

REMARKS ON THE OBJECTIVES OF THE WEBINAR

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FEDERATION OF THE DISABLED (SAFOD)**

WEBINAR ON ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY BUSINESS INNOVATIONS

28-29 SEPTEMBER 2021

SALUTATIONS

1. Mrs. Alexia Manombe-Ncube, Deputy Minister for Disability Affairs in the Presidency, Namibia
2. Mr. Wabotlhe Chimidza, Chairperson of Botswana Federation of the Disabled (BOFOD) & Executive Council Member of the Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD)
3. Our partners from Loughborough University with whom we have jointly organized this webinar
4. Representatives from Government Ministries or Departments
5. All Webinar Participants from the academia, research institutions, businesses, disability organizations, and other sectors
6. All Protocols Observed

Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD) and the Loughborough University, I am pleased to join my chairperson in welcoming you to this webinar.

SAFOD is a leading Southern African disability-focused network engaged in coordination of activities of organizations of Persons with Disabilities. The organization was formed in 1986 by persons with disabilities. We work in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region. In each of the countries we work in, we coordinate our programs and activities through our national affiliate federations.

It is great to see so many enthusiastic men and women here, in this webinar, who are keen to learn more about business innovations in assistive technology and share their own experiences. This is just one of the many initiatives that SAFOD is being involved in to help push the increase of access to AT among persons with disabilities.

We believe that such increase will not only help to improve the general welfare of the persons with disabilities who will be using such AT, but also the entire society that stands to benefit because of enhanced participation of persons with disabilities in national development and in the day-to-day life.

Ultimately, the results of our interventions are not only for SAFOD and Loughborough University. If you are an organization dealing with, for example, issues of environment, you will appreciate how this project can contribute towards the work that you are doing, as increased AT uptake will enhance affective participation of men and women with disabilities in your work; so is the same scenario with organizations dealing with human rights, gender, entrepreneurship, health, education, just to mention a few examples.

To address the AT access gap in Southern Africa, in March 2016, SAFOD launched an initiative dubbed "Assistive Technology

Information Mapping Project (AT-Info-Map) project, in partnership with the University of Washington and the African Network for Evidence-to-Action in Disability (AfriNEAD), to map availability of AT in the region through a mobile application and website database. One of my colleagues will discuss this project in detail in his presentation later today, so I won't take much of your time talking about the project; except just to highlight the fact that later in 2019, we decided to organize a regional Assistive Technology Expo in Namibia.

Unfortunately, the event has been postponed twice for various reasons, the latest being the Covid-19 pandemic. The new dates are from 26 to 30 September 2022. In the meantime, to ensure that we remain focused on the objectives of SAATE, we are planning a series of webinars between September 2021 and September 2022, starting with this one, today.

The overall goal of these webinars, including this one, is to ensure that we do not only build the necessary momentum towards SAATE 2022, but we can also begin to achieve some of the SAATE's overall goals early, and progressively.

With regards to this first webinar, whose theme is focused on "Assistive Technology Business Innovations," we aim to provide a facilitating pathway towards enabling people with disabilities to set up and run their own sustainable and inclusive business.

Specific objectives include: to raise awareness of available resources related to business innovations; to provide examples of best practices for sustainable and inclusive businesses; and to identify steps towards the facilitation of resources and training to support sustainable and inclusive business.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have the confidence that this webinar is going to be a great success, and that it is going to help to elevate the AT discourse to the top of the international development agenda.

I, therefore, urge you all to freely share your views and experiences throughout the event, and to give everything you can towards the success of these webinar. In other words, the success of the webinar very much depends on how you unreservedly interact amongst yourselves.

May God Bless You All!

Thank you