



Republic of Namibia

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER
OF THE
MINISTRY OF GENDER EQUALITY, POVERTY ERADICATION AND SOCIAL
WELFARE: DISABILITY AFFAIRS:
HON. ALEXIA MANOMBE-NCUBE**

**AT THE
WEBINAR ON ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY BUSINESS INNOVATIONS**

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Director of Proceedings

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**Our distinguish researchers and presenters from different countries
and institutions**

Ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted to address you all at this special event today. I have studied your programme and flyer; I am so excited to read about all the valuable information that will be shared over the next two days! The combination of academia, researchers, organisations for persons with disabilities and small and medium-sized AT entrepreneurs promise to make it an event packed with creative ideas that will indeed impact the life of persons with disabilities positively. I acknowledge and appreciate the wisdom that I am sensing among the group of people that will share their expertise with us.

I am, since 2019, aware of the Assistive Technology Expo when the Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD) announced the event that was supposed to be held in Windhoek in June 2020. We were all looking forward to this special event, but in the end, Covid-19 came along and cut our wings, but today we can say: WE ARE BACK ON OUR FEET AGAIN"! I am glad that we indeed make use of the technology to connect us today in this virtual space.

I had a look at the website of the Southern Africa Assistive Technology Expo (SAATE) and I am glad to see that the event is still scheduled to take place from 26-30 September 2022 in Windhoek, capital of Namibia. We are looking forward to the wide range of technology products that will be

introduced and showcased to us to make the lives of people with disabilities easier and allow us to live more independently.

Ladies and gentlemen

The theme of the webinar is “*Assistive Technology Business Innovations.*” Everything about entrepreneurial ideas make me excited, because I visualize how wonderful ideas in people’s minds become a reality, I see how people are *employed* to transform ideas into real tangible objects or in software that enhance people’s lives. In the end, people’s living standards improve because of the employment and the use of these devices and its spells a win-win situation for all. To design and manufacture products should be our motto, in such a way we will help Mother Africa to take her place on the global stages. I am glad that we have various stakeholders namely researchers, manufacturers, suppliers, service providers, Civil Society Organisations and representatives of OPDs from Southern Africa and beyond on this webinar- through our interaction, we can and will create a better world.

Allow me to pause for a moment and share with you the story of Rob Smith from England, founder of the business ACTIVE HANDS. I read about him on the internet.

Rob was just 20 years old when he fell down a cliff, which left him with a spinal cord injury and partial paralysis in all four limbs. One of the things he struggled with was picking up and gripping things, which made everyday tasks much more complicated.

With the help of his mother and her sewing machine, he started to make his own gripping aids- simple sleeves that he could put over his hand and tighten to help him make a fist and grip items. When some of his wheelchair ruby teammates wanted to use them too, he realised he had a business idea and founded *Active hands*, which is now a thriving family business selling to people all over the world.

The reason why I am telling this story, is to encourage you that persons with disabilities can guide you best in what they need, you never have to run out of ideas. Sit next to people with disabilities and those taking care of them, teaching them and you will hear the needs and you can be the solution to those needs. And when you employ people to make these devices, include persons with disabilities in the various processes.

Director of Proceedings

I am glad that the research “The 2020 Mobile Disability Gap” will be shared with us. Research is indeed one of our cornerstones to advance the course of people with disabilities. In the National Disability Mainstreaming Plan for Namibia, which was launched in 2020, we have 12 theme, and the 10th theme reads as follows: *Promote Disability Research by and with persons with Disabilities to Monitor and Report on Progress of the UN Convention on Persons with Disabilities Targets.* This theme is driven by Article 31 of the UNCRPD which is titled: *Statistics and Data Collection*, as well as Article 22 of the African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights on the Rights of persons with Disabilities in Africa.

Furthermore, I am impressed with the innovations such as rechargeable hearing aid batteries, the Signcoach app that teaches the Botswana Sign language and other that we will learn more about over the next two days. It is indeed so important that designers and manufacturers must enjoy our support. Your noble aim to uplift the living standards of people with disabilities is heart-warming. We must work strategically and intentionally if we want to make a difference, and I can see that you are already doing so.

Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to echo the call of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind. To the organisers, through webinars such as this, you are already doing this and in such a way, you are strengthening the efforts of the Government in Southern Africa to uplift

marginalised groups of people, such as the people with disabilities. I want to mention that in the Republic of Namibia, efforts such as these help us to reach our short term and long term goals, such as VISION 2030, The 2nd Harambee Prosperity Plan, the SDGs, and all other legal frameworks put in place to uplift the Namibian nation. Thank you so much for doing this.

In conclusion, I wish you the best with the various webinars that you are planning, leading to the big event, the Expo, in September 2022. Enjoy the next two days and hopefully, by God's grace, I will see all of you in September 2022

I thank you.