

## Project EASE Increases Election Access in the Philippines



Blind architect Jimmy Silva (second from left) who, chairs the Accessibility Committee of the United Architects of the Philippines, confers with members of the Project EASE audit team and school officials during an inspection of the Commonwealth Elementary School to determine its accessibility in preparation for the May 2013 elections.

### IFES-led project evaluates accessibility of polling stations, makes recommendations for improvement.

Voting is becoming more accessible for voters with disabilities in the Philippines through the project for Ensuring Accessibility of Schools in Elections (EASE).

Project EASE aims to increase the participation of persons with disabilities by ensuring they are able to join Election Day activities. This is done through evaluating the accessibility of schools across the country where voting is normally held.

To date, one of the project's biggest successes has been developing a guide – *Accessibility Guidelines: How to Conduct Accessibility Audit* – that helps stakeholders conduct an audit in identified schools. Published with IFES' technical assistance, the guidelines provide easy reference for those who conduct accessibility audits.

Using the guidelines, accessibility audits were recently conducted in 52 schools nationwide to determine key infrastructure issues. This resulted in an accessibility plan for each audited school. The plans were put into action by 27 schools in time for the May 2013 elections, making critical improvements to infrastructure so polling precincts were truly accessible to persons with disabilities.

Accessibility audits considered the behavior of voters with disabilities as they interacted with each school. This includes travel time from his or her home to drop-off points and parking areas, as well as available public and private transportation. It also evaluated the process of a voter locating his or her precinct, exiting the voting center and using the toilets.

According to the former Commission on Elections (COMELEC) Commissioner Rene V. Sarmiento, EASE ensures public schools used as voting centers for the 2013 elections are prepared for all voters, including those with disabilities.

Project EASE is a joint initiative of IFES, the COMELEC and the United Architects of the Philippines in partnership with the National Council on Disability Affairs, the Department of Education, the Department of Public Works and Highways and the United States Agency for International Development.