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DISABLED (SAFOD)**

WEBINAR ON

**MULTI SECTOR DIALOGUE ON BRIDGING INNOVATION, INVESTMENT AND
INCLUSION GAP TO INCREASE ACCESS TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning

On behalf of the Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD), It is my honor to welcome you to today's webinar, which brings together diverse stakeholders under a shared commitment: **to bridge the innovation, investment, and inclusion gaps that continue to hinder access to Assistive Technology (AT) for persons with disabilities.**

This dialogue could not be more urgent or more necessary.

We are gathered here today as partners and stakeholders from across sectors including government, civil society, the private sector, academia, and most importantly, the disability community to engage in a meaningful dialogue on how we can collaboratively address the barriers that continue to limit access to life-enhancing assistive technologies.

Assistive Technology is not just about devices, it's about dignity, independence, and the realization of rights. Yet, for millions of persons with disabilities, especially in low-resource settings, access to AT remains limited due to fragmented innovation ecosystems, insufficient investment, and systemic exclusion.

Today's multi-sector dialogue is an opportunity to not only share knowledge and showcase innovative solutions but to also align our efforts toward inclusive, sustainable, and scalable approaches. By coming together, we can ensure that no one is left behind in the digital and technological revolution. Across many countries and institutions, we already have **well-articulated frameworks and policies** — including international commitments like the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** which clearly affirm the right of persons with disabilities to access the assistive products and technologies they need to live independently and participate fully in society. Article 4 of the UNCRPD calls on the States to promote the availability and use of assistive technologies. Article 20 addresses personal mobility and

access to quality mobility aids. And yet, despite these legal commitments, we continue to see **a significant gap between policy and practice.**

Implementation remains patchy, under-resourced, and often siloed, leaving many people without the tools and support they need. This disconnect disproportionately affects those in low-income and marginalized communities, where the promise of inclusion remains unfulfilled.

AT really affects not only persons with disabilities but also the development in general. The fact that AT will enable persons with disabilities easily access the physical environment and other facilities and services means that their contribution to the development of the nation will be significantly enhanced. That is why we must start to encourage discourse about how best to integrate AT in our policies, legislation and national programs.

I extend a warm welcome to all our speakers, panelists, and participants. Thank you for lending your voices, your insights, and your commitments to this cause. May today's discussions inspire action, foster collaboration, and pave the way for impactful change.

Together, let's reimagine a future where access to Assistive Technology is not a privilege, but a right fulfilled.

Thank you — and I wish us all a meaningful and productive session.