Multi-Sector Dialogue on Bridging Innovation, Investment, and Inclusion Gap to Scale Access to Assistive Technology for Persons with Disabilities

SAFOD WEBINAR

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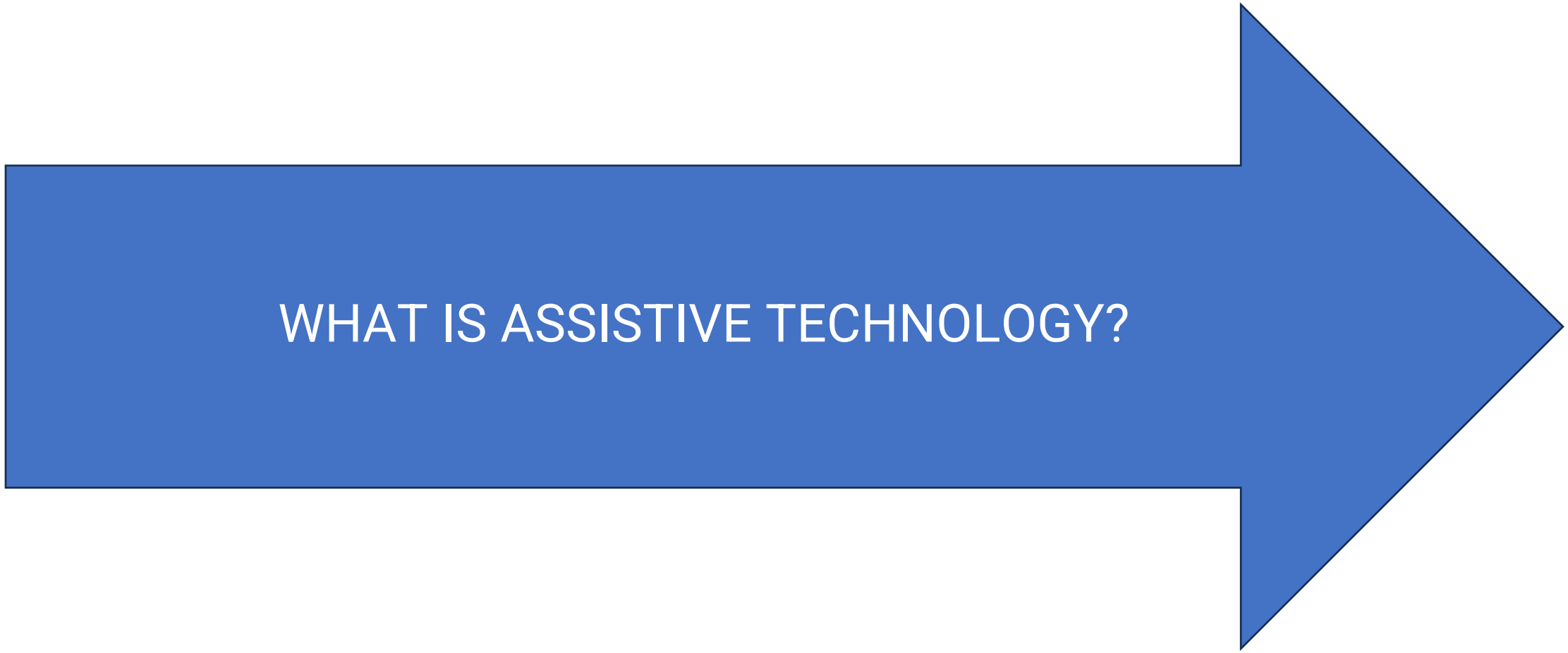
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY?



ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Assistive Technology (AT) is an umbrella term for assistive products such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, prostheses, eyeglasses or digital devices, and their related systems and services. AT is a subset of health technology (WHO, 2016).

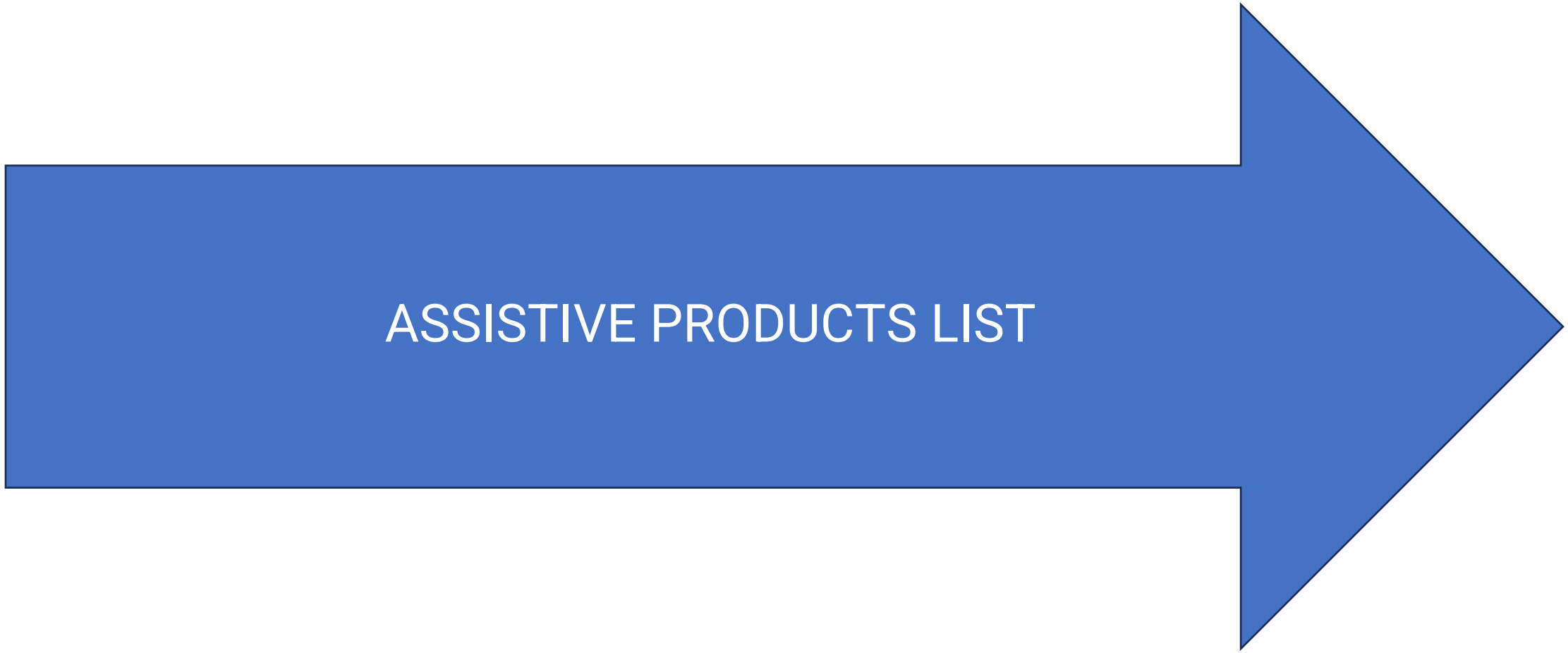
AT can range from **low-tech solutions like a pencil grip** to **high-tech solutions like specialized computer software.**

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

AT helps persons with disabilities who are estimated to be **over 2 billion globally,** to independently conduct their daily living activities, and to participate in all aspects of life, including education, employment, and social activities.

AT is also used to prevent impairments and secondary health conditions (WHO, 2016).

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) ASSISTIVE PRODUCTS LIST



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) ASSISTIVE PRODUCTS LIST

In 2016 WHO launched its first-ever **priority assistive products list (APL),** as a first stage of implementing a global commitment to improving access to assistive products for everyone, everywhere – the Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology (GATE).

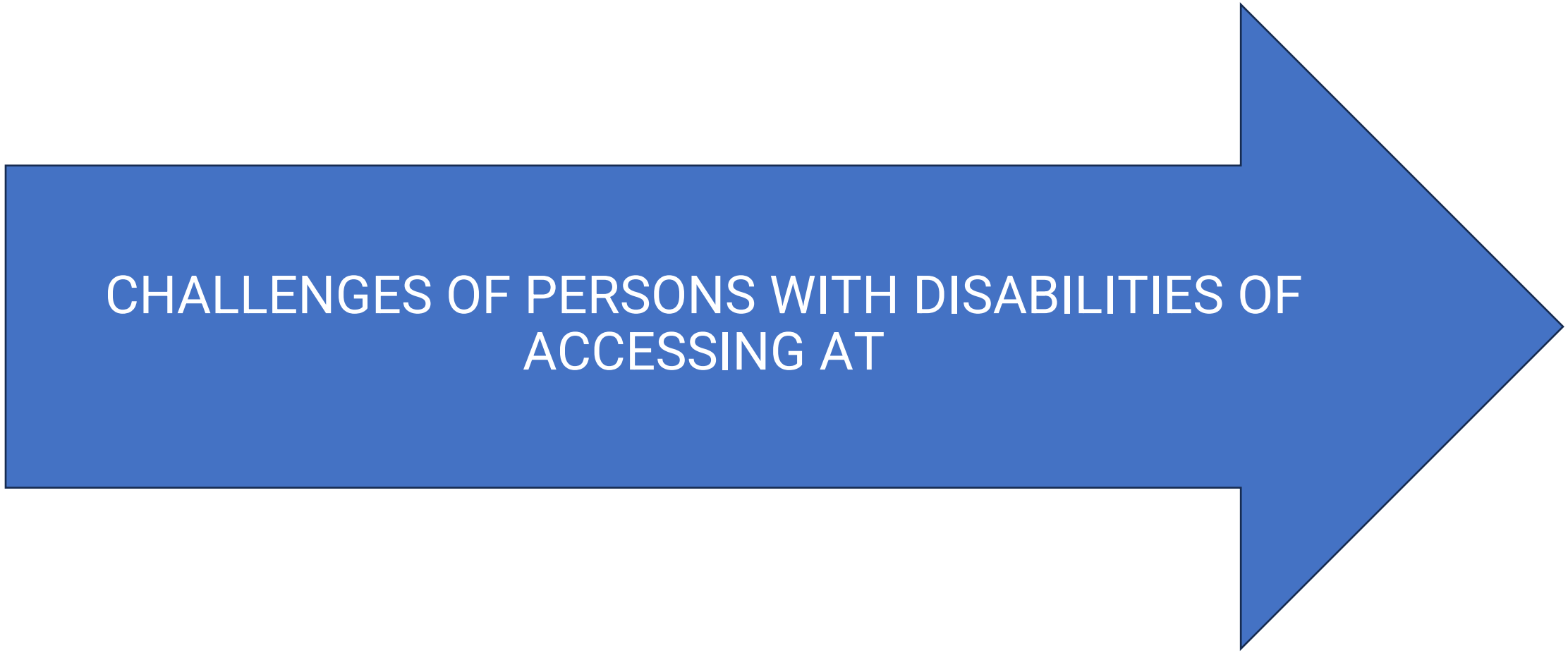
The APL includes 50 priority assistive products; the aim is to provide Member States with a model from which to develop a national priority assistive products list according to national need and available resources.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) ASSISTIVE PRODUCTS LIST

- Like the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines, the APL can also be used to guide product development, production, service delivery, market-shaping, procurement, and reimbursement policies (including insurance coverage).

- However, few countries have thus far managed to come up with their own national assistive technology priority lists, policies or programs. The list is currently under review.

CHALLENGES



CHALLENGES

- Access to assistive products is far from universal, many people have little or no access to basic assistive products, hence many people are being left behind.

- **In low-income countries only 10% of people have the AT they need**. Reasons include high costs, limited availability, inadequate financing, lack of awareness and suitably trained personnel. **In high-income countries 90% of people in need have the AT they require** (WHO, ATscale).

CHALLENGES

- The number of people who need AT across the world is reportedly growing fast due to among other things, ageing populations, non-communicable diseases and accidents. It is estimated that 3.5 billion people will need AT, by 2050.

- In many countries, access to AT in the public sector is generally poor or non-existent, resulting in families being left with no choice but to dip into their already constrained family budgets to procure AT - a burden for users and their families.

CHALLENGES

- Poor persons with disabilities often rely on donated AT, which usually comes in large quantities of sub standard or used products.

- Due to the intersection of disability and poverty, they are expected to be grateful for whatever they are given, even if such AT is not appropriate for the user or the context, and may even cause secondary health challenges or premature death.

- Similar scenarios are common in disaster situations, where the need for AT is high but is often neglected.

CHALLENGES

- In many high-income countries, people are reportedly able to access AT via health or welfare systems.

- There is a general lack of affordable and appropriate access to AT by persons with disabilities in low-income countries, compounded by inadequate financing, and procurement processes that are not disability inclusive.

- Where services exist, a silo approach is commonly prevalent, resulting in fragmented service delivery which leaves many persons with disabilities behind.

CHALLENGES

- In some African contexts, people often have to travel to different places to for example meet the requirement of 3 quotations, that are needed by public officials, for one to complete an application for support with AT.

- Such scenarios only serve to add to the burden on users and caregivers, who often given up on seeking support, due to inability to meet transport costs as well as consultation fees at the healthcare facilities.

CHALLENGES

- The AT industry is currently limited and extremely specialized, to the extent that it is reportedly serving the requirements of high-income settings.

INNOVATION

INNOVATION

- In current debates about disability issues, it seems as if it is easier for us to talk about the historical marginalization of persons with disabilities, than about moving towards coming up with innovations that arise from marginalization to drive ingenuity and innovation.

- Working with innovators who include persons with disabilities, to advance inclusion is a smart business decision.

INNOVATION

- Businesses can unlock business value through reaching new markets, tapping into diverse talent pools, and building inclusive networks to strengthen their innovation capabilities. The bottom line is that inclusive practices can bring about great benefit to all people, including to persons with disabilities.

INNOVATION

- In any case, demand for assistive devices is reportedly increasing, due to accidents, increased comfort with using technology, and rising prevalence of health conditions that include arthritis and knee issues.

- There is therefore a need for local businesses to seriously consider tapping into the market of AT, thus establishing local industrial hubs for the same.

DISABILITY INCLUSION

INCLUSION

- Inclusion is key to upholding the principle of the SDGs of leaving no one behind. We cannot talk about inclusion when people are unable to access AT.

- The active and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in building innovation-led and knowledge-driven economies is important from the beginning to the end - DESIGN, TESTING AND ROLL OUT.

INCLUSION

- Businesses that understand the concept of inclusivity, go beyond just ticking boxes of disability inclusion, but they find new opportunities and partnerships to drive growth in ways that uplift everyone.

- In any case, marginalized people that include persons with disabilities are largely an untapped source of innovation.

INCLUSION

- As such addressing the needs of persons with disabilities is not just a moral obligation, but it is also a growth opportunity for businesses.

- Economic value can be unlocked by pursuing business objectives that also drive inclusion and equity.

INNOVATION

INNOVATION

- Business practices that better engage and invest in marginalized communities can actively address systemic inequities and access novel commercial opportunities.

- For example, the WHO asserts that almost each person with disabilities requires at least one assistive device (wheelchairs, crutches, white canes, hearing aids, vision aids etc.).

INNOVATION

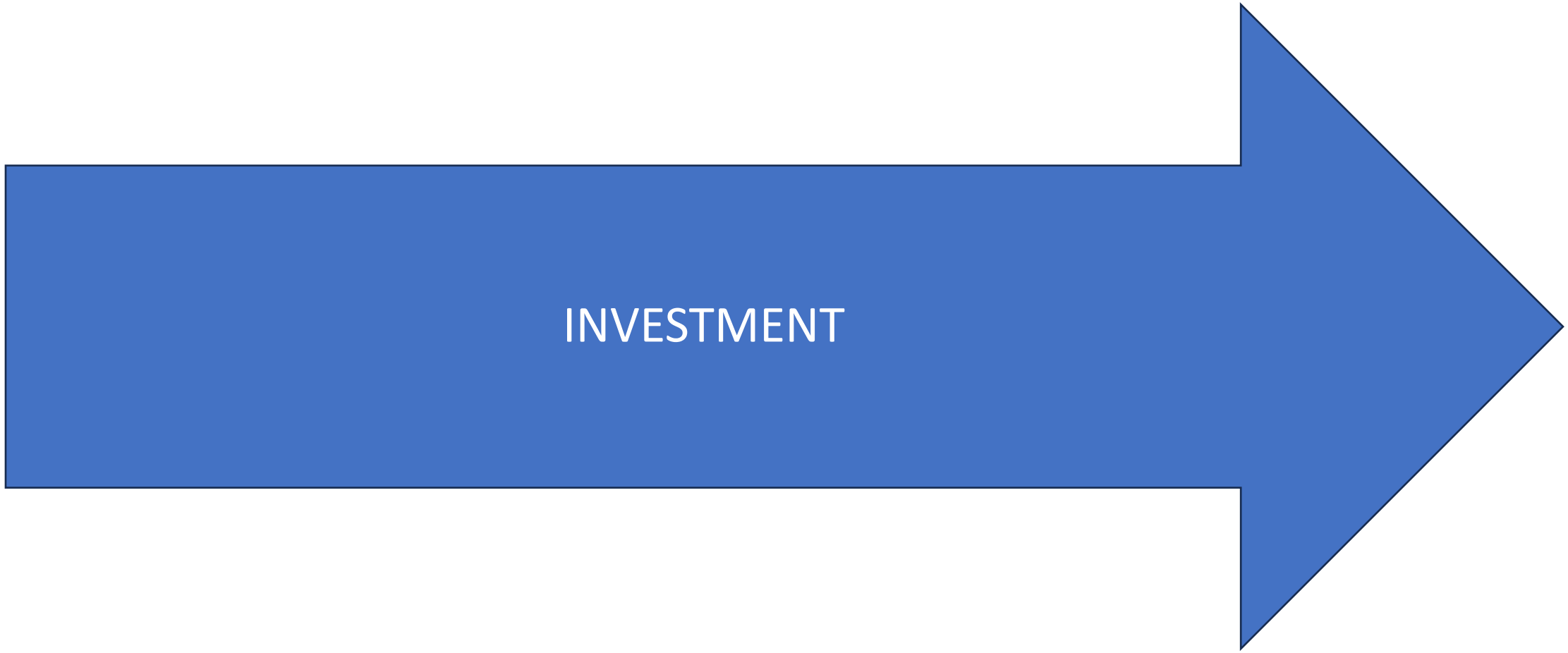
- Innovation hubs at institutions of higher learning including in Universities can design assistive devices, local industry can manufacture and diverse stakeholders can procure and/or distribute.

- End users include but are not limited to hospitals, rehabilitation centres, schools, businesses, home care settings, individuals, families and communities.

INNOVATION

- There is therefore a need for local businesses to seriously consider tapping into the market of AT, thus establishing local industrial hubs for the same.

INVESTMENT IN ASSISTIVE TECHNIOLOGY



INVESTMENT IN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Governments can invest in assistive technology (AT) for persons with disabilities through various strategies. These include:

- providing direct funding for AT devices and services;

- offering tax incentives or subsidies to individuals or businesses for AT acquisition;

INVESTMENT IN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

- establishing loan programs for companies that develop or manufacture AT, such as those providing mobility aids, communication tools, or software.

- Procurement policies that prioritize accessible products and services can further support AT adoption.

INVESTMENT IN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

- Governments can also fund research and development to improve existing AT and create new technologies (paying attention to both indigenous and contemporary knowledge systems).

- Additionally, investing in training and education for users, caregivers, and professionals ensures effective AT utilization, maximizing its impact on improving the lives of persons with disabilities.

INVESTMENT IN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

- Philanthropic giving to organizations that provide AT or support research and development in this area is also a valid option.

- The private sector can offer grants, sponsorships, or philanthropic donations to organizations that develop, distribute, or provide training on AT.

INVESTMENT IN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

- Collaborations between private companies, non-profits, and governmental agencies can foster innovation and expand access to AT, including support for inclusive design and manufacturing processes.

- Finally, companies can integrate AT into their products and services to increase accessibility for users with disabilities, which creates a larger market for AT.

THE END