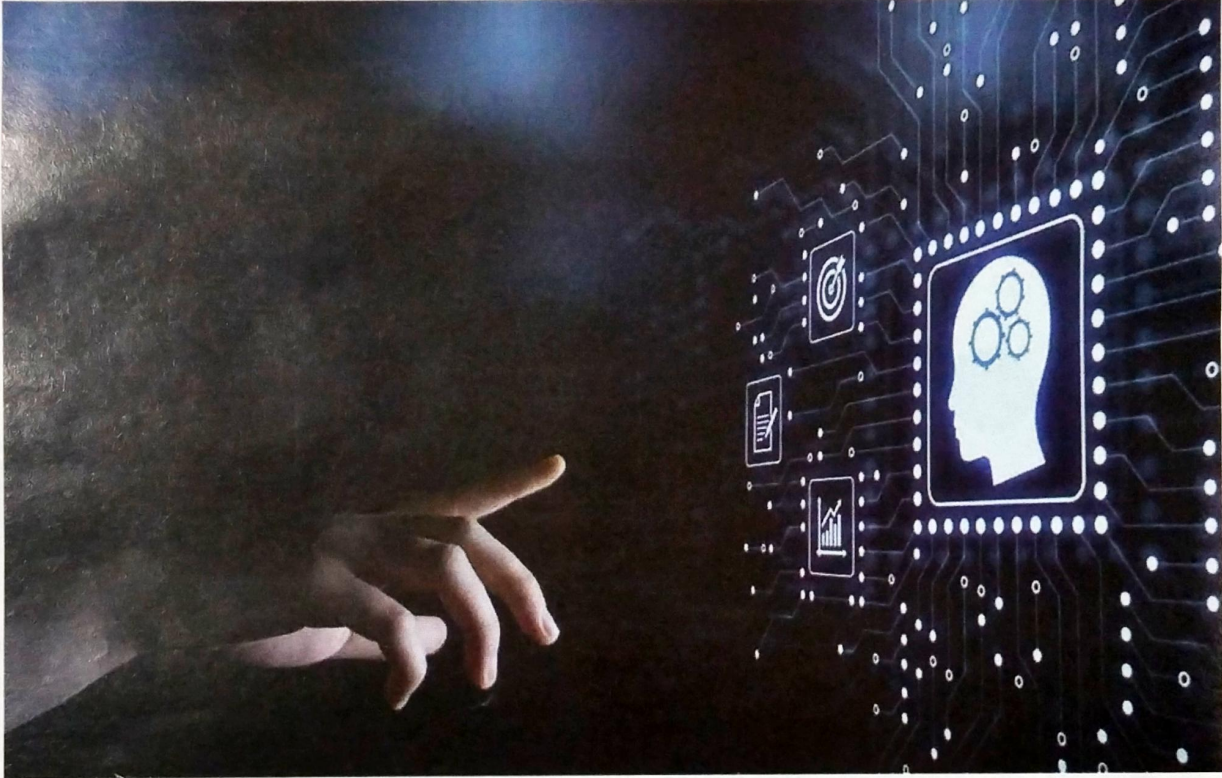


# Assistive Technology: Not just a humanitarian decision

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Assistive Technology (AT) is helping people with disabilities to overcome barriers and perform tasks that might otherwise be challenging or impossible. While providing assistive technology to people with disabilities is undoubtedly a humanitarian decision, it is also a smart economic and social decision. Here are a few reasons why:

It was very encouraging to see PCQuest cover Assistive Technology products and services in their recent issue (February 2023) thereby giving much needed visibility and credibility to this growing space.

Persons with Disabilities in India should

have equal opportunity and ability to earn their livelihood and lead a happy and satisfied life.

The Indian statistics (based on the 2011-16 census) on Persons with disability (PwD) indicate that there were at least 27 million people with one or more of the following

disabilities: Seeing, hearing speech, movement, mental illness and multiple things. The actual number today is probably over 100 million. Meanwhile the a world report on disability estimated that, more than 1 billion adults and children worldwide were living with some form of disability

It is imperative both humanitarian as well as economic, to bring this vast community into the mainstream with on-par Learning, Living and Livelihood (3 Ls) standards. This will not only give equal opportunity to the community but potentially improve the GDP of the country too by a few points. This is a huge, for profit, social entrepreneurship/business opportunity too.

One of the keys to unlocking this 3 Ls challenge is the use of 'Assistive Technology (AT)'. Assistive technology includes devices, equipment, instruments and software, for use by persons with disability for participation; to protect, support, train, measure or substitute for body functions/structures and activities; or to prevent impairments, activity limitations or participation restrictions.

As a life changer, AT can support people in need in all aspects of life – when appropriate to users and their environment, assistive products enable them to move around independently, communicate more effectively, and reduce the consequences of cognitive, mobility, hearing and vision impairments. These further increase the individual user's well-being, self-esteem, self-image, and the motivation to pursue important life goals. From the perspective of those responsible for public policy, assistive technology enables people to live healthy, productive, independent and dignified lives, and to learn, work and generally take part in society. It results in socioeconomic benefits such as reduced direct health and welfare costs (such as recurrent hospital admissions or state benefits), and a more productive labour force, indirectly stimulating economic growth.

This is easier said than done as it requires a multi-dimensional approach. The widespread availability and use of Assistive Technology requires the convergence of public policy, entrepreneurship, funding and world class manufacturing facilities on the one hand and distribution networks, consumer marketplaces



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and access on the other.

One market research firm estimated that the assistive technology global market will grow from US\$ 14 billion in 2015 to between US\$ 26 – 31 billion by 2024. The investments required to strengthen and improve product / service delivery systems and provide the assistive products while significant are small relative to these benefits. In fact, investing in increased AT access will generate a ROI of 9:1.

Then there is the significant role of businesses big or small and corporations, to make that leap of faith and recruit, train and employ PwDs in large numbers.

It is our hope that if we as a country start Executing on these building blocks it would be the start of creating a well-connected mutually dependant ecosystem that would enable many persons with disability to come out of their Current underprivileged situations and move towards Learning Livelihood and Living.

Over the next few articles, we will unravel these building blocks and examine in some detail what can and needs to be done.

(AssisTech Foundation (ATF) is India's first assistive technology focused ecosystem enabler that enables empowerment of people with disabilities in areas of living, learning and livelihood by leveraging Assistive Technology.)

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