AT2030 Venture Spotlight Series

Scaling assistive technology innovation

This AT2030 Spotlight Series profiles growth-stage assistive technology businesses developing practical technologies and business models to meet unmet access needs at scale. Each case study explores the problem they are addressing, the model they are building, the evidence behind their work, and how AT2030, GDI Hub and GDI Accelerate are supporting their growth trajectory.

UK International Development
Partnership | Progress | Prosperity

AT2030

Global Disability Innovation Hub

GDI Hub Accelerate

Shonaquip

Thirty years of building assistive technology systems that last.

30+
Years shaping a market and delivering AT in Africa

3 regions
Southern, East and West Africa

Tens of thousands
People reached over time

Shonaquip is a South Africa-based social enterprise working at the intersection of assistive technology, disability inclusion, and systems change. Over more than 30 years, they have developed an approach shaped by a simple reality: providing a device is not enough.

Their work spans the design and manufacturing of mobility and posture support devices, alongside clinical services, training, and long-term engagement with the systems that determine whether those devices are used safely and effectively over time.

The Problem

In many low-resource settings, access to assistive technology is limited. Even when devices are available, the support required to use them safely over time is often missing. Poorly fitted equipment can cause pain and long-term complications. Devices without repair pathways break and are not replaced. Children without appropriate support are excluded from school. Caregivers, often women, carry the ongoing physical and emotional burden.

Procurement systems tend to reinforce this. They prioritise unit cost and short-term delivery, rather than whether a device continues to work in someone's life.

The Innovation

Shonaquip's model integrates product, service, and system support into a single approach to assistive technology provision. This includes locally designed and manufactured mobility and posture support devices, combined with clinical assessment and fitting, training for therapists and caregivers, and ongoing follow-up.

The model extends beyond direct service delivery. Shonaquip also supports other local innovators through prototyping and manufacturing, contributing to broader ecosystem development.

Manufacturing is embedded within this approach. Products are designed, tested, and refined within the environments where they are used, with durability and repairability built in from the outset.

Why it Works - Delivery Model

Shonaquip works through a combination of government procurement, NGO and donor programmes, medical insurance, and direct service delivery, including outreach clinics and early childhood programmes.

Delivery is multidisciplinary. Clinical teams, technicians, educators, and parent networks all play a role, reflecting the different types of support required for long-term use.

Expansion into new regions is approached carefully. Partnerships are established with local organisations that can provide both distribution and ongoing service. This helps ensure that growth does not outpace the ability to deliver quality support. Follow-up and repair are built into the model from the beginning, rather than added later.

Evidence and Traction

Shonaquip's approach is grounded in over three decades of delivery. Reported outcomes include improved posture and function, reduced device abandonment, fewer secondary complications, and increased participation in school and community life.

There is also evidence of reduced caregiver burden, an outcome that becomes particularly relevant when engaging with health systems and policymakers.

Much of this evidence has emerged through long-term service delivery and user follow-up. Increasingly, it is being formalised to support arguments for procurement reform, shifting the focus from upfront cost to lifecycle value.

GDI Hub Support and Engagement

Shonaquip's collaboration with GDI Hub has focused on making a complex model easier to communicate and act on. This has involved clarifying how different parts of the organisation's work fit together, from product design and manufacturing to training, service delivery, and policy engagement. It has also supported a clearer articulation of how these elements contribute to both impact and financial sustainability.

Part of the process has been identifying which aspects of the model can be expanded through partnerships, and where local capacity needs to be built first.

Wider Implication

Shonaquip highlights a core gap in assistive technology: delivery of devices does not guarantee delivery of outcomes. Addressing this challenge requires investment beyond the product itself — in assessment, training, and follow-up — as well as procurement systems that account for long-term value. Models built in this way may scale more slowly, but they are more likely to deliver sustained impact.

GDI Accelerate is GDI Hub's platform for strengthening the systems that help inclusive innovation reach scale. The 'GDI Accelerate Growth Sprint' supports high-potential growth-stage assistive and accessible technology ventures through diagnosis, strategy refinement and investment-readiness planning, generating tailored support plans within GDI Accelerate's market-access and enterprise-strengthening model.

Design and manufacturing of mobility and posture support devices, alongside clinical services, training, and long-term engagement .

Bios

Shona McDonald
Founder & CEO

Shona McDonald is the founding Executive Director of Shonaquip (Pty) Ltd, Uhambo Foundation and the Champions of Change Trust, trading as ShonaquipSE, South Africa's first Hybrid Social Enterprise and Africa's only ISO 13485 certified wheelchair design and manufacturing facility, advancing inclusive, locally rooted and sustainable Assistive Technology systems.

She serves on the Boards of the International Society of Wheelchair Professionals and ATscale (a UN platform), and has shaped national and global disability policy, aligning strongly with the UK PACT and GEDSI agenda through her focus on gender equity, disability inclusion, locally led innovation, and systems change. A disability activist since 1982, inspired by her daughter Shelly and the families ShonaquipSE serves, she holds Schwab, Ashoka, Paul Harris and RESNA Fellowships.