

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN SUDAN

Situation Analysis during the Democratic Transition



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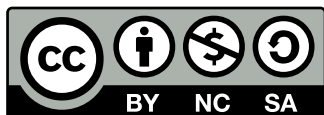


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The political participation of persons with disabilities (hereafter also PwD) is a fundamental human right that should be guaranteed and promoted. Through this analysis, we find that the interest of political parties in disability issues is an important element in enhancing PwD's political participation and attracting them to the political field, and in this context there is still a long way to go to ensure adequate and effective representation. Disability issues need to be an integral part of political agendas.

In addition, we find that the laws and legislation in force and the prevailing political atmosphere play a pivotal and important role in determining the extent of civic and political participation of PwD, no less than among other social groups.

The barriers and factors that limit the political participation of persons with disabilities are multiple and complex. They go beyond barriers of discrimination, negative perceptions or lack of physical and information access to other factors. Overcoming them requires a joint effort by governments, civil society and PwD's organizations. Political participation is not merely a democratic duty, but a basis for guaranteeing the rights and dignity of persons living with disabilities.

Disabled people are not only beneficiaries or casualties of policies, but can also be effective decision makers and leaders who contribute to shaping them—and thereby the future of their societies. To achieve this, strategies of education and awareness raising must be developed that articulate the participation rights of PwD. The societal perception of disability must be changed from one of pity

The interest of political parties in disability issues is an important element in enhancing PwD's political participation and attracting them to the political field.

and exclusion to one of respect, equality and recognition of rights including those stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN 2007).

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND ON THE STATUS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

People with disabilities often face multiple barriers of discrimination, isolation, stigma and negative stereotypes. They are also confronted with barriers to access in the physical environment, barriers to accessing information, and other obstacles posed by legislation, policies and procedures. All these factors may contribute in one way or another to weakening disabled people's socio-economic integration and reducing their effective participation in society. When it comes to the political process, the existence of such factors can be a real disincentive to disabled people's active participation.

The concept of full and effective political participation includes the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs directly or through representatives, the right to vote and to stand for election, and the right to have access to public office. Discrimination, segregation, stigma and negative images of persons with disabilities (hereafter also PwD) may discourage their desire to participate in the management of public affairs. They may be discouraged from competing for positions because they are aware of the barriers and biases mentioned diminishing their chances of winning, but also flawed legislation may deprive them even of their right to vote and to put themselves forward as candidates.

Persons with disabilities in Sudan are not unique in experiencing these difficulties. This Report seeks to analyse the status of political participation of persons with disabilities during the transitional

period—both for the sake of the Sudanese context and as part of the community of concern about disability rights globally.

OBJECTIVE OF THE SITUATION ANALYSIS

This situation analysis aims to explore the extent of political participation of persons with disabilities in Sudan's democratic transition process by examining the current legal framework and whether it guarantees the political participation of PwD; and by collecting their views on the level of their participation and involvement in political parties and non-partisan political groups. This is to identify obstacles affecting PwD's political participation and then propose recommendations aimed at addressing them. The main topics that the situation analysis sought to explore included the following:

1. Assessment of applicable laws and regulations and their impact on the political participation of persons with disabilities.
2. The extent to which PwD are aware of their rights pertaining to political participation.
3. The extent to which PwD participated in previous general elections and the difficulties and obstacles they faced.
4. The extent to which PwD participate in non-partisan political groups and parties, and the extent of their inclusion in party platforms.
5. Any further barriers and factors that negatively affect the political participation of this social group, not captured above.

METHODOLOGY

In seeking to fulfil these objectives a mixed approach was used to collect, analyse and classify quantitative and qualitative data that included the following.

Desk review

The international legal framework that guarantees the political participation of persons with disabilities was reviewed. A comprehensive examination of the laws that constitute the legislative

framework governing PwD's political participation in Sudan was carried out by comparing them with international standards set by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN 2007; hereafter UNCRPD) and the recommendations of the Convention Committee.

Focus groups

The focus groups included 40 representatives of associations/ organizations of persons with disabilities. These were conducted to obtain a deeper insight into the challenges and the interventions required to enhance the political participation of PwD in Sudan.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was conducted in eight states in Sudan to collect data on PwD's knowledge of their political participation rights, their participation in political parties and other political groups, the challenges they face in the electoral process, and other relevant factors hindering their political participation. The questionnaire surveyed 40 persons with disabilities from each state aged 18 and over, bringing the total to 320 people from about 55 administrative localities. Kassala state from the east, Gezira/Al Jazeera from the centre, North Kordofan and South Darfur were chosen for geographical distribution in addition to the number of persons with disabilities in these states compared to others. The Northern state was chosen for geographical considerations, the states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan were chosen for their special constitutional status, and the state of Khartoum was chosen for the presence of representatives of persons with disabilities. The questionnaire was devised based on the desk review and focus groups.

Key informants' interviews

To explore the political participation status of persons with disabilities within the political parties, interviews were conducted with 10 key informants from 10 different parties who were well-informed about their internal workings. This aimed to assess the parties' efforts in facilitating access to their programmes for persons with disabilities, the extent of providing necessary accommodations, the inclusion of disability issues in party programmes, the degree of their participation in decision making and leadership within the parties, and their involvement in public office during the transitional period.

Limitations of the study

1. *Scarcity of data on political participation; incomparability.* Data on the political participation of persons with disabilities is scant or non-existent, making it challenging to compare their political participation during the transitional period either with other periods, or with the general population or other vulnerable groups.
2. *Representative challenges in sample selection.* Most of the survey participants were among PwD with higher levels of education, and representation for people with intellectual disabilities was lower than expected.
3. *The impact of social expectations on responses.* Due to the sensitivity surrounding political topics, some participants may have been tempted to provide responses that align with social acceptability rather than disclose their genuine experiences and opinions. Especially during focus group discussions on political parties and non-partisan political groups.

Chapter 1

DESK REVIEW

1.1. INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

The right to political participation in international human rights law

Participation in political life is often talked about in conjunction with participation in public life. The UNCRPD addresses political participation under the heading of participation in ‘political and public life’. The latter concept is not given a formal definition, but the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in its general recommendation 23 of 1997, clarified that political and public life is a broad concept that refers to ‘the exercise of political power, in particular the exercise of legislative, judicial, executive and administrative powers’. The term encompasses:

All aspects of public administration and policy formulation and implementation at the international, national, regional and local levels ... [also] many aspects of civil society, including public bodies, councils and the activities of organizations such as political parties, trade unions, professional or industry associations, women’s organizations, community-based organizations and other organizations concerned with public and political life.
– (CEDAW 1997: para. 5)

The right to political participation is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 21, paragraph 1, which states that ‘Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives’.

‘Everyone has the right to take part in the conduct of the public affairs of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives’.

Paragraph 2 of the same article provides for 'Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country' and paragraph 3 states that 'The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures' (UN 1948).

The article permits certain restrictions on the enjoyment of political rights, but requires reasonableness in those restrictions (see Universal suffrage, below).

Similarly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (UN 1966) in its article 25 stipulates that every citizen, without distinction as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, has the right to enjoy without unreasonable restrictions the following rights:

- (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;
- (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.
– (UN 1966: article 25)

Universal suffrage

According to an Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) thematic study on the participation of PwD in political and public life, universal suffrage is 'the foundation of modern democracies' (OHCHR 2011: para. 25). It is a concept that extends the right to vote to benefit all citizens who have reached the age of majority, regardless of any basis on which human beings are usually discriminated against, be it religion, race, sex, language, and so on. Historically, restrictions on the right to vote have been imposed

on the basis of race, as well as on property and wealth, and on the basis of gender—whereby women have been completely excluded from voting and running for office.

The first struggle for advocates of universal suffrage was to remove restrictions on male suffrage and to include adult men in voting regardless of their race, wealth or property ownership. In the early 19th and 20th centuries, they then worked to abolish restrictions on women's participation (OHCHR 2011).

The OHCHR has observed some reasonable and unreasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right to vote in practice. For example, it considered setting a minimum age to exercise the right to vote to be a reasonable limitation. In contrast, restrictions based on literacy, level of education, property, or membership in a particular party are not reasonable (OHCHR 1996: para. 10). A minimum age required for a person to run for or hold a particular post set higher than the minimum voting age is reasonable (para. 4); restriction of the right to vote or stand for election on the grounds of physical disability is unreasonable (para. 10).

Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 29 of the UNCRPD provides for the right to participate in political and public life, under which states parties undertake two obligations: first, to ensure that persons with disabilities 'can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others' (article 29a); and second, to promote the enabling environment for this (see article 29b).

With regards to the first obligation, article 29 identifies a number of ways in which states can and must ensure that persons with disabilities are able to participate effectively in political and public life, whether directly or through freely chosen representatives. It elaborates three requirements. The first concerns voting procedures, facilities and materials, which must be 'appropriate, accessible, and easy to understand and use' (article 29a (i)). The second requirement is that PwD be able to vote secretly and freely without intimidation, and to run for elected office and 'perform all public functions at all levels of government', facilitated by assistive and new technologies

where appropriate (article 29a(ii)). The third requirement is to ensure the freedom of expression of the will of PwD as voters, and here the article establishes that they are allowed to choose a person to help them vote whenever necessary (article 20a(iii)).

With regards to the second obligation there are two requirements that states must fulfil. The first is to 'promote actively' an environment that encourages participation in public life, including in non-governmental organizations/associations and in political parties (article 29b(i)). The second focuses specifically on representation of persons with disabilities, by persons with disabilities—at all levels from the local to the international (article 29b.(ii)). All these requirements on states deal with PwD as a whole, that is they do not exclude any particular sub-group.

Non-restriction of the enjoyment of political rights

The Committee on Civil and Political Rights (composed of independent experts tasked with monitoring the implementation of the ICCPR) has expressed a clear view protecting the right of persons with physical disabilities to enjoy political rights, but until the mid-1990s its position on persons with intellectual disabilities did not protect their right to political participation. According to General Comment 25 on the right to participate in public affairs, 'established mental incapacity may be a ground for denying a person the right to vote or to hold office' (OHCHR 1996: para. 4). However, the legal landscape has changed radically since; arguably, most such voting restrictions are no longer consistent with the prohibition of discrimination provided for in ICCPR article 2(1) and article 25, nor with the contemporary concept of democracy (OHCHR 2011: para. 25).

In addition, a significant legal development has played a role in establishing the right of persons with intellectual disabilities and psychosocial disabilities, which is the adoption of the UNCPRD itself. As we have seen, the text of article 29 does not refer to any reasonable limitation relating to disability, nor does it exclude any category of persons with disabilities. Thus, article 29 protects the right of persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities to participate in political and public life.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has followed suit in practice. The Committee expressed concern that some states deny persons the right to vote or stand for public office on grounds of deafness, intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, restricted legal capacity according to the law of the country concerned, or persons being under quarantine or guardianship. The concluding recommendations of states parties issued by the Committee are to stop these practices and adopt new ways of interacting with PwD that respect their right to political participation. In the concluding recommendations from Slovenia, for example, the Committee expressed concern about the denial of the vote to those persons assumed to be unable to understand the meaning, purpose and impact of elections, and recommended that all persons be guaranteed the right to vote regardless of their disability, and provided with decision-making support, including accessible voting materials as necessary (CRPD 2018a).

The Committee also expressed concern about North Macedonia's (then 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', FYROM) electoral laws that provide for 'mental capacity' as a prerequisite for the right to vote and run for public office, depriving persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities of these rights (CRPD 2018b). It recommended that FYROM review its electoral laws with a view to eliminating this requirement. The recommendation was repeated with other countries sharing the same restrictions, including Türkiye (CRPD 2019a).

Political participation and accessibility for persons with disabilities

What the UNCRPD requires goes beyond simply not denying participation rights to PwD. It imposes an obligation on states parties to facilitate PwD in their participation and remove barriers to it. Since electoral accessibility is one such problem area, the Convention has given it particular attention. The Committee's attention to this matter is not limited to the removal of architectural barriers such as narrow entrances, thresholds on entrances, stairs, or the absence of clear signs, for example. It goes beyond mobility issues to provision of appropriate electoral information and materials for PwD, facilitating voting procedures, and providing accessible voting technologies.

Electoral laws that provide for 'mental capacity' as a prerequisite for the right to vote and run for public office, depriving persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities of these rights.

Accessibility rights extend beyond the stages of voting and candidacy to the actual holding of office and performance of duties, where elected PwDs must have the opportunity to carry out their mandate in a fully accessible manner.

One of the recommendations of the Committee in this regard is the adoption of an electoral accessibility plan (CRPD 2019b), to provide for, among others, election materials and information in formats accessible to all persons with disabilities. The Committee had already commented on electoral accessibility and access to candidates' political meetings as part of that (CRPD 2014). Accessibility rights extend beyond the stages of voting and candidacy to the actual holding of office and performance of duties, where elected PwD must have the opportunity to carry out their mandate in a fully accessible manner (CRPD 2014a).

Relationship with other human rights

The UNCRPD is a comprehensive agreement that stipulates all human rights of persons with disabilities. It is well established that human rights are interdependent and indivisible; the upholding or 'progressive realization' of some rights being promotive and protective of others. Realization of the right to education, for example, identifies and avoids a number of health risks, and the promotion of health rights makes the individual more receptive to education. The promotion of education and health rights in turn supports a person's participation in political and public life. Some of the provisions in the UNCRPD play an indirect role in PwD's inclusive participation in political and public affairs, others a direct role.

In this context, the thematic study prepared by the OHCHR (2011) on the participation of persons with disabilities in political life referred to a number of articles, including article 4, paragraph 1, which provides that states parties shall 'take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination against persons with disabilities'; article 9, on appropriate measures to ensure persons with disabilities have equal access to 'the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communication technologies and systems', and article 12, which reaffirms the right of persons with disabilities to be recognized everywhere as persons before the law and 'to enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life'. Article 19 recognizes the right of all persons with disabilities to their full inclusion in the community with choices over where, and with whom, they live. Article 21 calls for accessible information formats and

communication technologies for official interactions including sign languages, Braille and others, as part of upholding PwD's freedom of expression, opinion, and access to information.

1.2. DISABILITIES AND PARTICIPATION IN THE SUDANESE LEGAL CONTEXT

For the first time in Sudan's history, 1993 saw the inclusion of disability questions in the country's fourth census (Hemedan 2008). Based on the fifth national census of 2008 conducted before the secession of South Sudan, the total population of the northern states that make up the current Sudan is approximately 30.5 million, of whom about 1,463,000 are persons with disabilities. According to that census, the prevalence of disability was about 4.8 per cent among the general population, 5.0 per cent among males, and 4.6 per cent among females. By housing, the disability rate is 4.3 per cent in urban and 5.0 per cent in rural areas, and is 4.6 per cent among nomads. There are a number of questions about the accuracy of the proportion and number of persons with disabilities in the fifth national census of 2008, not least because persons with disabilities are estimated to be 10–15 per cent of the population globally. Due to armed conflicts in different parts of the country, poverty, lack of health services and other factors, the country's disability rates are not expected to be lower than the global average. Further factors suggesting the 2008 figures are an underestimate relate to the definition and classification of disability, and the existence of some customs in some areas that conceal disabilities or people with disabilities.

Disability rights and the constitutional document

The constitutional document for the transitional period stipulates that rights and duties in the state are based on citizenship, without discrimination on several grounds including race, religion, sex, disability (Sudan 2019: article 4(1)). The document stated that 'people are equal before the law and are entitled to the protection of the law without discrimination as to ethnicity, colour, gender, language, religious belief, political opinion, racial or ethnic origin and any other grounds' (article 48).

The constitutional document for the transitional period stipulates that rights and duties in the state are based on citizenship, without discrimination on several grounds including race, religion, sex, disability and other grounds.

The constitutional document clarified that one of the tasks of the transitional period is to guarantee and promote the rights of women in Sudan (article 8(7)) and to enhance the role of youth and enhance their opportunities in all fields (article 8(8)). However, it did not provide for the active promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities as one of the tasks of the transitional period.

'The State guarantees persons with disabilities all the rights and freedoms set forth in this document, in particular respect for their human dignity, access to appropriate education and work and full participation in society'.

The constitutional document devotes an article to women's rights in which their rights are protected as contained in ratified international conventions, guarantees their rights in all fields and provides for their promotion through positive discrimination (article 49). The document also devotes an article to the rights of the child in which it stipulates the protection of children's rights as contained in international and regional conventions ratified by Sudan (article 50). In contrast, the constitutional document devotes a separate article to the rights of persons with disabilities stating: 'The State guarantees persons with disabilities all the rights and freedoms set forth in this document, in particular respect for their human dignity, access to appropriate education and work and full participation in society' (article 64(1)).

The constitutional document protects the right to participation in political and public affairs by stipulating the right of every citizen to do so (article 59). It also stipulates the right to freedom of expression and information, the right of every citizen to receive and disseminate information and publications, access to the press and the Internet and freedom of the press (article 57), as well as freedom of assembly, organization and association of political parties, associations, organizations, trade unions and professional unions (article 58). It further states that 'all rights and freedoms enshrined in regional and international human rights conventions and treaties ratified by the Republic of the Sudan shall be an integral part of this document' (article 42(2)).

It should also be noted that the constitutional document did not require any condition related to physical health in the membership of the Sovereign Council (article 13), the Council of Ministers (article 17) or the Transitional Legislative Council (article 26). It is important to note that the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2017 has never addressed the political rights of persons with disabilities nor their political participation.

Right to vote and stand for election

With regards to voter eligibility, the 2008 National Elections Act required voters to be Sudanese, over 18 years old and registered in the electoral register—but also that voters ‘be of sound mind’ (Sudan 2008: article 21). That a person was ‘not of sound mind’ is one of several grounds on which any other registered voter can object to their being on the electoral register (article 24(1)).

With regards to candidacy and access to public office, the law in a number of places referred to the conditions for excluding PwD from holding such positions. Eligibility for the office of President of the Republic requires good reason (article 41(1)), and the application is considered null and void if the candidate does not meet this requirement (article 44). The requirement of sound mind is repeated as one of the requirements for eligibility to stand for election to the Council of States (article 52(c)) and to legislative councils (article 53(1)). The law also considers that an application for candidacy for membership of legislative councils is invalid if the candidate does not meet the condition of sanity, among other conditions (article 57).

The National Elections Act also required members of the National Elections Commission to be of sound mind (article 6(2)) and provided that the position of a member shall be vacant in the case of a medically certified ‘mental infirmity or physical incapacity’ (article 7(1)).

It is worth mentioning here that the law’s requirement of ‘sound mind’ to obtain rights, such as the right to hold public office in one’s country, and the right to vote or be elected, contradicts the right of persons with disabilities to exercise their right to political participation, and constitutes discrimination based on disability from the perspective of the UNCRPD.

Article 12 of the UNCRPD differentiates between legal capacity, which pertains to the ability to possess legal rights and duties, and mental capacity, which refers to the ability to make decisions. It clarifies that actual or perceived deficits in mental capacity should not be used as a basis for denying legal capacity. This challenges the notion that ‘unsoundness of mind’ or other discriminatory labels can be used to justify the removal of the legal rights of PwD (GC No. 1 2014b).

The requirement of sound mind is repeated as one of the requirements for eligibility to stand for election to the Council of States (article 52(c)) and to legislative councils (article 53(1)).

Provisions fall far short of meeting electoral accessibility requirements in accordance with the UNCRPD. As we have seen, the Convention deals with physical access but also voting materials, procedures and process, and with presenting information in accessible formats.

Mental capacity is not a static, scientifically absolute attribute but is constructed by an individual's societal and political environment, resulting in diverse perceptions and evaluations. Experts such as psychologists and psychiatrists are also affected by these external influences in their assessments, rendering mental capacity a dynamic concept interwoven with and shaped by the prevailing societal and political contexts (GC No. 1 2014b).

The conflation of mental and legal capacity results in instances where the legal capacity of PwD is removed based on the diagnosis of an impairment (status approach), a decision that is perceived to have negative consequences (outcome approach), or deficient decision-making skills (functional approach) (GC No. 1 2014b).

Accessibility

Sudan's National Elections Act 2008 requires polling stations to meet several conditions, including that the centre be located on open ground, or otherwise in large premises that voters can have access to, and leave easily (article 73(1)). The centre must also be 'located in a place to facilitate' access by people with special needs and the elderly (article 73(1)). These two provisions fall far short of meeting electoral accessibility requirements in accordance with the UNCRPD. As we have seen, the Convention deals with physical access but also voting materials, procedures and process, and with presenting information in accessible formats.

With regards to access to information, the law guarantees candidates in elections the use of all media, including print, audio-visual, Internet, electronic messages, and any other means in their election campaigns (Sudan 2008: article 66). However, it makes no reference to the provision of information in a format accessible for PwD. This means neither candidates nor the National Elections Commission (NEC) have any obligations in this area; given that the law is silent on the matter such provision is not guaranteed.

Access to information, the law guarantees candidates in elections the use of all media, including print, audio-visual, Internet, electronic messages, and any other means in their election campaigns.

The law gives the National Elections Commission the authority to establish the necessary rules to regulate voting operations and procedures, including polling procedures for the illiterate and those with special needs (article 74(1) and (2)). The accessibility assessment of electoral process procedures therefore requires

consideration of those rules established by the NEC. It is worth noting that the term ‘people with special needs’ is used as a synonym for ‘people with disabilities’ at times.

The right to form and join parties

The Political Parties Law of 2007 granted every Sudanese who has reached the age of 18 the right to participate in the establishment and membership of political parties (Sudan 2007: article 12(1)). The law prohibits the holders of a number of positions—such as members of the regular forces, judges in the judiciary, legal advisers at the Ministry of Justice, senior leaders in the civil service, and diplomats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—from participating in, or joining, any political party during their tenure of office (article 12(2)). The law stipulates that, for the establishment or continuation of the activity of a political party, among other conditions, its membership must be open to any Sudanese who adheres to the objectives and principles of the party (article 14(a)), and that the leaders of the party and the leaders of its institutions at all levels be democratically elected, taking into account the representation of women according to the percentages set by the party (article 14(c)).

The law does not explicitly refer to disability/special needs or to persons with disabilities, but it makes citizenship the only condition for the right to form and be a member of political parties. Thus, PwD cannot be denied such activities on grounds of their disability. On the other hand, the law does not promote the participation of PwD in political parties as it does the participation of women under article 14(c), for example.

Right to form associations and organizations

The Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Act of 2006 does not deal in detail with organizations of persons with disabilities, but it authorizes ‘organizations of those with special needs’ to ‘establish a union to look after their common affairs and defend their causes’ (Sudan 2006: article 17(2)), as well as to cooperate with other civil society groups on issues of common concern (article 17(1)). With regards to the registration of voluntary non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations (NGOs and CSOs), article 9 of the 2006 Act stipulates conditions which are generally reasonable—but the intransigence encountered by NGOs in practice is often due to

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application of article 11 which mentions that the licence of each organization shall be renewed annually, in accordance with 'such conditions as the regulations may specify' (article 11).

Chapter 2

SURVEY

2.1. SURVEY LOCATIONS AND NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

The survey was conducted in eight states: Northern, Kassala, Gezira/ Al-Jazeera, Khartoum, North Kordofan, South Kordofan, Blue Nile and South Darfur. The number of localities surveyed was 55. The number of participants in the questionnaire was 320 persons with disabilities aged 18 or over (Table 2.2).

Respondents by gender

The percentage of men participating in the questionnaire was 57.4, while the percentage of women was 42.6 (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Participants by gender

Gender	%
Male	57.4
Female	42.6

Respondents by age

Persons aged 18–23 made up 11.9 per cent of survey respondents, in the 24–29 age group 13.8 per cent, in the 30–35 age group 32.2 per cent, in the 36–41 age group 25.4 per cent, and those over 41 years of age, 25.7 per cent (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2. Participants by age

Age	Number	%
18–23	37	11.9
24–29	43	13.8
30–35	72	32.2
36–41	79	25.4
Above 41	80	25.7
Not specified	9	2.8
Total	320	100

Survey participants by education

As shown in Table 2.3, different degrees and types of education and some who did not receive education were represented among the survey participants.

Table 2.3. Participants by education

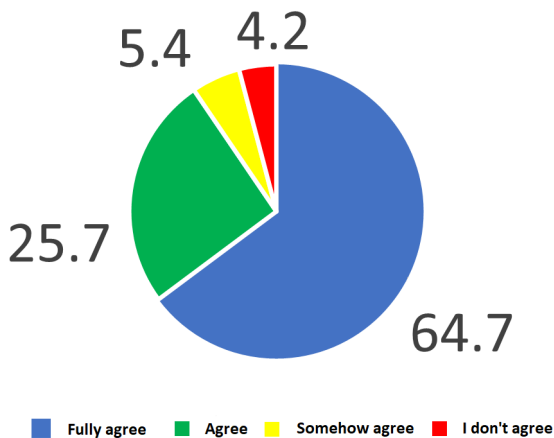
Education	Number	%
Uneducated	22	6.9
Quranic classes	12	3.8
Religious education	7	2.2
Technical and vocational education	9	2.8
Adult education	6	1.9
Primary	17	5.3
Basic or intermediate	31	9.7
Secondary education	81	25.3
Upper secondary	9	2.8
University	90	28.1
Postgraduate	31	9.7
Not specified	5	1.5
Total	320	100

2.2. SURVEY RESULTS: PERCEIVED MEANINGS OF PARTICIPATION

Right to vote in elections

Those who strongly agreed that political participation means the right to vote in elections reached 64.7 per cent, and the percentage of those who agreed that political participation means the right to vote in elections was 25.7 per cent, while the percentage of those who agreed to some extent was 5.4 per cent, and those who did not agree that political participation means their right to vote in elections reached 4.2 per cent (Figure 2.1). This indicates that the vast majority of persons with disabilities consider voting to be an essential aspect of political participation.

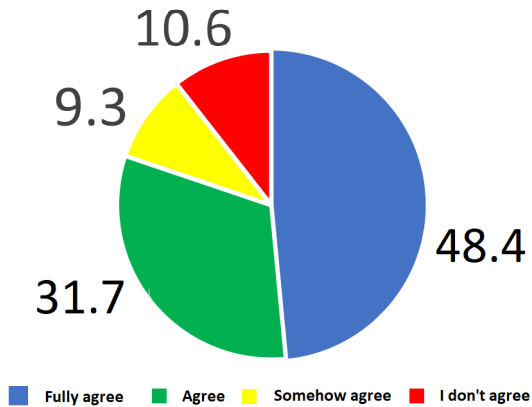
Figure 2.1. 'Political participation means the right to vote in elections'



Right to stand for election

A total of 89.4 per cent of respondents agreed that political participation means the right to run in elections, while 10.6 per cent did not agree with this statement. Among the respondents who agreed, 48.4 per cent strongly agreed, 31.7 per cent agreed, and 9.3 per cent agreed to some extent (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. 'Political participation means the right to run in elections'



Survey participants by type of disability

Persons with a range of different disabilities participated in the survey, as shown in Table 2.4.

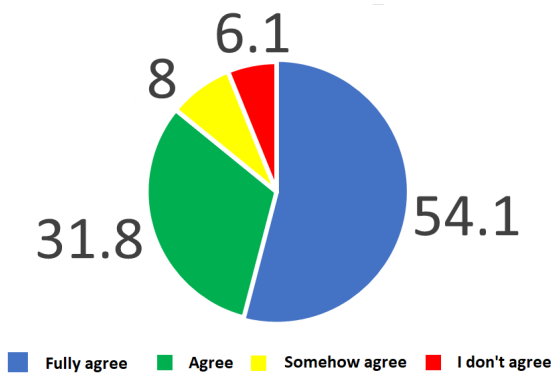
Table 2.4. Participants by type of disability

Type of disability	Number	%
Hearing	88	27.5
Visual	78	24.4
Physical disability	105	32.8
Intellectual	22	6.9
Autism	1	0.3
Learning difficulties	4	1.3
Psychological	3	0.9
Several	13	4.1
Other	4	1.2
Not specified	2	0.6
Total	320	100

Right to hold public office

A total of 94 per cent of respondents agreed that political participation includes the right to hold public office, while 6.1 per cent did not agree with this view. Among those who agreed, 54.1 per cent strongly agreed, 31.8 per cent agreed, and 8 per cent agreed to some extent (Figure 2.3).

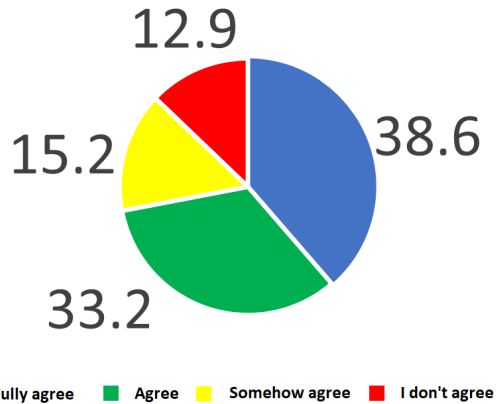
Figure 2.3. 'Political participation means the right to hold public office'



The right to form and join parties

A total of 87 per cent of respondents agreed that political participation includes the right to form and join parties, while 12.9 per cent did not agree with this assertion. Among those who agreed, 38.6 per cent strongly agreed, 33.2 per cent agreed, and 15.2 per cent agreed to some extent (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4. 'Political participation means the right to form and join parties'



Freedom of opinion and expression

A total of 97.8 per cent of participants agreed that political participation means freedom of opinion and expression, while 2.2 per cent did not agree with this statement. Among those who agreed, 61.5 per cent (195 participants) strongly agreed, 31.2 per cent (99 participants) agreed, and 5.1 per cent (16 participants) agreed to some extent (Figure 2.5).

Freedom of assembly and association

A total of 93.5 per cent of participants agreed that political participation means freedom of assembly and association, while 6.5 per cent did not agree with this statement. Among those who agreed, 44 per cent strongly agreed, 38.2 per cent agreed, and 11.3 per cent agreed to some extent (Figure 2.6).

Freedom of information and access to information

A total of 96.1 per cent of respondents agreed that political participation means the right to freedom of information and access to information, while 3.9 per cent did not agree with this statement.

Figure 2.5. 'Political participation means freedom of opinion and expression'

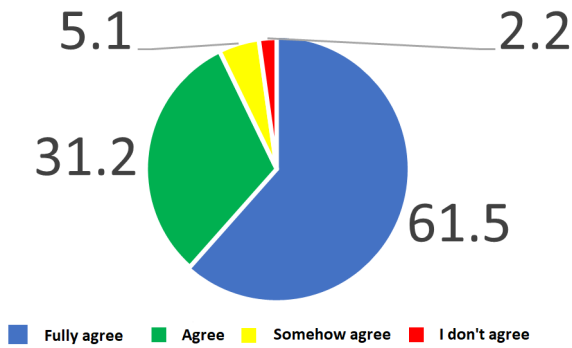
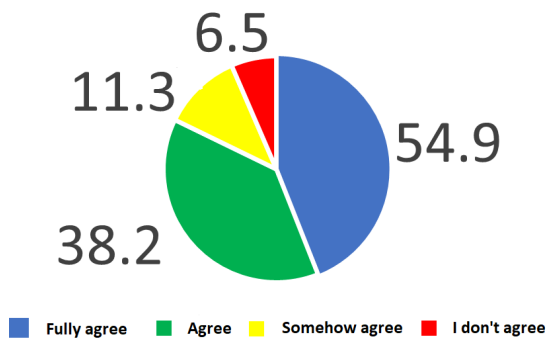


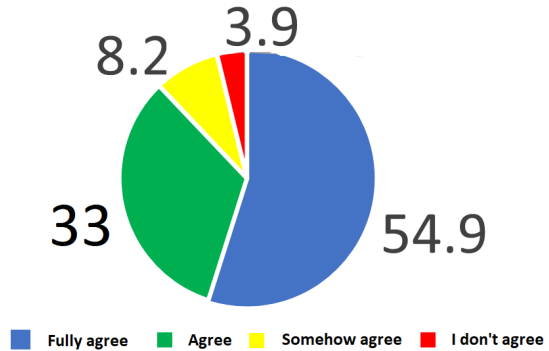
Figure 2.6. 'Political participation means freedom of assembly and association'



Among those who agreed, 54.9 per cent (173 participants) strongly agreed, 33 per cent (103 participants) agreed, and 8.2 per cent (26 participants) agreed to some extent (Figure 2.7).

All the mentioned statements linking political participation to rights obtained approval rates (strong agreement + agreement) of more

Figure 2.7. 'Political participation means freedom of information and access to information'



People with disabilities see participation in voting as the essence of democracy and their right, while they may be skeptical about the right to run for office and who holds public office.

Media discourses critical of political parties over the years may have had an impact on this outcome.

than 70 per cent, which suggests that there is a broad consensus among PwD on the importance of these rights for enhancing their political participation. The statements on freedom of opinion and expression followed by that on the right to vote in elections were the most agreed to. Meanwhile if we focus on people who disagreed with the link between these rights and political participation, the right to stand for election is the one that faced the most resistance or rejection. This indicates that awareness of its importance should be raised.

It is interesting to note that there is a difference in approval rates between the right to vote and the right to stand for election, which may indicate that many people with disabilities see participation in voting as the essence of democracy and their right, while they may be sceptical about the right to run for office and who holds public office. When considering the latter, PwD expressed relatively less agreement compared to other component rights of political participation. This suggests potential challenges in achieving these rights in practice.

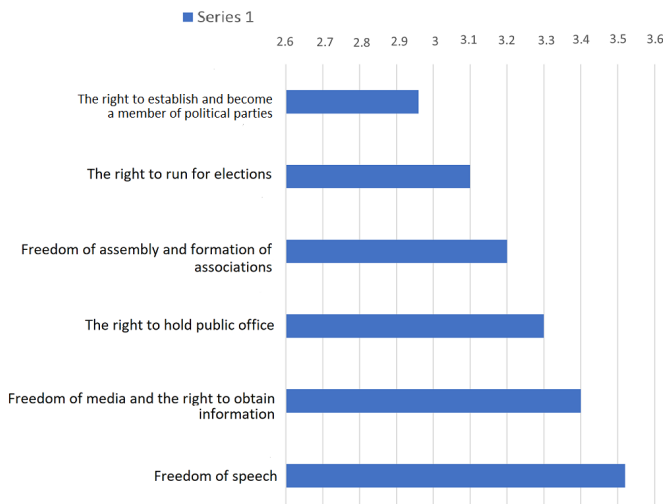
In the survey responses the right to form and join parties was linked to political participation the least of all, which may reflect a relative sense of challenges in forming or joining parties. Media discourses critical of political parties over the years may have had an impact on this outcome.

A larger percentage of respondents strongly agree that holding public office is a crucial aspect of political participation compared to forming and joining political parties. This implies that they see holding public office as a more direct and critical way to engage in politics and effect change. It may also reflect the belief that this right has a greater impact on representing interests within the political sphere. This perspective reflects a greater emphasis on the end goal (public office) rather than the means (party participation).

Figure 2.8 shows the average assessment of persons with disabilities for the different rights enquired about in the survey, on a scale of four degrees. The data shows that persons with disabilities in Sudan attach great importance to their political rights, especially freedom of opinion and expression and the right to vote. In contrast, they see the right to form and join parties as the least important part their political participation, which could indicate a need to promote and raise awareness of this right. Overall, analysis and comparison show that people with disabilities see great importance in most political rights, but there are some reservations and potential challenges they may face in achieving some of these rights.

They see the right to form and join parties as the least important part their political participation, which could indicate a need to promote and raise awareness of this right.

Figure 2.8. Persons with disabilities' average assessment on a scale of 4 degrees



2.3. PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE OF VOTING IN ELECTIONS

Participation in general elections

The number of respondents who had participated (voted) in the previous general elections was 215, or 67.2 per cent. Of those who voted in one or more previous election, 63.4 per cent were men and 36.6 per cent were women. A total of 135 men had participated in one or more of the previous elections, or 74.2 per cent of the male respondents. The number of women who had done so was 78, or 57.8 per cent of female respondents.

Participation in previous elections by educational level

Table 2.5 indicates how many respondents reported having been voters in the past, as against their educational background.

Table 2.5. Participation in previous elections by educational level

Type of education	Turnout in elections %
Uneducated	54.5
Quranic class	63.6
Religious education	100
Vocational and technical education	100
Adult education	50
Primary	58.8
Basic or intermediate	64.5
Secondary education	74.7
Upper secondary	44.4
University	68.6
Postgraduate	73.3

Participation in previous elections by type of disability

Respondents with motor disabilities were the most likely to have voted in previous elections, followed by people with hearing disabilities, and then people with visual impairments. The participation of persons with more than one disability was weak, while the participation of people with intellectual disabilities was very weak (Table 2.6).

Table 2.6. Participation in previous elections by type of disability

Type of disability	% participation in one or more previous elections
Physical disability	35.3
Hearing	29.3
Visual	25.1
Intellectual	3.7
Several	2.8
Other	3.8

The participation of persons with more than one disability was weak, while the participation of people with intellectual disabilities was very weak.

2.4. ACCESSIBILITY IN PREVIOUS ELECTIONS

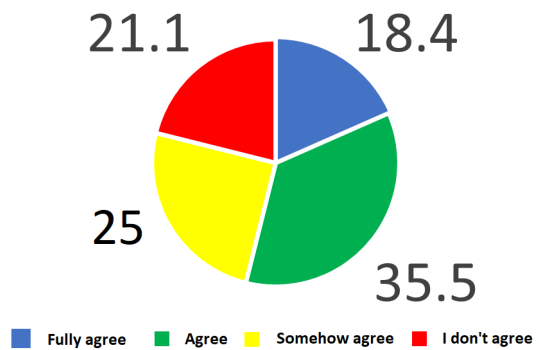
Persons with disabilities who had previously voted in elections (215 individuals) were asked about the accessibility of the various stages of the electoral process. Twelve dimensions of accessibility were discussed, explored in turn below. The proportions of responses given in each case refer to percentages of these 215 (survey participants were asked about their own experiences).

Ease of electoral registration

The majority of respondents who had participated in previous elections reported that the registration process was easy, but a considerable proportion (21 per cent) reported that it was not easy,

as in (Figure 2.9), and this indicates that there may well be barriers to accessibility that need to be addressed in future elections.

Figure 2.9. 'The registration process was made accessible/it was easy to be entered in the electoral register'



There is a need to improve and expand the mechanisms for distributing information in future elections.

Accessibility of information on parties and candidates

While the majority reported that information was available and satisfactory 'to some extent' or above, a significant percentage (28 per cent) reported that the information was insufficiently available or was unclear/unsuitable for them to access (Figure 2.10). This indicates that there is a need to improve and expand the mechanisms for distributing information in future elections.

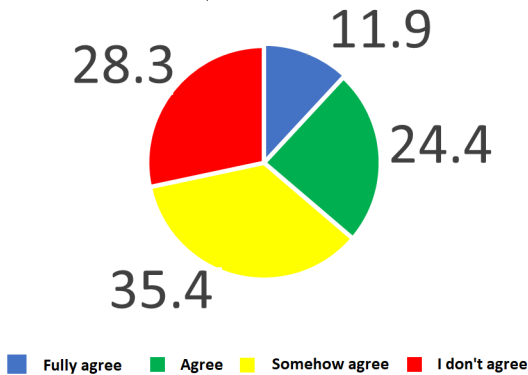
Ease of access to polling stations

The majority of respondents reported ease of access to polling stations. However, close to a quarter reported that access was not easy (Figure 2.11). This suggests that there is room for improvement in accessibility at some polling stations to meet the needs of this segment of society.

Ease of movement/mobility inside polling stations

The majority of respondents stated that ease of moving around polling stations was appropriate. However, almost a third reported that they have faced mobility challenges inside polling stations

Figure 2.10. 'Information on parties and candidates is satisfactorily available and suitably accessible'



(Figure 2.12). This finding illustrates the importance of taking into account the needs of persons with disabilities when designing and equipping polling stations.

Figure 2.11. 'Access to the polling station was easy'

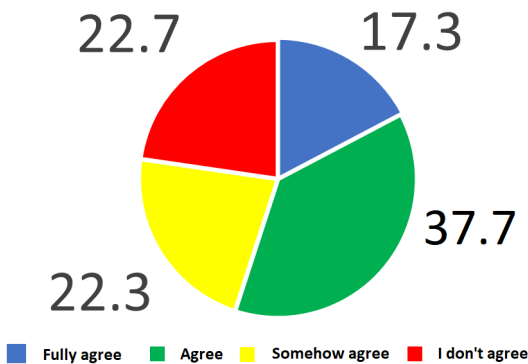
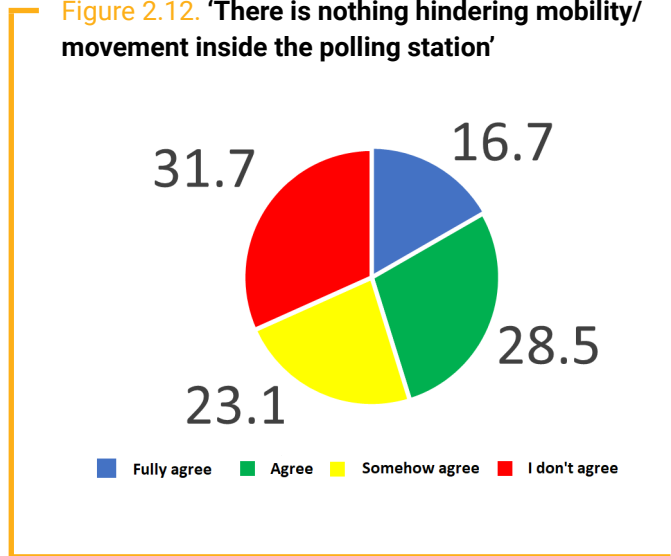


Figure 2.12. 'There is nothing hindering mobility/ movement inside the polling station'



Electoral officials must take into account the needs of PwD in presenting information that is clear and easily understandable for all voters.

Ease of access/convenience of voter information inside polling stations

The majority of respondents reported that information was provided to them in an appropriate way inside the polling stations. However, over a quarter stated that this was not the case for them (Figure 2.13). These findings reinforce that electoral officials must take into account the needs of PwD in presenting information that is clear and easily understandable for all voters.

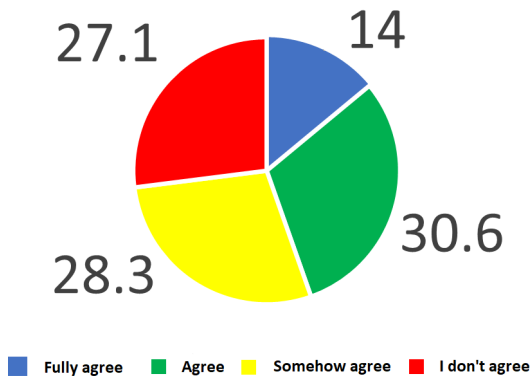
Communication barriers for people with hearing and visual impairments

A majority of respondents (more than half) stated that there are communication barriers for people with hearing and visual impairments (Figure 2.14). This suggests that there are significant challenges that must be addressed in the future to ensure better communication with PwD, especially those with impairments of these kinds.

Ease and convenience of voting method

The majority of respondents said that the voting method was easy and convenient for them, and this indicates the success of the electoral process in providing a positive experience to voters.

Figure 2.13. 'Information needed within the polling station/centre was provided in an easily accessible and convenient way'



However, about a quarter of respondents reported there were challenges in the way they cast their vote (Figure 2.15).

Figure 2.14. 'There are no communication barriers for people with hearing or visual impairments'

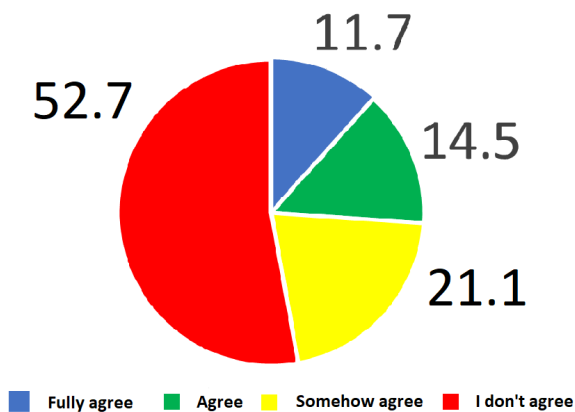
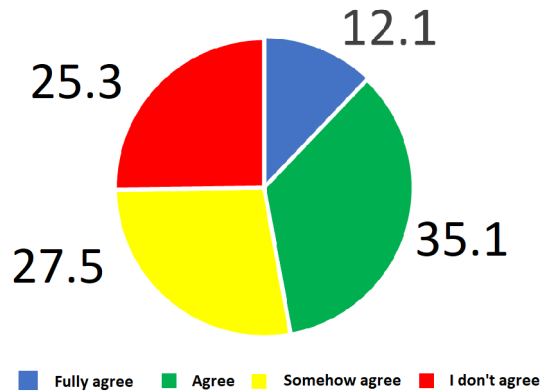


Figure 2.15. 'The voting method was easy and convenient'



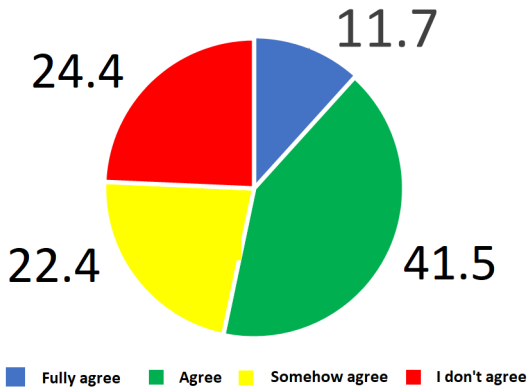
Ease and convenience/suitability of voting materials

The results indicate that a large majority of respondents felt that voting materials were suitable/appropriate and convenient/easy to use, but a significant minority (24.4 per cent) reported finding them difficult to use or did not consider them appropriate (Figure 2.16). Reviewing and developing the materials to ensure the highest rate of satisfaction among voters with disabilities is therefore called for.

Ballot secrecy—confidentiality of the voting process

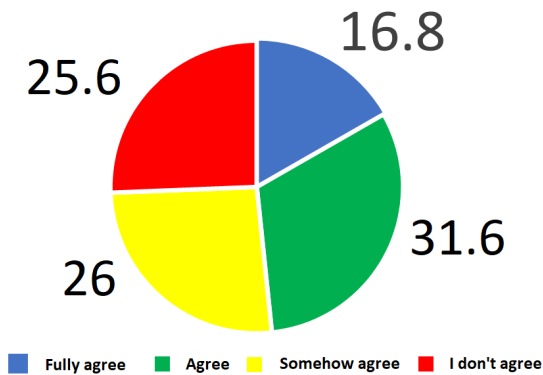
Secrecy in voting processes is key to ensuring electoral integrity and voter confidence. The majority of respondents stated that the voting process was confidential, and this is positive. However, about a quarter of the survey participants reported lack of ballot secrecy in their election experiences. It may be useful to study the causes of this in seeking solutions for future elections. Notably, people with physical disabilities reported confidence in ballot secrecy more frequently (that is by a larger majority) than did people with visual impairments. People with hearing disabilities were the group most concerned about the secrecy of the voting process among the three groups. For policymakers and electoral officials, this data highlights the need for further investigation of the challenges faced by PwD, especially those with hearing impairments. The goal must be to

Figure 2.16. 'Voting materials were convenient/ suitable and easy to use'

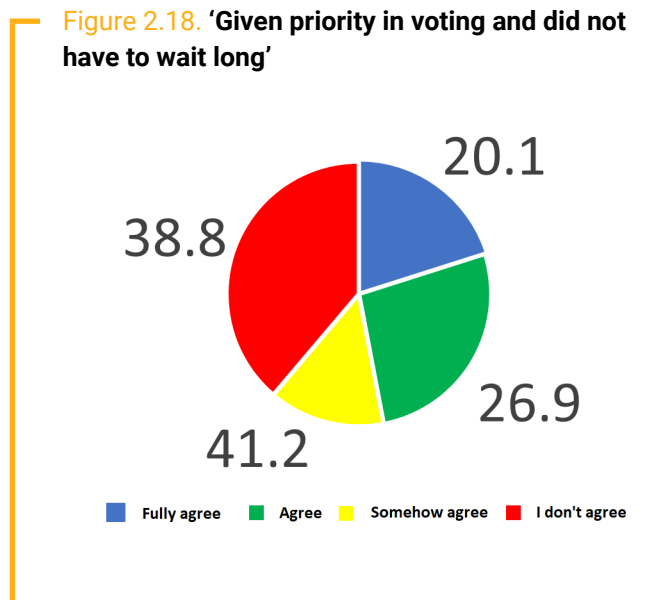


ensure that everyone has an equal and unhindered opportunity to vote in secret (Figure 2.17).

Figure 2.17. 'Votes were cast in secret/ confidentiality was upheld'



Priority voting for people with disabilities; waiting times
 The results suggest that a large majority of respondents (over 60 per cent) feel that the voting process did not take too long and that people with disabilities were adequately prioritized. But the remaining almost 40 per cent did not agree with this statement, indicating that they experienced longer wait times or did not feel they were given priority. This calls for improvements in the process to ensure the convenience of all voters (Figure 2.18).



Independence of voting choice

Of those who participated in voting in previous elections, 78 participants, or 36.3 per cent, explained that political parties had transported them to the polling stations. Among 71 of the participants (33 per cent), it was reported that those who had offered transport tried to influence them to vote for specific candidates. A total of 111 participants indicated that an attempt was made to influence their vote inside or near the polling station. 75 indicated that they were influenced to vote for a particular political party by their family.

Assistance in the voting process

Those people who reported using the assistance of another person to cast their vote numbered 93 participants, or 43.2 per cent. Of voters with visual impairments, 63.3 per cent did so, compared to 43.7 per cent of persons with hearing impairments, 27.2 per cent with intellectual disabilities, and 19.1 per cent with motor disabilities. With regards to assistance in the voting process, 64.9 per cent of respondents preferred to be assisted by acquaintances, compared to 35.1 per cent who preferred polling station staff.

2.5. BARRIERS TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION— WITHIN AND BEYOND PARTIES

The extent to which PwD consider each factor as negatively affecting their political participation a 4-degree scale was adopted where 1 indicates a non-influencing factor, 2 a weak factor, 3 an influencing factor, and 4 a very influential factor. The following factors were all identified as influential. Table 2.7 ranks the barriers that arose in the focus group discussions by the weighting they obtained in the questionnaire responses.

2.6. EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPATION IN NON- PARTISAN POLITICAL GROUPS

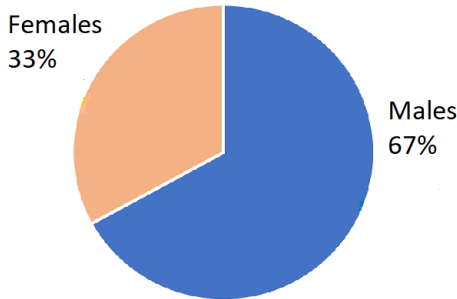
There were 91 participants who answered that they were members of non-partisan groups, or 28.4 per cent of the total participants in the questionnaire survey. The number of men participating in non-partisan groups was 61, while the number of women was 30. Thus, the reported proportion of males to females in non-partisan groups was 67 per cent to 33 per cent (Figure 2.19).

It was found that the number of participants who joined during the past three years, that is, after the formation of the government of the first transitional period, was 49, representing 53.8 per cent of those reporting membership of non-partisan groups and 15.3 per cent of the total participants in the questionnaire. Most non-partisan political group members were university educated (35 graduates), followed by

Table 2.7. Barriers to political participation, within and beyond parties

Barriers to political participation	Weight, out of 4
Financial costs of political participation	3.08
Names dropped from voter rolls	3.13
Waiting times; slow voting procedures	3.24
Lack of ballot secrecy	3.29
Difficulty in reaching polling stations	3.33
Difficulty of voting procedures	3.33
Mobility challenges and difficulty of movement within polling stations	3.36
Non-cooperation of polling station officials	3.36
Information on polling stations unavailable	3.37
Information at polling stations not accessible	3.39
Weak importance attached to political participation	3.39
Dissatisfaction with the party political programmes proposed	3.41
Negative stigma/prejudice against PwD	3.41
Election organizer does not make information about parties and candidates accessible	3.48
Parties do not submit their programmes in ways easily accessible to PwD	3.50
General political atmosphere charged with dispute and conflict	3.53
Laws and regulations limiting the participation of PwD	3.53
Disability not presented as a key issue by political parties	3.72

Figure 2.19. Participation in non-partisan political groups by gender



people with secondary education (24 school graduates), and those with post-university education (11 individuals).

Assigned tasks in non-partisan groups

Seventy people responded that they were assigned tasks in non-partisan political groups, 25 of whom said this was 'always', 15 said 'often', 18 said 'sometimes' and 12 said it happened 'rarely'. We conclude that 21.9 per cent of persons with disabilities surveyed were assigned tasks in non-partisan political groups.

Participation in seminars and speeches held by non-partisan groups

Sixty-one persons respondents who were members of non-partisan groups participated in seminars and speeches held by non-partisan political groups. Of these, 24 of them were involved on an 'ongoing/permanent' basis, 10 were 'often' involved, 18 'occasionally' involved, and 9 'rarely' involved. We conclude that 19 per cent of PwD surveyed participate in seminars and speeches held by non-partisan groups.

Participation in political decision making of non-partisan groups

Of the respondents, 58 stated they participate in the political decision making of the non-partisan groups to which they belong, 21 of whom 'always' participated, 8 did so 'often', 14 'sometimes' and 15 'rarely'.

From this, we conclude that 18.1 per cent of PwD in the survey participated in the political decision making of non-partisan groups.

Participation in selecting non-partisan group representatives

Sixty-eight individuals reported that they participate in the selection of representatives of the non-partisan groups, 24 of whom 'always' participated, 8 'often', 19 'sometimes' and 17 'rarely'. That is, 21.25 per cent of PwD in the survey participated in selecting the representatives of their respective non-partisan groups.

Informed about decisions/positions of non-partisan groups

Of the survey participants, 68 stated that they are informed about the positions adopted by their non-partisan groups; 28 were 'regularly' informed, 8 'often', 8 'sometimes' and 24 'rarely' informed. From this, we conclude that 21.2 per cent of respondents believed they were informed about the positions taken in their respective non-partisan groups.

Disability-friendly information provided to group members

Of the respondents, 63 said they were provided with disability-friendly (accessible) information in/by their non-partisan groups, 23 were 'always' so provided, 11 'often', 11 'sometimes' and 18 'rarely'. From this, we conclude that only 19.7 per cent of persons surveyed were provided with information in an appropriate way always, often or sometimes.

Disability-friendly adjustments to group activities

'Reasonable adjustments' for the needs of PwD can include things like translation, reserved seating, mobility access, materials in audio, Braille and other accessible formats, and so on. In the survey 57 people reported being provided with reasonable adjustments during activities held by non-partisan groups. Of these, 15 of said these adjustments were 'always' made, 8 said 'often', 12 said 'sometimes' and 22 said 'rarely'. Thus, only 17.8 per cent reported being provided with disability-friendly adjustments during the activities of non-partisan groups.

2.7. PARTICIPATION IN PARTY POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Assigned tasks in political parties

Of the questionnaire participants, 28 stated that they are assigned party tasks, 12 of them 'continually/permanently', 5 were 'often' assigned party tasks, 6 'sometimes' and 5 'rarely'. Thus, the proportion of respondents reporting this was 8.7 per cent.

Participation in party meetings

Forty-three individuals participating in the questionnaire stated they participate in party meetings, 15 of them on an 'ongoing/permanent' basis, 11 of them 'often', 14 'sometimes', and 3 'rarely'. Thus, the proportion of respondents participating in party meetings was 13.4 per cent.

Participation in party seminars and correspondence

Of the 17 individuals who reported participating in seminars and speeches held by their parties, 17 of them participate 'continually/permanently', 6 'often' participate, 10 'sometimes' and 8 'rarely'. Thus, 12.8 per cent of survey respondents are thought to participate in seminars and speeches held by political parties.

Participation in party decision making

Thirty-five individuals in the questionnaire reported participating in party decision making, 8 of them on an 'ongoing/permanent' basis, 7 'often' participating, 11 'sometimes' and 9 'rarely'. Thus, 10.9 per cent of survey respondents stated that they participate in party meetings.

Participation in internal party elections

This dimension of accessibility was surveyed separately from other party decision making. Of the 35 individuals who said they participated in internal party elections, 12 of them did so 'always', 7 'often', 7 'sometimes' and 9 'rarely'. Thus, the proportion who stated they participate in party meetings came out the same as those reporting taking part in party decision making more generally, at 10.9 per cent of respondents in the survey.

Informed about the positions of parties and political developments

Of the 37 persons surveyed who said they were informed about their parties' positions and political developments, 16 of them were informed on an 'ongoing/continual' basis, 4 'often', 10 'sometimes' and 7 'rarely'. Thus, the percentage of persons with disabilities who participate in party meetings is 11.6 per cent of the total number of respondents to the survey.

Disability-friendly party information provided

Thirty-seven persons participating in the questionnaire said they are provided with the same information as others without disabilities, and in an appropriate manner. Of these, 14 stated this was on an 'ongoing/continual' basis, 7 said they are 'often' given information in an appropriate way, 14 'sometimes' and 3 'rarely'. Thus, the proportion of respondents reporting they are appropriately informed is 10.3 per cent, or around half as high as for disabled people's non-partisan group activity.

Disability-friendly adjustments to party activities

'Reasonable adjustments' for the needs of PwD can include things like translation, reserved seating, mobility access, materials in audio, Braille and other accessible formats, and so on. Twenty-five persons with disabilities participating in the questionnaire stated that they are provided with disability-friendly adjustments, nine of them on an 'ongoing/continual' basis, three are 'often' so provided, six 'sometimes' and seven 'rarely'. Therefore, the proportion of persons with disabilities who are provided with disability-friendly adjustments during party activities is only 7.8 per cent.

Disability-friendly adjustments to party activities 'Reasonable adjustments' for the needs of PwD can include things like translation, reserved seating, mobility access, materials in audio, Braille and other accessible formats.

Chapter 3

INTERVIEWS ON PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL PARTIES

An analysis was conducted on the status of disability and PwD's activities within political parties as basic structures for participation in political and public life. Interviews included two sets of questions, the purpose of which was to (a) identify PwD's ability to access the activities of political parties; (b) identify the extent to which they are included in party programmes and structures; and (c) identify the level of their participation in management and decision making, that is, how far they are involved in determining parties' choices.

Interviews were conducted with a sample of 10 political parties, including old parties, newly formed parties and some political movements. Responses and levels of interaction with the subject matter of the interviews varied, and can be summarized in the following conclusions:

1. *Disability-friendly information and communication.* Only two political parties who responded to interview questions reported that their party platform and materials are presented in accessible formats understandable for all PwD, such as audio files for the blind. The same two parties stated that their party platform is especially dedicated to disability, and they have programmes and activities aimed at disability issues. On facilitating access to information in party seminars and activities, one party only stated that it 'always' uses disability-friendly methods, while two parties reported that they 'sometimes' do so.
2. *Internal structures.* Nearly all parties that responded to interview questions reported having a level of administration for people

with disabilities, except for one party that did not have a disability department.

3. *Membership and leadership.* All but one of the parties that responded to the interview questions reported that their members included persons with disabilities. Regarding the representation of PwD in leadership positions, two parties replied that there is representation at this level. The rest made it clear that there is no representation of PwD in leadership or that the representation is weak.
4. *Representation among candidates.* There is one party that ran a disabled candidate in previous elections, while the rest offered varied reasons for not having done so. Some cited political reasons, namely a boycott of the previous elections. As for submitting candidates with disabilities to any of the general committees or public positions during the transitional period, two parties answered that they had done so. The rest gave multiple reasons why this had not happened, the most important of which were political reasons.

Most political parties do not give due consideration to disability, and the participation of people with disabilities is still very weak and limited within the majority of political parties.

The general conclusion drawn from these interviews is that most political parties do not give due consideration to disability, and the participation of people with disabilities is still very weak and limited within the majority of political parties. As for the very few parties that demonstrated reasonable inclusion of disability, this is attributed to the presence of people with disabilities in leadership positions.

Chapter 4

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

4.1. BARRIERS AND FACTORS

The barriers and factors affecting the political participation of persons with disabilities can be summarized as follows.

4.1.1. Financial costs of participation

Political participation can sometimes require financial costs that not everyone can afford. People with disabilities may have additional costs related to mobility, communication, escorts or assistive technology. Therefore, they may feel that it is difficult to afford to attend meetings, activities and political events, as well as access to polling stations—especially considering that PwD face challenges in obtaining livelihoods and incomes.

4.1.2. Names dropped from voter rolls

Persons with disabilities may have more difficulty updating their registration or maintaining their status as registered voters due to mobility/access and other barriers. Sometimes, PwD may be inadvertently overlooked when updating records. This can have a further, psychological impact, making those affected feel marginalized or excluded from the democratic process and reducing their motivation to participate in the future.

4.1.3. Waiting times; slow voting procedures

When considering the voting process, waiting times or slow procedures may not seem like a major problem for many people. But for people with disabilities, this can have a profound impact and may hinder them from exercising their democratic rights. PwD,

especially those with motor disabilities, may find it difficult to stay in queues for long periods, whether due to physical pain or fatigue. People with intellectual or psychological disabilities can also face special challenges when waiting for long periods without interaction or guidance. In addition, crowded or noisy places can be frustrating or confusing for people with sensory impairments or mental health difficulties. Even where it is achieved, negative experiences of casting a ballot can reduce the likelihood of participation in future elections.

4.1.4. Mobility challenges (accessing polling stations; difficulty of movement within them)

Easy and safe access to polling stations is essential to ensure the participation of all voters in the democratic process. But people with disabilities may face special challenges including long distances; lack of suitable/adapted entrances and exits; narrow or obstructed corridors; voting spaces that are unsuitable for wheelchair users or those of short stature; and lack of trained staff to provide appropriate assistance.

4.1.5. Difficulty of voting procedures

When they are complex or poorly communicated, voting procedures can be a barrier for many voters, especially persons with disabilities. Among the difficulties that PwD face are unclear instructions. It can be difficult to understand how the procedures are sequenced from entering the building and making sure that the name is in the records, to the act of voting itself. Regarding the time allotted, PwD may need more time to complete the voting process. This can expose them to stress, especially if there are long queues of waiting voters.

4.1.6. Non-cooperation of polling station officials

Friendly and helpful treatment by officials at polling stations is key to ensuring accessibility and participation of all voters, especially persons with disabilities. Potential staff-related difficulties facing PwD include insufficient disability rights awareness and lack of adequate training to deal with specific challenges. There are also negative prejudices and perceptions that some polling staff may have about PwD, leading to poor service. Lack of cooperation from staff may also result from lack of necessary equipment at the polling station.

4.1.7. Information on polling stations unavailable

Providing adequate and clear information about polling stations is essential to ensure broad and equal participation of all voters, and becomes even more important when it comes to persons with disabilities. Shortcomings in this area can leave PwD unable to understand the exact location of polling stations or how to access them. There may be failures in providing voter information through enough different channels and in alternative formats such as large print, sign translation and audio.

4.1.8. Information at polling stations not accessible/inadequate

The same applies to communication at the polling station. PwD require clear signs and signals enabling them to follow procedures, or to request they be adapted, as appropriate. PwD may have difficulty reading instructions or understanding symbols and images if their specific needs are not taken into account. They may also have problems communicating with polling staff who are not adequately trained to be aware of and informed about disabilities.

4.1.9. Ballot secrecy not assured

Voting secrecy is an essential component of the integrity of the electoral process. It guarantees the right of voters to vote freely without any external influences or fear of the consequences. In the context of disability, concerns about the secrecy of voting are usually due to the dependence of some PwD on assisted voting. The lack of appropriate training for polling staff can also be an issue.

4.1.10. Weak importance attached to political participation

Failure to recognize the importance of engaging in the democratic process can have a negative impact on the participation of PwD in elections and other political activities. On the part of PwD themselves, this may result from feeling insufficiently represented in political institutions in the present and that they will not be sufficiently represented in the future (a vicious circle). Levels of political awareness may also be affected by remote geographical location and other factors affecting the electorate as a whole. Negative past experiences of political participation may also have an impact on PwD's perceptions and willingness to participate.

They may also have problems communicating with polling staff who are not adequately trained to be aware and informed about disabilities.

Negative perceptions towards persons with disabilities may hinder PwD from expressing their opinions or participating in political dialogues, reducing the incentive for decision makers to take account of their needs and preferences.

4.1.11. Negative stigma/prejudices against PwD

Stigma and negative perceptions are among the most prominent challenges faced by persons with disabilities in societies around the world. When it comes to political participation, these biased perceptions can deepen the gap and reduce the chances of fair representation. Stigma and prejudices lead some to believe that PwD do not have the capacity to make informed political decisions, and in turn PwD feel that they are not represented, valued or treated as citizens in the full sense of the word. Negative perceptions towards persons with disabilities may hinder PwD from expressing their opinions or participating in political dialogues, reducing the incentive for decision makers to take account of their needs and preferences.

4.1.12. Failure to provide accessible information on parties/ candidates by (a) electoral organizers and (b) political parties

Inclusive, effective democracy implies that voters must have sufficient information about parties and candidates to participate in an informed manner. People with disabilities have different needs, whether visual, auditory or motor. The lack of information in alternative formats limits access and constitutes a tangible barrier for PwD, hindering their ability to make confident and informed decisions. It is the responsibility of both electoral organizers and political parties to present the choices before the electorate in accessible ways.

4.1.13. Disability not presented as a key issue by political parties

When political parties do not consider disability issues as a central part of their agenda, it becomes difficult for PwD to find representatives offering to advocate for their interests. This reduces their engagement and with it the competitiveness of the electoral contest. Whoever wins, disability issues will not receive enough attention and to that extent, the legitimacy of governance arrangements suffers too. Insufficient attention to disability issues reflects a lack of awareness on the societal level, where in fact these issues directly affect a sizeable minority and, indirectly, many more voters. Political parties often place other priorities above disability, whether related to security or other socio-economic issues.

4.1.14 General political atmosphere charged with dispute and conflict

A conflictual and conflict-affected political atmosphere can have a significant impact on political participation and people with disabilities are no exception. PwD may be more vulnerable in times of political conflict, due to difficulty in mobility, access to resources or greater exposure to violence and psychological impacts. Tense political situations may lead to the withdrawal of PwD from the political process, especially if they feel that their voice is not heard or considered. Political conflicts and tensions can reduce trust in the political system and parties and foreground a narrower set of issues, making PwD feel that their participation will not bring change.

4.1.15. Laws and regulations limiting the participation of persons with disabilities

As also discussed in the desk review, laws may explicitly prohibit the political participation of PwD, especially those with intellectual disabilities. Currently, Sudan's laws do not mandate the provision of accessible information (or other reasonable adjustments), nor do they effectively prevent discrimination. The active promotion of PwD's representation in public and political life, including their representation in elected positions, is neglected when the law could have played that role. In summary, Sudan's laws do not reflect contemporary realities or international standards on the rights of persons with disabilities. In addition to all this, another challenge related to the laws is their actual application in practice.

Sudan's laws do not reflect contemporary realities or international standards on the rights of persons with disabilities.

4.2. FURTHER DETAIL FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

4.2.1. The meaning of political participation for persons with disabilities

Participants talked about the importance of political participation for PwD in order to be represented in legislative councils, parliament or any function that enables them to defend their rights and the rights of the groups they represent. Some saw political participation as an assertion that PwD exist in Sudan and are worthy of mutual respect, as well as an opportunity to demonstrate abilities. Others pointed to the need for PwD's participation in decision making and control

of state resources in the executive and legislative fields, stating that its importance lies in the fact that it guarantees and enforces rights, monitors their implementation, enacts and activates legislation, benefits health provision (rehabilitation programmes for PwD) and enables the expression of needs and aspirations.

On the other hand, some participants asked the question: Do people with disabilities want to participate politically? The question was an expression of urgent practical needs on the part of PwD within daily and family life, which are a priority for them, as well as distress about barriers to fulfilment of other/strategic needs. Under these circumstances, talking about participating in political life in such circumstances is a luxury. Others expanded on this by explaining that PwD are completely misunderstood as having practical or 'service' needs only. The desire to participate may exist, but there is a need to raise the awareness of PwD of the importance of political participation and the need for their presence in decision making.

One participant explained that PwD are not isolated from what is happening in the country. Throughout previous periods, military rule did not allow for political participation, and PwD were affected no less than other social groups. One participant added that the desire to participate in political life and awareness of the need to do so are linked, and stressed the need to work with political parties to increase their awareness of the issue. Participation in political life was very important, not in itself, but because it was a means of obtaining other rights.

Some PwD linked awareness of rights with accessibility of information and knowledge. For example, people with visual and hearing impairments cannot access the Constitution and laws because these are not available in alternative formats.

The participants pointed out that disability organizations have been regularly active since the 1970s and have made great efforts. But in almost all states they have low capacity and are thinly spread, which does not enable them to carry out activities such as awareness-raising among political parties and society at large.

4.2.2. Positive experiences of participation

Some participants reported positive experiences where they were accompanied by people of their choice to cast their votes. One referred to his successful candidacy for a party position and his being selected as the party's candidate in any upcoming elections. Another participant who had participated in two electoral processes, including work on a campaign, explained that treatment of PwD varies between polling stations. He said it depends on staff's level of understanding of disability, and that he had encountered understanding people among polling staff. One participant explained that he was director of a state polling station in 2015 and a computer assistant was appointed to him, which was widely accepted. Participants agreed that there was some participation of PwD in the previous elections, and there was need for a general plan to make this less of an isolated/individual experience. Work with political parties could increase levels of participation and publicity for it.

4.2.3. Intimidation or retribution against politically active disabled people

Participation in elections is often voluntary, but in some cases PwD may—like other voters—be subjected to social pressure, whether that be positive inducements (bribes of money, payment in kind or threats. One participant shared an experience when her neighbour forced her to go to the polling (to vote for a particular party, but behind the scenes she did not vote for anyone. Some participants noted that there were many such irregularities, with PwD brought to the polling stations to vote for certain candidates rather than exercising a free choice. Sometimes an Election Commission officer will insist they are assisted to vote by someone they do not know, leaving them without assurance that their vote goes to their preferred candidate. Sometimes a visually impaired person may not find his name on the register and a party representative says that they can vote, on condition it is in support of a particular candidate. Attempts have also been made to cast doubt on the integrity of the election in the minds of some visually impaired people.

In some cases, PwD were induced to breach electoral rules, one participant explaining that he voted when he was under-age

because the candidate promised to pay his family for each vote. PwD sometimes bargained their votes for promises to have their needs met. Electoral contestants stopping the provision of certain vital goods or services (such as assistive technologies) if PwD vote against them is a form of extortion which is of concern.

One participant explained that in the 2015 elections, she was a treasurer for one of the candidates in the constituency and faced verbal and physical violence from an opponent's supporters. The latter monitored her for a long time even after the elections, denouncing her difference of views and using derogative language that opposed her very participation as a woman with a disability.

Families sometimes prevent their disabled members from voting out of fear for them.

More generally, discussants pointed out that society at the neighbourhood level may discourage people with disabilities from expressing their civic or political viewpoints. Examples include questioning the ability of PwD to write or to vote, among other abilities. As well as some members of society questioning PwD's 'usefulness to society', families sometimes prevent their disabled members from voting out of fear for them.

4.2.4. Participation of women with disabilities

The experiences of the focus group participants showed that some members of society perceive women with disabilities as being incapable and think that, being women, their place should be at home.

There was agreement on the need to raise awareness of the participation rights of women with disabilities in all of Sudanese society, especially among rural communities.

Participants explained that women with disabilities face specific problems within the family or home. Discouragement from political participation may extend to being stopped from going to vote at election time. This indicates an urgent need to raise awareness within families. Some discussants explained that women without disabilities, too, are limited to certain spheres of public office (the fields of social care and childhood); women with disabilities face even greater challenges. There was agreement on the need to raise awareness of the participation rights of women with disabilities in all of Sudanese society, especially among rural communities.

4.2.5. Political participation of persons with intellectual disabilities

Participants reported that people with intellectual disabilities are deprived of legal capacity, and that parties therefore do not care about them. People with intellectual disabilities are generally represented by parents, even in their unions—The Sudanese National Union of the Deaf, and The Sudanese National Union for the Blind. Awareness-raising about intellectual disabilities was felt to be a major challenge, with their education/training and rehabilitation centres being concentrated only in cities. There was consensus that laws limiting their participation—via deprivation of legal capacity—must be changed.

4.2.6. Reasonable adjustments

Some participants stressed the importance of pre-election arrangements such as gathering more and better detailed statistics on disability, such as the geographical distribution of PwD (and their specific needs) in electoral districts. Some discussants stressed the importance of representing persons with disabilities—of all categories—in the work of the National Elections Commission's various committees so that reasonable adjustments could be planned for.

Participants believe that workers in polling stations are not familiar with how to deal with people with disabilities of all categories, and that there is a lack of knowledge of accessibility at societal and official levels. One participant in the 2010 election was not blind at the time, and noticed at the polling station that all PwD were placed together, treated with guardianship and voting lines.

Parties and disability

A number of discussants stated that political parties in Sudan do not prioritize the participation rights of PwD, and that parties lack awareness of disability rights. Some believe that the disability sector is often created within political parties for political gain rather than for making progress on the rights of PwD.

Some members of the focus groups pointed out that one of the largest political alliances in the country referred to PwD as ‘people with special needs file’ in its documentation, which indicates a lack of knowledge of the internationally recognized terminology and rights framework based on the UNCRPD, and a lack of commitment to the issues.

Some participants also believe that parties sometimes do some nominal work in this area for appearances’ sake—until they are said to have done so—while in fact viewing PwD as inferior and marginalizing them within the party. Although the majority of participants accepted the idea of creating a separate department for PwD within parties, some criticized it as promoting discrimination (or as another measure taken merely for show). Some members of the focus groups pointed out that one of the largest political alliances in the country referred to PwD as ‘people with special needs file’ in its documentation, which indicates a lack of knowledge of the internationally recognized terminology and rights framework based on the UNCRPD, and a lack of commitment to the issues.

Resistance committees and other non-partisan political groups

The participants’ opinions were divided regarding non-partisan political groups such as resistance committees and others. While some reported more awareness of the rights framework and other disability issues, giving examples of a greater acceptance of PwD’s opinions than in political parties, others saw no significant differences. For the latter, non-partisan groups are likewise exclusionary towards PwD and/or use them for media reputation, supporting their interpretation with corresponding examples of this. A number of participants believe that leadership put little effort into participation initiatives and are satisfied that ‘bringing in two or three people with disabilities’ counts as representation for this whole social group.

Others drew a distinction between older and newer organizations, saying that the newer ones do not stigmatize PwD or lack rights awareness, so that ‘now everyone can declare their affiliation to the resistance committees’. For this group, the clarification of disability rights in the charter of resistance committees represents evidence of improvement.

Chapter 5

CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the desk review, questionnaire and focus groups, it was clear that there are many gaps that need to be filled and steps that need to be taken to enhance the political participation of PwD. The following recommendations begin with the legal-regulatory framework and then address themselves to particular stakeholders. Emerging from all stages of this situation analysis, the recommendations reflect input from persons with disabilities themselves, as well as from the authors.

5.1. LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

1. Adopt a legal framework that explicitly provides for the rights of PwD to vote, stand for election, hold office and perform all public functions at all levels and branches of government on an equal basis with others.
2. Repeal all legislative provisions that restrict the rights of PwD to vote and stand for office, whether directly—for example, by banning the participation of persons who do not meet the requirement of ‘sound mind’—or indirectly, such as by prohibiting the nomination of persons unable to read and write the official language.
3. Prevent discrimination in political participation and adopt provisions requiring reasonable adjustments in all electoral processes—registration, voting, candidacy, complaints—and performance of functions when holding public office (e.g. sign language interpretation and other assistance that may be needed to perform tasks).

4. Adopt clear provisions that promote the right of PwD to political participation, such as a quota system, which is one of the most important means of supporting and promoting their political participation.
5. Adopt legal provisions that set out legal standards on accessibility, including binding regulations in the building code, as part of ensuring accessibility at polling stations.
6. Enact legal provisions requiring the National Elections Commission and other relevant bodies to provide information on elections in formats accessible to PwD. Minimum standards in this area should also be imposed on political parties and candidates.
7. Protect the right of PwD to vote through secret ballot and ensure their right to choose those who assist them in voting, whether polling staff or others.
8. Guarantee the political participation rights of persons with disabilities in treatment institutions and deprived of their liberty.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS COMMISSION

Adopt a national plan to ensure access to voting procedures, polling centres and appropriate voting materials; provide minimum operating standards, and complaints mechanisms for failures to meet them; adopt inclusive voter registration and education practices; and train polling station staff in disability issues. It is important to have a roadmap for PwD's political participation rights regardless of political fluctuations in the country.

1. Enhance access to information on elections in general, candidates' political campaigns and electoral instructions and guidelines, and promote good communication with the National Elections Commission staff and polling stations through sign language interpretation and audio materials.
2. Promote the ability of PwD to run for office by paying the financial costs associated with reasonable adjustments that non-disabled candidates do not have to pay, such as sign language interpretation services and enlarged print publications.

3. Disseminate information on any action taken by the National Electoral Commissioner to support the inclusiveness of the electoral process, and inform PwD of the support available to promote their political participation and the procedures for obtaining it.
4. Provide information on candidates, parties, polling stations and electoral procedures in several formats such as Braille, audio recordings, accessible websites, sign language, simplified formats that are easy to read and easy to understand, and graphic illustrations.
5. Include reasonable accommodation in its electoral budget to achieve physical accessibility of centres and accessibility of information, by making them accessible to persons with disabilities.
6. Appoint staff at the National Elections Commission whose mission is to support the political participation of persons with disabilities and respond to their accessibility needs.
7. Train staff on enhancing the participation of PwD in elections.
8. Select staff with disabilities to work in polling stations and commissions to influence decisions and procedures and make them more inclusive, among others identified to promote progress in this area.
9. Facilitate the electoral registration process and work to improve the process of easily finding names in the register during voting.
10. Select venues and locations of polling stations according to criteria including physical accessibility (internal and external).

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

1. Consult with organizations of persons with disabilities in order to include their issues and priorities in party programmes.
2. Make programmes widely available to PwD in a variety of accessible formats.
3. Encourage the participation of members with disabilities in party meetings, seminars and speaker meetings, as well as in internal party elections and party decision making.
4. Provide reasonable adjustments during party activities, and choose accessible venues for party activities and events.

5. Adopt enhanced measures such as quotas to ensure that PwD are represented in party leadership offices.
6. Encourage the nomination of persons with disabilities for public office.
7. Raise awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities within party structures (employees and opinion leaders) and challenge negative stereotypes.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

1. Advocate for laws and regulations that promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the political process.
2. Advocate for policies that promote political participation, accessibility at polling stations, and access to information.
3. Communicate with the Electoral Commission in order to reflect the views and priorities of PwD, identify obstacles that limit their participation, and choose appropriate means of support to overcome these.
4. Work with political parties, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to advocate for the political participation rights of PwD.
5. Raise awareness among PwD about their political rights and the importance of political participation, and disseminate information about the political process as well as voter education materials specifically (on voter registration dates and procedures, and requirements for voting at polling stations).
6. Provide training and capacity-building programmes for PwD on, for example, advocacy, election campaigns and leadership skills for persons with disabilities who wish to run for office.
7. Through shadow reporting, provide observations on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities article 29.
8. Work to change negative stereotypes about people with disabilities.

5.5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL NGOS

1. Advocate for laws and policies that protect the rights of PwD to participate in political life and that actively promote their inclusion in political life.
2. Build the capacity of the National Elections Commission and contribute to the training of polling staff on the political participation of PwD.
3. Provide technical assistance and capacity building to local organizations of persons with disabilities, such as advocacy training, campaign leadership, rights and civic education training.
4. Conduct and support research on the distribution of PwD and organize voter education campaigns with their involvement, ensuring the participation of disabled women and youth and with attention to language/other regional differences.
5. Promote international cooperation and knowledge sharing on disability-inclusive political participation, sharing best practices through conferences and other means.
6. Work to change negative stereotypes about people with disabilities.

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During his career, he has strived to shed light on childhood issues, and pressing issues facing people with disabilities. He has consulted many international and local NGOs and United Nations agencies, and sought to network CSOs working in the field of children.

He participated in the implementation of a number of projects aimed at promoting rights, organized and supervised many workshops, and wrote in the fields of the rights of persons with disabilities, children's rights and anti-corruption. His research focusing on the compatibility of Sudanese laws with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the inclusion of children's rights in educational curricula, the legal framework and requirements for building an effective anti-corruption body were among his most prominent contributions.

He has been active in providing training courses and participated in many international and regional conferences, and received the Open Society Foundation mission in its programme to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in 2018. He has participated in a number of training courses in the areas of the rights of persons with disabilities, children's rights and anti-corruption at the regional and international levels.

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There are a number of barriers and obstacles to the political participation of persons with disabilities (PwD) in Sudan.

This Report aims to analyse the status of their political participation during the transitional period and during the previous general elections by exploring and examining the laws and legislation in force and their impact on the political participation of PwD, and exploring the extent to which PwD are aware of the rights that fall under the umbrella of political participation, as well as shedding light on the extent to which disability issues are included in party programmes and providing facilitations to enhance the participation of PwD in non-partisan political parties and groups.

The Report also aims to identify and explain the factors that negatively affect the political participation of PwD, and suggests recommendations to enhance their political participation.

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