

AT DIGEST ISSUE 2

Reflection on barriers to accessing assistive technology
in low- and middle-income countries



Introduction:

“The role that my device plays is like water to those marooned on a deserted island ...”

Quote from a student who is hard of hearing, Pakistan

Assistive technology (AT) has immense potential to improve independence, participation, and productivity, facilitate access to education, employment, and family life. However, the [Global report](#) on AT published by the World Health Organization revealed that one billion potential users are denied access to AT. In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), only 3% percent of those who need such life-changing products have access to them.

This article reflects on key barriers to assistive technology in LMICs. These reflections are from IDA’s Assistive Technology User Fellows from Africa (Uganda), Asia-Pacific (Bangladesh and Pakistan), Middle East and North Africa (Sudan) and Latin America (Peru), as well as from participants of assistive technology workshops from amongst Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in Kenya and Rwanda held in November-December 2023.



Barriers across Borders



AT devices are **not widely available**, particularly in the rural areas of all seven countries. The distribution chain of assistive products and provision in most countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sudan, and Uganda is not balanced. The availability and distribution in Kenya is better due to better cross- sectoral efforts. Across nations, AT is concentrated in the cities, leading to the forced migration of the families of children with disabilities to access educational settings that offer AT. The assistive products available may be rendered unusable due to the difficult and unpaved terrain, for example in hilly areas of Rwanda and Bangladesh, as these products have not been developed with these considerations in mind. It was observed in all countries that mobile phone applications and other technology-based solutions for communication, transportation, and access to information are often unavailable or inaccessible due to limited internet connectivity, the lack of digital literacy and financial insolvency insufficiencies. Specialized devices and training on those for deafblind individuals are practically non-existent in remote areas of Bangladesh and Uganda. There is also a lack of qualified personnel to maintain assistive technology, which means that when an assistive product such as a wheelchair breaks down, it cannot be repaired in the places where the user resides.

[Read more.](#)

AT Fellows' Reflection Corner

A key component of the IDA-GDI Hub AT Fellowship is to offer fellows exposure to global and regional discussions and opportunities to engage with a variety of stakeholders. The AT Fellows' Reflection Corner is a space for fellows to share their thoughts and insights as they work on varied projects through the course of their fellowship. In this second issue of AT Digest, Elizabeth Campos from Peru reflects on the AT Workshop conducted in Peru. [Read more](#)

