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**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING ACCESS TO
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY IN THE WHO AFRICAN REGION**

Information Document

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BACKGROUND

1. Everyone is likely to need assistive technology during their lifetime.¹ In the African Region, 90–97% of people who need assistive technology do not have access to it, despite its potential to reduce poverty, enhance productivity, and promote the well-being of individuals. It is within that context that Member States adopted the regional Framework for improving access to assistive technology during the Seventy-first session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa in 2021.² This is the first report outlining the progress made since the adoption of the Framework.

2. The Framework recognizes that assistive technology is key to achieving universal health coverage and responding to emergencies. The Framework further seeks to achieve the following objectives: reinforce governance and political support for the provision of assistive technology for all; increase accessibility of appropriate assistive products; improve availability of qualified personnel at all levels; and expand the coverage of services for the provision of assistive products.

3. The milestones for 2024 targeted: (i) 40% of Member States conducting an assessment of their assistive technology situation; (ii) 40% of Member States developing a national strategy to improve access to assistive technology; (iii) 40% of Member States establishing a governance framework to improve intersectoral coordination on assistive technology; (iv) 35% of Member States adapting technical guidelines and standards for the safe provision of assistive technology; and (v) 35% of Member States integrating the supply of quality-assured assistive products into their national procurement plans.

PROGRESS MADE/ACTION TAKEN

4. The UNICEF-WHO Global report on assistive technology (GreAT) was published in 2022.³ The rapid assistive technology (rATA) survey conducted in 35 countries included data from eight countries⁴ of the Region. According to the report, 10–15% of the population in the eight countries of the African Region do not have access to assistive technology. The main barriers to access include lack of awareness and services, out-of-pocket expenditure, weak integrated supply chains, and inadequate capacity of the health workforce. The recommendations from the report were used to support Member States to develop national strategic plans. As part of the implementation of the report, funds (US\$ 3.3 million) were mobilized to support Senegal's Strategic Plan.

5. Sixty-two per cent⁵ of countries in the Region have assessed the capacity of their assistive technology ecosystem to provide appropriate assistive technology and respond to unmet needs at the population level, using the WHO assessment toolkit. The assessment served as a basis for 17 countries⁵ to develop evidence-based and comprehensive policies and plans.

¹ (<https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/assistive-technology>, accessed 31 December 2023).

² (<https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2021-11/AFR-RC71-11%20Framework%20for%20improving%20access%20to%20assistive%20technology%20in%20the%20WHO%20African%20Region.pdf>, accessed 31 December 2023)

³ (<https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/354357/9789240049451-eng.pdf>, accessed 31 December 2023)

⁴ Global report on assistive technology, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Togo, Rwanda, Sierra-Leone, United Republic of Tanzania. (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049451>, accessed 31 December 2023)

⁵ Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra-Leone, South Africa, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

6. Twenty-three per cent⁶ of countries in the Region have developed their national assistive products lists, including for emergencies, using the WHO model Assistive Products List (APL). These policy documents guide governments as well as the public and private sectors and partners to focus on priority investments and scale up access to assistive technology.

7. WHO in collaboration with UNICEF has developed a supply catalogue for assistive products. Through global tenders, lower prices were negotiated for a range of assistive products. This collaboration will facilitate the procurement of cost-effective assistive products in countries for governments, field teams and partners.

8. Two hundred and thirty-three health workers in three countries⁷ were trained on the provision of assistive products at the primary care level, using the WHO Training on Assistive Products (TAP) tool. Their capacity was strengthened to effectively provide assistive products as part of the integration of assistive technology at the primary care level.

9. A regional collaborative centre of excellence for assistive technology is being established in Kenya with the support of WHO. The design brief has been completed, and construction will soon start. The centre is envisioned to play a pivotal role in policy development and training for the assistive product supply chain across the health system as an integral part of health services.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

10. Although progress has been made, the challenges of limited awareness of the needs and benefits of assistive technology, limited availability of assistive technology data, inadequate domestic funding, and weak supply chains, still persist.

NEXT STEPS

11. Member States should:

- (a) promote integration of assistive technology in key sectors, especially within health, education, labour, social care, and environment;
- (b) establish hubs in the Region for priority services, to ensure affordability and accessibility;
- (c) integrate education and training in the workforce and support networks, task-shifting and task-sharing at the primary care and community levels;
- (d) invest in health information systems and research, to quickly respond to emerging needs and ensure that assistive products are appropriate and accessible to those who need them most.

12. WHO and partners should:

- (a) continue to monitor the milestones and support Member States to adopt and adapt the Framework for implementation at country level.

13. The Regional Committee is invited to note the progress report and endorse the proposed next steps.

⁶ Benin, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra-Leone, South Sudan, Zambia.

⁷ Ghana, Liberia and United Republic of Tanzania.