2024 High-Level Political Forum
Friends of Vision VNR Lab Concept Note

Integrating Assistive Technology into VNRs to Deliver a New Development Vision

Organizers: The World Health Organization (WHO), The UN Friends of Vision Group
Date and Location: 9 July 2024, 9:00am – 10:00am, UN secretariat building, room S-1522/23.
(08:45 -09:00 Coffee and Light Refreshments)
Modality: In-person meeting held under the Chatham House Rule, conducted in English

Overview:

The VNR Lab will draw attention to the importance of ensuring that efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda include access to assistive technology and provide Member States with supplementary guidance on the various good practices used by governments to integrate the role of assistive technology in national development plans and policies as a cross-cutting accelerator of sustainable development and how this is reported in their VNRs. Member States, inter-governmental organizations, and all interested stakeholders will learn to develop, implement and strengthen policies and programmes, as appropriate, to improve access to assistive technology within universal health, education, labour and/or social services coverage and help fulfill their global policy commitments.

Objectives:
- Exchange experiences, and identify good practices and innovative approaches in addressing the role of assistive technology in the VNR review and drafting process
- Explore the breadth of assistive technology and its role in ensuring inclusive achievement of the SDGs; and therefore, the benefits of integrating approaches and measures of access across relevant Goals (SDG1, SDG3, SDG4, SDG5, SDG6, SDG8, SDG10) to maximize synergies, efficiencies and effectiveness of interrelated efforts
- Share existing and emerging assistive technology targets and tools with which to measure and report on access, un-met need, system preparedness, return on investment and impact.
- Assess progress made in achieving global commitments, related targets and indicators, in particular UN resolution 75/310 Vision for Everyone, WHA71.8 resolution on AT, SDG Target 3.8 and SDG Indicator 5.b, WHA 74/9 global target for effective coverage of refractive errors and others.
- Develop and maintain multistakeholder high level support and action towards higher political commitment for improving access to AT to ensure no one is left behind

Event Details:

VNR Labs provide an informal platform for experience sharing and reflection on the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process. The Labs, held under the Chatham House rule, are open to Member States, the United Nations system and representatives of Major Groups and other Stakeholders. This VNR Lab on assistive technology is being organized by the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with the Friends of Vision group (FoV). The FoV is currently co-chaired by Antigua and Barbuda, Ireland and Bangladesh.

Guiding Questions:

- Why is it important that access to assistive technology inform the 2030 Agenda implementation and monitoring in all its dimensions? How can the collection, analysis and reporting of assistive technology access, un-met need and system preparedness promote

and inform increasingly impactful policies to achieve greater equality and sustainable growth?

- What good practices and data tools may be used by governments to integrate assistive technology in the VNR process in all stages, including planning and preparations, drafting of the report, presentation at HLPF, and national follow-up after HLPF?

- How can the international assistive technology policy roadmap and relevant indicators provide support to Member States in the VNR process? How can government ministries, civil society, UN entities and others assist Member States to identify and integrate the relevant data?

- What are some challenges and gaps in integrating assistive technology in the VNRs and using relevant data and analysis to address broader sustainable development issues? What are some specific examples of how these challenges are being addressed in your country?

Background:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development places good health and well-being at the centre of a new development vision. Assistive technology as a term refers to the systems and services related to the delivery of assistive products which maintain or improve an individual's functioning, wellbeing, inclusion and participation. Around the world, 2.5 billion people need assistive technology in order to live their lives and achieve their full potential. With populations ageing and rising numbers of people affected by non-communicable diseases, this number is projected to increase to some 3.5 billion people by 2050.

However, considerable inequity in access to assistive technology exists. As few as 3% of people in some low-income countries were reported to have access to the assistive products they need, in comparison to 90% in some high-income countries. This cost the global economy billions in lost productivity despite cost-effective solutions existing today. Unaddressed vision impairment, for example, has a projected cost of $411 billion in lost productivity each year. However, 90% of cases of poor vision worldwide could be solved by a simple pair of glasses that cost as little as $1.50.

A global shift in perspective is required to position the assistive technology sector as multisectoral, broad based and essential to the achievement of the SDGs; and in particular in making universal health coverage (UHC) inclusive, reducing inequalities, strengthening communities and supporting sustainable growth, with a high social and economic return on investment. Improved data collection on the need, unmet need, system preparedness, return on investment and individual impact of assistive technology and the integration of this evidence within the VNR reporting mechanism will strengthen support for policy decision-making across sectors and countries and help implement global commitments.

Hosted by the WHO and the Friends of Vision group, this VNR Lab will create a space for Member States and members of the UN system to gain insights into why mainstreaming / integrating assistive technology into national plans and policies is important in delivering the 2030 Agenda and how these efforts have been reported in VNRs. Member States will offer practical guidance, as well as best practices and challenges encountered integrated assistive technology in their national plans or policies and VNRs. The event will be structured around existing global policy instruments and frameworks and how they can help place assistive technology higher on national health, education social welfare, and development agendas and more effectively integrated into future VNRs.