



Equal Access

IFES works to promote equal rights, justice and political participation for persons with disabilities around the world.

Today, 15 of every 100 people in the world has a disability. IFES works with disabled persons' organizations, civil society groups and election management bodies to include these 1 billion citizens in political and public life. IFES has collaborated with individuals from around the globe on increasing electoral access.

This includes Yusdiana.

As a young person in Indonesia, Yusdiana contracted polio and learned how to navigate life – physically, emotionally and mentally – using a wheelchair. Now an adult, she holds key leadership positions in the disability community, advocating for equal rights and political inclusion.

“As a person with a disability who grew up experiencing many barriers, I see my participation in elections gives me the opportunity to make a decision on who best will represent my voice in parliament and government. [I want to elect a] person who I believe will fight for my rights and community to have a decent life as equal as other citizens.”

The General Election Network for Disability Access in Southeast Asia (AGENDA) – supported by IFES – has taken Yusdiana around the globe. She has observed six elections and provided feedback to election management bodies on how to make the electoral process more accessible.

In June 2013, Yusdiana spoke at the 23rd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. Her attendance marks growing recognition and appreciation for the political rights of people with disabilities. During her speech, Yusdiana underscored the importance of ensuring political rights for persons with disabilities.

In addition to AGENDA, other IFES initiatives include global tools such as ElectionAccess.org – the first online global resource on the political participation of persons with disabilities – and *Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes*, a manual for civil society, government and practitioners.





“All electoral processes should be accessible, easy to understand and use, regardless of the type of disability a person has. This is necessary to real democracy, which must be of and for all the people.”

- YUSDIANA

About IFES

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) supports citizens' right to participate in free and fair elections. Our independent expertise strengthens electoral systems and builds local capacity to deliver sustainable solutions.

As the global leader in democracy promotion, we advance good governance and democratic rights by:

- Providing technical assistance to election officials
- Empowering the underrepresented to participate in the political process
- Applying field-based research to improve the electoral cycle

Since 1987, IFES has worked in over 135 countries – from developing democracies, to mature democracies.

For more information, visit www.IFES.org and www.ElectionAccess.org.



1850 K Street NW • Fifth Floor • Washington, DC 20006 • www.IFES.org



Advocacy

Over 80 percent of persons with disabilities live in developing countries. These individuals are usually not afforded the same rights as other citizens, including the right to vote, run for office and serve as community leaders. Advocacy skills help educate, bring awareness and rights to this community.

In Nepal, IFES has been working with disabled persons' organizations (DPOs) to produce educational street theater to sensitize the general population on the rights and abilities of persons with disabilities. In Georgia, IFES held a competition for journalists to develop the best story on electoral access for persons with disabilities.

In Mali, IFES partnered with the largest national DPO coalition to conduct civic and voter education campaigns throughout the transitional elections. This DPO organized citizen information days, door-to-door get-out-the-vote operations and information sessions on voting procedures and civic duty. Beyond

traditional education activities, the DPO developed a national manifest for presidential candidates on the priorities and concerns of the disability community.

Finally, disability rights have been specifically mentioned in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' Human Rights Declaration due to advocacy conducted by IFES and DPO partners across the region.



Leadership

IFES strives to ensure persons with disabilities are able to cast their ballots on Election Day, but political participation is more than just voting. Many IFES programs include people with disabilities in leadership positions, such as poll workers or observers.

IFES focuses on empowerment of women with disabilities, as they are often doubly marginalized in their communities. In Papua New Guinea, IFES hosted a training-of-trainers session to help young women develop leadership skills and encourage civic engagement. In Cambodia, almost 500 women with and without disabilities participated in leadership training to build their skills. Within a year of the training, 62 percent of these women had become election officials, candidates or observers.

In the Dominican Republic, IFES programming targeted youth with disabilities to provide the next generation of leaders with the necessary skills and confidence to serve as effective leaders. IFES provided training on advocacy and program management, in addition

to teaching youth with disabilities how to be election observers and acquire official accreditation to serve in this role.

"I felt empowered after the IFES training on leadership skills. Now I can face anyone."

- Ruth Javati,
Participant in IFES training-of-trainers
in Papua New Guinea



Collaboration

IFES works with election management bodies (EMBs) to ensure their policies and procedures are in line with international standards, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This includes providing guidance on election law reform to guarantee all citizens, including persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, have the right to vote. IFES has also worked with EMBs to design assistive tools, such as tactile ballot guides that allow voters who are blind or have low vision to mark the ballot unaided.

In Guatemala, IFES worked with partners to develop a new chapter in the poll worker training manual on disability. The chapter covers basic rights, as well as introductory sign language skills. During a survey conducted after the training, 82 percent of poll workers said their knowledge of how to administer the vote to persons with disabilities increased; 86 percent reported an overall increase in knowledge of the rights of persons with disabilities.

In Zimbabwe, IFES supported a local disabled persons' organization in conducting physical assessments of 1,630 polling stations

“A person with a disability is first and foremost a citizen. They have the right and duty to vote.”

- Emmanuel Menard,
President of the Haitian Transitional College of
the Permanent Electoral Council

hroughout the country using a standardized 14-point checklist. Assessment teams included people with disabilities who provided recommendations to the EMB on how to improve access to polling stations.



Research

Limited research has been conducted on the political participation of persons with disabilities. IFES is working to close this global gap by conducting research on the public's perception of fellow citizens with disabilities, as well as analyzing barriers voters with disabilities encounter on Election Day. This research can lead to better-informed voter education campaigns that sensitize the public on the political rights of persons with disabilities. It can also lead to the development of assistive tools and policies that allow equal access to the electoral process.

In Libya, an assessment of voters' opinions of the electoral process included views of people with disabilities and asked questions about access to the political process. This report found persons with disabilities encountered frequent discrimination, and polling stations and materials were not accessible. To remedy these issues, IFES helped establish the Electoral Access Working Group – comprised of the election commission and disabled persons' organizations (DPOs). One initiative of the working group has been to launch a media campaign called *Zaykum Zayna* (As you are, we are) via social media.

In Southeast Asia, IFES partnered with DPOs from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines and Vietnam to produce the report *Accessible Elections for Persons with Disabilities in Five Southeast Asian Countries*. The research reviewed legal frameworks, identified barriers and compiled good practices. It is the first regional report to ever examine access to the political process.

In Ukraine, an annual survey conducted for the past 21 years now includes questions about the public's perception of candidates with disabilities.

