large-scale impact. The work will focus on a pre-agreed, prioritized list of mobile phones with the requisite AT features and available globally. The work will focus more on the hardware, with lesser emphasis on the software. The work will focus broadly on LMICs, not on any particular country or region, although case studies or best practices from particular countries or regions may be included.

The scope of work can be divided into the six thematic areas listed below. The proposal should cover all six thematic areas and be guided by the initial questions provided within each one. Please note that the thematic areas and questions are expected to evolve further as this work progresses.

1. Building a case and advocating for a national programme on mobile phones as AT

- a. What are the key explicit and implicit barriers in LMICs to building a national programme on mobile phones, including among public stakeholders, private/industrial stakeholders, civil society stakeholders and non-governmental stakeholders? What explicit and implicit barriers are

related to leadership and governance within the governments, national policies and regulations?

- b. What barriers are unique to mobile phones, or differentiate them from other assistive products or health products (e.g. mobile phones considered a luxury due to their multiple uses)?
- c. How can government representatives build a case and advocate for a national programme on mobile phones as AT (e.g. highlighting the benefits of improved health, social and economic outcomes for users, families and the wider communities)?
- d. Who is the intended audience of advocacy for a national programme on mobile phones as AT (especially in the government and telecommunications sectors)?

2. Overarching framework for designing and financing national programme on mobile phones as AT

- a. What conditions need to be met for a government to successfully initiate a programme on mobile phones?
- b. What overall approach should a government adopt to design and finance a national programme on mobile phones as AT?
- c. What are the key differences from other AT, health or social welfare programmes?
- d. How can such a programme be integrated into ongoing national programmes? Should it be integrated into other programmes?
- e. Are there opportunities for cross-country learnings? e.g. Georgia offers mobile phones with video call capabilities to people with severe hearing loss, Kenya provides lower costs based on differential contractual terms and payment plans

3. National strategy, policy, regulatory and governance interventions

- a. What types of national level strategies, policies or regulations are required or need to be amended? (e.g. inclusion of mobile phones or relevant accessibility features in a priority AT list, or adoption of universal design in mobile phones manufacturing)
- b. As this sector is rapidly growing, how to ensure national level strategies, policies and programmes to accommodate potential future trends?
- c. How can mobile phone-related national level strategies, policies or programmes be integrated into existing national strategies, policies and programmes (e.g. expansion of universal health coverage programmes)?
- d. What knowledge-sharing and capacity-building efforts are required across ministries to successfully implement such programmes?
- e. What interministerial structures and governance mechanisms are required for successful implementation (e.g. involvement of health, telecommunications and finance ministries)?
- f. What are potential financing and budgeting structures for effective implementation? (e.g. mainstreaming or standalone budgets)
- g. How to monitor implementation of the policy, strategy or programme? How to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework and integrate it into standard data collection systems?

h. Are there opportunities for cross-country learnings?

4. Key elements of a national programme on mobile phones as AT

- a. How to increase the availability of mobile phones as AT and of relevant software (e.g. identification of relevant mobile phones, accessories & software that meet minimum standards, promotion of production or import and government incentives to the private sector)?
- b. What are the programme delivery options for mobile phones (e.g. direct procurement and delivery by government, public-private partnerships for delivery channels)?
- c. What types of training and support are required for end users (e.g. needs assessment, matching needs to device, training on device usage and digital literacy)?
- d. What types of long-term support is required by users and what options are available (e.g. repair shops and batteries)?
- e. How to conduct advocacy and raise awareness among users and relevant private and public organizations?

5. Costing of the national programme

- a. How to assess the need for mobile phones as AT at the national level (e.g. prevalence estimates, usage gaps and purchasing power estimates for the target demographic)?
- b. How to estimate the current cost of ownership of prioritized mobile phones and relevant software in LMICs (e.g. hardware, software, data, training, maintenance, updates and purchase of a new phone)?
- c. How to estimate the cost of setting up the relevant ecosystem to support a national programme (e.g. training, distribution and maintenance networks)?
- d. What possibilities exist for achieving economies of scale by leveraging ongoing programmes (e.g. leveraging current PHCs, partnering with private sector distribution networks and integrating with current national insurance schemes)?

6. Options for resource generation or cost reduction

- a. What device affordability intervention options are available for governments to reduce the costs of mobile phones in the markets (e.g. reduced taxes and tariffs, provision of subsidies, creation of public-private partnerships for production and distribution, encouraging new social enterprises, free provision, reimbursement, micro-financing and integration into health insurance)?
- b. What options do governments have to generate resources for such a programme (e.g. integration into current health or telecommunications budgets, or using innovative financing and public-private partnerships)?
- c. What financing options are available to end users (such as free provision to identified persons, charity-based provision, national health insurance, vouchers, reimbursements, alternative payment options, micro-financing, cash transfers or conditional cash transfers, or private sector-led low-cost phones or payment plans)?
- d. What are the pros and cons and associated risks of the different financing interventions?

IV. Expected Activities

The project is expected to be completed in 12 months.

First, the selected team will define the methodology for this work and develop a detailed workplan. The team will leverage the available research to define a list of mobile phones and associated accessories and features to be used as the foundation for the research.

Second, the team will establish a Technical Advisory Group of experts from different regions, sectors and organizations to provide feedback and guidance at every step of this work. This will include identifying and inviting experts, having regular interactions, including but not limited to meetings, and sharing summaries of these interactions.

Third, the team will conduct a scoping review, including secondary research on the available white and gray literature, policy analysis and data analysis of hardware and software costs.

Fourth, the team will conduct key informant interviews, workshops and focus group discussions to identify recommendations. As there exists limited literature on this topic, this activity is expected to gather ideas to generate innovative solutions, to learn from other areas of AT, health or social welfare and to collect successful examples from the private sector and/or high-income countries. At the end of this exercise, the team is expected to be able to answer the questions in the six thematic areas, define an overall framework, provide a menu of options for designing and financing a national level programme for different country contexts and offer an assessment of the pros and cons of each option. The team will hold workshops or validation sessions with national governments to test the feasibility of the recommendations.

Fifthly, the team will, on an ongoing basis, synthesize the outcomes of the activities above in the form of guidance, policy recommendations and best practices in close collaboration with ATscale. This includes a final guidance document, to be reviewed by ATscale and the Technical Advisory Group, and supporting communications materials.

Finally, the team will lead dissemination efforts of the findings which may include webinars, workshops, participation at relevant conferences and events, among other activities, and ongoing knowledge-sharing through online or in-person engagements.

V. Outputs/Deliverables

The Contractor will be responsible for delivering the following:

1. Technical Advisory Group constituted and report on literature review findings submitted and reviewed by ATscale
2. Key informant interviews conducted and report on interview findings submitted and reviewed by ATscale
3. Final guidance document drafted, reviewed by ATscale and the Technical Advisory Group and submitted, along with supporting communications materials, such as

presentations and briefs. This is the most critical final deliverable. The guidance document should at a minimum include the following sections which may evolve as work progresses:

- a. How to build a case to advocate for a national programme on mobile phones as AT
 - b. Proposed framework for designing and financing a national programme on mobile phones as AT
 - c. Key national strategy, policy, regulation and governance interventions that need to be considered
 - d. Key components for building a national programme on mobile phones as AT
 - e. How to cost the components of the national programme
 - f. Government's options for resource generation and cost reduction for the end users
4. Dissemination efforts completed, e.g. webinars, workshops, presentations at relevant events, in collaboration with ATscale

VI. Inputs

[ATscale's strategy overview](#), [investment case](#) and [product narratives](#) provide information on the content of ATscale's work. Moreover, ATscale is currently conducting research on the impact of smartphones as AT on users. The findings of this work can be used to prioritize key mobile phones and software.

The contractor will use a global approach, using communications technology to conduct remote interviews with stakeholders, including governments, researchers, manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, industry consortiums, development agencies, among others. Regular consultation/progress update calls will be held with the ATscale Secretariat based in Geneva. Some travel may be necessary.

Currently available global resources can be used as a starting point for research. These include. GSMA reports such as [Mobile Disability Gap Report, 2021](#), [Driving Digital Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities: Policy Considerations for LMICs, 2022](#), [Empowering Persons with Disabilities Through Digital Inclusion: Insights from Innovation Fund, 2023](#) and [Four Considerations for PAYG Model in LMICs, 2023](#). Relevant reports from other organizations include [Strategies Towards Universal Smartphone Access, 2022](#), [Affordable Devices for All: Innovative Financing Solutions & Policy Options to Bridge the World Digital Divide, 2023](#), [Scaffolding Digital Literacy Through Digital Skills Training for Disabled People in the Global South](#).

VII. Time frame of the service

The expected time frame for the service is from end 2024, with a target start date of 1 December 2024 and a 12-month duration (e.g. 1 December 2024 to 30 November 2025).

VIII. Payment Schedule and Reporting Requirements

Fixed payments will be made upon submission and acceptance of the deliverables indicated in the Expected Activities and Outputs/Deliverables section.

The final payment schedule will be established at the contract signature stage and is to be proposed by the bidders in the financial proposal.

Example of payment schedule:

Payment Schedule	Deliverables	Cost
Payment 1: First report - within x months of signing the agreement (The number of months will be decided after the award following a discussion with the awarded offeror)	1. Technical Advisory Group constituted and report on literature review findings submitted and reviewed by ATscale	Total cost to be determined in the contract, as per price proposal in Form B
Payment 2: Second report - within x months of signing the agreement (The number of months will be decided after the award following a discussion with the awarded offeror)	2. Key informant interviews conducted and report on interview findings submitted and reviewed by ATscale	Total cost to be determined in the contract, as per price proposal in Form B
Payment 3: Key deliverable - within x months of signing the agreement (The number of months will be decided after the award following a discussion with the awarded offeror)	3. Final guidance document drafted, reviewed by ATscale and the Technical Advisory Group and submitted, along with supporting communications materials, such as presentations and briefs	Total cost to be determined in the contract, as per price proposal in Form B
Payment 4: Communication products and efforts - within 12 months of signing the agreement	4. Dissemination efforts completed, e.g. webinars, workshops, presentations at relevant events, in collaboration with ATscale	Total cost to be determined in the contract, as per price proposal in Form B

IX. Minimum requirements for service provider and key personnel

The bidding organization should possess the following minimum requirements:

- At least five years of demonstrated experience in assistive technology, particularly in digital assistive technologies. Specific experience in mobile phones, telecommunications and related areas will be an asset.
- At least three years of demonstrated experience in building relationships and networks with key stakeholders in the field of digital technology space at the global, regional and/or country levels. Specific networks and relationships in the mobile phones space or telecommunications space will be an asset.
- At least three years of demonstrated experience in policy analysis focused on digital technology, mobile phones, telecommunications, public finance, public

health or social welfare programmes.

- Demonstrated working experience in low- and middle-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, South-East Asia and Latin America.

In terms of key personnel, bidders are expected to propose a team with a minimum of two members. The team should include a team lead/project manager and a member/s with other expected roles, such as a Finance/Economics/Regulatory Affairs Specialist, Public Health Specialist and a Digital Technology Specialist. Some of these roles may be combined into one individual. If an Offeror does not have the expertise required for the provision of the services to be provided under the Contract, such an Offeror may submit a Proposal in association with other entities. For more information, please refer to the document, Section I: Instruction to Offerors, point 4.

The **Team Lead** should have experience managing similar projects and should meet the following minimum requirements:

- Master's degree (AT-related area, digital technology, public health, health economics, public administration, business administration, or related area) or equivalent (or Bachelors degree with 10 years of experience) with a minimum of 7 years of experience required in digital technology, telecommunications, public financing, public health or social welfare programmes.
- A minimum of 5 years experience in managing and coordinating similar projects, or their equivalent.
- At least 5 years of experience conducting policy analysis, producing strategic recommendations, reports and other materials relevant to the project design and focus.
- Demonstrated experience in building relationships with different stakeholders across sectors, conducting interviews and workshops, identifying future opportunities, among other activities. Specific experience with government stakeholders in LMICs is essential.

Overall, **the proposed team** should possess the following qualifications:

- At least 3 years of experience and familiarity with assistive technology, mobile phones and telecommunications, public financing, public health, or related fields.
- At least 3 years of experience in policy analysis, quantitative and qualitative analysis skills, solution-orientation, innovative mindset, experience in developing policy recommendations.
- Excellent written communication skills with the ability to assess complex systems and programmes.
- Demonstrated experience in LMICs is essential.
- Experience in engaging with cross-sectoral stakeholders, especially government stakeholders.

X. Working Relationship

The Contractor will be expected to work closely with a designated contact person within the ATscale Secretariat who will communicate with the former providing details of the services and specific requirements. They will hold regular meetings to discuss the process and content of developing the services.

XI. Sustainability considerations

Supplier Sustainability: ATscale is committed to maintaining the highest level of integrity. This includes respect for universally recognized principles on human rights, including labour rights, equality, health and safety, environmental responsibility, quality management and anti-corruption. Offerors must complete the attached DRiVE Supplier Sustainability Questionnaire.

Inclusion: ATscale values diversity and particularly encourages bidders who promote personnel with a lived experience of disability and/or using assistive technology within their workforce or who have proposed key personnel to apply.

Gender: The supplier must provide a clear statement and supporting documentation that outlines how gender is mainstreamed internally. This should include the organization's current or future plans/activities with regard to the following: gender diversity in the recruitment process, equal pay, equal opportunities between men and women, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse or any form of discrimination and paid parental leave policies for men and women.

To the extent possible, ATscale encourages suppliers to maintain gender-equal representation and geographic diversity in defining the proposed personnel team.

UNOPS would like to highlight the following Conditions for UNOPS Contracts:

- Article 2 – Responsibility for Employees
 - Article 3 – Assignment of Personnel
 - Article 9 – Copyright, Patents and Other Proprietary Rights
 - Article 10 – Publicity, and Use of the Name, Emblem or Official Seal of UNOPS
 - Article 13 – Termination
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