

## Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities through Voter Education Campaigns



*A Nepali woman who is blind reads voter information in braille.*

Voter education campaigns are an ideal opportunity for election management bodies (EMBs) and disabled persons' organizations (DPOs) to engage persons with disabilities in the electoral process. Creative, inclusive and accessible voter education campaigns empower men and women with disabilities as citizens and voters, ensuring that all voters are able to participate in elections.

Disability-inclusive voter education campaigns are both inclusive and accessible. An **inclusive** campaign means that materials show positive representations of men and women with disabilities participating in elections. For example, a poster or video could show a woman with a physical disability voting. An **accessible** campaign means that information is provided in formats that are

easy to use for persons with disabilities. For example, Nepal provided voting instructions in braille for voters who were blind or had low vision, and Georgia provided sign language interpreters during political debates to facilitate access for participants who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

### Myanmar

During Myanmar's historic 2015 election, the Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI), a local DPO, organized a mobile "get-out-the-vote concert". The campaign presented a unique method to inform persons with disabilities about their right to vote and to encourage them to cast their ballots on Election Day.

For three days, MILI members drove around in an open-bed truck lined with voter education posters and a band of musicians with disabilities. The truck stopped in six towns where the band performed popular songs to gain the attention of persons in the neighborhood. After performing the first few songs at each location, MILI spoke to voters about the elections, providing information on voting and polling procedures as well as emphasizing how voting empowers citizens and allows them to have a voice in their country's future.



*Musicians with disabilities perform popular songs and talk about the voting process on a mobile stage.*

During this time, volunteers also distributed 4,000 voter education pamphlets. One pamphlet outlined information on polling procedures for voters with disabilities and highlighted the different types of available assistance. A second pamphlet described the step-by-step process of voting and illustrated the process with animations of voters with visual, hearing or physical disabilities.

MILI targeted towns that were among the 15 towns where the Union Election Commission (UEC) piloted more accessible polling stations on Election Day. At these polling stations, which were located near schools and hospitals, the UEC provided polling officials who had received disability access training from

MILI and other DPOs. At these locations, voters with visual disabilities were also able to use braille ballot guides when casting their ballots. These guides allowed voters who are blind to cast their ballot independently and in secret.

## Mali



*The boîte á images includes a voter using a wheelchair in the picture above.*



voters with intellectual disabilities. Image boxes have also been used around the world in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti to increase awareness of participation in political life and elections.

*Boîte á images*, or image boxes, were used by the Electoral Access Project in Mali (PAPEM) for a voter education project. By including voters with disabilities in the drawing, the project not only encouraged persons with disabilities to take part in the election but also increased awareness of other voters of the right of persons with disabilities to take part in political and public life.

Trained facilitators used the images to help explain the voting process. The wordless format enhanced access of persons with low literacy as well as

## Dominican Republic

In 2012, the “Right to Choose” project, established by La Red Iberoamericana de Entidades de Personas con Discapacidad (the Iberoamerican DPO network, or La Red) utilized multiple formats to reach voters with disabilities. An inclusive television spot was produced, which showed persons with disabilities participating in the community and voting. It also incorporated an inset box with sign language interpretation in order to reach voters who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. The video empowered persons with different types of disabilities to take part in elections as active citizens and demonstrated the voting process.



*This screenshot from the “Right to Choose” video shows a group of people who are deaf talking about elections.*

Disability rights organizations such as the Association of People with Physical-Motor Disabilities (ASODIFIMO), the National Federation of Dominicans with Disabilities (FENADID), and the Circle of Women with Disabilities (CIMUDIS) played an important role in the project, and through their participation, helped to achieve the project's success in defending the rights of people with disabilities. The National Council on Disability (CONADIS) also supported the implementation of sensitization activities.

## Armenia



*This poster from the campaign in Armenia calls for equal access to polling stations.*

The Disabled Center for Development of Education and Culture (PAROS) led a coalition of 9 disability organizations to implement a project to empower Armenians with disabilities to participate in the 2007 and 2008 elections for the National Assembly (parliament) and Presidency. The national program on disability awareness and enfranchisement made the elections amongst the most accessible and inclusive in the history of Armenia.

. A series of televised public service announcements were aired nationally, and Armenian journalists provided positive media attention on project activities (such as the development of a tactile ballot guide). An increased awareness of disability rights was complemented by strong support from the Armenian government and endorsements by high-ranking elected officials and election candidates.

## Libya

In 2013, an Electoral Access Working Group, which included members of the Libyan General National Congress, disabled persons' organizations, disability rights activists, and civil society members, was formed in Libya. Together, Working Group members launched a successful social media campaign called *Zaykum Zayna* ("As you are, we are") to promote awareness of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in Libya, emphasizing the right to political participation for men and women with disabilities.

The *Zaykum Zayna* campaign led to the development of voter education material in braille and the provision of sign language interpreters for all press conferences hosted by the High National Election Commission. A collection of advocacy tools and information about trainings was also developed through the campaign.



*A young woman with a disability holds a leaflet from the campaign.*

SOURCE: IFES