

Foreword



The very foundation of a democracy lies in the representation of all the communities and an indispensable part of nation building starts with the inclusion of all in its electoral process. Hence, to uphold the sanctity of free and fair elections, Election Commission of India has selected 'Accessible Elections' as central theme of year 2018. The theme seamlessly integrates into the underlying philosophy of universal adult suffrage and the concept of 'No Voter to be Left Behind.' Hitherto, the focus is to enhance participation, strengthen facilitation, mould public perceptions about the potential of PwDs, include their voice as equal citizens and set the stage for their social and economic integration.

A lot has already been done, and yet a lot more has been envisaged. A well designed framework of guidelines has been put in place under the directions of the Commission for facilitating PwDs at every step in the electoral process. Specific needs of the PwDs are being taken up, as the Commission works towards forming a Disability Cell.

An International Conference on 'Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwD's) in Electoral Processes' has already set the tone to consolidate and gain from international experience. The Commission is also working on national consultation on 'Accessible Elections' to get inputs from people working in the field about the challenges PwD Voters face, and the possible solutions to obliterate these hindrances. The Commission is looking forward to collaboration with other government departments/CSOs/Corporates in taking forward this endeavour effectively.

I am indeed happy to introduce this booklet, "Breaking the Barriers: Making India Accessible", which talks about the guidelines, ECI's strategy, interventions, challenges and way forward. It also brings forth the best practices from different Indian states and stories of human interest. Placing this document on VOICE.NET will help create awareness and thus contribute to the cause of enhancing electoral participation by Persons with Disabilities across all the democracies of the world.

A cause we are committed to- empowering **PwDs** through **Power with Democracy!**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Uday Kumar', written in a cursive style.

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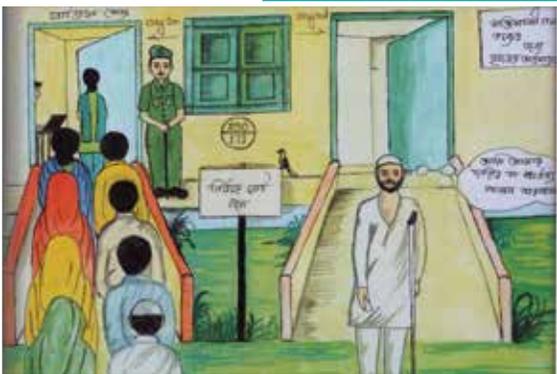
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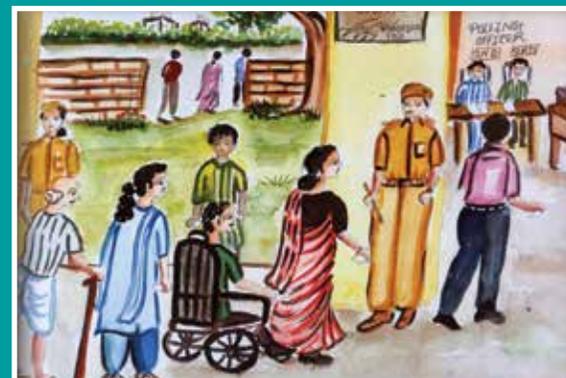
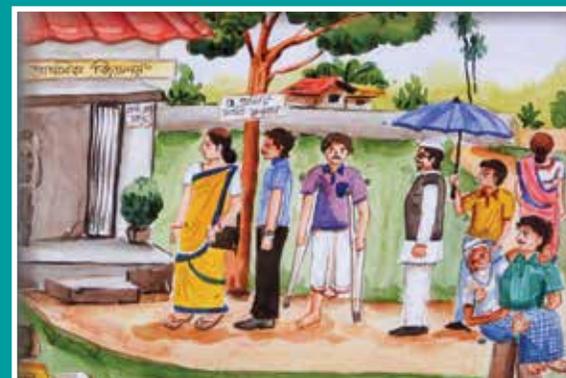
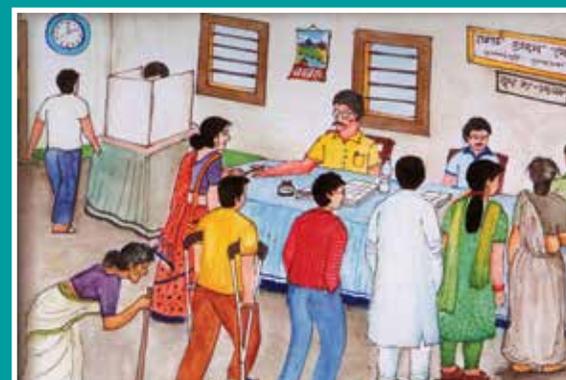
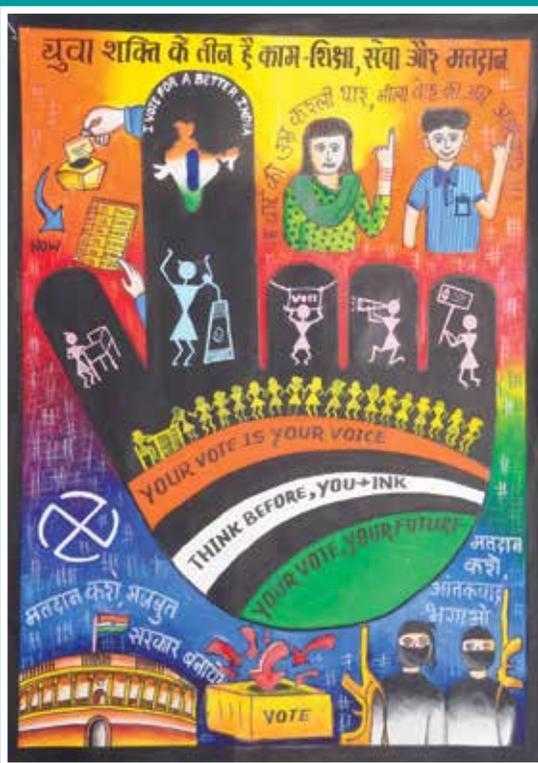
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SECTION I

Overview: Accessible Elections

One of the laudable features that the Founding Fathers of the nation embedded in our Constitution is Part XV Elections; that provides for an Independent Election Commission, Universal Adult Suffrage, maintenance of electoral rolls and all the other fundamentals for conduct of free, fair and inclusive elections. These features have helped the polity evolve into a vibrant and a rich democratic culture marked by faith of Indian People in the electoral exercise, its non partisan nature, and with the basic tenet of 'No Voter should be left behind.' — a perfect blend for inclusion and the consequent everlasting determination and endeavour for maximizing of the base of democracy in India.

Guiding Principles for Accessibility

Article 324 of the Constitution provides for the Election Commission, its powers and functions for maintenance of the Electoral Roll and conduct of elections in a free and fair



manner. Article 325 provides that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in the electoral roll on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or anyone of these. Article 326 provides for the Universal Adult Suffrage to be the basis of elections. The concerned provisions of the Constitution and the law that flows there from cast an obligation on the ECI for conduct of free, fair and inclusive elections based on adult suffrage.

While the scope of Part XV Elections of the Constitution is very large, this article intends to focus on the 'Accessible Elections' that has been selected as central theme of this year's 'National Voter's Day' celebration. The theme, that seamlessly integrates into the underlying philosophy of universal adult suffrage and the concept of 'No voter to be left behind.'

A larger recognition to the rights of 'Persons with Disability' came from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that stress upon respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy and independence of voter, freedom to make one's own choice, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity, accessibility etc.

'The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 defines a "person with disability" as a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others.' This would in effect mean inherent barriers to inclusion of such persons in the electoral process.

Elections Provide Choices

Elections provide for exercise of choices by the voters to elect their representatives based on adult suffrage and it calls upon the Election Machinery to provide for that (i) eligible citizens are registered as voters in the electoral roll and (ii) voters

are empowered to make choices for their representatives by casting the vote. Persons with Disabilities (PwD) constitute a special section of society that requires an affirmative action wherein the electoral machinery has to reach out to them for registration as voters and provide suitable facilities at the polling stations to enable them exercise their franchise.

Barriers and Redressal

The barriers in access to electoral participation that may be perceived by the PwDs relate to difficulties in voter registration, inaccessible registration materials or facilities, inadequate or inaccessible voter education and related materials, difficulties in physical access to polling stations, inability to vote independently and privately, absence of or inappropriate assistance from poll workers etc. The list is only illustrative but in effect it means discouraging PwDs from exercise of their right to franchise. Barriers do dissuade persons with disabilities from voting.

In a democracy in true spirit of universal adult suffrage, every vote matters, every vote counts. Given this fundamental premise, equal access is vital to participation for PwDs. The barriers can be obliterated if they are addressed appropriately and effectively under a well designed Policy Framework.

Directions and Guidelines of the Commission

Directions of the Commission on the subject focus on the following broad areas in Election Management and Planning:

- Identification of PwDs including polling station wise list;
- Facilitation in filling up voter registration forms;
- Assured Minimum Facilities at Polling Stations, preference in obtaining facilities at polling stations, Matdata Sahayata Kendras and other election offices in the field;

- Involvement of NGOs, CSOs/DPOs, RWAs;
- System Sensitisation and Training;
- Use of technology to provide help to PwDs;
- Cooperation of Political Parties
- Building a Comprehensive Statistical Data Base.
- Utilising the services of volunteers;
- Training and Sensitisation of Officials handling the work relating to PwDs.

SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education And Electoral Participation)

Voter education and outreach for PwDs is an integral part of the SVEEP plans. Broad areas of coverage are as below:

- An officer well versed with provisions of facilities for PwDs, shall be designated for each of the Assembly Constituencies.
- Wide publicity through various modes shall be ensured. Basic publicity material shall be prepared with simple language, sign language, Braille.
- Special/Mobile camps should be organised to educate and motivate PwDs
- Efforts should be made to prepare volunteers from NCC, NSS, NYK etc to motivate and create awareness among PwDs.
- Publicity regarding services offered by CSC, MSKs should be enhanced.
- Efforts shall be made to have renowned PwDs as District Ambassadors and District, State icons.

Lok Sabha Elections, 2014

During the Lok Sabha Election 2014, ECI initiated several measures that made registration process voter-friendly.

- Online registration & name search facility in Electoral Roll on ECI's & CEOs' website.

- SMS based services for searching name and polling booth.
- Information on election laws, guidelines and details regarding ROs, AROs, BLOs on CEOs' website.
- Voter Facilitation Centers (VFCs) for E-Roll issues and EPIC.
- Forms 6, 7, 8 & 8A at prominent places including banks, post offices, colleges, universities & schools.
- Nation-wide special registration camps held in weekly haats, during festivals and through mobile vans to facilitate voters for checking their details on the voters' list.

ECI has implemented several measures to ensure basic facilities at the polling stations making them conducive for PwDs to cast their vote. Some of them are as below:

- Braille signage on the Ballot Unit of EVM
- Construction of ramps – are temporary installed where permanent ramps had not been provided.
- Entering polling stations without waiting in the queue.
- Facility granted to take wheel chairs inside polling stations.
- Polling personnel briefed about the provisions of Rule 49 N of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, for permitting a companion to accompany a blind/infirm elector.
- Electors with speech & hearing impairment were given special care as in the case of other disabled persons.
- Poll personnel were trained & sensitised regarding special need of PwDs.
- Special Directions of the Commission were given for providing adequate facilities to the PwDs .

Provided Basic Minimum Facilities (BMF) at the Polling Station, such as

- Location of polling stations preferably at the ground floor in good quality buildings with separate entrance and exit
- Drinking water
- Toilets
- Provision of first aid
- Adequate space with ventilation, sufficient lighting & amenities like chairs, benches & covered shelter

Voter Information and Awareness

Wide publicity of all available facilities by means of print and electronic media including social media has been given besides holding meetings with political parties and candidates.

Initiatives in the Year 2018

During the year, the Commission has launched the theme 'Accessible Elections' on the eve of the National Voter's Day 2018. An international seminar has been organised on 'Inclusion of the Persons with Disabilities in the Electoral Processes'. The seminar is hosted on the VoICE.NET platform for knowledge sharing across the world.

The Commission has already set up a Steering Committee to deliberate on the major challenges faced by the PwDs with a view to consolidate the status of facilities and address the challenges in this area. A series of guidelines have already been

issued on the subject. We intend consolidating our efforts on accessible elections during the year.

A Premise for Way Forward

ECI directions and guidance is based on the premise that the PwDs have the right to full electoral participation, on basis of equality and shall not be discriminated against on any grounds. The rights of PwDs have to be respected, protected and promoted as per the mandate. In this context 'Accessible Elections' and enabling environment for the same provide an opportunity for electoral participation. ECI continues support in its endeavour to provide effective and efficient information, awareness, facilitation for enhanced participation for PwDs. And as such ECI is committed to ensure that PwDs feel encouraged and confident to enjoy their rights of electoral participation without any discrimination whatsoever.



Guiding Principles

The essence of democracy lies in inclusion of all the communities. Representation can be considered to be complete only if the voices of all the communities is heard and included.

The issue of inclusion in electoral participation is discussed in a number of specific human rights documents such as the 1965 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) etc. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities laid the initial guidelines.

While the CRPD is the primary benchmark for assessing the political rights of persons with disabilities, the right to participate in political public life is firmly instantiated in the



foundational instruments comprising the human rights legal framework.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006 (CRPD)

Article 21: Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice, as defined in article 2 of the present Convention, including by:

- (a) Providing information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities in a timely manner and without additional cost;
- (b) Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official interactions;
- (c) Urging private entities that provide services to the general public, including through the Internet, to provide information and services in accessible and usable formats for persons with disabilities;
- (d) Encouraging the mass media, including providers of information through the Internet, to make their services accessible to persons with disabilities;
- (e) Recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages.

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:

- (a) To 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) To promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on 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.

The provisions contained in CRPD specify the mandate for inclusion and special attention to PwDs in terms of equal access. There are several other international treaties and agreements which support the inclusion of the PwDs.

WHO on Persons with Disabilities

The World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that 15 percent of the world's population has a disability, with 80 percent of these persons living in developing countries. PwDs may also include various ethnic, religious, socio-economic and gender groups. Elections should provide them an equal opportunity, with other citizens, to exercise their preferences and shape up the relevant political outcomes.

The mandate of the UN bodies coupled with the enabling country legislations and the support from the EMBs for participation in the electoral process has made a substantial impact in removal of barriers to inclusion. Pioneering work has been done by international organizations, such as UNDP, WHO, NDI, IFES etc., to support inclusion and equal access through targeted voter education programs in many countries. Technology can help improve access to the voting process as demonstrated by the practice followed by many countries.

Voter Education for Greater Inclusion of all Citizens

The main aim of voter education is to provide all the requisite information for effective and efficient electoral participation by all constituents to achieve the desired objectives of universal adult suffrage. While many categories of voters are covered under the general or formal voter education programs, there are special groups which need strategically well designed and a focused outreach and special campaigns to receive voter information, facilitation and motivation to participate. Efficacy and efficiency of any voter education program lies in effectively reaching out to such special groups also. Voter Education outreaches and campaigns should address and motivate inter alia the PwD voters for maximization of participation and voter turnouts. Media, Civil Society organizations may be involved as important stakeholders in voter education outreach for inclusion of such special groups.

Safeguards provided in the Constitution of India

Article 324 of the Constitution provides for the Election Commission, its powers and functions for maintenance of the Electoral Roll and conduct of elections in a free and fair manner. Article 325 provides that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in the electoral roll on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or anyone of these. Article 326 provides - Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assembly of every State shall be on the basis of adult suffrage; Every citizen of India not less than eighteen years of age on such date as may be fixed in that behalf by law and is not otherwise disqualified and shall be entitled to be registered as a voter at any such election.

Provisions under **Rule 49N** of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, ECI guidelines, and Supreme Court orders directly address the issue of assistance to persons with disabilities. Under Rule 49N, if owing to blindness or other physical infirmities an elector is unable to recognise the symbol on the EVM or unable to record vote by pressing the appropriate button thereon, the presiding officer shall permit the elector to take with him a **companion of not less than eighteen years of age to the voting compartment** for recording the vote on his behalf and in accordance with his wishes.

- Polling personnel are to be given appropriate directions and sensitized through training classes about the special needs of the disabled and to be courteous and to provide necessary support to them at the polling station.
- Permanent ramps to be provided in all public buildings where polling stations are located. Full facility should be provided for such electors to take their wheelchair inside the polling station. Where permanent ramps have not been provided, temporary ramps have to be provided.
- Sufficient publicity to be given well in advance in print and electronic media about the availability of facilities so that the persons with disabilities are aware of the facilities beforehand, and are thus encouraged going and exercising their franchise.

- Observers should also ensure that such facilities are given; the absence of such facilities should be notified to the respective Government for remedial/future action.



The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

Section 11 of Chapter II of the Act (RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS) talks about accessibility in voting stating that the Election Commission of India and the State Election Commissions shall ensure that all polling stations are accessible to persons with disabilities and all materials related to the electoral process are easily understandable by and accessible to them.



Launch of Voter Guide in Braille by ECI



Strategic Framework

ECI's broad policy framework on Accessible Elections emanates from the guiding principles and the mandate as discussed in the previous chapter. Further, its Strategic Plan for 2016-25 spells out long term strategic interventions and the current focus on a continued endeavour for enhancement of inclusion of PwDs as an integral part of its election management including voter education.



STRATEGIC PLAN OF ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA 2016-25

STRATEGIC PILLAR 6: PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Goal 1: Inclusive Special facilitation for registration of certain category of voters including – Differently - abled electors etc.

Activity 1: Electoral Roll to be made PwD friendly by identifying such voters in a dedicated section of ER, within each part. It envisages constitution of a Working Group on Facilitation and Inclusion of PwDs.

Goal 2: Accessible Improving and strengthening accessibility for electoral registration with envisaged outcome of Barrier free electoral registration.

Outcome: Barrier –free electoral registration.

Activity 1: Making available one voter’s facilitation center at every District Head quarters.

Activity 2: Making available one Voter Facilitation center at every Block Head quarters.

Activity 3: Integration with CSCs- Integrating the facility of Common Service Centers voter related services throughout the country by adopting service area approach.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 5: ELECTION MANAGEMENT

Goal 1: Strengthening planning processes

Activity 3: Strengthening Basic Minimum Facilities in Polling Stations.

Activity 4: Lowering Physical and administrative barriers for voting.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 8: ELECTORAL LITERACY AND EDUCATION

Goal 1: Activities 1 and 2 cover information, motivation and facilitation inter alia for PwDs.

Interventions

Each Elector is important for effective functioning of democracy and must get his/her rights. The Electoral Laws not only guarantee equality to Persons with Disabilities, but also make provisions for facilitating their access and participation in the electoral process.



Framework

The Commission has drafted a framework to strengthen the voter base of persons with disabilities. The implementation of the directives stated below to be followed uniformly by all States and UTs.

Identification of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)

- Preliminary data shall be collected by every State with the help of Census, Social Justice & Empowerment Department, Women and Child Welfare and Samagra Yojana.
- The officers/employees of Social Justice and Empowerment Department as and when required shall be drawn on deputation/assigned duty as Nodal Officers to ensure the availability of basic facilities to the PwDs.
- Polling Station wise list of 18+ persons with disabilities shall be prepared from data collected from the above mentioned departments at DEO/ERO/BLO level.

Mapping

The name of the PwDs should be mapped and the list be made available to the BLOs but it should not be marked in the electoral roll to maintain the privacy of PwD.

Enrolment

- A separate polling station wise list of PwDs indicating the type of disability shall be prepared from the voter list.
- After obtaining information regarding PwDs from concerned departments, the process for inclusion of the names of the eligible PwDs who are not listed in the electoral roll shall be initiated.
- PwDs shall be given preferences in obtaining facilities at the polling stations, Mat data Shayata Kendras (MSKs), Voter Assistance Centres (VACs), Office of DEOs, EROs, ROs etc. All the possible steps should be taken to ensure that PwDs are not required to wait in queue.
- Adequate instructions to facilitate filling up of forms 6, 7, 8 and 8A shall be provided at the above mentioned help centres.

SVEEP Strategies – Outreach and Voter Education

- A separate SVEEP plan should be prepared incorporating information, education and facilitation for PwDs.
- An Officer shall be designated/appointed assembly constituency wise for each district. Such officers shall be trained regarding provision of facilities for PwDs.
- Wide Publicity through various modes shall be ensured. Special basic publicity material shall be prepared by using simple language, sign language and braille in regional languages (by the respective states)
- Audio applications like voice SMS (web or mobile) for registrations should be developed for visually impaired voters.
- There should be proper Voters' Guide for PwD Voters especially catering to their needs
- PwD should be informed in advance about polling stations where facility of online booking for wheel chairs is available
- Special /Mobile camps shall be organised to educate and motivate persons with disabilities and regular programs shall be organised through various media.
- Efforts shall be made to prepare volunteers from student organisations like NCC, NSS, and NYK etc. to motivate and create awareness regarding the election process among PwDs.
- Publicity regarding the services offered by CSCs/MSKs shall be augmented.
- Efforts shall be made to have renowned PwDs as District Ambassadors and District/State Icons.
- A comprehensive activity chart (Annexure) regarding ease of registration and voting by PwDs has been prepared for clarity and coherence. This Chart clearly underlines the various activities to be carried out, steps to be taken, fixing of responsibilities of concerned officials, a definite time frame for each activity and desired outcomes.

Involvement of NGOs/CSOs/DPOs/RWAs

- Voluntary and other organisations working for PwDs like Non- Government Organisations (NGOs), Community Based Organisations (CSOs), Disabled Persons'

Organisations (DPOs) and Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) etc. shall be motivated to help in imparting information regarding election Process to PwDs in a non-political, non- partisan manner. Assistance shall be sought from these organisations to provide various facilities to PwDs.

- Only non-political & non-partisan organisations should be considered to motivate and create awareness among PwDs.

System Sensitisation and Training

- Special Training sessions shall be organised to sensitize the election machinery to make efforts to address the needs of PwDs.
- All officers/employees, police officials etc. involved in the election process should be clearly instructed on the facilities to be provided to the PwDs.
- Instructions qualified in sign language and Braille script and displayed (in Hindi, English or Regional language use)
- Contribution in election process by PwDs – The PwDs who volunteer to assist in the election process in the form of working at Voter Help Centres, working as BLOs, working in polling team etc. should be assigned such work so that they can motivate other PwDs to participate in the election process.

Use of Technology to provide help to PwDs

- The Websites of each CEO/DEO shall be made user friendly and readily accessible to PwDs.
- Visually impaired voters shall be provided the facility of voice SMS to convey information like the status of registration, polling station number, name of polling station, the Serial Number in the Voter's list, the assembly constituency in which the name of PwD is registered, the Voter ID no. (EPIC), Polling Schedule etc.

Note: Data of persons with disabilities shall not be displayed on website and should not be shared so as to maintain their privacy.

Improving Physical Access and Facilities at Polling Stations

- Exclusive polling booths, as far as practicable, should be set up for PwDs in places where they reside in large numbers. Other facilities according to the needs of the PwD like proper toilets, tactile signage outside the polling stations and Voters' guide in braille for the visually impaired voters should be made available
- It shall be ensured that polling stations are situated on the ground floor, if not, lift facility/extension of ramp to each floor should be provided.
- A standardised and uniform design of ramps shall be implemented.
- Temporary/Mobile ramps shall be made available where ever permanent facility cannot be provided.
- Access to ramps shall be made smooth in places of sandy and slushy pathways.
- Ramps shall be provided in such a manner that it directly leads to the door of polling stations to avoid navigating through corridors.
- Proper approach roads to Polling Stations shall be ensured by local authorities/respective departments.
- Mobile barricades in front of doors of each Polling Station shall be erected.
- Entrance door of polling station shall be kept wide open and adequate space around the voting compartment should be ensured for wheel chair movement.
- Facility for separate entry should be made available for PwDs.
- Pathway to polling rooms shall have indicators with standard signage.
- Depending on the number of PwDs among electors in a polling station, facilities like ramp, tricycles, basic information through audio- video, should be made available. These facilities should be physically verified and certified by the Commission.
- Wheel Chairs shall be provided at identified polling stations.

- Priority entry passes shall be issued to the persons with disabilities. All possible steps should be taken to ensure that PwDs are not required to wait in queue.

Cooperation of Political Parties

- Political parties shall also be motivated to display publicity material, manifesto, appeal etc. in audio- video and in Braille as well as sign language as per the requirement of the PwDs.

Recent Initiatives

Election Commission of India is churning up the wheel of electoral awareness in the nooks and corners of the country with special focus on the Persons with Disabilities this year. Specific guidelines have been developed to spread awareness as also infuse motivation among them.

ECI issued instructions, among others, to take proactive steps to identify Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in advance and to create a database with the help of Census, Social Justice & Empowerment Dept., Child Welfare Dept. and Samagra Yojana. As per the instruction issued, PwDs in each polling station would be identified by BLOs and such information would be kept in the database, without forming this additional information as part of electoral roll.

Further, directions were issued codifying the Assured Minimum Facilities (such as ramp, drinking water, toilet, lighting, furniture, help desk and proper signage at each polling station) to be given to the PwDs and to set up special polling stations exclusively for them in places/areas where PwDs reside in large numbers and in leprosy sanatorium.

The data on polling station wise list of PwDs with type of disability noted against registered electors can be used to ensure complete enrolment of PwDs in the electoral roll and to select renowned PwDs as District Campus Ambassadors and District/State Icons etc.

Communication Strategy

- **Interpersonal Contact:** During House-to-House, BLOs to identify PwDs who were eligible for registration yet not enrolled. Efforts were taken to enroll the unenrolled electors during the Pre-Revision Campaign. The left-out eligible as well as the newly eligible PwD electors should be gleaned from the BLO Registers and necessary action may be taken for their enrolment. For the benefit of potential PwD electors, the practice of Home Registration may be continued as in previous years. In this, BLOs, at the time of their visits, may collect forms with relevant documents from prospective electors in need of registration or EROs/AEROs may themselves visit and take reasoned decisions on the basis of filled-in forms. Resources available with departments such as Social Welfare and Sarva Shiksha Mission may be suitably utilized, using their knowledge base.
- **Outdoor Campaigns:** Hoardings and banners are to be displayed at prominent places such as Road Junctions / Markets /Offices at Block/Municipalities, Universities/ colleges. Stickers are to be placed on vehicles of public transport.
- **Electronic Media:** Electronic media had always been a very important vehicle of mass communication. Audio/video content is being developed to provide an aid to PwDs so that the information can be delivered successfully.
- **Traditional Medium:** Tableau should be set in motion such that it should move across districts for a considerable stretch of time generating awareness among the electors. DEO's appeal letters will be distributed in the area of low registration and voter turnout during Summary Revision Programmes and General Elections. Programmes in the local language to be formulated using folk art and other cultural activities to convey the message to be channelized.

Accessibility measures for PwDs

Major problems for voters with disabilities include inaccessible polling places, lack of knowledge among polling officials about disability or accommodations, and discomfort among polling

officials in helping people use accessible voting equipment like Braille Ballot Unit.

- a) Guidelines and instructions for Polling officials should address the issues of PwDs.
- b) Database of PwDs shall be created by States on the basis of database maintained by Department of Disability/ Social Welfare/ Hospitals or CMOs office etc., for special enrolment drive. Special facilitation initiatives shall be taken up at the Polling Stations based upon the database
- c) Collected for the type of facilitation required.
- d) Specific needs for PwDs at various stages, from registration to voting etc may be studied and existing guidelines of ECI on BMF and instructions for Polling personnel on poll day shall be shared with the members of the technical committee and subject experts for suggesting modification to make the guidelines disable friendly.
- e) Detailed guidelines for ramps and their standardization may be developed and circulated to ensure uniformity in the ramps at the Polling Stations. At present, guidelines of the Commission are devoid of technical specifications for the size and gradient of the ramps.
- f) A provision of an additional column in Form 6 was recommended wherein a PwD can also mention his/her type of disability, and special requirements for the same, at the time of registration. A special column for BLO Register may also be added for getting information of PwDs among registered electors.
- g) Best practices of other countries like delayed voting, Vote-by-mail, provisional voting etc. may be studied for possible adoption.
- h) The Commission directed that if a leprosy sanatorium is located within the constituency, then, if possible, a polling station might be set up at the sanatorium for the benefit of the inmates and sanatorium staff might be appointed as Presiding and Polling Officers of the polling station.
- i) KAP survey questionnaire has a segment for PwDs related issues. Special awareness material is being developed at national level in Braille for the visually disabled.

Voter Awareness

The content for the PwDs shall aim to address the issues gap in information and motivation in PwDs; to highlight the accessibility initiatives of the Commission and also to sensitize the polling personnel and general public at large to specific needs of the PwDs such as:

- A film on electoral literacy for PwDs may be produced detailing the process of registration and voting and also highlighting accessibility initiatives of the Commission. The content and format should be such as to be able to be understood by widest spectrum of people with different disabilities. All the content shall also have audible notes for the hearing impaired, also high contrast and text enlargement feature to be made available for the visually challenged. Pilot testing among the users shall be integral part of the production.
- Short motivational promos shall be made for TV and Radio targeting PwDs and their family members and public at large. This should meet the twin requirements of motivating PwDs to participate in elections and sensitising public to issues of PwDs.
- Other tools like Posters, Flipcharts, Pamphlets, Brochure for PwDs and training kits for Trainers/Facilitators may also be prepared to be shared with CSOs. Subject experts in the Technical Committee shall come up with ideas on training kits besides methodology and channel for dissemination of the tools so prepared for the next meeting.
- All content shall be prepared in close coordination and supervision with the Technical Committee. CSO Samarthyam offered to provide the PwDs who may act in the films.

Sensitisation of Polling Officials:

Sensitisation films on issues like setting up of accessible polling station with all the standard specifications, assistance to be provided to the PwDs at the time of voting, and behavioral aspects is being prepared and the same will be shared during training programme of the election officials and also used during IIIDEM (India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management) trainings.

A small handbook wherein specific needs of the PwDs and relevant interventions to cater the same have been created. The same shall be shared with Technical Committee members for suggestions for further improvement.

Best Electoral Practices Awards, 2018

During the celebration of 8th NVD, election officials are being awarded for initiating good practices for the facilitation of Persons with Disabilities in different states.

Training & Capacity Building

Commission organised a one day training workshop on 'Web Accessibility' for Persons with Disability which was taken by resource person's i.e members/trainers of Disability Rights Alliance.

Knowledge sharing platform

A special issues was launched on Persons with Disabilities in the VolCE International Magazine, an ECI publication. The issues carries rich experience for knowledge sharing on Inclusion of PwDs across the world.

International Conference

An International Conference was also hosted by ECI on 'Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Election Process. ECI signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for cooperation in the filed of Election Management with National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) of Guinea, Central Election Commission of Maldives and also with International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance

Collaborations

Collaboration with Ministries and Departments

There have been successful collaborations with Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, mainly the Doordarshan and All India Radio, besides the Directorate of Field Publicity and Song and Drama Division.

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting extended support by providing airtime and programme content on national channels and regional channels of Doordarshan and All India Radio. Ministry of Railways, Civil Aviation, Department of Posts etc are among others with whom collaborations have been taken up for greater outreach to people. At State level, CEOs shall collaborate with State Government Departments like the departments of Health, Education, WCD, Cooperatives, Welfare etc., so that these departments can extend their existing infrastructure and manpower (field functionaries) for electoral education and outreach. ASHAs and AWWs shall be roped in for all State elections for continuous engagement with the people. Department of Education shall be taken as an active partner in the SVEEP programmes at District and State level. Collaboration with youth organizations like NYKS, NSS, NCC shall help tap the new voters in the age group of 18-19yrs. For exclusive reach to Persons with Disabilities, Commission actively reaches out to Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and Blind Persons' Associations.

Collaboration with Private Media

Besides Public Broadcaster, Private Media plays a significant catalytic role in disseminating information and enhancing electoral awareness among the people. Successful collaboration with Media Houses yielded results in terms of wider reach. ECI has chalked out the Framework of Engagement with Media Organisation, CEOs and DEOs shall collaborate with Private Media Houses within the parameters specified in the Framework for information dissemination and enhancing electoral participation with special focus on the PwDs.

Collaboration with CSOs

Recognising the potential of Civil Society Organisations in playing a significant catalytic role in enhancing citizen engagement of Persons' with Disabilities especially in the areas of reaching out to the last-mile, ECI developed a Framework of Engagement with CSOs. Within this Framework, CEO shall collaborate with CSOs for non-partisan, objective, non-political citizen awareness, facilitation and engagement.

Collaboration with PSUs/Corporates

Public Sector Enterprises and Corporate Houses can play a significant role by extending support to the SVEEP programme and also fulfill their Corporate Social Responsibility. All collaborations that CEOs shall take up with the PSUs and Corporate sector for voter education and wider outreach, shall be within this Framework.

Icons/Ambassadors

Identifying the ability of inspirational personalities to establish authentic connection with the masses, ECI associated with renowned Indians from various field enjoying national appeal and appointed them as ECI's National Icons to motivate voters. Similarly renowned individuals in states were appointed as State Icons. Focus is being laid down on PwD Icons so that they can spread the message more effectively.

Assured Minimum Facilities (AMF)

AMF constitutes Provision for ramp, drinking water, adequate furniture, proper lighting, proper signage, helpdesk, and toilet. This effort was taken to ensure wholesome and constructive participation of Persons with Disabilities and their active engagement in the Electoral process.

Following are the specific guidelines:

AMF	Specifications
 Signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Parking for Persons with Disability (PwD) coming on wheelchairs or other vehicles (to be visible from the road)After entrance arrow signs marks indicating the queueArrow mark indicating the polling personnelSignage for Male/Female toiletsSignage for toilets for PwD votersSignage indicating drinking water
 Help Desk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tables of 4' x 2 1/2' with provision for 3 people to sit - one BLO with booth slips, two NSS / NSC volunteers (1 male 1 female) to guide and assist the voters (especially the PwDs) entering the polling station

AMF	Specifications
 <p>Ramp</p>	<p>Ramps should have an inclination ratio of 1:10 and not more than 1:14 Firm hand rails to be provided which should not be of shaky material In case there are stairs to reach polling station, ramp should also be provided there</p>
 <p>Toilets</p>	<p>Whether separate toilets for Male and Female voters available Whether toilets are PwD-friendly. Whether running water is there in the toilets If running water facility is not there what arrangement has been done?</p>
 <p>Drinking Water</p>	<p>Whether there is facility of drinking water</p>
 <p>Separate Entry and Exit</p>	<p>Whether separate entrance and exit is provided in the polling station If no separate entrance and exit is available, whether provision of rope separator/partition can be done? specify</p>
 <p>Lighting</p>	<p>Electricity connection with two plug points Minimum 1 fan 2-3 tube lights</p>
 <p>Furniture</p>	<p>Is adequate furniture is available? Height of the table on which the Ballot Unit is kept should be disabled-friendly Sufficient moving space around the table for wheel chairs</p>

Challenges

According to Census 2011, the persons with disabilities constitute 2.21% of the total population. However, many believe the number to be much larger. Electoral participation is not only about the rights of persons with disabilities to cast their vote. Free and fair electoral participation means access to electoral awareness programs and campaigns, participation of electors with disabilities in the political campaigns of the candidates and political parties, making campaign materials and speeches accessible, ensuring that websites of the ECI, the various political parties and candidates are accessible, creating awareness about voter registration, and making voter registration accessible for persons with disabilities.

Election Commission of India is in collaboration with Department of Social Justice and Empowerment to get the data and BLOs are also directed to initiate door to door campaign to maintain the data of PwDs in their register during the summary roll revision. Still identification is a major challenge and disability categorisation poses another challenge. Some of the main barriers faced by persons with disabilities in the



Challenges



pre-voting stage are attitudinal barriers such as scepticism about the decision-making ability of persons with disabilities, lack of accessible information about candidates, political parties, public meetings and consultations and the low number of voter registrations as most electors do not know how to get themselves registered as voters, do not get information about it and voter registration sites are not physically accessible.

Communication is perhaps the most important aspect to be addressed while reaching out to persons with disabilities. This could be complicated since different disabilities require different modes for communication. For instance persons with blindness or low vision would require an audio/ tactile output, large print and electronic texts which are not image files so that their technology can read it out to them. People with hearing impairment would require textual or picture based forms of communication. This would also be useful for people who cannot read. For persons with physical, motor, cognitive and other kinds of disabilities also similarly, there is need to have a combination or multiple formats to suit their choice. These different formats which can be used by persons with disabilities are termed as 'accessible formats', since they can be accessed by them. Since communication takes place over different forms

of media and for a variety of purposes at different stages of the election process, between multiple stakeholders such as the Government, political parties, media houses etc. attention is being given to standardizing accessible communication across the board to ensure easy and effective communication for all.

Barriers during the voting stage include the infrastructure of voting sites such as buildings without ramps, or polling booth counters that are too high, voting machines that are unusable for the blind etc. Training of election staff is also another challenge that creates hindrance in the PwDs voting percentage.

National Policy for Persons with Disabilities

A national policy has been drafted to create a barrier free environment for PwDs. Following is the important points of strategy:

- Public buildings (functional or recreational), transport amenities including roads, sub-ways and pavements, railway platforms, bus-stops / terminals, ports, airports, modes of transports (bus, train, plane and waterways), playgrounds, open space etc. will be made accessible.
- Use of sign language in all public functions will be encouraged

Way Forward

The Election Commission of India is working on new initiatives for the inclusion of PwDs in the electoral process. Hitherto, **District, State and National workshops** are to be organised to get inputs from the election officials across the country on the current voting status of Person with Disabilities in their area, challenges and possible solutions. Then a **detailed concept paper** will be prepared which will be a principle document to make further policies and conduct programs. Ms. Smitha Sadasivan, Member, Disability Rights Alliance and a Consultant with ECI will be taking an active part in the process.

Also, to improve the voting percentage and effectively monitor the major challenges being encountered by them, a PwD cell was inaugurated in the commission named as **Special Disability Cell**.

In addition to that, programs are being designed to **train the election official** towards the specific needs of PwD voters. Year 2018 is completely dedicated to make the elections accessible.

SECTION II

Best Practices from States of India

Odisha (2013)

Inclusion of for Persons with Disabilities (PwD)

According to the 2011 census, India has around 70 million people with disabilities. Election commission made special efforts in provincial elections since 2013 and the national elections to make the elections inclusive and extended extra facilitation for persons with disabilities and also for old and infirm.

The Cuttack administration took the challenge of mainstreaming PwD electors and enhancing their participation in the electoral process. A survey of PwDs, conducted through Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) in October-November 2013 wherein 46,989 numbers of PwDs including children, had been enlisted. Out of the above list, PwDs aged above 18 years were shortlisted which numbered 20,208. Single Window Camps for PwDs were conducted in all the Blocks and Urban bodies. In all these camps, an exclusive counter was set up to enrol PwD in the Electoral Roll.



A special meeting was conducted by District Election Officer, Cuttack to draw up an action plan for arrangements to be made for electors with disability. Representative from Association of PwDs was also present. Strategy was evolved with clear tasks; targets, assigned to officers. The District Election Office unanimously set a goal to achieve 100 % voting by PwD electors as a matter of their right. One district level Unit and 14 Block level monitoring controls rooms were opened for the purpose. The Block level control room acted as a Call-Centre. Every PwD voter was called at least thrice over his phone & explained the facilities made available at booths. It was decided to provide at least two volunteers to every polling booth to assist PwDs. Measures like barrier free access to each of the polling stations with construction of permanent or temporary ramps, deployment of Wheel chairs at all booths, disabled friendly furniture in Polling booth, Provision of Signature Guide, Provision of special queue for priority casting of votes, Lay-out Design for Hearing-impaired, Engagement of sign language interpreter for the Hearing Impaired, Printing of Braille Ballot papers were under-taken.



Awareness generation was undertaken through various methods & media. Voters' Guide in vernacular language, on the voting rights and facilities for PwD voters was distributed. To motivate PwD electors & boost the morale of their family members, Household Contact programme was conducted for 10 days. The Anganwadi workers visited the household of PwD voters & handed over awareness material. The family members were explained regarding the arrangements made to boost their morale.

Gathering information about PwDs in the district posed to be one of the huge challenges. The task of reaching out to PwD voters for awareness purposes with a 100% accuracy and efficiency proved to be a tough task. Moreover means of awareness used themselves posed a challenge as the same medium couldn't be used for every PwD voter. Awareness campaigns, Audio/Video, Print media, Posters, special logistics at the polling booths for the convenience of voters was initiated.

The Cuttack administration was able to reach 88.30% of the total PwD population in its district, the highest ever.

Uttar Pradesh (2014)

Sitapur - Differently-abled crowned as 'Loktantra-Doot' (Messengers of democracy)

District Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh took a novel initiative for the differently-abled voters in the District. District Magistrate (DM) and District Election Officer (DEO), Sitapur, took this worth-appreciating enterprise with an aim to motivate the differently-abled to come out and vote during the General Elections to the Lok Sabha 2014.

The strategy to involve the differently-abled was charted out to make them feel as much part of elections and democracy

as rest of us.

A painting/ poster competition of differently-abled was held at the District headquarters, which witnessed huge participation from all over the District. Titled '*Mera mat bhi dega lokTantra ko naya aayam aur majbooti*', this competition witnessed a participation of over 4,000 differently-abled. Many of them painted about the rights and duty of differently-abled. The posters showed the differently-abled reaching the booth and voting or a differently-abled smiling as he shows-off the mark on his finger with pride. These posters were then displayed at each polling booth of Sitapur District.

“It feels so good that we have been specially invited by District administration. We are not less than anyone else and we will surely vote,” said Ramlal, who walks to the polling station with an aid.



A digital diary of all differently-abled voters was also created containing detail of each differently-abled in the District. The BLO and the District Control room were in touch with them throughout the SVEEP campaigning till the poll day. It was also decided that there would be no-queue for the differently-abled. Focus was given on the families where both the spouse was differently abled.

In addition to this, about 3000 differently-abled persons were chosen from the District with each one representing their polling booth. Hence each one of the 3,000 polling booth in the District had a ‘Booth Ambassador’. They were crowned as the ‘Loktantra-doot’. This added to their prestige and gave them immense confidence.

This was followed by a grand ceremony wherein all the 3,000 Loktantra-doot were brought on motorcycles, which were termed as ‘Loktantra-vahan’. The rally of motorcycles with the differently-abled as the pillion-rider drew maximum cheers from the crowd. Then, the Loktantra-doot were further motivated and inspired to turn into emissary for elections by the then CEO of U.P.

Azamgarh: Booth Dost for PwDs

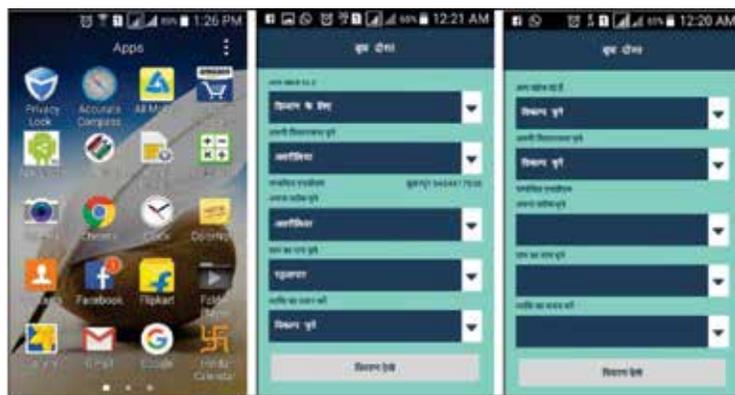
Special efforts and innovations were made in Azamgarh to strengthen the concept of INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY.

An intensive survey was done by which 30583 PwDs were listed, the highest in UP. The survey also included the type of disability of the PwDs, their mobile number, epic number etc. A free, offline app was made to reach out to the PwDs. Using this app, a two way



communication was established between the BLO and PwDs which helped in filling form 6 and any EPIC related issues.

There are around 650 newly recruited lekhpal in the District who are in their training tenure. They were given the name of BOOTH DOOT and were allotted booths for survey of PwDs. There are around 3461 booths and each lekhpal were given around 5-6 booth for survey. A mock poll session with around 300 PwDs who were facing 6 types of disabilities namely deaf, dumb, blind, without hands, legs and muscular dystrophy were invited and had a one to one experience with the EVM machine and a mock booth. It helped them to give a first-hand experience of booth. Distribution of voter slips in braille for the visually impaired voters was arranged. SVEEP Song was made



and sung by PwDs to motivate the community and the same was pictured in sign language also for the deaf PwDs.

In addition to that, a tableau for “Inclusive Democracy” was displayed on parade ground on Republic Day and on Valentine Day, as gesture for our love for voting rights and PwDs, a Rose Marathon to promote voter awareness for PwDs was attended by hundreds of PwDs. They were felicitated with Roses during the march.

It was by these efforts that out of 30583 PwDs 21479 actually voted (Around 70%).

Kanpur Nagar: Election with a human touch (2017)

For a healthy democracy it is necessary that all the organs of the society participate in its democratic processes. It is failure of a democracy if any of its community fails to participate in the process of electing its representatives. For Uttar Pradesh General Assembly Election 2017, District Kanpur Nagar decided that the upcoming election will be an election with a human touch and special focus will be facilitation of Divyang Voters (PwDs).

The fundamental task to identify Divyang voters started when all BLOs were asked to identify through door to door verification. Later list of 23357 PwD pensioners was taken from PwD welfare department and provided to all BLOs area wise to supplement their search. BLOs could hardly identify around 8000 Divyang people despite repeated efforts. When this did not succeed in city area, employees, Zonal Officers of Municipal Corporation, Civil defence volunteers, ICDS workers were combined in ward wise teams and deployed for door to door survey of PwD people. The purpose was to identify Divyang people by surveying each household and confirming whether their names exist in Voter list or not.

Immediately thereafter the exercise of voter registration of left out Divyang people was started.



After registering all the left out voters a control room comprising 10 people was started to feed the details of all Divyang voters AC wise. Special SVEEP activities were carried out with the help of Divyang associations, NGOs, Education departments, NSS and Civil defence. The main emphasis was on awareness rallies, street plays, EVM training and pledge taking.

District level officers of Panchayati Raj, Health, Revenue departments and In charge of NSS, NCC, NYK, Civil defence were called to depute their employees or volunteers as PwD Assistants. They were assigned the responsibility of PwD for smooth voting. These were arranged after a thorough consultation with PwD Associations for their special needs. Auto Rickshaws and E-Rickshaws were used as PwD Rath (Chariot) to carry PwD voters to polling stations.

The result of whole exercise was very overwhelming where in 80.78% PwD voters actually voted in a hassle free manner using all provided facilities.

Uttarakhand (2017)

Rudraprayag

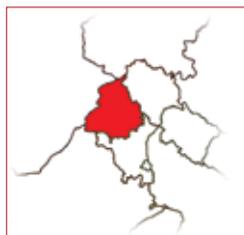
Divyang Doli was initiated to facilitate PwD voters, for around 232 voters spread across 133 polling stations, it was a helping hand for voters with disabilities who could not walk to the polling station on their own. Volunteers were roped in to assist persons with disabilities to reach the polling station and cast their vote with ease.



Punjab (2017)

Hoshairpur

In accordance with the Election Commission of India's mantra "No Voter to be Left Behind", Hoshairpur District focused on ensuring that in the coming Assembly Election, all the Persons with Disability cast their franchise and they should not



be deprived from this exercise due to the difficulty in travelling to the Polling Booth. In addition to the usual procedure of Identification and mapping, special efforts were made to improve the voting percentage of PwDs. Various steps are targeted in this direction to ensure availability of assistive aids at polling booths so that all the PwD voters not only get motivated to participate in election process but also can vote easily, safely and with dignity.



Rallies at block level were organised regarding the SVEEP activities and approximately 356 volunteers with voter's consent were deputed for PwD voters. Polling Booth Level micro planning & mapping of each PwD voters which needs the wheel chairs or any other assistance was incorporated. Volunteers were not only just enrolled but they were trained also (all of them were registered as First time Voters and belonged to family of respective PwD Voter) to facilitate the every PwD voters for voting with inter-sector cooperation of Health Department thus ensuring that every PwD voter has dedicated motivator cum assistant.

Moreover, on National Immunization Pulse Polio Round a special message was conveyed by the frontline workers

regarding the PwD voters to cast their vote easily, safely and fearlessly. Also, on January 25, 2017 voter day celebrated at block level where as all the PwD voters were invited personally by special invitations and were motivated to cast their vote.

Special needs of the PwD voters were catered with proper management. Availability of wheel chairs at booth level to the PwD Voters was ensured. Provision of emergency service was maintained at Dispensaries, CHC's, and SDH & Distt. Hospital during the polling days. *All above efforts resulted in 92% turn-out of PwD voters during Assembly Elections-2017 which is again the best performance in the state for ensuring Most Inclusive Voting till date.*

SBS Nagar

The District Shahid Bhagat Singh Nagar has added a new feather in its cap by bringing the PwD Voters into the main stream of democratic process by ensuring 90% PwD Voter polling during the recently concluded Assembly polls in the state. The District Health Department was entrusted with task



of identification of the eligible Persons with Disabilities who have not been enrolled as voters so far. The District Health Department, working on the micro plan prepared for the PwD voters, mobilized the SMOs, MOs, ASHA, ANM, MPHWS (M) and MPHWS (F) workers to identify and educate the PwD voters for their participation in electoral process. With a view of giving a concrete shape to the well planned program on PwD voter participation, the district administration also identified the availability of wheel chairs and deputed 356 volunteers for making it convenient for the PwD voters to exercise their franchise.

District Administration dedicatedly put its efforts to mobilize PwD voters by organizing seminars, awareness rallies etc. for voters awareness in general and establishing personal rapport with the PwD voters in particular in their respective areas of jurisdiction. Nehru Yuva Kendra organised "Jago", "street plays" and "Candle Marches" in different villages as part of SVEEP activities. Special emphasis was laid on mobilizing PwD voters

during the campaign. Besides, identifying the PwD voters, the requirement from the PwD voters for making it convenient for them to cast their vote, were also taken care off on the day of polling. Individual letters were sent to each PwD voter soliciting them to vote and also allocate volunteers to bring and assist them to their respective polling booths. National Voter Day 25th January 2017 totally dedicated to the PwD voters and special invitation was given by District Election officer to each PwD voter during this function. Hence, after excluding the dead voters, the effective PwD count stands at 1455, out of which as many as 1307 exercised their franchise. *90% PwD voters participated in the electoral process and made a valuable and inclusive contribution to the franchise.*

Ludhiana

PwD (Persons with Disabilities) voters were made a special focus area by providing them free pick-up and drop service, along with Youth volunteers who greeted them with rose buds and an invitation letter. State level function held at Ludhiana to encourage and create awareness among physically disabled voters and video clips made to encourage them to come out and vote. Through ECI360 Mobile App, PwD (Person with Disability) can include everyone in the Electoral process; PwD can now request facility to enable them to vote. Request for additional service can be made & monitored online.

Jammu and Kashmir (2014)

Electoral Inclusion - Participation of "Special Voters"

District administration launched a mission "Rehbar" in collaboration with District Red Cross Society under SVEEP for providing home to booth services for aged, differently abled, aged and informed.

A village wise survey was done and such special voters were identified. A list of 1048 differently voters were drawn and each voter was assigned one assistant from same polling booth area for facilitating movement to and from polling booth. Later, more such voters were added after the scheme was publicized and additional voters turned up for availing assistance. Tricycles were hired for 43 polling stations, 21 vehicles were pressed into action for ferrying differently abled voters and their nominated attendants. In all 1506 such persons were facilitated to polling booths and back to their residences. In a record of sorts 114 centurions participated in the polls.

Booth Level Officers were provided assistance allowance for managing Palkies and Ponnies in hilly areas for such special

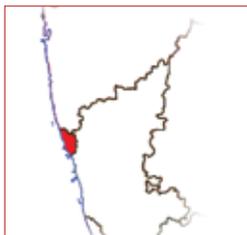


needy voters. The survey was earlier done through BLOs and Anganwadi workers in all 259 villages and list of all such voters was drawn which was followed by assigning one persons for assistance to each such voter and providing assistance allowance as well as arrangements.

Special measures were put in place at all 53 Model Polling Stations for special voters and warm welcome was extended besides all services provided for their travel from homes to polling booths. This was made possible through a community based exercise. Out of these 1506 voters 1389 are differently abled or physically handicapped; out of 1389 such voters 986 reported to have never voted citing physical inability as majored reason and in some cases they had not enrolled earlier. Of these 614 were newly enrolled voters however they were already in age group of 25-80 and in some cases beyond that as well. At all 301 Polling stations "Special Voters' Assistance Booth" was established in addition to general assistance booth and women voters' assistance booth, to facilitate the special voters. *District achieved 100% participation of differently abled, aged, centurions, sick and infirmed.*

Goa (2017)

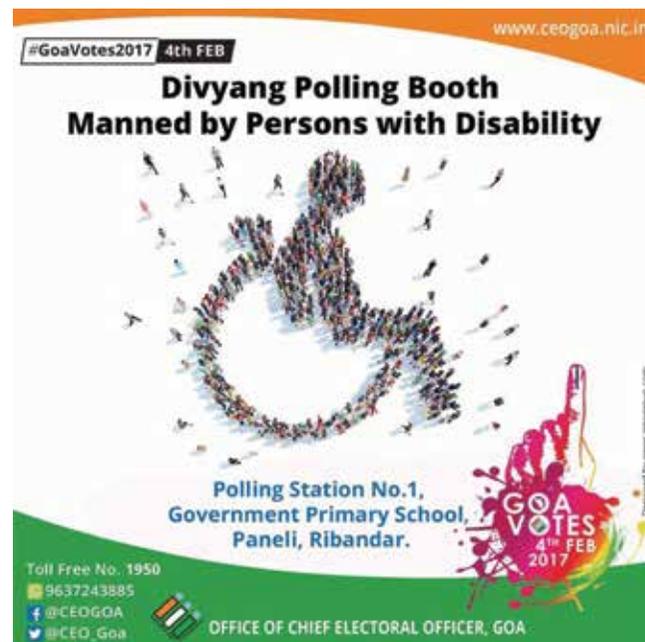
In tune with the Election Commission's intent to make the election process more inclusive and to encourage differently abled voters to exercise their franchise, it was decided to declare one of the polling stations in 11- Panaji AC as a Divyang Polling Station. This polling station was managed entirely by staff,



including the Presiding Officer, who are differently abled. Special efforts were taken to identify such staff from the various government departments. The willingness of the officials were sought and two groups were formed – one for the duties on the day of poll and one reserve. Special training was given in

two rounds for these personnel and their feedback was taken in order to make provisions for their specific requirements at the polling stations so that they have a comfortable experience. This initiative was widely appreciated by the national and local media and NGOs working for the differently abled. *The Divyang Polling Station had a large voter turnout.*

In addition to this, special efforts were made to identify differently abled voters in each Polling Station Area through



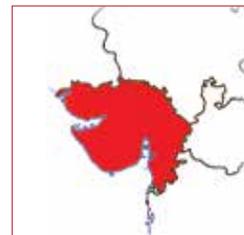
house to house verification by BLOs and Sector Officers. Accordingly, transport facilities through the vehicles of Sector Officers were made available on the day of poll to the differently abled. More wheelchairs were provided in polling stations where a larger number of differently abled voters were expected to cast their votes.



Gujarat (2017)

Ahmedabad

Enrolment Programs were held at organisations working with PwDs like Blind People's Association, Prakash, Uthan Talim Kendra etc. 8236 PwD voters identified through BLO survey, which is highest in the state.



To appeal to them, two Pwd Icons in the district are identified. SVEEP activities like Voter Awareness Tricycle Rally by PwD Voters were organised along with the other awareness campaigns.

Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu, a special campaign for PwDs was organised. Following initiatives were taken.

- Preparation and collection of polling station wise differently-abled people details. The details include the EPIC card number, the type of disability, the kind of assistance required during and before the polling day and telephone number
- Use of a dedicated phone number coupled with 1950 to facilitate on call enrolment.
- Indication of differently-abled voters in the electoral roll
- Braille enabled voter slips
- Volunteers to be deployed to facilitate enrolment in orphanages and homes



Activities conducted during Awareness phase

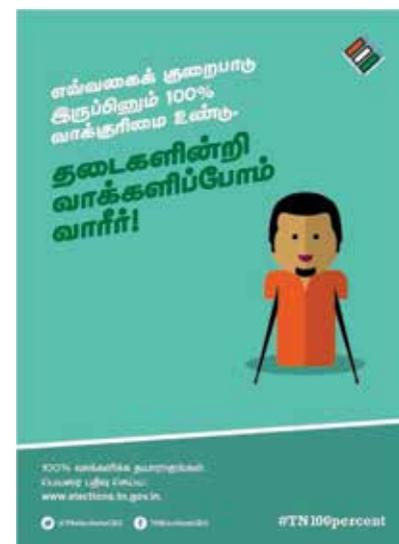
- Preparation of volunteers tagging software called as “Enable Pandy by Young Pandy” to offer a basket of services to the differently-abled people by the volunteers including college students, Red Cross Members and NGOs.
- Conduct of cultural programmes (constituency-wise) in a phase manner to increase the morale and awareness level of the differently-abled voters.
- Conduct of Differently abled Voters Day
- Awareness messages in the form of posters and stickers to be Braille enabled.
- Video awareness messages shall be prepared with sign language interpretation.
- Motivational SMS to all the differently-abled voters every week.
- Constitution of differently-abled activist groups to act as volunteers to monitor the implementation of initiatives at the Polling Station level.
- Confidence Building Measures (CBM) by distributing awareness material through volunteers.

Polling Day Arrangements

- Provision of permanent sturdy ramp with handrails (3” width, gradient of 1:12 to 1:10) , Wheelchair, Wide non-slippery path.
- Separate queue for senior citizens and differently abled people, seating arrangements inside the Polling Station.
- Ensuring 3 feet wide doorways at the entry and exit points, providing adequate space inside the Poll Station.
- Desk and counters at wheel chair accessible height
- Ballot sheet and EVMs should be in Braille
- Braille Enabled Voters Slips
- The table where the EVMs placed shall be of adjustable height
- To provide amplifiers for hearing impaired, sign language Interpreters and trained volunteers on the Poll Day
- Drinking water facility at accessible height
- Easily accessible rest rooms, Thank You cards

Specific Initiatives

Sensitisation of BLOs and all election facilities on the importance and sensitivity of addressing the needs of the differently-abled voters was initiated. Website of the Election Department was linked with that of the Social Welfare Department to facilitate data sharing.



Checklist for Social Audit of Polling Stations

Checklist for Social Audit – Accessible Elections India		
Polling Booth and Voting Process		
Selected State :	Selected Parliament/ Assembly Constituency	Polling Booth No.
Polling Booth Address	Name of Officer in Charge	
Accessibility Audit done by		
Date		

Sl. No.	Polling Booth Facility / Voting Process Activity	Check / Tick if available	Comments
1	Approach to Polling Booth Facility		
	Approach road to Polling booth is paved to be accessible with flat / non-skid surface and clear of debris, low hanging objects, trees or poles like obstacles		
	Pathway to the Polling booth has necessary curb cuts and ramps in pedestrian / footpath , if crossings available has zebra signs, signals with audio based notice for stop and start pedestrian crossing, to facilitate easy transit from transport vehicles to the Polling booth facility		
	Pathway to the Polling booth is marked with large print signs with pictures for Directions to the booth		
2	Parking and Amenities		
	Reserved Parking facility or a temporary parking arrangement is available for vehicles / wheel chairs of persons with disabilities		
	Path from parking facility to Polling booth and back is paved to be accessible with flat / non-skid surface / guiding tactile signs for wheel chair / crutch / non visual users and no obstacles present		
	Haphazard parking of vehicles or other obstacles in the parking place is not allowed and monitored to take action for removal		
	Accessible Toilet for men / women with grab rails, dry, non-skid flooring, wide enough for wheel chair movement/turning, wash basins in height easy to access through wheel chairs is available for use on requirements		

Sl. No.	Polling Booth Facility / Voting Process Activity	Check / Tick if available	Comments
	First aid Kits and Ambulance facilities are available to meet disaster management, emergency requirements and the team in Polling booth are trained or have knowledge on emergency or risk management procedures particularly to assist persons with disabilities, health issues like arthritis or other standing difficulties, elderly persons and pregnant women		
3	Access to Polling Booth		
	No hazards or obstacles or partitions or sandy surface or irregular pavement exist or placed temporarily in the path way from entry point of the facility to Polling booth and obstruct free access. If partitions are available for entry and exist, they should be minimum 1 to 1.2 metres width		
	Ramps are available and stable to allow wheel chair / crutch / caliper users with a flat and has a gradient of 1: 10 or 1:12, anti-skid pavement and flat surface		
	Ramps have grab / guard rails to assist elderly and users with mobility impairments.		
	Alternative pathway with ramp if planned, have Universal accessibility Symbol as a sign to mark it as designated way for persons with disabilities, health issues like arthritis or other standing difficulties, elderly persons and pregnant women		
	Entrance and doorway to Polling booth has a width of minimum 1 to 1.2 meters pathway for entry / exit of a wheel chair user		
	Warning strips and signs in contrast colour to the flooring wherever there is a rise in level or steps in the polling booth		
	Volunteers are available in the Polling booth facility to assist on requirements for persons with disabilities, health issues like arthritis or other standing difficulties, elderly persons and pregnant women		
4	Inside Polling Booth		
	Level across the flooring of the Polling booth to the identification, checking and polling point is flat surface, wide enough for wheel chair movement / turning and has no obstacles for barrier free movement within to finish the voting process by self		

Sl. No.	Polling Booth Facility / Voting Process Activity	Check / Tick if available	Comments
	Voting mechanism in Electronic Voting Machine is accessible with braille and large print (18 points and more) information for candidate identification distinctly and sound based response after successful voting		
	Voting process instructional guidelines displayed in bilingual (English and Regional Language) or given are in large print, braille for persons with visual impairments and elderly persons		
	Enough visual instructions, directional guidance with pictures are displayed for carrying out the voting process is available in the Polling booth for persons with communication difficulties		
	Personal assistance with simple sign language gestures known for those with hearing and speech impairments for carrying out the vote casting is available in the Polling booth		
	Adequate lighting facility is available for reading / polling to the elderly and persons with visual impairments.		
	The height of the table / counter of the voting machine is at accessible height for accessible wheel chair users / those with lesser height to cast their vote comfortably and in secret / privacy		
	Electronic Voting machine in the Polling booth is turned on, tested and in proper working order for casting the vote during the Election day		
	Extra seating / resting points in the polling booth are available on requirements or trouble while standing during the voting process for persons with disabilities, health issues like arthritis or other standing difficulties, elderly persons and pregnant woman		
	Assistive devices / aids like Wheel chair, Signature guides, rulers, easy to hold large grip marker pens, magnifiers, portable lighting, to aid signing or writing, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device or a communication dictionary in context to voting process are available in polling both		
	Polling booth officials and agents allow extra time to cast vote, aware of the special needs and provide reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities and their care givers, persons with health issues like arthritis or other standing difficulties, elderly persons and pregnant woman		

Human Stories

Messengers with Magic

Working on an idea by the District Election officer of Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh, 3000 differently-abled persons were selected as Booth Ambassadors to represent each of the polling stations of the district. Crowned as the *Loktantra-doots* (messengers of democracy), each of them rallied on motorcycles - '*Loktantra-vahan*' (vehicle of democracy) and were given identity cards. *Loktantra-doots* who encouraged one and all to exercise their franchise.

The election officials also organised a painting/ poster making competition that witnessed a participation of more than 4,000 differently-abled persons. This confidence building exercise bolstered the spirits of the electors of the district who came forward in strong numbers to cast their vote in the elections.



The Man in a Baby Cart

Belonging to village Ratnal of Anjar Taluka, Gujarat, Dhanjibhai Ahir has the reputation of voting in every elections - from Gram Panchayat to Lok Sabha. However he suffers from a peculiar disease – his bones break very easily. Over 30 years in age, he never went to school due to his condition and is totally illiterate. Today, he stands at a height of only 2.5 feet.

Dhanjibhai is totally bedridden and the only way he can commute is by using a baby cart, and that too when assisted. His 12-year-old nephew, Satish Valji Chhanga, enthusiastically accompanies him everywhere.

With every election, Dhanjibhai with an unwavering resolve arrives at the polling station in his baby cart without fail and casts his vote. With every election, Dhanjibhai reinforces every one's belief in the ballot.

Voting against all odds

Edward Moorthy, one of India's brave citizens, got his foot inked at a poll booth in Orlem, Malad, Mumbai on 24th April, 2014. Moorthy lost his arms in a train accident while going to his workplace a couple of years ago.

When asked to share his experience, he said, "The staff members were very cooperative and I used the stump of my arm to press the button. I think the staff members were awed, judging by the way they were gaping at me." Moorthy had his foot inked to show that he had voted. He placed his foot on the table with some help and an officer applied the ink while others in the polling booth looked on with a mix of curiosity and admiration.



Conjoined Sisters

“We have voted because we want to play our part in the formation of the next government,” exuded the twins Saba and Farah, outside a polling station in Patna. So what’s special about them? Well, they are conjoined twins, now joining hands in strengthening the democratic fabric of their state.

“It was a moment of great pride for us. We decided to vote this time to send a message that people, particularly the youth, should come and cast their vote”, said Saba.

The famous twins, who are joined at their heads, turned eighteen in 2015. Although they are two individuals, the Commission recognizes them as ‘one’ voter. They have been issued a common voter identity card by the Election Commission of India. The card also has their names clubbed as “Saba Farah.”



Nidhi gives Voting a Voice

Differently-abled Nidhi, a young girl born deaf and mute turned into an immensely popular Election Icon in Gaya in Bihar. Unbelievable but true! With the tagline “Vote is my Voice”, she gave a new impetus and momentum to the voter education and electoral participation campaign in the district. The talented Nidhi was noticed by the district administration through her brilliant paintings at *Bihar Divas* celebration.

Her hoardings were installed across the district and soon she became a popular champion for electoral participation. She also actively participated in every activity for voters’ awareness and education in the district. She became an instrument of empowerment for silent voters and gave voting a voice that would echo in our hearts for years to come!

I vote with my mouth!

Venkatesan aged 30 years, a teacher in Government High School at Mookanahalli, Tamil Nadu, lost both his hands in an accident and uses his legs and mouth for writing and performing other daily activities proficiently. Never has his disability deterred him from casting a vote. How does he cast his vote? He puts a pen in his mouth and uses it to press the EVM button.



A special citizen, Venkatesan is focused on teaching the youth the importance of their vote and he continually inspires them to exercise their right.

Steadfast ex-serviceman

N Elangovan (65) never misses to cast his vote. Though a quadriplegic, he is so steadfast in his commitment to nurture democracy that he has never failed to cast his vote in any of the parliamentary, assembly or local body elections till this date. He has the habit of reaching the polling station early to vote, and inspire others to turn out on polling day to cast their vote.

An ex-serviceman, he served 230 Signal Unit of the Indian Air

Messages from Icons



“ People with disability need to break the vicious cycle of ‘Out of sight is out of mind’ and make our vote count. In this day and age it is important to make ourselves-known and visible and make it impossible for people to ignore disability and send a very strong message to the political parties that our vote matters too!

A higher turnout of persons with disability would make government to adopt a right- based approach towards disability vis-à-vis policy- making and it will make disability part of the development agenda and not a welfare issue. I encourage persons with disability to come forward and vote and exercise their right to franchise.”

Arman Ali
Icon from Guwahati, State of Assam

“

The recent elections in Himachal were accessible and I voted for the first time. We went to schools, colleges and communities to motivate the voters. I appeal to everyone especially the young and future voters to enroll themselves and be a part of democracy building.”

Muskan
Icon from State of Himachal Pradesh





It is time to remove NOT from CANNOT as now we are tax payers, we are Olympians, we are mountaineers and we can become anything.

Accessibility is a basic right of every individual. We have the equal rights of voting as everyone has in the society.”

Suvarna Raj
Icon from Nagpur, State of Maharashtra



To be part of a democracy is very important. Having a disability, doesn't make a person less human to exercise his right and live life the way he wants.”

Vibha Goal
Icon from Azamgarh,
State of Uttar Pradesh



Democracy provides freedom and rights. One of the most important rights is right to vote. One shouldn't miss to vote as it's the only opportunity to strengthen the foundation of democracy. For the development of country, inclusion of all the communities in a country's electoral process is necessary. Everyone should proactively contribute in the development of the country. ECI's campaign "No voter to be left Behind" is the need of the hour.”

Kavita Bisht
Icon from State of Uttrakhand

Photoframes





No Voter to be Left Behind: Every Vote Counts



Annexure

Activity chart displaying clarity and coherence regarding ease of registration and voting by PwDs:

I. EASE OF REGISTRATION FOR PwD CITIZEN

Activity	Steps	Responsibility	Time Line	Risk	Outcome
Identification of eligible PwD citizens	Data collection, sharing and dissemination of information	DEO EROs/AEROs BLOs Concerned Departments	6 months prior to Summary Revision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identification of PwD and types of disabilities 2. Data collection from different sources. 	Mapping of PwD voters
Facilitation to the eligible PwD citizens	Nodal officers for PwD, Organising special camps, Setting up MSKs, CSCS	DEO EROs/AEROs BLOs Concerned Departments (SJ & DWD)	3 months prior to Summary Revision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Duplicate entries of electors with disabilities in E-Roll. 2. Improper facilities at MSKs for PwD 3. Lack of skilled staff. 4. Non availability of different types of materials forms etc. 	Enrolment of left out electors with disabilities.
Marking in E- Roll Database	Marking in BLO registers. The names of PwDs should be mapped and the list be made available to the BLOs but should not be marked in the electoral roll to maintain the privacy of PwDs	EROs/AEROs BLOs	3 to 6 months prior to Summary Revision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Misuse of facilities by persons other than PwD. 2. Errors of commission and omission in marking. 	Availability of information of electors with disabilities
Dissemination of information to Stakeholders, Political Parties, Election Machinery, Media, Electors	Organising meeting with Political Parties, Release of Press Notes, Training of Election Machinery.	DEO EROs/AEROs BLOs	6 months prior to Summary Revision	Lack of coordination between Stakeholders and Election Machinery.	Awareness among Electors with disabilities.

Activity	Steps	Responsibility	Time Line	Risk	Outcome
Environment building, SVEEP activities for registration	Targeted intervention, Organising Media Campaign, Ensuring involvement of NGOs & BAGs	DEOs CEO/ZP EROs/AEROs BLOs SVEEP partners, Concerned departments (S] & DWD)	6 months prior to Summary Revision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of coordination/ co-operation amongst departments. 2. Lack of funds. 3. Non availability of diverse facilities to meet diverse needs. 	Maximum inclusion of electors with disabilities.

II. EASE OF VOTING FOR PwD VOTERS

Activity	Steps	Responsibility	Time Line	Risk	Outcome
Set up of special exclusive Polling Booths for PwD	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparation of separate list of PwD from E-Roll database. 2. Identification of places where PwD reside in large numbers like Blind schools/ institutions etc. 3. Identification of building for Polling Booths 	DEO ROs/AROs Nodal Officer BLOs	3 to 6 months prior to election	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scattered population of PwD, 2. Accounting of type of disability. 	Increase in participation of PwD in democratic process.
Creating facilities in Polling Booths according to need of PwD.	Providing facilities like Ramps, Signage in Braille as well, Separate queues, Sheds, Seating arrangements, Wheel chairs, Waiting rooms, Assistants etc.	DEO ROs/AROs Nodal Officers	3 months prior to election	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of polling stations at ground floor. 2. Non availability of ramps, lifts, lack of sufficient open space. 3. Non availability of diverse facilities to meet diverse needs. 	Increase in Voter turnout of electors with disabilities

Activity	Steps	Responsibility	Time Line	Risk	Outcome
Dissemination of information regarding available facilities to the Stakeholders, Political Parties, Election Machinery, Media, Electors.	Organising meetings with Political Parties, Training of Election Machinery, Release of Press Notes and SVEEP activities. Sending Voice SMS, demonstrating poll process during distribution of voter slips and on the day of polls through signage.	DEO ROs/AROs Nodal Officers Media	30 days prior to poll	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of coordination between Stakeholders and Election Machinery. 2. Election Machinery overloaded with work. 3. Availability of required resources. 	Awareness among Stakeholders regarding facilities and information available for electors with disabilities.
Identification of special needs, if any	Identification and Tabulation of special information regarding needs of electors with disabilities by BLOS within Polling Booth area during door-to-door distribution of voter slips.	DEO ROS/ AROS BLOs	30 days prior to poll	Lack of skilled manpower.	Motivation, Mouth publicity, Increase in voter turnout of electors with disabilities.
Assistance at Polling Station on poll day.	Enlightening the BIOS, POs, Polling Parties, Security personnel etc. about the assistance needed for different types of disabilities during the training, Deployment of skilled personnel in special exclusive PBS and with Sector/ Zonal magistrate.	DEO ROs/ AROS BLOs	30 days prior to poll	Lack of Skilled Manpower	Motivation Mouth Publicity, Increase in voter turnout of electors with disabilities.
Environment building, SVEEP activities for poll and ethical voting.	Organising targeted interventions, Media campaigns, Involving NGOs & BAGs	DEO CEO ZP EROs/AEROs BLOs SVEEP partners, Concerned Departments (S) & DWD)	6 months prior to poll	Objections/ complaints may be raised by Political Parties.	Optimum turnout of electors with disabilities.



No Voter to be Left Behind: Every Vote Counts



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