Overview

The Challenge

Children with disabilities are one of the most marginalized groups in society, facing daily discrimination that bars them from enjoying their rights and participating on an equal basis with the rest of society. Globally, there’s a lack of access to tools and devices that support children with disabilities, such as hearing aids, mobility aids (i.e., wheelchairs or crutches) or cognitive aids that help people with memory, attention or other intellectual challenges. Also referred to as Assistive Technology (AT), these devices are crucial to help children participate in society and access essential social services.

With a limited number of disability-inclusive items in the UNICEF Supply Catalogue, UNICEF is embarking on an urgent mission to bring a disability lens to our products.

The Response

UNICEF is focusing on three key activities to ensure disability-inclusive supplies are available and accessible worldwide: (1) ensure current supplies are inclusive; (2) introduce new AT products to programmes worldwide, and (3) improve advocacy efforts to gain a global consensus for AT.

1. UNICEF is currently analyzing its products in the Supply Catalogue to ensure they can be used by persons with disabilities. One example is the School-in-a-Box kit, where each item is being reviewed to understand how suppliers can modify it to be more inclusive.

2. To introduce new AT products to programmes, UNICEF is working with the World Health Organization (WHO) to develop guidance for AT manufacturers and suppliers, and humanitarian and development staff who procure supplies. This includes a procurement manual with quality measure checks to ensure each AT item meets the needs of persons with disabilities, and the Assistive Product Specification (APS), a guide-book with specs for 27 prioritized AT products that describes the quality requirements for manufacturing.

3. To increase advocacy for assistive technology, UNICEF organized three high-level workshops under the AT2030 Programme, a global programme supported by UK aid to bring focus to AT. The workshops brought representation from at least 18 governments, 13 UNICEF offices and four development partners. Other on-going activities include engagement with partners to conduct webinars, trainings and events.

The Impact

Disability-friendly supplies have a direct impact on the well-being of children with disabilities. Assistive technology supports their inclusion into society, thereby increasing the opportunities for education and employment. For example, a proper use of hearing-aids leads young children to improved language skills. Or, an appropriate wheelchair can increase the chances of participating in school.

UNICEF aims to contribute to 500 million people gaining access to AT by 2030, which is the goal for ATscale, the global partnership for assistive technology. By bringing an inclusive-focus to our supplies, children with disabilities can access tools and devices to help them participate in society and restore their rights as children.

Key Figures

| Challenge* | 93 million children with disabilities worldwide |
| 970 million people (incl. children) worldwide need eyeglasses and low vision aids |
| 94 million people (incl. children) worldwide need hearing aids |
| 75 million people (incl. children) worldwide need wheelchairs |

| Response |
| 2 | new publications on AT products by UNICEF/WHO |
| 3 | global workshops on AT organized by UNICEF |
| 10+ | new AT products en route to being included in UNICEF’s supply catalogue (wheelchairs & hearing aids) |
| 500 million people to gain access to AT by 2030 through ATscale partnership activities |

* Data from ATscale2030 and UNICEF Disability Webpage
Key Partnerships

To reach the ATscale global goal of 500 million people with assistive technology (AT) by 2030, it’s essential to leverage the strengths of our partners. UNICEF has undertaken key partnerships via ATscale and AT2020, and with the World Health Organization (WHO).

1. **ATscale**: To address the gaps in available AT products worldwide, a global partnership comprised of 11 organizations, including UNICEF, launched the ATscale global partnership in 2018. The focus is to bring AT products to children in five categories: hearing aids, wheelchairs, glasses, prosthetics & associated devices, and assistive digital devices & software.

2. **AT2030**: AT2030 is a global programme for innovating and scaling AT products via four main activities: data & evidence, innovation, country implementation, and capacity & participation. It is lead by the Global Disability Innovation Hub, with UNICEF as an active partner. With an investment of £20 million by UK Aid, the programme’s goal is to reach nine million people directly and six million more people through life-changing AT.

3. **WHO**: UNICEF and WHO have established a taskforce for accelerating the inclusion of quality AT products and services in UNICEF’s Supply Catalogue. Through interagency collaboration and the development of guidance manuals, UNICEF and WHO are using each organization’s strengths to amplify the accessibility and availability of appropriate assistive technology.

Essential AT publications

When developing, purchasing and implementing assistive technology, it’s essential to understand the specific needs and environmental constraints of the products. Such knowledge will advance inclusivity and reduce financial deficits caused by erroneous product procurement. UNICEF and WHO seek to build global uniform standards via two publications:

1. **UNICEF procurement manual**: The procurement guide will contain comprehensive directives to support timely acquisition of appropriate products and services, while ensuring quality measure checks to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

2. **Assistive Product Specification (APS) 27**: This is a key resource for making AT products available at an affordable price worldwide. It documents the technical specs for 27 prioritized AT products. The selection is based on WHO’s 2016 Assistive Products Priority List, which categorizes products into six broad domains: mobility, vision, hearing, communication, cognition and environment. This will be the first time that quality specs for AT products is made globally available, resulting in a higher quality of products for children with disabilities.

**Disability focus during COVID-19**: Persons with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as they are more likely to be excluded from the services provided. To support their inclusion, UNICEF and WHO have developed a disability-inclusive product list for COVID-19 supplies to help programme staff consider persons with disabilities when they purchase COVID-19 supplies. Some examples include see-through PPE masks that allow for lip reading and handheld sanitizers on wheelchairs to reduce the spread of the disease.

For more information contact:

**UNICEF Product Innovation Website**: https://www.unicef.org/innovation/productinnovation

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**ATscale Founding Partners**

- UNICEF
- Government of Kenya
- World Health Organization
- International Disability Alliance
- Clinton Health Access Initiative
- Global Disability Innovation Hub
- China Disabled Persons’ Federation
- Norwegian Agency for Development
- United States Agency for International Development
- United Kingdom Department for International Development
- UN Secretary-General’s Envoy for Financing Health MDGs and for Malaria

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**The Disability-friendly Latrine**

One example of how UNICEF is modifying its current products to be more inclusive is the Disability-Friendly Squatting Plate Addon. New “add-on” parts were developed to attach onto the standard squatting plate dispatched in emergencies. When assembled, the new device provides handrails and seating for children and adults with disabilities who have difficulties safely accessing sanitation services, especially those with trouble squatting.

“He can hold the handles on the sides when he sits so I don’t have to hold him. I just watch and make sure he’s okay,” Monira’s son, Hashim, suffers from an intellectual impairment, making it difficult to access sanitation services.

See video to learn more.