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ASSESSMENT OF ELECTION ACCESS BARRIERS IN GUATEMALA



November 2012

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Assessment of Election Access Barriers in Guatemala

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Assessment of Election Access Barriers in Guatemala

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I. Overview of Research Initiatives

In advance of the September/November 2011 elections in Guatemala, IFES conducted various activities to improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the electoral process. To reflect on lessons learned and future programming needs, IFES designed this study and contracted the Guatemala City-based research organization ConsumeR to conduct fieldwork from August 6-14, 2012. Three research activities captured the different perspectives of those working on or affected by inclusion issues: a survey of 250 electoral authorities; six focus groups consisting of persons with disabilities and those who work with persons with disabilities; and six in-depth interviews with leaders of disabled persons organizations (DPOs) with whom IFES had worked during the previous electoral cycle.

II. Key Findings

Survey of Electoral Authorities

In telephone interviews with 250 electoral authorities, respondents were asked about their experiences with poll worker training and the poll worker manual, specifically the sections of the training and manual IFES had developed, which covered administering the vote to persons with disabilities. Most of the respondents (82%) were randomly selected from a list of municipal election board (JEM) members, the body that selects and trains the poll workers, and 12% of respondents were randomly selected from a list of departmental election board (JED) members, the body that selected the JEM and is directly responsible for the final results transmission from each department in Guatemala to the TSE's main data center.

- The training on how to administer the vote to persons with disabilities and the IFES-developed section on this topic in the poll worker manual were both well-received by electoral authorities: 92% of respondents say they were very (63%) or somewhat (29%) satisfied with the trainings. Likewise, electoral authorities believe the trainings helped them feel very/somewhat prepared (97%) and very/somewhat confident (98%) to carry out their duties on Election Day. Nevertheless, 79% of respondents express the need to spend more training time on this topic before future elections.
- Respondents say their knowledge of how to administer the vote to persons with disabilities (82%) and their knowledge of the rights of persons with disabilities (86%) increased after the trainings.
- Asked which additional knowledge they feel is needed to improve poll workers' readiness to assist voters with disabilities, respondents recommend more experts who are knowledgeable and experienced in assisting persons with disabilities and more specific people assigned to provide assistance to persons with disabilities (33%), more time for training (30%) and more training materials (14%).

- A majority of respondents say all persons with disabilities who came to vote where they were working were able to vote with no problems (68%); yet 29% say some persons with disabilities were able to vote with no problems, but others had problems voting; and 3% say all of the persons with disabilities who came to vote had problems voting.

Focus Groups

A total of six focus groups were held in Guatemala from August 6-14, 2012. One focus group was held in Sanarte (a rural area), two in Escuintla (a rural area) and four in the capital, Guatemala City. Three focus groups consisted of eight to 10 persons with disabilities, and three focus groups were formed with representatives of organizations that work with persons with disabilities, some of whom had disabilities themselves. The focus groups' objectives were to document participants' experiences and elicit their opinions on access to political life in Guatemala.

- Persons with disabilities express strong interest in politics and elections and describe voting as a civic duty.
- The most common obstacles encountered when voting include inaccessible transportation, poor polling station infrastructure (a lack of ramps and tables of appropriate heights) and a lack of sensitivity on the part of fellow citizens and poll workers. Many participants mention that the obstacles start from the time they leave their homes.
- While it is understood that improvements have been made in each subsequent electoral cycle, most participants say there is still much to be done to remove these obstacles to voting for persons with disabilities. Further, some participants believe that in Guatemalan society as a whole, sensitization, compassion and respect for the rights of persons with disabilities are lacking. Participants call for the government and other entities to work toward shifting this societal mentality.
- In general, people affiliated with DPOs are more aware of voter education efforts and advertisements, while other focus group participants who are not affiliated with DPOs report that these efforts have a limited reach, noting that much of the information available in the capital is scarce in other areas of the country. Very few participants report having seen or heard TV or radio ads.
- Similarly, participants affiliated with DPOs are more aware of the rights of persons with disabilities in Guatemala than those not affiliated with DPOs. Many focus group participants are aware that laws pertaining to these rights exist, but almost no one feels the laws are followed or enforced. They do not feel this is necessarily because these laws concern persons with disabilities, but instead believe this is because enforcement of laws in the country is lacking in general.

In-depth Interviews

Six in-depth interviews were conducted with leaders of DPOs who were involved in IFES programming prior to the 2011 elections. The main objective of the interviews was to gain understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the DPO community in Guatemala.

- The interviewees perceive improvements in access for persons with disabilities in the September/November 2011 election cycle and attribute it to the work of DPOs and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal's (*Tribunal Supremo Electoral*, TSE) increased openness and goodwill toward the issue of inclusion.
- DPO leaders note that progress has been made in improving inclusion in Guatemala. Greater and better participation of persons with disabilities in the electoral process is evident, but many obstacles remain. DPO leaders echo focus group findings that indicate more progress has been made in the capital than in the interior.
- DPO leaders are not very optimistic that the government will improve its record of adhering to and enforcing the rights of persons with disabilities and laws pertaining to those rights. Nevertheless, they express commitment to continued efforts that push for this change.
- DPO leaders and focus group participants identify nearly all of the same barriers for persons with disabilities when voting: poor polling station infrastructure, inadequate transportation and, within society and among poll workers, an overall lack of sensitivity toward or understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities.
- DPO leaders agree the poll worker training was substantial, but say more is needed to improve electoral authorities' knowledge of and sensitivity to persons with disabilities. They also say it is unclear whether the training translated positively in practice on Election Day.
- Funding and technical resources are the main challenges facing Guatemalan DPOs.
- DPO leaders say they value both the technical expertise and financial support received from IFES and others. They hope that the collaboration can continue into the future, not only immediately before elections but between electoral cycles as well.

III. Findings from a Survey of Guatemalan Electoral Authorities

Research Overview

A survey of 250 electoral authorities was conducted via telephone to gauge the effectiveness of the manual and trainings on administering the vote to persons with disabilities. Most of the respondents (82%) were randomly selected from a list of municipal election board (JEM) members, the body that selects and trains the poll workers, and 12% of respondents were randomly selected from a list of departmental election board (JED) members, the body that selected the JEM and is directly responsible for the final results transmission from each department in Guatemala to the TSE’s main data center. A profile of the respondents follows.

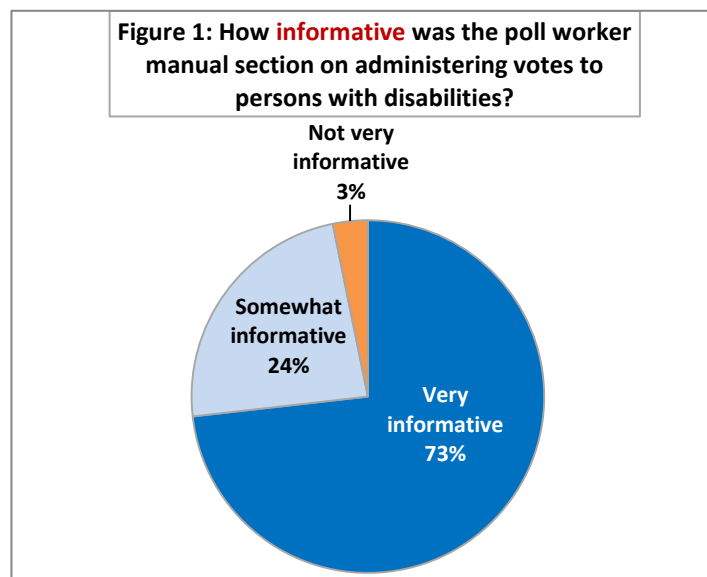
- Seventy-eight percent of respondents have worked in two or more elections; 22% have worked in only one.
- Seventy-seven percent of respondents are men, and 23% are women.
- Only 1% of respondents have a disability.
- Thirty-three percent of respondents received training in the interior, and 67% received training in the capital.

IFES provided oversight to ConsuMer, the Guatemala City-based research organization engaged to conduct the interviews. The short survey asked respondents for their evaluation of the poll worker training and poll worker manual and inquired about their experiences assisting persons with disabilities on Election Day. Overall, surveyed poll workers found the training and manual useful; contributing both to their increased feelings of preparedness and confidence in administering the vote to persons with disabilities.

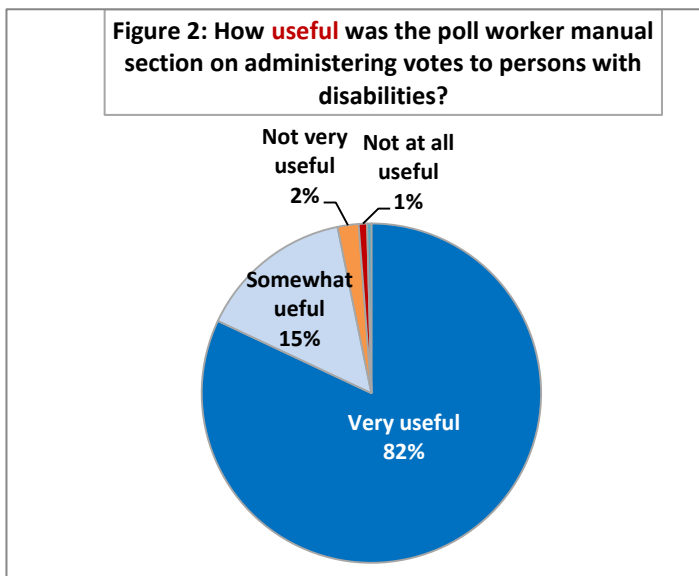
Findings

Evaluation of Training and Poll Worker Manual

The poll worker trainings overall receive high marks with 92% of respondents saying they were very (63%) or somewhat (29%) satisfied with the trainings. Likewise, electoral authorities believe the trainings helped them feel very or somewhat prepared (97%) and very or somewhat confident (98%) to carry out their duties on Election Day. In addition, they say their knowledge of the Guatemalan election process increased significantly or somewhat as a result of the trainings (98%).

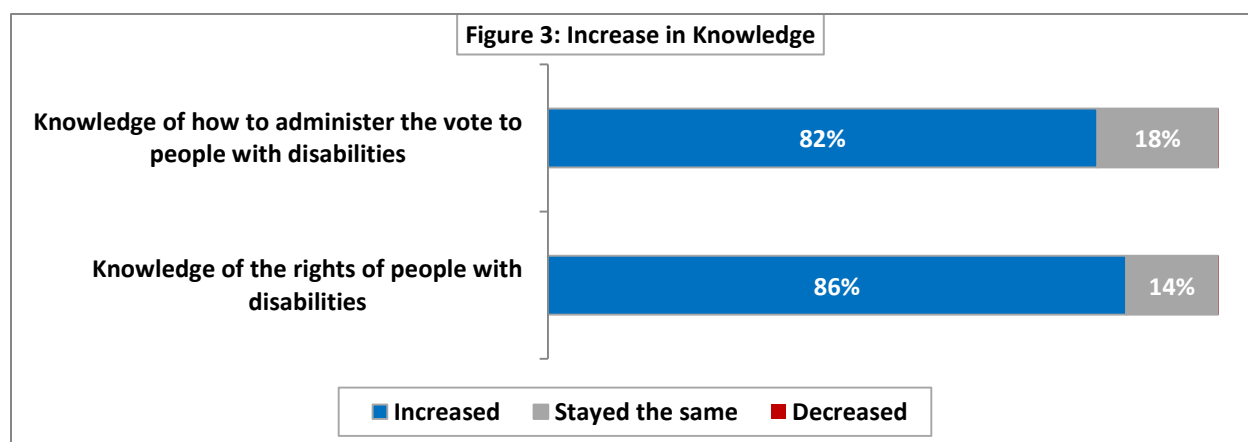


The poll worker manual is also reviewed positively; 97% of respondents say it was very (64%) or somewhat good (32%). The section produced by IFES,¹ that contained information on how to assist persons with disabilities when voting is also reviewed positively, with 97% saying the section was very (73%) or somewhat informative (24%) (Figure 1). Ninety-seven percent of respondents also report this section was very (82%) or somewhat (15%) useful to them in administering the vote to persons with disabilities (Figure 2). Respondents report finding the manual to be useful



because it informed them about how to assist those with disabilities (36%), gave new information or removed doubts (21%) and was strongly focused on how to assist persons with disabilities (16%). The trainers, who covered the manual section on administering the vote to persons with disabilities and were trained by the Guatemalan NGO *Consejo Nacional para la Atención de las Personas con Discapacidad* (the National Council for the Care of Persons with Disabilities, CONADI) are also evaluated as very (70%) or somewhat knowledgeable (24%). Only 4% say the trainers were not very knowledgeable and 1% say they were not knowledgeable at all on this topic.

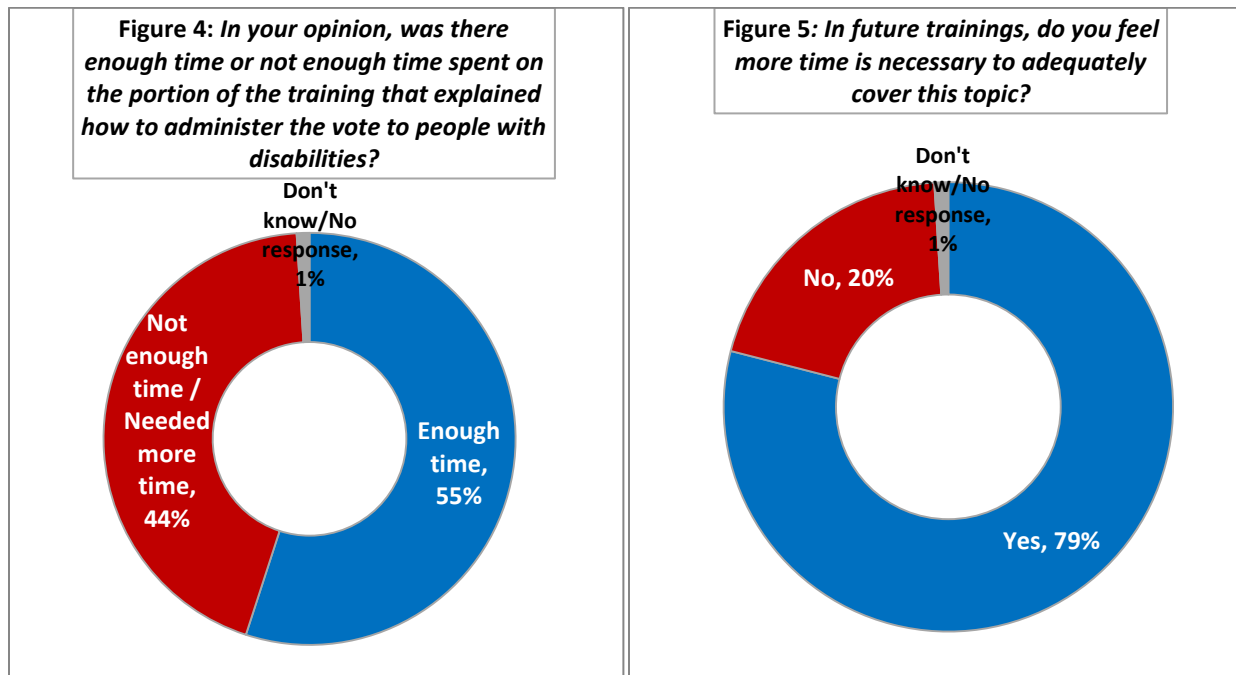
Respondents say their knowledge of how to administer the vote to persons with disabilities and their knowledge of the general rights of persons with disabilities both increased after the training (82% and 86%, respectively) (Figure 3). Those who received trainings in the capital report a slightly greater increase in knowledge than is reported by those in the interior.



¹ Please see Appendix I for an excerpt from this portion of the manual.

Nevertheless, respondents are split in their opinions on whether there was sufficient time (55%) or insufficient time (44%) spent on this topic (Figure 4). When asked directly about future trainings, a majority (79%) say more time is needed to adequately cover the topic of administering the vote to persons with disabilities (Figure 5).

Those who believe more time is necessary to cover this topic say it is because this change would improve the training by focusing more on this topic (40%), better equip people who do not have much experience in this realm (17%) and give more practical information on assisting those with disabilities (18%).



Election Day Experiences with Persons with Disabilities

Ninety-five percent of electoral authorities surveyed say they knew how to administer the vote to persons with disabilities at their polling stations. Those trained in the capital and those who worked on elections previously are slightly more confident about this ability.

Ninety-percent of electoral authorities surveyed say at least one person with a disability voted in their respective polling stations on Election Day. A majority of respondents say that all persons with disabilities who came to vote were able to vote with no problems (68%); yet 29% say only some were able to vote with no problems while others had problems voting; and 3% say all of the persons with disabilities who came to vote at their polling stations had problems voting.

Of those who say problems were encountered, 46% cite a lack of accessible infrastructure or equipment; 27% cite problems at the polling station and with political party representatives (including representatives that voted for persons with disabilities); 24% cite issues such as long queues or voting taking a long time (including persons with disabilities not receiving priority to vote when there were long

lines); and 21% cite problems such as persons with disabilities not accepting help. Seven percent of respondents report knowing of a person with a disability who was not able to vote, but 93% say they do not know of any such cases.

Finally, when asked which additional knowledge they feel is needed to improve poll workers' readiness to assist voters with disabilities, respondents recommend increasing the number of experts with knowledge and experience in assisting persons with disabilities and the number of designated poll workers to assist with persons with disabilities (33%), allowing more time for training (30%) and providing more training materials (14%).

IV. Findings from Focus Groups with Persons with Disabilities

Research Overview

From August 6-14, 2012, six focus groups were held. Three groups each consisted of eight to 10 persons with disabilities. The other three focus groups brought together eight to 10 representatives of organizations that work with persons with disabilities, some of whom have disabilities themselves. One focus group was held in Sanarte (a rural area), two in Escuintla (a rural area) and four in the capital, Guatemala City. Focus group participants were recruited through IFES' contacts with DPOs in the country. Each group of participants represented a mix of genders, ages and types of disability. The focus groups' objectives were to document participants' experiences and elicit their opinions on access to political life in Guatemala.

Structure of Section

This report presents the conclusions of the six focus groups; findings are presented by topic area. The focus group participants will be referred to as "participants" throughout the report. Direct quotations from participants are also presented, and each quoted person is identified by demographic characteristics, as below:

"In my opinion ..."

–Female, 36-49, blind, Sanarte [Gender, age group, type of disability, focus group location]

Detailed Findings

Interest in Politics

Nearly all focus group participants express an interest in politics, and nearly all have voted in past elections. Across groups, participants express a strong sentiment that voting is a right and a duty for all citizens; a few believe it is even more important that persons with disabilities vote, as they are a marginalized group in society. A few participants say that while it is important to vote, it is also important for persons with disabilities to obtain leadership positions and become elected officials. Almost all participants voted in the September/November 2011 elections, and most say they plan to vote in future elections.

“It is a right that we have as citizens, and elections are very important. ... It is more important than in the past. It is important and for people with disabilities even more because it is a part of society that has been marginalized and forgotten; then it is hoped that, through democracy and elections, a better future will come.”

–Male, 18-24, blind, Sanarte

“I feel that certainly it is our right to choose, but we forget that the second part is to be elected and someone with a disability almost never has a real chance of winning; there has been one person with a disability who is engaged in positions that are powerful. And not only that, but everything relates to decision making; political parties are very inflexible in that case, and there is no room for people with disabilities to have a say in political parties.”

–Female, 45-54, visually impaired, Guatemala City

Information on Elections for Persons with Disabilities

Most participants report that information on elections and voting is limited for persons with disabilities. Members of DPOs, including many of those in the focus groups, believe they are more informed about voting and elections than those with disabilities who are not affiliated with DPOs. Focus group participants who work for DPOs are more inclined to say a lot of information exists. But participants who are not DPO members feel information is more limited.

Visibility of Pre-Election Voter Education Campaigns Targeting Persons with Disabilities

Only a few focus group participants report awareness of pre-election voter education advertisements or materials that targeted persons with disabilities, but all participants think they are a very important initiative to continue. Those who work with DPOs say they worked on efforts to widely disseminate this information but needed more resources to increase visibility.

During the focus group meeting, participants viewed advertisements that the IFES project and partners produced and ran ahead of the elections:

- TV and radio spots: *“No hay limitaciones.”* (There are no limitations.)
- Radio spots: *“Tu vas a votar?”* (Will you vote?)
- Billboards and bus station posters: *“Yo vote y volveré a votar.”* (I voted, and I will vote again.)²

Some focus group participants recall the TV and radio spots, but many do not. The relatively low recall may be due to the fact that many months have passed since the pre-election period when the ads aired. Ideally, testing for visibility would have occurred much closer to the elections.

A few participants who work for organizations serving persons with disabilities are critical of the ads, saying the production was poor and the message was weak; however, they praise the purpose and message of the ads.

“[The ad] from television I remember seeing, but the radio ad I did not.”

–Female, 25-34, physical disability, Guatemala City

² Please see Appendix 1 for images of the posters and billboards and for links to the video and audio files.

Voting Experiences

Many participants report they had issues voting, but others say they had no problems. The participants who are members of the Blind Union agree that the existence of Braille ballots is a great achievement, and most do not feel the secrecy of their votes was compromised. A few blind voters disagree, however, feeling that the Braille ballots made it easy to identify the voters and how they had voted. Some who voted with Braille ballots express concern that their votes are not secret, indicating this might especially be true in small municipalities. One participant says that if only three blind people vote in a particular location, for example, it would be easy to find out whose ballot was whose. No focus group participants report seeing persons with disabilities working at polling stations.

One participant's voting experience was negative: People at the polling station did not realize she was deaf, and she was treated poorly by others in line and by a poll worker. She believes persons with disabilities are often deterred from voting out of fear of being treated poorly.

Some note that persons with disabilities often assist each other at polling stations. A few of those who did not have problems voting believe that access was better because they were in the city, but in the interior there were more problems with access. Some participants sense that progress has been made in improving accessibility to elections; but they assert that this progress has been limited, and some say most progress has occurred in the capital but not the interior.

"For example, last time I went to vote, I was in the line and people spoke to me, but I did not understand. Another person laughed, and then I thought they were asking me for my ID card, but I didn't understand. I just stood there, and then they realized I was deaf. Then they gave me my ballot, but a little sarcastically."

–Female, 35-44, deaf, Guatemala City

"For me that was the biggest obstacle I encountered: first the huge queue, then the table that is too high and I cannot call someone to help me because the vote is secret."

–Female, 45-54, little person, Guatemala City

"I climbed to the second level; but there was a man in a wheelchair, and it took three people to help him up the stairs."

–Female, 45-54, blind, Sanarte

"I felt that I was helped quickly and because I knew how to vote by Braille ballot. I think it went well."

–Male, 35-44, blind, Sanarte

Obstacles to Voting and Inclusion in the Election Process

All groups identify inadequate transportation and infrastructure at the voting centers (polling stations that require voters to use stairs, tall voting tables) as the main barriers to accessibility, but a lack of sensitization on the part of poll workers is also mentioned. A few participants, particularly those with physical disabilities, believe the obstacles begin when they leave their homes. Some participants believe

the presence of more poll workers with disabilities would help improve the situation, arguing that persons with disabilities are more likely to be sensitized to certain issues. Some deaf participants mention the difficulty in communicating in the absence of an interpreter at the polling station. They express their feelings of being inconspicuous without someone to interpret for them when they went to the polling stations.

One person notes that persons with disabilities must ask for help themselves if they need help and should not expect people to necessarily come to them and help them. Some blind participants indicate that accessibility at the polling stations was not necessarily difficult for them, if they had to climb stairs for example, but they say they are unsure of how people in wheelchairs would have managed.

“The lack of sign language interpreter was an obstacle because there is no one in Escuintla in Guatemala there. I understand, but my deaf students do not understand – they say people mock them.”

–Female, 35-44, deaf, Guatemala City

“Inside there are many obstacles because in my voting center I have to pass on a ramp that is very steep. There were members of the TSE standing there, and [they] saw that I was burning my hands to stop my chair. And this is when I get mad – they saw me and just kept talking.”

–Male, 25-34, paraplegic, Guatemala City

“The truth is that the difficulties are the architectural barriers, like the steep slopes. Transportation for people with physical disabilities is the main problem, really, because in order to get to the poll station, we have to take the buses where the doors are very narrow, hard to climb, people have to support you and sometimes the bus drivers do not stop. Many times, I do not take buses; I just take myself on my chair through the streets because I know I’ll get there faster than waiting for a bus to take me.”

–Female, 45-54, paraplegic, Guatemala City

“The polling centers are still not architecturally adequate. There are many barriers.”

–Male, 35-44, blind, Sanarte

“In the capital, it’s a little easier. But in the interior, it is more difficult because there is nothing; there is no attention or accessibility.”

–Male, 35-44, deaf, Guatemala City

The participants frequently mention the general problem that society lacks awareness or sensitivity to those with disabilities. For example, people laugh at them or do not want to help them. One participant mentions the news on TV has no interpretation; therefore deaf people cannot understand the news reports.

“I do not [feel included in the electoral process in Guatemala] because they don’t give enough help.”

–Female, 45-54, small person, Guatemala City

“I have always thought that here in Guatemala the awareness among society is lacking. There have been awareness campaigns in high school, university, from government entities; but we are people with disabilities, and we value and have the same rights as a normal person.”

–Female, 35-44, deaf, Guatemala City

“Like the example of the buses, people laugh at people with disabilities. There is no help, no sympathy, no respect. They must be made aware that people with disabilities should be respected too.”

–Male, 25-34, deaf, Guatemala City

Opinions on Politicians’ Commitment to Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

Overall, focus group participants do not feel politicians are interested in areas of importance to persons with disabilities. But many express the sentiment that politicians often lie and do not accomplish many of their promises – not just promises made to the disability community. A few participants, mostly those affiliated with DPOs, recall having heard of the platform on disability inclusive politics that was presented to candidates for the new government to enact, but most participants say they had not heard of this effort.

Few participants are hopeful that politicians will fulfill their promises to focus on this issue. However, this is attributed to politicians’ general lack of credibility and not necessarily to their lack of commitment to this issue in particular. Members of DPOs say it is important to continue pressing politicians in order to see gradual progress for better inclusion policies.

“I think actually the experience and history of Guatemala has taught us that politicians here usually do not care about anything, least of all persons with disabilities.”

–Female, 45-54, blind, Guatemala City

“The problem with the authorities is that they don’t 100 percent take us into account and they only speak lies to us.”

–Male, 45-54, blind, Sanarte

Knowledge of National and International Standards

Those who are members or employees of DPOs tend to be more aware of national and international standards on the rights of persons with disabilities; however, there is a sense that most other citizens are not generally aware of these standards. Furthermore, focus group participants generally do not believe these laws are abided by, due either to a lack of interest or a lack of knowledge. Some participants clarify that laws are not really respected overall in Guatemala and there is not necessarily a unique neglect of laws specifically concerning persons with disabilities. A few DPO members make the case that persons with disabilities need to associate with DPOs to help defend such laws and rights and push for sanctions if they are not respected.

“There is no enforcement if institutions do not comply with these laws.”

–Female, 45-54, paraplegic, Guatemala City

V. Findings from In-depth Interviews with Leaders of Civil Society Organizations

Six in-depth interviews were conducted in Guatemala City with representatives of DPOs and other organizations that work on issues regarding inclusion, in order to gain understanding of the opinions, priorities and areas of need amongst DPO leaders. IFES worked with each of these organizations in the leading up to the September/November 2011 elections.

	Organization	Disability?
Interviewee 1	<i>Comité de Ciegos y Sordos de Guatemala</i> (Committee for the Blind and Deaf in Guatemala)	Blind
Interviewee 2	<i>Consejo Nacional para la Atención de las Personas con Discapacidad</i> (National Council for the Care of Persons with Disabilities; CONADI)	Blind
Interviewee 3	<i>Asociación de Sordos de Guatemala</i> (Association of Deaf Persons in Guatemala; ASORGUA)	No
Interviewee 4	<i>Fundación Guatemalteca para Niños con Sordo-Ceguera Alex</i> (Alex Guatemalan Foundation for deaf/blind children; FUNDAL)	No
Interviewee 5	<i>Asociación de Capacitación y Asistencia Técnica en Educación y Discapacidad</i> (Association of Training and Technical Assistance in Education and Disabilities; ASCATED)	No
Interviewee 6	<i>Asociación Nacional de Ciegos de Guatemala</i> (Association of Blind Persons in Guatemala; ANCG)	Blind

Detailed Findings

Adherence to National and International Standards

Asked if Guatemala is abiding by national standards such as Article 53 of the constitution or the National Policy on Disabilities 16-2008 and the Law on Assistance to People with Disabilities 135-96, DPO leaders say there is little awareness of or adherence to these laws among citizens and/or authorities.

Ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is viewed positively. The CRPD offers a good legal framework from which to push for reforms, but in practice it has not accomplished much in Guatemala. Still, DPO leaders feel progress has been and continues to be made in this realm, but much work remains. As focus group participants indicate, respect for the rights of persons with disabilities and compliance with the laws protecting those rights remains an issue in Guatemala. DPO leaders view compliance with these laws as a long-term goal to work toward.

“We believe they are beginning to generate significant actions that are not being met at 100 percent, but we cannot say that they are not doing anything. There are different manifestations of political will to want to address the issue. The fact is that many years of exclusion clearly tells us how this issue has been abandoned along the country’s history. You say there are two basic components: One is the lack of knowledge of rights

by persons with disabilities to demand respect and fulfill those rights, a subject in which we started doing other important actions, and it is also lack of knowledge of the legal framework by the same authorities and institutions that generate the same services for people with disabilities in Guatemala. Because we have the experience that people with disabilities have certainly been neglected by the state and 80 percent of the services running for disabled people in the country have been made by private institutions, but many of these private institutions or some – and little by little – are disappearing.”

Evaluation of Obstacles and Progress in the September/November 2011 Elections

DPO leaders believe improvements in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the electoral process have occurred, yet there is much more work to be done. These leaders also believe that certain disability groups have made more advances than others: the blind have made the most progress, followed by the deaf, and then the physically disabled and finally the mentally disabled. At least one interviewee says that, since implementing Braille ballots years ago, there has not been much progress to speak of.

“We could show that there are basically three factors that have been decisive in this space to share. The first is the issue of accessibility of physical spaces and transportation that significantly hinders the movement of people into different spaces; that obviously affects employment, education and citizen participation in general. There are also significant barriers to communication and information in general, but information is quite limited for those who are blind or deaf. And a third element that I would add is the fact that the lack of commitment has existed for years in the country’s political authorities to generate conditions to facilitate the participation of people with disabilities. Fortunately, on election issues they are taking significant actions to overcome some of these, but we believe that there was a lag of many years in addressing these issues.”

Despite these improvements, however, poor infrastructure and a lack of information top the list of current obstacles to voting.

“Information is not clear on the electoral process and the process of going to cast the vote. The other obstacle is accessibility, the distances they have to cover, if you do not have adequate transportation, or the ability to mobilize resources, because they will not invest in transportation from one place to another to go vote.”

Overall, interviewees assess the September/November 2011 electoral process more positively than past elections, perceiving improvements but accepting that they are still limited. Furthermore, interviewees perceive neither a wholesale rejection of the rights of persons with disabilities nor a problem with the secrecy of the vote. Some problems with elections that interviewees mention are those that affect all of the Guatemalan population, not only persons with disabilities. These problems include a lack of credibility in the system (which generates apathy about voting), vote buying and inconveniently located or distant polling stations.

Consistent with the focus group findings, the main obstacles facing persons with disabilities include infrastructure, transportation and a lack of sensitization both in the public generally and among poll workers regarding the needs and rights of persons with disabilities. DPO leaders identify these obstacles in particular:

- Transportation to voting centers
- Infrastructure problems/physical barriers (lack of accessibility due to steps and physical barriers, absence of ramps)
- Polling stations that can only be accessed by stairs, mostly impacting those with physical disabilities
- The difficulty for blind people who do not know Braille to obtain assistance when voting
- Greater improvements to accessibility in the capital city than in rural areas
- Potentially compromised secrecy of the vote because of the structure of lower voting booths

Interviewees mention positive achievements as well, including the increased assistance and guidance in the voting centers; priority voting for persons with disabilities; and assistance in special situations (such as carrying a person with a wheelchair upstairs of a voting center).

Interviewed leaders say they find it difficult to determine if obstacles actually impact whether people participate. They say that citizens with disabilities not only are affected by the same skepticism as other citizens but also face these other barriers. However, they observe that despite perceived obstacles, activities of DPO groups in the country are increasing, which they consider an encouraging trend.

Rating of the Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE) and Electoral Reform

The interviewees agree that further electoral reform should occur and steps toward reform have already started, some with assistance from IFES. Still, they feel further reform is needed, both in new arenas and in improving existing areas of inclusion, such as secrecy of the vote with Braille ballots. Some interviewees also believe the sector serving persons with disabilities has stagnated and more efforts need to be undertaken to ensure additional achievements.

Most interviewees rate the work of the TSE positively, saying it has shown openness to working on issues of inclusion in this election cycle. However, some worry this openness could be tied to the personalities in charge now, namely the current President of the TSE María Eugenia Villagrán de León. However, they believe this commitment is an obligation that must become institutionalized within the TSE, regardless of leadership.

“Efforts are palpable and tangible. Disabled people are realizing the attitude change that can be within an institution to promote these initiatives for change, so that their needs and their rights are covered, if you are doing something that looks and feels tangible.”

“Probably I think Dr. Villagrán has been one that has perhaps been more open to include the sector, to include processes, but I do not know – that’s my ignorance – if you have to

see a mandate for that to happen. I think in the '90s if I'm wrong, maybe I'm wrong with the dates, was when the Braille ballot was introduced and from that date until now has been another situation, meaning the disabled sector has spent almost 20 years in the same position, taking into account the amount of time, I do believe that what has been done by the TSE in this period was positive, although there is still more to be done."

"I consider it an obligation, not that they are doing you a favor. [It] is an obligation to inform the public and be inclusive. That's what I think."

Expectations for Commitments to the Platform Given to Candidates

Expectations are low for compliance with the proposed platform for persons with disabilities that was given to candidates. Some of these low expectations are due to the limited success of previous efforts. Nevertheless, it is agreed that these forums and platforms are an important means of pressure as DPOs continue to strive toward better inclusion. Interviewees understand that this is a long-term goal, which will require a lengthy process that is strengthened by cooperation between DPOs.

"During the last process, people tried to make a commitment to a minimum agenda of the issues that people with disabilities have suggested in terms of wanting to be served. The most important right now, but not of this current government, was the incorporation of a specific attention to the issue of education for people with disabilities, as this is the movement that grew out of that minimum agenda. But there is still work that needs to be done to improve the inclusion of people with disabilities in education. I think we should always be positive, though sometimes we despair, but if we continue working with organizations, and in this case the government, we can reach success regarding these issues. We are going to continue to promote these efforts, but we must be clear that all these processes are long term. Because the priorities of officials also affect when these developments can be made."

"Yes, they have given an opportunity to sit and talk with them, but despite all the nice words and good efforts they have made, they have not done real actions that we can say they are accomplishing."

Poll Worker Knowledge

Interviewees do not generally perceive problems from members of polling stations with respect to the rights of persons with disabilities; however, they note some remaining issues to be addressed in future electoral cycles. Interviewees believe a strong effort was made in training members of the polling stations, but these efforts may not have reached the desired effect. The method of training that was used (first train-the-trainers and then cascade training) was perceived to possibly not have been as effective as intended. They note that electoral authorities were trained on disability issues, but important information may have been lost in the process of cascading. Interviewees also say they do not know how trainings were actually implemented, nor do they know to what extent the training was applied in practice.

For those who lack sensitivity to the rights of persons with disabilities, trainings may lose some of their intended spirit of inclusion and service to the group. Interviewees note that improvement in this area first requires development of greater sensitivity in society in general; a more sensitive society will be more receptive to this type of training.

“I believe there is a general unfamiliarity with the issue of disabilities. One’s attitude will not change by training. If only training poll workers, how sustainable is this? It is better to inform the general community and society in general on the issue of people with disabilities. This would make a more permanent change.”

Recommendations for Making Future Elections More Accessible

As mentioned previously, DPO leaders believe there have been improvements since the last electoral cycle and the TSE has been more open to inclusion issues. However, a few note that the TSE’s openness during this election could have been driven by specific TSE staff and not necessarily as an institutional initiative, raising questions about the sustainability of this commitment to inclusion issues.

The interviewees’ recommendations for goals to achieve before future elections focus largely on information and on communication to society and authorities in the electoral process. Interviewees also say that achieving a change in laws will be important to further ensuring the inclusion of the disabilities sector within the process and monitoring the defined minimum agenda from prior to the September/November 2011 elections. Interviewees also emphasize the importance of developing a database, census or registration of persons with disabilities, including information on their locations and types of disability. This would notably be used for statistical purposes and for planning the electoral process in ways that more effectively integrate voters with disabilities.

“One, training and training on civil and political rights; two, accessibility of information and communication; and three, having a statistic or a database of people with disabilities with their classifications – deaf, blind, Down syndrome, autism, multiple sclerosis and all sub classifications of disability.”

“I think there should be more involvement of people with disabilities to enable them to be more involved in what is taking place.”

In discussing how to make elections more accessible to persons with disabilities, interviewees made several recommendations that can be put into effect well in advance of the next election cycle, including:

- Increasing information and awareness to society as a whole regarding the rights of persons with disabilities
- Training persons involved in the process (from the TSE and otherwise) and integrating DPOs into the training process
- Improving the collective knowledge about the laws and rules that guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities, not only in the electoral process but within society generally

- Enforcing laws and regulations regarding persons with disabilities, thereby eliminating many of the barriers that they face
- Improving infrastructure, roads, transportation and the like, and eliminating architectural barriers in voting centers to increase accessibility.

“I recommend having permanent, ongoing training processes on the civil and political rights of people with disabilities, for people with disabilities and people without disabilities. This would ensure people of the TSE would better understand the theme of disability. It is also necessary to increase public access to information and to improve accessibility to physical spaces, like adding handrails and wider sidewalks.”

“Well, I would insist on starting right away, specifically on the infrastructure side. I believe that we should not wait until the run-up to the elections to see what improvements are made, but to start now because that requires a budget. Attention should also be paid to where the polling stations are, because many polling stations are not accessible.”

“Transport is vital, the accessibility of a person living outside of a town really needs to improve, to gain access to the polls. For example, we are in a very urban area here, which has a voting center near here, but a person in a rural area may have problems arriving at the polling station. A person in a wheelchair or a visually impaired person may not have an easy or direct route to their polling station.”

Evaluation of their Organizations’ Work with IFES

DPO leaders credit and value IFES’ financial support and technical expertise. Leaders say they hope support of this nature can continue, not only before elections, but during the entire electoral cycle. Not surprisingly, a lack of resources remains a major hurdle for DPO leaders.

All DPO representatives express a need for support in order to reach the goals of the groups they represent. From this perspective, IFES’ involvement with their organizations is seen as highly beneficial and relevant in supporting their mandates. The opinions of the respondents indicate that IFES provided valuable support that enabled the progress made toward greater participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the electoral process. They note that although there is still some way to go, significant progress has been made.

DPO leaders praise IFES for its experience and guidance to DPOs in this area; they note IFES’ assistance with the Proposed Agenda for People with Disabilities for 2012-2016. Some also say that effective teamwork helped some organizations, such as CONADI, gain greater visibility and participation from the media and at forums, allowing them to publicize the challenges facing their members and propose different initiatives.

The interviewed DPO leaders are generally very satisfied with IFES’ support and are keen to continue collaborations in the future, not only during election periods but on a more continuous basis. They seek

solutions that will achieve greater impact and scale and will result in true inclusion for this sector of society.

“IFES’ experience brought us something very important. IFES by nature, with an international identity, viewed as the expert on the subject, generated a very direct approach to the disabled population. They also took into account the views of people with disabilities, the users of these types of support, and this assured us that the result was effective in that sense.”

“Following up to the minimum agenda also was supported by IFES, printing the minimum agenda, where civil society asks the candidates, who will govern what they want to be fulfilled in their government.”

The work of IFES and the grant from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which allowed IFES in partnership with ASCATED to develop a pilot program to place ramps in the capital city and identify voting centers with access facilities for voters with disabilities, was also viewed as a positive achievement.

“First we were working on the introduction and dissemination of voting for people with visual impairment and did some workshops and made some voter education spots that said blind people can vote. IFES also collaborated with the Canadian Embassy on the subject of the ramps and other various pre-election activities. We also worked with them so the audio Electoral Act was sponsored by IFES.”

An interviewee also praises the IFES-produced audio CD, with a Braille cover, that provides details on the Election Law.³

“The CD that IFES sponsored was positive. IFES also sponsored meetings and workshops on proposed reforms of the electoral law on the issue of disability and IFES has supported many activities. We as the National Association for the Blind in Guatemala are very pleased with the involvement of IFES in our efforts to make an impact on searching for how to motivate people with visual disabilities to cast a vote.”

“When you have nothing and suddenly receive some support, everything is seen as beneficial. We look at it all like that – after every situation that occurred we did an assessment, and fortunately, I think the positives prevailed over some issues that could not have come at 100 percent. But perhaps most of all, logistics could have been better or some early problems that were not taken into account, but overall our experience was very positive and remains positive. IFES continues to support the electoral process in the topic of people with disabilities.”

³ See Appendix II for photos of IFES’ work.

Main Needs of Disabled Persons Organizations

In discussing challenges facing DPOs in Guatemala, most respondents name funding as the primary issue. Not having consistent, secure and continuous access to necessary resources is an ongoing challenge that affects the majority of DPOs in many ways. DPO leaders say if they could be assured of having even the maintenance budget of their organizations without continuously worrying about funds, it would affect not only their approach to planning and developing projects and programs, but many other areas as well.

The economic constraint is undoubtedly the most important obstacle faced by DPOs. It impacts which issues are prioritized, as well as the organizations' progress in recruiting qualified personnel and supporting modernization. A few interviewees also mention a lack of unity amongst DPOs in Guatemala as a challenge to their work. Another interviewee identified attracting youth to their work as an obstacle, stating they mainly work with older people.

Other suggestions to continue advancing in this work include the following: tracking the achievements during the last election, keeping the issue of persons with disabilities relevant and interesting, monitoring the minimum agenda items given to candidates, keeping pressure on the situation of persons with disabilities and seeking to continue the progress even during the periods between elections.

Despite the challenges and limitations, respondents are positive in their view of the future, satisfied with their progress and hopeful about achieving more ambitious goals for the community in general and, in particular, for the sector each represents.

“The greatest difficulty is not having permanent resources to work in these areas of participation.”

“Only conducting work around the election time, which falls every four years, is problematic. The work must continue even in periods between elections.”

“The budget factor, because the work of organizations that serve people with disabilities is not sustainable. Of the 54 institutions that were funded by the state, only 12 or 13 remain funded.”

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the survey, focus groups and in-depth interviews that inform this study point to several conclusions and recommendations for future work on inclusion in Guatemala:

- **More Poll Worker Training on Inclusion:** Results of the phone survey of electoral authorities indicate satisfaction with the portions of the training and manual that covered administering the vote to persons with disabilities. However, findings also indicate more time could be spent on this topic in order for poll workers to feel better equipped to assist persons with disabilities at polling stations. Despite electoral authorities reporting an increase in knowledge of the rights of persons with disabilities and how to administer the vote to this population, a few focus group participants report negative experiences with poll workers when voting on Election Day. Some of these experiences involved being treated with disrespect or a lack of eagerness or willingness to assist; this indicates a need for further sensitization of poll workers on how to interact appropriately with persons with disabilities at the polling station and affirm their rights.
- **Reducing Obstacles to Voting:** Findings from the survey, focus groups and in-depth interviews all identify the same common obstacles to voting for persons with disabilities: infrastructure, transportation, information and public/poll worker sensitization. Groups must continue to work toward removing these barriers, and planning should begin early in the election cycle, not only directly before an election. Adding more ramps and low tables, making interpretation more widely available for deaf voters and protecting the secrecy of the vote for Braille ballots are also important issues to be addressed in country.

In terms of election information dissemination, some findings indicate that persons with disabilities outside the capital and/or outside the DPO community may not have been reached as effectively. Thus, it is important to increase outreach and employ more dissemination methods, like face-to-face outreach, in rural areas. Overall, findings imply that attention should be paid in areas outside the capital to improve access and address inclusion.

- **More and Improved Sensitization Campaigns:** Continuing sensitization campaigns, both with the general public and with poll workers, will be key in continuing to educate Guatemalans on the importance of respecting the rights of persons with disabilities.
- **Advocacy and Policy Efforts:** It is important to continue efforts to educate advocates for persons with disabilities on how to pressure the government to uphold the rights of this population. Applying continued pressure to politicians to reach out to this group of citizens and training persons with disabilities to run as candidates for elected office will be important elements to mainstreaming inclusion issues in Guatemala.
- **More funding for DPOs:** Given the resource constraints identified by most of the interviewed DPO leaders, more permanent funding for these organizations must be secured. DPO leaders

also say it would be very beneficial to fund efforts in between election periods, instead of only allocating heavy amounts of funding immediately preceding elections.

- **Research:** In future programming, conducting research before the work begins can assist in tailoring outreach and other activities. Additionally, conducting research immediately following elections would help improve respondents' recall of voter education efforts and their voting experiences.

Appendix I: IFES-Sponsored Training Manual Section, Posters, Billboards and TV and Radio Spots

Poll worker Training Manual, Section on Administering the Vote to Persons with Disabilities

manual de **JUNTAS RECEPTORAS DE VOTOS**

2. Durante la votación ¿a qué le llaman Voto Prioritario?

En cumplimiento al artículo 29 de la Convención sobre los Derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad, el cual dice que los Estados Partes deben garantizar la igualdad de participación en la vida política y pública, incluso el derecho al voto, a ser candidato a elecciones y a ocupar puestos públicos, el Tribunal Supremo Electoral a definido como voto prioritario, a la atención preferente a personas con discapacidad, con el afán de garantizarles la libre expresión de su voluntad como electores y a este fin, cuando sea necesario y a petición de ellas, se permitirá que una persona de su elección les preste asistencia para votar.



Personas con discapacidad

A continuación se definen los términos que deben reconocer los miembros de Juntas Receptoras de Votos:

1. **¿Qué es una deficiencia?**
es toda pérdida o anomalía de una estructura o función psicológica, fisiológica o anatómica.
2. **¿Qué es una discapacidad?**
es toda restricción o ausencia de la capacidad de realizar una actividad en la forma o dentro del margen que se considera normal para un ser humano.
3. **¿Qué es una minusvalía?**
es una situación desventajosa para un individuo determinado, consecuencia de una deficiencia o discapacidad, que limita o impide el desempeño de un rol que es normal en su caso en función a la edad, sexo, factores sociales y culturales.

Los tipos de discapacidad con los que puede encontrarse una Junta Receptora de Votos son:

- Personas con deficiencias visuales:** ceguera total o baja visión;
- Personas con deficiencias auditivas:** sordera total o baja audición;
- Personas con deficiencias del lenguaje:** habla



Billboards and Posters

**YO VOTÉ
Y VOLVERÉ A VOTAR**

**VOTA TU TAMBIÉN
6 DE NOVIEMBRE**



GUATEMALA MERECE EL ESFUERZO   

**YO VOTÉ
Y VOLVERÉ A VOTAR**

**VOTA TU TAMBIÉN
6 DE NOVIEMBRE**



GUATEMALA MERECE EL ESFUERZO   

**YO VOTÉ
Y VOLVERÉ A VOTAR**

**VOTA TU TAMBIÉN
6 DE NOVIEMBRE**

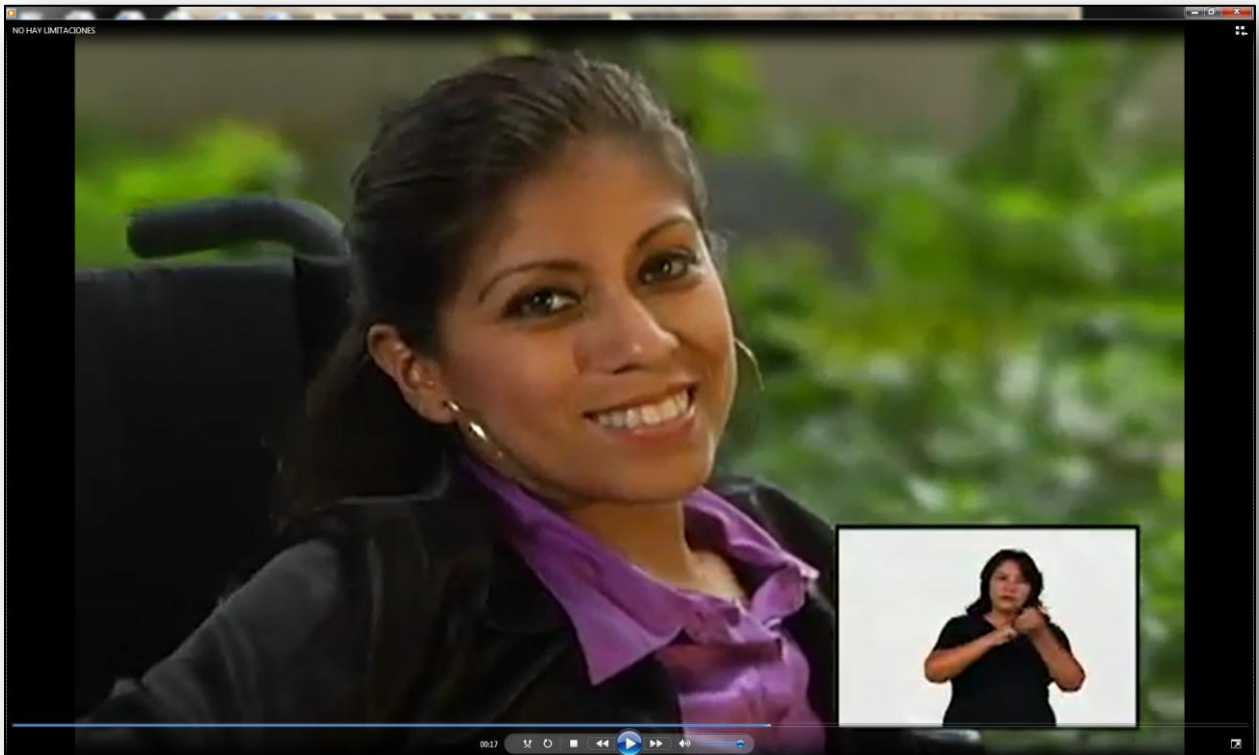


GUATEMALA MERECE EL ESFUERZO   

TV Spot

TV Spot “No Hay Limitaciones.” Audio from this advertisement was also used for a radio spot.

[Click here to view.](#)



Radio Spot

[Click here to listen.](#)

Appendix II: Photos of IFES' Work



Above are photos of the IFES-sponsored billboards. They depict persons with disabilities voting and encourage persons with disabilities to vote on November 6.



Global Expertise. Local Solutions.
Sustainable Democracy.