AT DIGEST ISSUE 3

The importance of meaningful consultation in AT policymaking
Introduction:

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More than 2.5 billion people around the world need at least one assistive product to support their full and effective participation in their lives, out of them, 90% do not have access to assistive technology. While access to AT is limited globally, the unmet AT need is disproportionately high in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMIC), where only 5–15% of people who require AT access have access to AT. Lack of human-centered AT policies is largely responsible for these huge unmet needs across the world. Integrating human-centered AT policies into the legal frameworks of the countries is a prerequisite for ensuring AT for all potential users. This article focuses on the relevance of meaningful consultation with and participation of AT users, including organizations of persons with disabilities, to AT policy making and implementation processes.
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) recognizes people’s right to participate in the government of his or her country directly or through chosen representatives. Article 4.3 of the CRPD reiterated the legal obligation of States Parties to closely consult with persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities and their representative organizations in the development and implementation of laws and policies. General Comment No.7 issued by the CRPD Committee further explained the obligations of States Parties to consult OPDs meaningfully, the process of how to consult meaningfully, and how to meaningfully engage OPDs in the monitoring processes. IDA-GDI Hub AT fellows observed in their countries that public policies are developed from a technical perspective and bureaucratic processes, and do not include consultations with beneficiaries and target groups of the policy, which in many cases causes policies to be disconnected from the life experience of people and does not identify their priority needs.
During this wonderful journey, my knowledge of the Sudanese context related to assistive technologies has increased, and I have also gained cumulative knowledge through reviewing the initial draft by discussing with the fellows and the project leads at IDA. The collaborative work in the review stage was effective and fruitful, as I listened to the colleagues and their different opinions, gaining a deeper understanding of their local contexts and diverse backgrounds.