



REGIONAL INCLUSIVE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY WEBINAR

Opening Doors:

How Assistive Technology Unlocks Education, Skills, and Opportunity
for Young People with Disabilities in Southern Africa

"Innovate, Include, Impact – Assistive Technology for Resilient Communities"

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Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 15.6% of people in the African Region have a moderate or severe disability, driving a growing demand for assistive technologies such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, low vision devices, and other mobility and communication tools.

Across Southern Africa, millions of children and young people with disabilities continue to face barriers to education, skills development, and equal opportunities due to inaccessible environments, limited access to assistive technology, poverty, and stigma. Yet, when available, assistive technology opens doors to learning, independence, employment, and full participation in society.



What is Assistive Technology?

Refers to a wide range of tools, devices, equipment, or systems that are designed to assist individuals with functional impairments, including those with disabilities in performing tasks, improving their functional abilities, and enhancing their independence

From screen readers and hearing aids to wheelchairs and communication devices — AT is a powerful enabler of inclusion and equal opportunity.



Assistive Technology in Education

Education is a fundamental human right under the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD)** and **SDG 4** — yet many learners with disabilities remain excluded due to inaccessible infrastructure and lack of AT.

AT Helps Learners To:

- ✓ Access classrooms and learning materials independently
- ✓ Participate actively alongside their peers
- ✓ Improve communication with teachers and classmates
- ✓ Build confidence and self-esteem
- ✓ Reduce dependence on caregivers

Examples of Assistive Technology:

- Braille books & refreshable Braille displays
- Hearing aids
- Wheelchairs, walkers & adapted desks
- Speech-generating devices
- Screen readers & magnification software



Building Skills for the Future

The digital economy is rapidly reshaping employment across Southern Africa. Young people with disabilities must be equipped with digital and vocational skills to compete equally.

Assistive Technology Enables Young People To:

- ✓ Learn digital literacy
- ✓ Participate in online education
- ✓ Access vocational training
- ✓ Develop entrepreneurial skills
- ✓ Work remotely using accessible technology

Digital Assistive Technologies:

- Screen reading software
- Speech-to-text software
- Text-to-speech applications
- Accessible smartphones
- Voice recognition software
- Captioning software
- Accessible learning management systems

Opportunities Created by Assistive Technology

When appropriate assistive technology is available, young people with disabilities gain access to:

1



Inclusive Education

Students stay in school longer, achieve better academic outcomes, and transition successfully into higher education.

2



Employment

Accessible technology removes workplace barriers, allowing persons with disabilities to perform jobs effectively.

3



Entrepreneurship

Young entrepreneurs start online businesses, provide digital services, and participate in e-commerce.

4



Civic Participation

Young people become active participants in leadership, governance, and community development.

5



Independent Living

AT enhances mobility, communication, and self-care — promoting dignity and independence.

Assistive Technology in Action

Real learners and community members across Zimbabwe using assistive devices to learn, move, and participate independently.



A learner using a wheelchair proudly represents her school at a formal event.



Mobility aids such as crutches support active community and civic participation.



A young learner uses a white cane to navigate her school grounds independently.

Gaps/Challenges Facing Southern Africa

Despite progress, access to assistive technology remains limited — challenges that disproportionately affect rural communities where disability services are often unavailable.

 High cost of assistive devices

 Limited local production

 Weak supply chains

 Lack of trained rehabilitation professionals

 Inadequate funding

 Rural-urban disparities

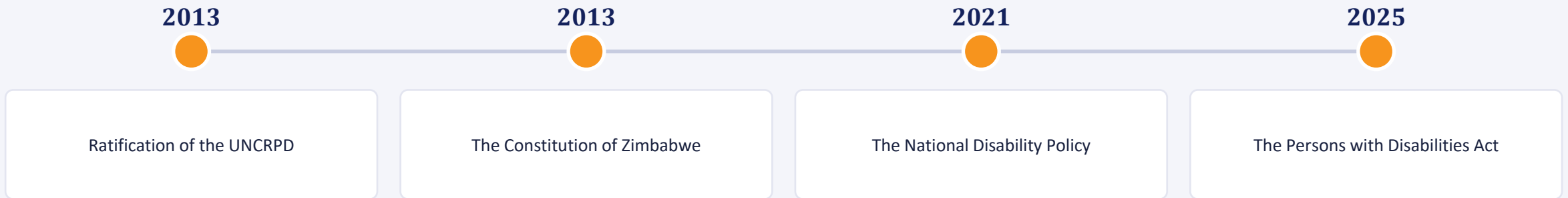
 Limited awareness among families & educators

 Stigma and discrimination

 Poor maintenance & repair services

The Zimbabwean Context

Zimbabwe's Commitments to Disability Inclusion



Yet Many Learners with Disabilities Still Face:





Local Impact in Action

Nkomwa Foundation Trust & Postal Telecomm Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ)

Organizations such as **Nkomwa Foundation Trust**, in partnership with stakeholders including **POTRAZ**, are demonstrating how digital skills training combined with assistive technology can empower young people with disabilities. PWDs trained on digital skills-904, Institutions supported with communication tools-94.



Acquire ICT skills



Improve digital inclusion



Increase employment & entrepreneurship opportunities

Call To Action

To unlock opportunities for young people with disabilities, Southern African governments and partners should:

- 1** Increase investment in affordable assistive technology
- 2** Integrate assistive technology into national education systems
- 3** Train teachers in inclusive education and assistive technology
- 4** Strengthen public-private partnerships
- 5** Promote local manufacturing and repair services
- 6** Expand digital infrastructure in rural communities
- 7** Involve persons with disabilities in policy development
- 8** Improve data collection on disability & AT needs
- 9** Raise community awareness to reduce stigma
- 10** Ensure sustainable financing mechanisms for AT

Conclusion

Assistive technology is more than equipment — it is a gateway to education, independence, dignity, and opportunity. Governments, development partners, civil society, organisations for persons with disabilities, educational institutions, and the private sector must work together so that no young person is left behind.

Exclusion



Participation

Dependence



Independence

Unemployment



Meaningful Livelihoods

By investing in inclusive technologies today, Southern Africa can build a future where every young person — regardless of disability — has the opportunity to learn, thrive, innovate, and contribute to sustainable development.



CLOSING MESSAGE

“Southern Africa's future depends on ensuring that every child and young person—regardless of disability—has access to the assistive technology, education and opportunities needed to reach their full potential. Investing in Assistive Technology is investing in an inclusive and prosperous Southern Africa.”

Dr Pick Nkomwa | Founding Director, Nkomwa Foundation Trust

Thank you.