

Accelerate Ability

A Thesis Led Accelerator for Disability

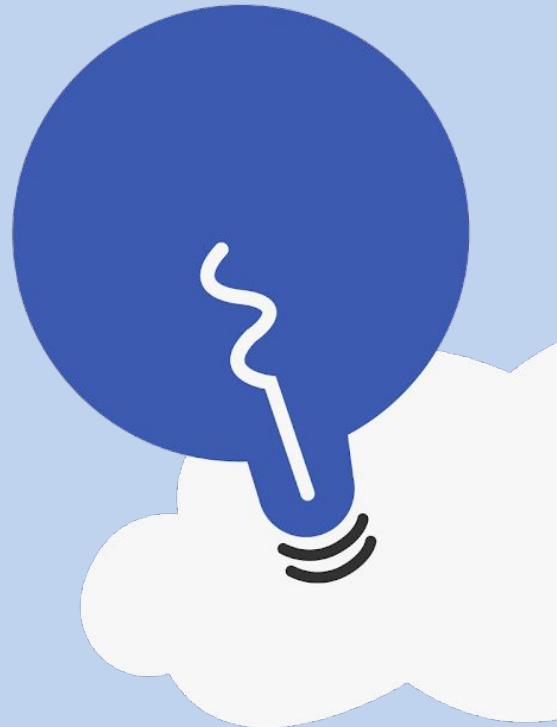
An Acceleration Approach to Scaling Need Based Technologies
to Enable Independent Living and Human Potential Realisation for People
with Disabilities in India



Designing interventions without sufficient thinking on contexts of users with disabilities, can set us back several years in the technology for independent living sprint.

An Accelerator Effort from India

- + User Needs Analysis through 83 Ethnographic Immersions with PWDs
- + The Pre-Accelerator Lab
- + Building a Disability Innovations Coalition with Experts and Organizations
- + The Pre-Accelerator Lab Program
- + Learnings from A Fragmented Ecosystem
- + Accelerate Ability: The Accelerator Vision



User Needs Analysis through Ethnographic Immersions with 86 PWDs

- + Despite policy and tech inroads, people with disabilities continue to experience roadblocks to independent living, as most solutions are not context-specific and seldom account for complex & layered user experience.
- + Among the many communication barriers for people with speech and hearing impairments, communicating with healthcare professionals cause significant anxiety and distress.
- + Significant developments in ICT as AT for the visually impaired have taken place, but people continue to face barriers in accessing online banking and e-commerce interfaces, and updates across different devices, softwares, and websites can hamper access and usability.
- + People with disabilities face increased vulnerabilities during health emergencies and natural disasters, contending with hostile environments and lack of customised, quick response solutions.
- + Single solutions cannot sufficiently address the multiple challenges associated with conducting what could look like a single task.
- + Disclosing disabled identity is difficult, but also necessary.
- + Lack of easily accessible and comparable information about disabled-friendly places, assistive products, and devices lead to making choices which are not fully informed and user experiences which are unsatisfactory.

A Pre-Accelerator Lab

The team ideated a pre-accelerator lab that aims to understand existing barriers of user challenges and ecosystem gaps and mentor promising AT startups to be user, context and market focused.

AccelerateAbility - a disability innovations pre-accelerator lab and a precursor to a larger accelerator program aimed at establishing:

- + to nurture and take technological interventions to scale by ensuring people with disabilities are at the core of all stages of interventions development.
- + to systematically inform the acceleration cohort of existing policy interventions and build grounds for new avenues for state action; and
- + to convene government organizations; industry, law, and policy experts; incubators; accelerators; and innovation consultants to facilitate deployment of hybrid interventions.
- + to build a vision / design for a larger catalytic accelerator based on rapid deep engagement with system stakeholders

Building a Disability Innovations Coalition with Experts and Organizations



Vihara and LIRNEasia started with engaging experts and institutions to onboard them as mentors and through the course of the pre-accelerator onboarded the most committed and competent individuals and organizations towards a robust Disability Innovation Coalition. The coalition comprises of technical, knowledge, and implementation partners. This Coalition committed to offer incubation, product testing prototyping support and enduring networks to acceleratees for product re-engineering, enhancement and scaling.

Accelerate Ability, Pre Accelerator

Engaging Disability and AT StartUps

- + The Accelerator reviewed 60 applications from select entrepreneurs representing all three disability segments.
- + Selection criteria to assess application included: solution efficacy, team strength, scalability and impact potential, and user traction.
- + A total of 18 startups with ICT/smartphone based components in their product solutions were selected to participate in the lab, representing visual (7), hearing (6), locomotor (3), cross-disability with a split focus on more than one segments (2).
- + Startups selected had a robust product prototype, early market traction, potential for scale and an understanding of the need for user-focused product innovation but showcased a fragmented approach. For-profit organizations with a history of being supported by an incubator and having undergone the iterations to improvise the product solution for catering to the challenge of masses were preferred.

AccelerAbility Phase 01

Dates: 10th August to 14th August

Time: 11 am to 2 pm everyday

Platform: Zoom Call
(Link attached on last page)

Outcomes: Learning, Iterations, Reflections, and 6 to 8 shortlisted startups from larger pool

Total: 05 Days

Build understanding on evolving challenges of disability segment and methods to create inclusive solutions

- / Understand the evolving landscape of disability segment to design inclusive future for PwDs
- / Active learning from industry experts on Disability, Policy, Intervention and innovation gaps in the segment
- / critique of social, technical and policy innovations for disability in India
- / Insights and gaps from visual, hearing and locomotor specialists
- / Masterclass on creating evaluation matrix and partner network model for contextually Sensitive, User Friendly & Accessible Solutions
- / Prototype design sprints in support of segment experts
- / Pitching session to screen finalists for sprint 02

Designing strategies to design contextual solutions

- / Mentoring sessions with industry experts to refurbish existing product solutions
- / Devising success metrics, evaluation frameworks, and partnership models to explore ways of contextualizing solutions
- / Refining the approaches and shortlisting startups for phase 02

4 Winning Start Ups received Bespoke Mentorship



Lazarillo | Making the World Accessible

Segment focus: Visual impairment
Product: Lazarillo App serves as a digital guide for the blind. As a person walks, the application notifies them of nearby places and objects that may be of their interest through voice notifications and warnings. So it might tell them if they're approaching a bus stop or there's a nearby restaurant.

User Base: 160,000 Users; More than 17,000 Monthly Active Users



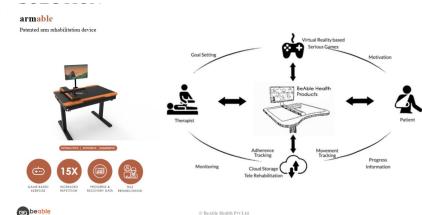
India Signing Hands

Segment focus: Hearing impairment
Product: ISH News is India's leading online News and Entertainment channel producing content in accessible formats such as Indian Sign Language, subtitles, voice-overs as well as attractive graphics. These are created by a team of Deaf professionals & CODAs (Child of Deaf Adult) using Indian Sign Language (ISL). User Base: Over 3.6 crore views on Facebook, YouTube & Instagram, since launch in Nov 2018.



MyUDAAN

Segment focus: Locomotor impairment
Product: myUDAAN is a Technology Driven Social Impact startup solving PEOPLE MOBILITY problems especially for Disabled, Elderly, Bedridden, expecting mothers & temporarily disabled. The product has been designed for PwD & being Leveraged through the Elderly
User Base: 1000 downloads; ~600 users with a 48% retention rate



BeAble Health

Segment focus: Cross Disability
Product: BeAble Health is committed to enabling health & lives, through design and technology. ArmAble is solving a pressing need for intensive, engaging and regular rehabilitation therapy for the Upper Limb. The connected application 'BeOne' connects patients to Doctors / Physiotherapists to monitor and deliver quality therapy decisions
User Base: B2B Model with Hospital, Clinics, and Rehabilitation centers.

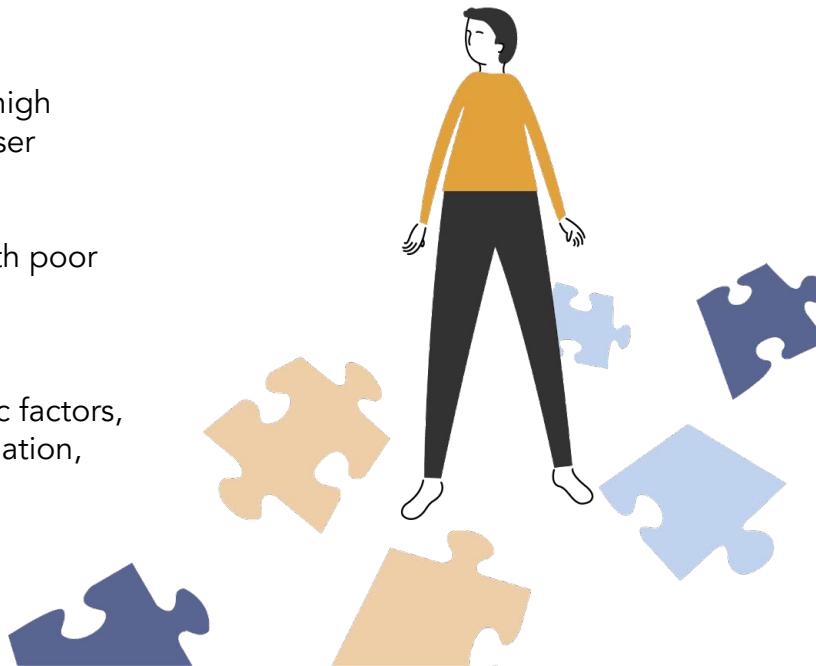
Learnings from the Pre-Accelerator Lab

Persons with disabilities face barriers in nearly every sphere of human participation--navigating the home and private life, negotiating transport and public life, accessing and continuing education, employment, economic inclusion, and accessing health care and emergency services.

A diverse set of barriers for varying disabilities often leads to a high transaction cost for disability organizations to aggregate their user bases.

Unavailability of assistive technologies at viable price points, with poor focus on user experience and human factors, render solutions inaccessible and unaffordable.

Solutions are often not adapted for cultural, social, and linguistic factors, and what is accessible and usable for one segment of the population, does not work for another.



Learnings from the Pre-Accelerator Lab

Innovators are developing products without enough user understanding, price point checks, market validations, and business mentoring support.

While accelerators/incubators focus only on scaling businesses, because only that gets quantified as impact, and funders do not have enough frameworks to evaluate the impact laid by innovators in the disability space.

Even if product innovators develop user-focused solutions, they have failed to experience deeper penetration in the community due to lack of on-ground partnerships for making the products available to the consumers.

This fragmented approach of solution making acknowledged by all experts also indicated a systematic process of scaffolding the immediate stakeholders: funders and the innovator community.

The disability innovations ecosystem is a fragmented, market unenabled and non-participatory at the moment.

Accelerate Ability Vision

The accelerator will perform the function of a social marketplace, bringing together users, innovators, implementers, facilitators, and investors to thoroughly map the ecosystem, boost contextual innovations development, and address problems of accessibility, market reach, and scale.

The accelerator will focus on addressing issues arising from ecosystem fragmentation, by convening users, innovators, implementers, and industry and policy experts on the same platform.

We will equip enterprises to embed user-perspectives in their innovations, create ways to achieve unit cost optimisation, design methods to deepen market reach, and ensure alignment with policy frameworks.



Program Design

An engaging and immersive accelerator program that is partnership led and that will contextualise existing solutions, enable development of product solutions keeping users at core, optimize the unit cost for mass affordability, and embed with disability associations and channels to ensure reach of products to users with disabilities.

Powered by three work streams: learning; prototyping and trialing; and showcasing, remote virtual convenings and mentoring sessions will operationalise the vision.

The program plans to create a learning ecosystem for participants of the program by:

- leveraging on partners' networks for knowledge dissemination
- development of partnership opportunities for innovators to scale
- establishment of channel embedment with disability associations for piloting the product solutions
- prototyping/testing of new/refurbished innovations.



Program Design

Learning Phase: User-Need Focused Product Enhancement Learning and Mentorship Phase

A. Cohort screening, selection and needs assessment

Entrepreneurs from existing pre-accelerator will be onboarded participants for the accelerator program through rigorous due diligence. Tailored learning sessions curation through prior needs assessment of the cohort

B. Active learning from industry experts on Disability, Policy, Funding, Impact

To context and objective of the accelerator for the cohort, the program will convene thought leaders and industry experts to disseminate the learnings on the evolving landscape of disability, ongoing research and findings from past work to highlight the challenges people with disabilities face in leading independent lives, and how tech innovations can be taken to the next level to fully cater to their needs.

C. Facilitated in-field observations to Identify Needs, Pain Points, and Opportunities across multiple operational contexts

In field context observations for acceleratees will be planned to gain understanding of user needs, use case contexts, and identification of potential areas of opportunities for business interventions

Program Design

Learning Phase: User-Need Focused Product Enhancement Learning and Mentorship Phase

D. Mentoring for User Needs Based Product Calibration & Enhancement

Remote mentoring phases for cohort to synthesise the learnings gathered from the field and articulating them into a context specific product ideation and development thesis that is calibrated by an informed understanding of users.

E. Impact measuring and monitoring for evidence creation

These sessions will also highlight the varied funding mechanisms like donor/social/charitable and value based funding instruments for entrepreneurs to access for further growth and scaling.

The team will equip the acceleratees to create robust theories of change, craft achievable and targeted success metrics, design evaluation frameworks, and articulate intended impact and projected outcomes to attract results based financing and impact bonds for sustained growth and scaling.

F. Remote Mentoring for extended technical advisory and support

The second mentoring phase will focus on aligning the mentees on the technical and business knowledge fronts to ensure growth and scaling.

Program Design

Prototyping and Trialling Phase: Prototyping and Testing for Price Pointing and Product Optimization

A. Prototyping, testing, price pointing, and product optimization for commercial and technical feasibility

Vihara in collaboration with implementation partner for next three months to test the technical and commercial feasibility of the products, and to devise ways to refurbish them for better uptake in the market.

The implementation partner will connect the incubatees (also acceleratees) to the technical mentors for prototype assessment and feasibility checks of the products; for further technical refinement of the product in terms of its usability, accessibility, and workability.

B. Partnerships for field trialing and scaling of products

The accelerator team will strive to develop partnership channels for cohorts to position their solutions in the market.

These partners will be responsible for socialising the products in their larger community and ensuring greater reach in the disabled community.

Through the channel embedding processes, we will collaborate with schools, institutes, NGOs, disability associations, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, and therapy clinics, to reach beneficiaries for field trialling of commercial feasibility, service uptake, user experience, and accessibility of the products.

Program Design

Showcasing Phase: Funding readiness and Product Showcasing

A. Pitching skills for funding readiness

The team will aim to impart pitching skills for the cohort to successfully communicate their work and abilities to raise funds from varied kind of investors.

To ensure the cohort is pitch ready, the team will set up demo pitching sessions before setting a platform for investor meet.

B. Partnerships for field trialing and scaling of products

The team at Vihara will organize an investor/donor showcase event for the cohort at the end of the program, offering opportunities for financial access to the startups who meet the predefined indicators.

The event shall also act as a platform where startups can create market and financial linkages connecting with the leading industry experts, mentors, and investors.

event will help partner organizations assess the impact of acceleration programs over the cohort, by mapping the value and impact created by startups over the course of the program and funds raised for scaling.

Thank you!

