My Voice Matters!
Supporting the Civic Engagement and Political Participation of People with Intellectual Disabilities

Workshop for Families and Self-Advocates

www.inclusion-international.org
☐ I vote you vote

☐ I don't VOTE You don't vote

CHOOSE!!!
Why Are We Here?

*To enhance political participation.*

*The workshop will:*

- Provide families, self-advocates and family based organizations information on inclusive civic engagement
- Identify strategies to increase the political participation of people with intellectual disabilities

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

– WHO are you?

– WHAT do you want to get from this workshop?
This workshop is part of a project on political participation: Accessing the Ballot Box.

The main objectives of the project are 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.
II Project: Expected Outcomes

- Increased **understanding** about the political participation of people with intellectual disabilities in the 3 countries.

- People with intellectual disabilities, their families and representative organizations in the 3 countries have the **capacity** to address the barriers people with intellectual disabilities experience in regards to political participation.

- Enhanced awareness by electoral officials and the public in the 3 countries about supporting people to exercise their right to political participation.
Goals and Outcomes for the Day
Together We Will:

• Learn about Political Participation
  – What it is and why it is important

• Understand why our voices aren’t heard
  – The barriers that keep us from being involved

• Learn how to get involved
  – Ways to make your voice heard

• Share ideas for ACTION
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
What is Political Participation?

Political Participation is about making your voice heard by your government.

It is about:

- Voting and being involved on laws and policies that matter to us.
  - Sometimes it is called civic engagement.

- Having a say on what is important to me and how I want my country to be.
  - This includes my right to vote and have my voice heard on laws and policies that matter to me.
What we know about Political Participation

• There is a systemic exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities, in particular women with intellectual disabilities, from political participation.

• People with intellectual disabilities are often denied their right to vote and engage in democratic processes.

• Families and the majority of their organizations do not identify political participation as a priority for people with intellectual disability
There is a growing interest from people with disabilities in having the opportunity to shape their communities and, in doing so, for them to be recognized and valued as community members.

To achieve this:

• People with an intellectual disability and their families need to participate politically as equal, active and engaged citizens.

• People with an intellectual disability, their families, and their organizations should *always* have a voice in programs that affect them, as well as decisions that impact their welfare and their communities.

• The UN CRPD is an opportunity, because it recognizes the Right to Participation in Political and Public Life (Article 29).
CRPD Article 29

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.
Disabled people have the right to take part in politics the same as every one else.

Disabled people have the right to vote by:

- Making sure voting is easy to do and understand.
- Making sure voting is secret.
• Allowing support to help people vote in the way they want, when needed.

• Making sure disabled people can be involved in non government organisations and political parties.

• Making sure disabled people can join organisations of disabled people.
What does it mean?

• Voting **forms, locations and procedures are easy for me to access**
• I am able to vote **in secret** on the day of elections
• I am supported to get identity cards and birth certificates so that I can register to vote
• **Voting information** such as the location of polling stations and the candidates is available in **accessible formats** – this could be plain language or using pictures
• I can choose who can help me vote. This is sometimes called **Voting assistance**
• I could be elected to **hold public office**
• I can **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**
• I can **form or join organizations** which represent people with disabilities at local, regional, national and international levels.
Small group

• Share examples of your political participation

• What barriers to you face in trying to participate in political life?
Why Our Voices Aren’t Heard

• A law says we are not allowed to vote or participate in government.
• People do not believe we have something to contribute
• We do not understand what the laws and policies mean and no one thinks it is important that I understand them
• I don’t know how to make my voice heard or change things
• I have never been given an opportunity to be included in my community. I need to go to school, and have a job
• Our families do not feel it is important that we vote or have an opinion on laws and policies.
• People do not value us.
Common Barriers

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 and Marginalization
WHY MY VOICE MATTERS
Why Does My Voice Matter?

• 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.
Why Does My Voice Matter?

• 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.
Getting Involved
Political Participation

BEFORE
to review and influence party platforms; 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
BEFORE elections

Individuals
• Get REGISTERED
  – You may need a national ID card to register
• Meet with your elected representative
  – Governments and elected representatives need to know about disability to be able to include disability in their priorities
  – Share your story and tell them about your life, your hopes and what you want to do.

Organizations
• Call on government, candidates to provide information in plain language
• Meet with government representatives
• Seek reform
  – Are their laws preventing people from voting?
• Inclusive policy analysis
  – CRPD compliance
  – Policy, budget, program analysis
During Election Period

Individuals
• Identify what is important to you and what you want the government to do to make inclusion a reality
• Call in to call-in radio and television shows – ask a question about disability
• Learn about the candidates/leaders debates and how the public can participate
• Candidates may canvass in your riding
  — invite them in, share your story, ask what they will do for people with disabilities

Organizations
• Provide your members with a plain language analysis of all party platforms
• Develop “fact sheets” to give candidates that identify key issues and “asks”
• Host or participate in a disability focused all-candidates debate
• Develop a public campaign on the right to vote.
• Using mock ballots, support people with intellectual disabilities to practice voting
ON Election Day

Individuals

• Find out where you vote
  – You may need to go to a specific voting station so you can vote
• Cast a ballot

Organizations

• Support people with intellectual disabilities to get to voting stations
• Support people with intellectual disabilities to cast their ballot
AFTER Elections

Individuals
• Follow-up with your elected representative
  – Relationships need to be ongoing not just during election period
• Participate in public consultations
• Share your story/knowledge for reports etc
• Get involved!

Organizations
• Follow-up with parties/government leaders
• Seek reform
  – Are their laws preventing people from voting?
• Inclusive policy analysis
  – this should be ongoing before/after elections
  – CRPD compliance
  – Policy, budget, program analysis
• Track and evaluate the impact/outcomes of government efforts
  – Reports to government, reports to international committees
Example: PANAMA

Efforts to promote citizen participation and engagement in advance of the election, including public awareness forums and pre-election forums with presidential candidates.

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.

Creation of a national Secretariat for the Social Integration of People with Disabilities (SENADIS).
exercise

• Practice voting
IDEAS FOR ACTION

CHANGE AHEAD
Get Informed

• Ask our families, our friends, people you trust and/or organizations about this issue

• Find out if laws in our country stop us from voting
  – Work with an organization to use the check list that will tell us if our country is following the CRPD. The check list is in the full report.

• Learn about organizations in our country working on things that are important to us
Make our Voices Heard

• Talk with our elected officials or government representatives. Our representatives are there for us. They have an obligation to listen to us and hear our opinions on issues that matter to us.

  “We (families impacted by disability) aren’t a big visible presence. . . . There aren’t as many people with disabilities in the province as there are farmers or business people. There are a lot of good causes and limited funds. But our visit with [our elected official] made me think that if every politician could meet a family in this way, we really could raise awareness of the issues,”

• Submit parallel reports to UN Committees about your country’s efforts on disability issues.
Collaborate

• We cannot do this alone.
  – Work with others who have expertise in issues that matter to you (ie civic engagement groups, education groups) and help raise their awareness about disability issues.
  – Start a group focused on disability rights and political participation.
Learn from Others

• MENCAP – All Party Group; Get My Vote Campaign
• Holland – Political Debates
  – host a debate on issues important to you/your group
• Lebanon – Cross-Disability Coalition
  – Working in partnership and solidarity with others
• Canada – candidate pledge cards; host all-candidates debates
• Germany/Japan/Peru – strategic litigation – challenging that people under guardianship cannot vote
• Kenya/Zanzibar – representative seats in Parliament
Be an ADVOCATE

• Identify specific goals we want to achieve.
• Identify the key issues that we are encountering.
• Identify some solutions
• Be clear (as possible) about what we are willing to accept, especially if we cannot get exactly what you want.
• Identify people who may be able to help.
• Identify the people that we need to speak with to achieve results.
Take ACTION

We can:

• Participate in events on civic engagement and political participation
• Share information on issues important to us
• Raise awareness on rights
• Talk about the barriers that get in our way
• Recommend solutions
Make CHANGE Happen

• People make laws and policies and we can change them too.
  – Sometimes it can feel like too many things need to be changed before we make a difference.

• Change takes time.
  – Start by focusing on one or two key problems and move from there.

• We are already doing this whether we know it or not!
  – Fighting to make sure we can vote, go to school, have a job or live in our communities is a form of political participation.
Accessing the Ballot Box: Inclusive Civic Engagement