

## Strengthening electoral systems to be inclusive and accessible

USA (Worldwide) - International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)

### SUMMARY OF PROJECT

The Election Access Program of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) promotes opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in the election process by providing specific recommendations to officials regarding election services and the voting environment, such that voter registration becomes more accessible, assistive devices such as tactile ballot guides are created, and transportation to the polls is readily available. Training and advocacy also empowers persons with disabilities to actively participate in the election process.

“Participation in political life provides the opportunity for people with disabilities to demand their rights as equal citizens.”

—Virginia Atkinson, International Foundation for Electoral Systems

### FACTS & FIGURES

- Lead author of the first manual, *Equal Access*, that provides government and civil society with guidance on how to ensure that persons with disabilities have a voice in political life.
- Developed an election access observation checklist and trained over 700 people in 7 countries to be access observers.
- Received the 2011 InterAction Disability Inclusion Award.

### PROBLEMS TARGETED

Elected officials are unlikely to address the concerns of people with disabilities, such as inclusive education or accessible transportation, if people with disabilities do not have a voice in the political process. Such participation provides the basis for mainstreaming their inclusion in all aspects of society by breaking down social stigmas and increasing the accountability of elected representatives.

## SOLUTION & METHODOLOGY

The Election Access Program trains individuals and advocates governments in order to include people with disabilities in the political process. It also lays strong emphasis on women, having developed and distributed voter education materials specifically aimed at women – with and without disabilities – in readily accessible locations, such as marketplaces. It has also conducted leadership training to teach women and other people with disabilities the skills required to participate as leaders in political life. The program has had a strong impact at the national and regional level worldwide, such as successfully advocating for disability inclusion in the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration and ensuring that people with intellectual disabilities have political access in Council of Europe member states.

## OUTLOOK & TRANSFERABILITY

IFES's Election Access Working Group shares lessons learned across regional teams and develops reference documents, such as how to interact with employees/partners with auditory disabilities and how to include persons with disabilities in program design. IFES's 2014 manual, *Equal Access*, which details how to include persons with disabilities in elections and political processes, can readily serve as a guideline and starting point for other regions, cities, and countries that seek to make their elections more accessible and to include persons with disabilities in political leadership.

### Photo

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title:

1. A voter in Guatemala shows his inked finger after casting his ballot on Election Day.
2. A woman casts her ballot in Aceh, Indonesia.

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