**Call for inputs**

**Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities**

***Disability-inclusive International Cooperation***

**Deadline: 15 April 2020**

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), an international nonprofit organization that works to empower every person to have a voice in political processes, has worked on disability-inclusive elections and political life in about 60 countries worldwide. IFES works with a variety of electoral stakeholders, such as election management bodies (EMBs), government ministries, civil society, and media to ensure all people have access to the political process. Based on its experience integrating persons with disabilities into democracy and governance programming and conducting targeted activities to empower persons with disabilities as voters, election officials, candidates, observers, and others, IFES submits the following inputs to the upcoming report of the Special Rapporteur on disability-inclusive international cooperation.

**IFES Inputs on Questionnaire**

**1. Please describe how your country’s international cooperation efforts, including international development aid, are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities; and how is funding tracked and reported.**

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is currently updating its disability rights policy, which is expected to be launched this year. USAID’s current [disability policy](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDABQ631.pdf), in place since 1997, calls on partners and staff “to avoid discrimination again persons with disabilities in programs which USAID funds and to stimulate an engagement of host country counterparts, governments, implementing organizations and other donors in promoting a climate of nondiscrimination against and equal opportunity for persons with disabilities.” The policy emphasizes that: issues related to disability are integral to international development; consultation with members of the disability community is critical; and investing in and strengthening disabled people’s organizations (DPOs) are vital steps for promoting the human rights of persons with disabilities.

The United States Department of State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) specifically mentions disability inclusion in its [proposal review criteria](https://www.state.gov/key-topics-bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/drl-proposal-submission-instructions-for-applications-updated-october-2018/" \l "IV.A). The “Monitoring and Evaluation Plan” section recommends disaggregating data by disability. The “Quality of Program Idea” states that programs should advance the rights “of the most at risk and vulnerable populations, including women, people with disabilities…” DRL is a good example of a donor that highlights the importance of disability inclusion in activities, objectives and corresponding targets, and enforces this policy by awarding additional points for inclusive proposals.

IFES, which receives a majority of its funding from bilateral U.S. donors, seeks to incorporate a disability rights perspective into the design and implementation of all international programs and D.C.-based organizational practices. Even if donors do not explicitly require a disability component in programming, IFES aims to integrate political access elements into each project. Doing so ensures that IFES services and products are inclusive of all citizens and contributes a unique value-add to program design. Inclusive programs also help to ensure that IFES meets its donor-mandated goals and policies; if 15% of a country’s population is not able to equally participate in IFES’ programs, it decreases the likelihood that IFES will be able to meet donor expectations and requirements. This approach has allowed IFES to engage with a broad range of stakeholders, including national human rights institutions, candidates, and political parties.

**2. Please describe how South-South and triangular cooperation support your country’s efforts to implement the rights of persons with disabilities, including by** **facilitating the exchange of innovative knowledge, skills and successful initiatives.**

IFES has played a key role in encouraging South-South cooperation to support efforts to implement the rights of people with disabilities. Through its global disability rights programming, IFES helps to facilitate the exchange of innovative knowledge, skills and successful initiatives.

The General Election Network for Disability Access (AGENDA), a creative partnership of DPOs and election-focused civil society organizations in Southeast Asia founded by IFES, is engaging policymakers to implement a new disability rights action platform of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Community. The *ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,* launched in 2018, builds on the region’s commitments to create a barrier-free community. The Masterplan translates principles from global human rights documents such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and from the UN Sustainable Development Goals into actions aligned with the ASEAN Community’s development blueprints. Because the Masterplan builds on prior commitments of member states, such as the CRPD, it is a critical document for generating strategic collaboration among ASEAN officials, national governments, and DPOs. The Masterplan has been used as a regional advocacy tool to combat stereotypes and foster respect for the rights of persons with disabilities throughout Southeast Asia, as well as to create South-South partnerships to amplify disability rights voices.

Since 2011, AGENDA partners have also convened four Regional Disability Rights Dialogues in Southeast Asia to encourage collaboration among EMBs and DPOs, as well as provide a unique opportunity for intra-regional knowledge transfer and advocacy with ASEAN regional bodies. DPO collaboration has resulted in language on disability-inclusive participation in the Bali Declaration on the Enhancement of the Role and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in the ASEAN Community and in the adoption of the Jakarta Addendum to Address Overlapping Forms of Marginalization, which further enhances the goals of the 2012 Bali Commitments on Equal Access to Elections.

**5. Please describe to what extent and how are persons with disabilities and their organizations involved and consulted in decisions related to international cooperation in your country, and how they can access international cooperation funds and grants (including legal requirements, procedures and challenges).**

As noted above in question 1, DRL is a good example of a donor that highlights the importance of disability inclusion in activities, objectives and corresponding targets. DRL enforces this policy by awarding additional points for inclusive proposals.

IFES’ technical approach also emphasizes the inclusion of persons with disabilities and their organizations in the design and implementation of all international programs. The rights of persons with disabilities are relevant to all of IFES’ work and IFES identifies disability as a cross-cutting theme that has wide-ranging implications for and impacts on all project activities. In addition to consulting with DPO partners on project design, IFES also aims to involve a cross-section of the disability community in all project activities (e.g. persons with physical, visual, auditory, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities).

**6. Please provide any information and statistical data available on disability-inclusive international cooperation in your country, including information related to the challenges and limitations of the international aid system to promote the rights of persons with disabilities.**

A key challenge in the U.S. is that the CRPD is not being leveraged. It is especially difficult for bilateral donors to promote the rights of persons with disabilities when the U.S. has not ratified the treaty.

Additionally, while USAID set a disability policy in 1997, there is currently no mandate that all USAID programming be disability-inclusive. There is also no disability policy at the U.S. Department of State. In order to address this gap, bilateral donors need to mandate mainstreaming disability into all programs, policies and staffing decisions. The U.S. House of Representatives has introduced the Office of International Disability Rights Act, H.R. 3373, which would codify the Office of International Disability Rights at the U.S. State Department (within State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor); mandate a high-level political appointee to lead the office; and require a State-wide disability policy.

There is real political will within the State Department to promote the rights of people with disabilities, and highly capable staff to implement this vision, but the authority, access and respect garnered by a high-level political appointee is the missing piece. The right leadership would put a much-needed disability lens on State’s everyday work and promote the rights of persons with disabilities in bilateral donor discussions on funding, resources and inclusion.