

Inclusion
International



ACCESSING THE BALLOT BOX: Inclusive Civic Engagement for People with Intellectual Disabilities

An Information Toolkit for
Governments

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Introduction

The right to be heard. The right to vote. The expectation that your voice matters and that your government should listen to you. The right to be active in your community – calling for change; holding governments accountable. These are basic rights that form the cornerstones of our society. These are the fundamental rights that so many take for granted. The rights that many are able to exercise without question because they are not labelled as having an intellectual disability.

Around the world, people with intellectual disabilities are denied their right to political participation. This denial happens formally – ie: through “unsoundness of mind” provisions in law and other restrictions to legal capacity – and informally – ie: as a result of stereotypes and assumptions. Both formally and informally our communities lack the mechanisms to support people to exercise their right to political participation.

Over the last 50 years, the growth in self-advocacy and the growing trend towards inclusion have helped shift the perception of people with intellectual disabilities. The identification as disability as a human rights issue – culminating in the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) – has provided a new platform to advance the full inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in all areas of their life.

As self-advocates and families have worked together for change, their message has been clear: without a voice we are powerless and invisible. Global efforts on poverty, inclusive education, living and being included in the community and decision-making have reaffirmed that people with intellectual disabilities need to have voice and control in their own lives.

In all regions, as these discussions have taken root and flourished, exclusion from political participation has been identified as a barrier to full citizenship and inclusion. Despite progress made in the last 50 years and the historic recognition in the CRPD that all people with disabilities have full and equal capacity – including the capacity to act, there has been little progress to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities have the support they need to



access the ballot box and exercise their right to political participation. In this regard, having a voice is not enough. Having governments and organizations that listen to you and represent your interests is what makes having a voice meaningful.

Political participation is not simply the act of casting a ballot on election-day. Political participation – happens before, during and after elections. To increase political participation and to help shape inclusive civic engagement, our focus, too, must extend beyond the ballot box to look at what inclusive political participation means and how people with intellectual disabilities can access the ballot box.

This information toolkit is designed to explore how to support people to access the ballot box before during and after elections and to support people with intellectual disabilities and their families, governments and partners to ensure people with intellectual disabilities are able to exercise their right to political participation.

Background

This concept paper has been developed as part of an Inclusion International project, *Accessing the Ballot Box*, funded by the UN Democracy Fund. The project was designed to address the limited political participation of people with intellectual disabilities in **Kenya, Zanzibar** and **Lebanon**.

Through surveys and workshops, the project identified the barriers and challenges people with intellectual disabilities face in exercising their right to civic engagement and political participation and aimed to increase the awareness and knowledge of project stakeholders (people with intellectual disabilities, their families and representative organizations, service providers and governments) on building inclusive democratic processes.

The main objectives of the project were to:

- establish a **baseline understanding** of the political participation of people with intellectual disabilities in Kenya, Lebanon and Zanzibar;
- **increase the awareness and knowledge** of people with intellectual disabilities, their families and representative organizations and governments about the right to political participation
- provide tools to initiate positive change.

The project did this through

- collection and analysis of data
- development of tools and publications on the right to political participation
- workshops and train-the-trainer programmes.

While the project was focused in those three countries, the tools and resources have been designed to be applicable in ALL countries.

We gratefully acknowledge the UN Democracy Fund for its support of this project, *Accessing the Ballot Box*.



Global Reality

The right to political participation is secured in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and explicitly reaffirmed for people with disabilities in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Despite this, we know there is continued systemic exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities, in particular women with intellectual disabilities, from political participation.

In 2011, more than 64 countries participated in thematic study by the UN Office for the High Commissioner on Human Rights. The vast majority reported that: persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities continue to be deprived of their right to vote and be elected on the basis of constitutional or legal provisions that link their political rights to legal capacity.

A recent survey by MENCAP, Inclusion International's member in the UK revealed that: Almost one in five people with intellectual disabilities were turned away from their polling stations when attempting to vote during the latest local elections.

A 2014 survey by Inclusion International highlighted that while over 80% of respondents indicated there were mechanisms in place for citizens to have their voices heard by governments, over 70% reported that it's not common for people with intellectual disabilities to be engaged in political and public life. Further, the study identified that:

- 62% indicate there are social and cultural restrictions that limit political participation
- 52% report that voting facilities, procedures and materials are not accessible
- 48% indicate that efforts related to political participation are not a priority

Even where legal prohibitions restricting voting are not in place, people with intellectual disabilities and their families report low levels of political participation. Families and individuals report feeling overwhelmed by the scale of political participation; this can lead to feeling disenfranchised.



People with intellectual disabilities and their families report having to fight for and struggle for access to basic supports and services – to attend school, to get a job, to live in the community. Unless and until these issues are addressed, people with intellectual disabilities are vulnerable to continued low levels of political participation.

Accessing the ballot box is as much about building inclusive communities as it is about improving electoral laws, policies and practices.

"I couldn't understand what was on the tv, so I couldn't vote" a self-advocate highlighting that the election materials weren't in plain language and that she didn't understand what the candidates were saying therefore she couldn't vote.

Why Political Participation Matters for People with Intellectual Disabilities

Historically, people with intellectual disabilities have been silenced and isolated. Despite progress on understanding disability as part of our natural diversity, many people with intellectual disabilities remain marginalized, hidden away and/or institutionalized. Traditionally, there has been little expectation that people with intellectual disabilities are able to contribute to, or have opinions about, how our communities are organized.

Government policies and practices – at all levels – are shaped as a result of political participation. Law reform is championed by advocates who are calling for change to make laws better and more reflective of the needs and interests of a particular group. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) play a critical role in influencing governments and holding governments accountable to their duties to citizens. In the absence of the voice of people with intellectual disabilities and their families, communities CANNOT effectively or adequately organize themselves in ways that are responsive to, and reflective of, their needs.

Political participation is often misunderstood to be only about voting and political life. While this is important, political participation extends well beyond the ballot box. Political participation encompasses the work we do in calling for: inclusive education, support for our adult sons and daughters to live and be included in the community, mechanisms to secure the right to make decisions, and, measures to address the entrenched poverty people with intellectual disabilities and their families experience.



Political participation is important because it enables people with intellectual disabilities and their families to:

- Raise issues that are important to them.
- Influence policies and agendas that take into account their interests.
- Play a part in creating a society that is responsive to their needs and interests.

Further, we know political participation is essential to ensure people with intellectual disabilities and their families be recognized as:

- Members of the community and as equal citizens before the law.
- Agents of change in their community and country.

Taking part in political and public life is about being included in society and having the voices of people with intellectual disabilities and their families heard.

Families and individuals tell us it's important because:

- The decisions that governments make affect my life and they should listen to me.
 - ❖ We have a right to say what our governments do and how our communities are organized.
- I have opinions on things that are important to me.
- People in my country need to understand what is important to me and what I need to be supported to live and be included in my community.
 - ❖ My participation can help build a community that is inclusive and responds to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities.
- Making my voice heard is what makes me an equal citizen. I don't want to be left out!
- When my voice is heard we know that ALL voices are heard. This makes our communities better for EVERYONE.
- When my government understands what is important to me they can make laws and policies that include everyone.

Inclusive political participation better for ALL

Securing the right to political participation for people with intellectual disabilities is not only important to the individual. The International Federation of Electoral Services (IFES) highlights that ongoing participation and inclusion in the mainstream of society, ensures the equal rights of people with intellectual disability, promotes equity, eradicating stereotypes, barriers are broken and public perception is transformed.

Government officials that understand the challenges of people with intellectual disability are better equipped to respond to those needs through policy, legislation and practices. They can become champions of the cause and contribute to building systems that are more inclusive for everyone.

Further, engaging people with intellectual disabilities in the electoral process results in democracies that are more inclusive and reflective of the needs of persons with disabilities.

"It's important to be involved so I can get what I need to be involved in the community"

WHAT DOES POLITICAL PARTICIPATION MEAN?

Political participation; political advocacy; inclusive civic engagement. There are many ways to describe what we are talking about. For the purposes of this project we have used the terms political participation – as it appears in Article 29 of the CRPD – and inclusive civic engagement interchangeably.

Families and individuals expressed concerns that political participation suggests connecting to a specific political party or a particular political agenda. Project partners expressed that inclusive civic engagement better reflected the nature of what we are addressing.

Essentially, what we define as political participation or inclusive civic engagement is:

- ***being involved in processes and strategies that are related to civic, political and public life.***

For us, political participation:

- Establishes the foundation for inclusion in all aspects of society.
- Is about having a say on how you want your country to be and what is important for you as a citizen.
- Includes voting and being involved in electoral processes but also includes being involved in civil society organizations and efforts to hold governments to account on their commitments to the rights of persons with disabilities.

These efforts may include:

- Voting
- Being involved in parallel reports submitted to UN treaty bodies
- Participating in government representation committees
- Engaging in coalitions and efforts to advance the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities
- Engaging with elected officials and government representatives

WHAT IS INCLUSIVE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The right to vote is a necessary condition for a healthy democracy. The implications and impact of this right reach far beyond the ballot box and cannot be confined to election-day. In a 2005 article, Inclusion International leaders, Diane Richler and Roberto Leal Ocampo, affirmed that “Including these citizens [people with intellectual disabilities] only on Election Day is an insufficient test of democracy”.

Inclusion International’s research and efforts in the Americas in the 90s and 2000s demonstrated that engaging people with intellectual disabilities in the electoral process built democracies that were more inclusive and reflective of the needs of persons with disabilities.



In advance of the 2001 elections in Nicaragua, with support from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), more than 200 observers were trained to monitor the elections. The monitors devised a methodology to monitor more than simple participation on election-day. They monitored participation of persons with disabilities throughout the electoral process: before (to review and influence party platforms); during (to cast a vote); and, after (to participate in the formulation of public policy and monitor public institutions through social audits and other mechanisms).

In Panama, efforts to promote citizen participation and engagement in advance of the election, including public awareness forums and pre-election forums with Presidential candidates, led to commitments by presidential candidates to policies that would enhance the full participation of persons with disabilities and their families in all aspects of their communities and to the creation of a national Secretariat for the Social Integration of People with Disabilities (SENADIS).

Voting is an important element of political participation. However, only by supporting people who have an intellectual disability and their families to engage in the electoral process before, during and after elections can they be assured of enjoying “political rights on an equal basis with others” as guaranteed by Article 29 of the CRPD.

AN INCLUSIVE ELECTORAL PROCESS

BEFORE

- to review and influence party platforms;
- to ensure disability is included in government agendas/priorities

DURING

- Cast a vote; accessibility of electoral process

AFTER

- to participate in the formulation of public policy and monitor public institutions through social audits and other mechanisms

1 R. Leal and D. Richler. Elections: An Opportunity for Inclusion.



Inclusive Political Participation

Article 29 provides a legally binding international standard to interpret and understand government obligations in realizing the right to political participation. Internationally, the right to political participation is formally secured in Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted in 1966 and entered into force in 1976.

More recently, Article 29 of the CRPD, adopted in 2006 and entered into force in 2008, not only explicitly articulates that persons with disabilities enjoy the right to political participation on an equal basis with others but identifies the roles of government in ensuring this right is meaningfully available for persons with disabilities.

CRPD ARTICLE 29

Participation in political and public life

States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others, and shall undertake to:

- (a) Ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected, inter alia, by:
 - (i) Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use;
 - (ii) Protecting the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums without intimidation, and to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate;
 - (iii) Guaranteeing the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice;

- (b) Promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in public affairs, including:
- (i) Participation in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country, and in the activities and administration of political parties;
 - (ii) Forming and joining organizations of persons with disabilities to represent persons with disabilities at international, national, regional and local levels.

WHAT THIS MEANS

- People with intellectual disabilities are able **vote** and **hold public office**;
- People with intellectual disabilities are able to **vote in secret** on the day of elections;
- **Voting assistance** is provided by a person of one's choosing;
- People with intellectual disabilities are supported to obtain identity cards and birth certificates in order to fulfil requirements for **voter registration**;
- Voting **materials, facilities and procedures are accessible**;
- **Voting information** such as the location of polling stations and the candidates is available in **accessible formats**;
- People with intellectual disabilities are free to **participate in civil society organizations** which are concerned with the public and political life of a country as well as the **administration of political parties**; and that
- People with intellectual disabilities can form or **join organizations** which represent people with disabilities at local, regional, national and international levels.
- NOT JUST ABOUT VOTING

BEYOND ENTITLEMENT: WHAT CRPD ARTICLE 29 REQUIRES FOR GOVERNMENTS

- Ensure that none of their policies and legislations have wording, processes and/or procedures that are discriminatory towards people with disability or exclude people with disability of their right and possibility of participating in civic and political life in their countries;
- Promote a free environment that encourages the participation of people with disabilities in civil society;
- Ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are counted in censuses;
- Ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are assisted to obtain birth certificates and identity cards;
- Facilitate the use of appropriate assistive devices and new technology;
- Put in place voting procedures, facilities and materials that are accessible and easy to use and understand;
- Ensure that people vote by secret ballot without any intimidation;
- Allow people to be assisted in voting by a person of their choice.



Barriers faced by people with intellectual disability in accessing political participation

BARRIERS

Census information is not reliable.

Identification cards/birth certificates are not universal for all citizens.

WHAT WE KNOW

Statistics on the number of people with disability is very important.

Not been counted makes them invisible to government and society.

ID cards/birth certificates not available for people with disability.

Families are reluctant to pay the cost of the ID card for their member with a disability. (they see no use for it since many will not even have access to an education or other services).

Travelling distance and times that offices are open coincide with parents time of work or household chores.

Identification of disability in these documents is an obstacle to voting rights.



Formal and informal denial of the legal capacity of adults with intellectual disabilities

It is assumed that people with intellectual disabilities lack the capacity to make decisions be personal, health related or financial.

Legislation around “legal capacity” is an obstacle for many to exercise their right to make decisions.

This includes not been able to vote for their candidate of their choosing let alone stand for election to public office. For this reason, they are denied the right to participate in the public and political life of a country. For example, in about 13 European countries, once one has been accorded the status of incapacity, this impacts on their right to vote.

Discriminatory laws and policies that prevent people with intellectual disabilities from participating in political and public life

For example, “unsoundness of mind” provisions which are present in a lot of African, MENA, Latin American and Asian countries. These prevent people with intellectual disabilities from making and exercising many activities that have legal implications like sing contracts, open bank accounts and participation in elections to name a few.

Problems with accessibility also create a barrier for people with intellectual disabilities who want to exercise their right to political participation

In most countries, polling stations are not accessible and the voting materials and ballots are not available in accessible formats. Article 29 (a) (i) imposes a duty on states to ensure that all “voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use.”

Social and cultural norms

Operate based on an assumption that people with intellectual disabilities cannot and should not even be making decisions as important as voting. In some countries, women with intellectual disabilities are denied the right to participate in any democratic processes simply because they are women.



Lack of up to date knowledge on the rights of people with intellectual disabilities

Many people in government are not aware that people with intellectual disabilities have a right to participate in political and public life. Without this knowledge, they will not take any measures to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities do participate.

Inadequacy of community structures in addressing the issues around the right to participate in public and political processes of people with intellectual disabilities.

There are underlying social and cultural causes of the denial of the right to political participation and what is required is a multi-layered response. Unfortunately, it is this response that is not always present to address the issues.

Voting and other political rights are not high ranking on the priority list of families of people with intellectual disabilities.

This in turn means that there will be very little if any advocating for these rights and this contributes to their being ignored by government officials and society at large. This is a situation which is not only unfortunate but also unacceptable given the importance of political rights to people with intellectual disabilities.

Exclusion from schools and communities

The exclusion people with intellectual disabilities in their communities has significant implications for their exclusion from political participation.



Summary of Barriers to Political Participation

The barriers to political participation – as well as recommendations for addressing the barriers and good practices from around the world – are documented in Inclusion International’s concept paper, *Accessing the Ballot Box: The Right to Political Participation*.² Overall, the barriers to political participation can be summarized into 8 key areas:

1. Denial of Legal Capacity
2. Discriminatory Laws and Policies
3. Problems with Accessibility
4. Social and Cultural Norms
5. Lack of Knowledge on the Rights of People with Intellectual Disabilities
6. Lack of Adequate Community Structures to Address the Right to Political and Civic Participation
7. Political and Civic Activities are Low on the Priority List of Families
8. Exclusion from education and communities contributes to exclusion from political participation

“Our laws are not strong enough to protect us” Self-advocate describing his experience of being denied his right to vote. Despite being legally allowed to vote, a policeman at a voting station told him he was not allowed to vote because he had an intellectual disability

“People in line were calling me names and telling me this is not my place” self-advocate describing his experience of voting.

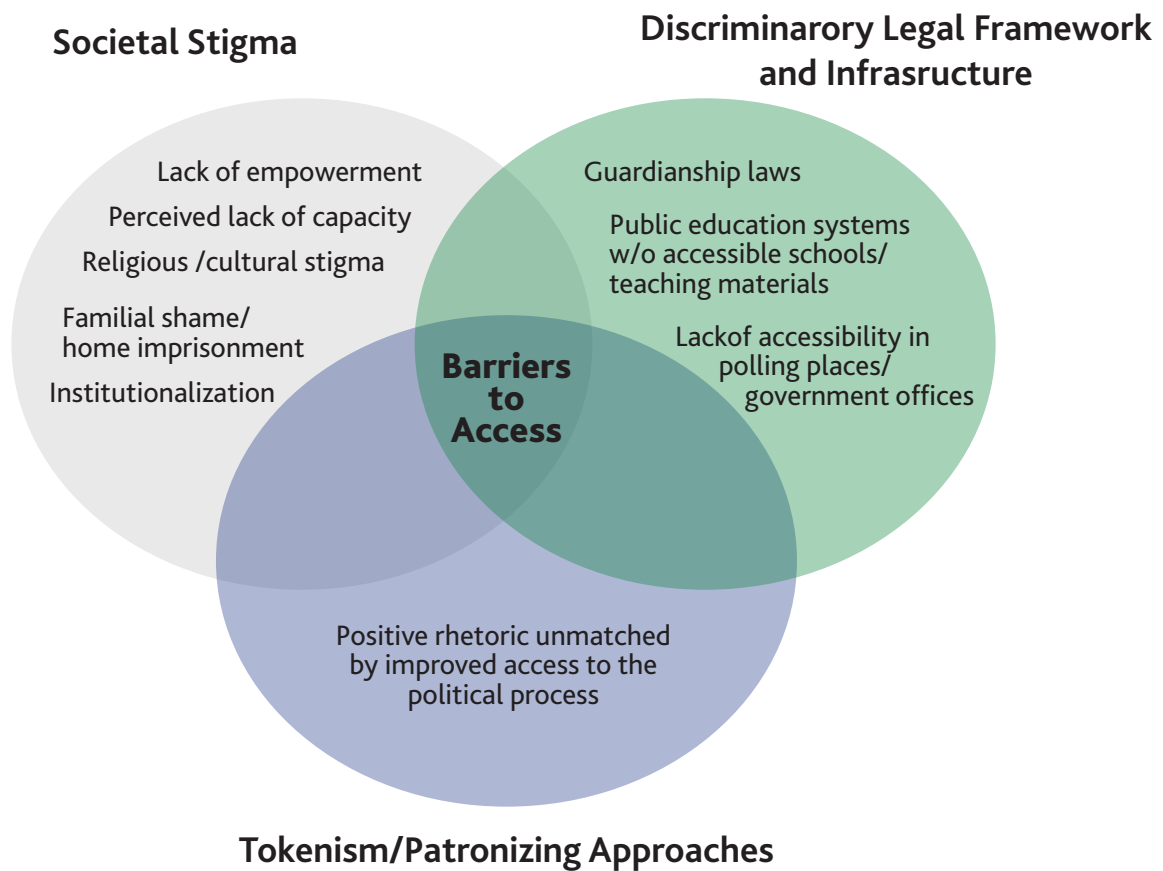
² Inclusion International. *Accessing the Ballot Box: The Right to Political Participation*. 2015. Available at: www.inclusion-international.org

Intersectionality and Political Participation

The barriers that limit the political participation of persons with intellectual disabilities are varied and multi-factoral. Similarly, CRPD Article 29 must be read in context with the CRPD as a whole. CRPD Article 29 is intrinsically linked with Articles: 3 (principles); 4.3 (obligation to consult); 5 (equality and non-discrimination); 9 accessibility); and, 12 (legal capacity). CRPD Article 29 is also critical for influencing Articles: 19 (living and Being Included in the Community); 24 (education); 27 (employment); and, 28 (standard of living)

The International Foundation for Electoral systems developed the following diagram that captures the inter-connection between societal stigma, discriminatory legal frameworks and tokenism that result in access to barriers.

Figure 3: Barriers Encountered by Persons with Disabilities



Making It Happen: From Right to Reality

Governments have distinct obligations to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are able to exercise their right to political participation. Securing CRPD Article 29 is not simply a matter of changing electoral laws or practices. While these efforts are critical, governments must go beyond these efforts to look at inclusive policy and practices and building inclusive communities.

This section will review options that can support governments in achieving these obligations.



ALIGN WITH THE CRPD

Countries should undertake a CRPD Compliance Assessment. In assessing CRPD Article 29 compliance, Inclusion International used the following check-list to evaluate a country:

	YES	NO	REFORM NEEDED?
Are there provisions in the law preventing people with intellectual disabilities from voting in elections?			
Does the law in your country prevent people with intellectual disabilities from standing for or holding public office?			
Are people with intellectual disabilities in your country supported to obtain birth certificates and identity cards to enable them to register to vote in elections?			
Is voting information about the political parties, candidates and polling stations made available to people with intellectual disabilities in accessible formats like plain language?			
Are voting materials, facilities and procedures in your country accessible to people with intellectual disabilities?			
Are people with intellectual disabilities able to vote in secret and if they need assistance, to be assisted by a person of their choice?			
Are people with intellectual disabilities in your country free to participate in civil society organizations which are concerned with public and political life?			
Are people with disabilities in your country free to participate in civil society organizations which deal with the administration of political parties?			
Can people with intellectual disabilities in your country join or form their own organizations which represent people with disabilities at the local, regional, national and international levels?			



INCLUSIVE PUBLIC POLICY

As our evolution of understanding human rights has progressed, we have recognized that particular populations experience particular rights based violations in particular ways. In order to address these violations, distinct conventions, like the CRPD, the UN Convention on the Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), have emerged. Similarly, a recognition of the importance of inclusive public policy has emerged. The exclusion of a gender analysis in policy development has been shown to have a negative impact on girls and women. The same is true for people with disabilities. **Public policy should benefit all citizens.**

Historically, public policy has not served people with disabilities well. Many countries have no specific policy on disability or what they do have is based on outdated assumptions of disability. Rates of poverty, unemployment/exclusion from the labour force, access to education, health status, illiteracy, violence and abuse, and other factors show that people with disabilities have been and remain systematically marginalized in society. Public policy decisions, or non-decisions, can be seen as directly contributing to these outcomes.

Public policy, when not informed by an inclusive analysis, can result in policy disincentives and gaps that perpetuate that exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Disincentives can be seen in the challenges of moving from income support to the labour market; gaps in supports and services for children, youth and adults; and, the lack of community-based supports.

Public policy can be more effective in achieving objectives and targets when it identifies and addresses built-in disincentives and gaps that leave people with disabilities without needed supports and opportunities.

Policies that result in inclusion, participation, contribution and full citizenship of all people including people with disabilities are good policies. **Public policy should ensure equality of opportunity and outcomes.**



INCLUSIVE ELECTIONS

Political participation requires that governments consider the barriers and challenges that prevent people from voting on election-day and take steps to address those barriers. Reform options may be legal in nature or practice-based. At minimum, governments should:

Law Reform:

- Remove all blanket disqualifications from voting.
- Undertake efforts to recognize the full legal capacity – including the capacity to act – for persons with intellectual disabilities.
- Repeal existing guardianship and substitute decision-making regimes and implementing positive measures to ensure persons with intellectual disabilities have access to support to exercise their legal capacity.
- Repeal “unsoundness of mind” and other similar provisions that may be found in laws that have the same legal effect of depriving legal capacity.
- Strengthen – or craft - anti-fraud and anti-manipulation measures to protect individuals who for diverse reasons (among which disability is only one) are at risk of manipulation and guarantee the integrity of the process.

Outreach and Training

- Ensure people with intellectual disabilities have the necessary ID cards to enable them to register as voters.
- Consider special registration drives for people with intellectual disabilities
 - ❖ Governments could partner with associations of families and intellectual disabilities to host these drives.
- Ensure electoral officials are trained on:
 - ❖ disability issues
 - ❖ how to communicate with people with intellectual disabilities
 - ❖ how persons with intellectual disabilities can be supported to exercise their right to vote.
- Ensure people with intellectual disabilities are also given the chance to become candidates.

Accessibility

- Require governments and political parties to provide information in plain language.
- Require all public consultations and events to be inclusive and accessible.
- Require that ballots include a picture of the candidate.
- Provide “express lines” or allocate particular times for persons with disabilities to vote.
- Require campaign materials, information and websites, be accessible and in plain language.
- Ensure voter registration information and other voter outreach measures are accessible and in plain language.
- Provide for:
 - ❖ mobile polling stations,
 - ❖ advance voting and / or postal voting,
 - ❖ voting by proxy, voting at home, voting at hospitals, etc.

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Inclusive communities lies at the foundation of inclusive political participation. Unless and until the root causes of marginalization are not addressed people with intellectual disabilities will continue to have low levels of political participation.

Inclusion International’s research has shown that key areas for investment are:

Self-advocacy and decision making

Families and people with intellectual disabilities tell us that self-advocacy – the empowerment of people with intellectual disabilities – begins at birth and it begins at home. People with intellectual disabilities need expectations that their voice matters and that their engagement is valuable.

Inclusive education

Families and people with intellectual disabilities repeatedly tell **Inclusion International that inclusive education is THE key to breaking down barriers and building inclusive communities.** Research and statistics back-up the stories of families and people with



intellectual disabilities and confirm that life-long patterns of inclusion begin in our local schools. The impact and value of inclusive education can be seen in the outcomes it affects:

- Children who are excluded from school are more likely to experience exclusion throughout their lives;
- Children who are included in school are more likely to be connected to their community, have meaningful relationships beyond their immediately family;
- They are more likely to get jobs and be healthier;
- They are more likely to be engaged in the civic life of their community;
- They are less likely to live in poverty.³

Living and being include in the community

There is a need to transform communities to be inclusive. People with intellectual disabilities and their families told us that living and being included in the community is about: Choice; Support and Community Inclusion. Choice about where and with whom one lives; Supports for individuals and families; and, that communities (education systems, health systems, recreation, transportation etc.) organize themselves in inclusive ways.

Investment in these three areas has the capacity to alter the reality of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

Governments cannot – and should not – do this alone. Working in partnership with people with intellectual disabilities, families and their representative organizations is necessary for securing the rights and advancing the full inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

“We did not know our law was taking away your basic human rights” Reaction from MPs in Japan in response to meeting with Takumi, a self-advocate who successfully sued the government for denying her the right to vote.

³ Inclusion International, *Hear Our Voices*. 2006 www.inclusion-international.org