

Accessible Voting for PwDs in Himachal Pradesh **General Election 2019**

Introduction

The very foundation of a democracy lies in the representation of all stakeholders and an indispensable part of nation-building starts with the inclusion of all in its electoral process. A larger recognition to the rights of 'Persons with Disability' came from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) that stress upon respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy and independence of voter, freedom to make one's own choice, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity, accessibility etc.

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

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

Background

In order to make elections accessible to persons with disabilities, efforts have been taken up in past years. A well designed framework of guidelines has been directed by Commission for facilitating PwDs at every step in the electoral process. Many States and Union Territories have done exemplary work for overcoming the barriers and creating accessible and friendly environment for PwDs. The International Conference on 'Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in Electoral Processes', held in January, 2018, aided to consolidate and gain from international experience. Prior to this, the Commission's resolve in support of inclusion of PwDs has also been conveyed through official directives dated March 12, 2016 and September 7, 2016.

In this continuation Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation program, better known as SVEEP, had been the flagship program of the Election Commission of India for voter education, spreading voter awareness and promoting voter literacy in India. Since 2009, efforts

have been made towards preparing India's electors and equipping them with basic knowledge related to the electoral process.

The nation has always been looking forward in achieving the aim of building a stronger democracy through greater synergy with Civil Society Organisations, Media and Corporate Houses and even greater queries, suggestions, and participation from individuals.

Breaking Barriers

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

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

ECI's Broad Policy Framework

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

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

- Identification of PwDs including polling station wise lists;
- Facilitation in filling up voter registration forms;
- Assured Minimum Facilities at Polling Stations, preference in obtaining facilities at polling stations, Matdata Sahayata Kendras and other election offices in the field;
- Involvement of NGOs, CSOs/DPOs, RWAs;
- System Sensitization and Training;
- Use of technology to provide help to PwDs;

- Cooperation of Political Parties
- Building a comprehensive Statistical Data Base.
- Utilising the services of volunteers;
- Training and Sensitization of Officials handling the work relating to PwDs

SVEEP

SVEEP's primary goal was to build a truly participative democracy in India by encouraging all eligible citizens to vote and make an informed decision during the elections. The programme was based on multiple general as well as targeted interventions which were designed according to the socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state as well as the history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning thereof.

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

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

Efforts taken to make voting accessible for PwDs in HP.

Assistant Professor cum Officer Incharge Sh. Manjeet Singh Saini of Composite Regional Centre for Skill Development, Rehabilitation and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Under Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India), Sundernagar, District Mandi (HP) was appointed by the Election Commission of India as Nodal Officer (HP) for further coordination on technical standards for accessibility of PwDs for the General Elections – 2019.

The major steps/ activities undertaken are as under:

1 Finalizing few booths

In a meeting with SDM cum ARO Sundernagar, District Mandi, it was decided to visit nearby booths for selecting few accessible booths which will be developed as model booths. A visit was done on 27th April and 21 booths were shortlisted out of which 18 booths were served with 2 special education trainees of CRC and 3 booths had 6 such special education trainees. All the model polling booths were made barrier-free and provided all the basic amenities. All these booths were provided with Braille experts and Sign language knowing experts.





2 Setting up of Special Auxiliary booth

A separate booth was set up at Himachal Pradesh Institute for Children with Special Abilities, Sundernagar, Mandi (HP) with Special Auxiliary tag. This was especially meant for PwD voters. Polling party was also drawn from PwDs. Specially trained Indian Sign Language interpreter and person trained in braille were deputed along with 6 special education trainees as volunteers from CRC, Sundernagar (a centre working for PwDs under Ministry of MSJ&E, GoI). This booth was tastefully decorated and made accessible for PwD voters with all basic amenities.



SPECIAL AUXILIARY BOOTH FOR PwDs AT SPECIAL SCHOOL SUNDERNAGAR

3 Sensitizing the masses

For sensitizing the masses a number of steps were taken under SVEEP programme of Election Commission of India. Charts, banners and posters were pasted/displayed at various places across the constituency including all the above selected booths. 2 models and 1 special auxiliary booth were provided with audio clues for better accessibility for voters. The video was prepared in Indian Sign Language, audio and with Hindi subtitles.

Huge Banners, Posters and Hoardings with photos of sign language interpreter exhibiting various suitable signs of various steps of voting were displayed at various places of Sundernagar, District Mandi, Shimla and other various places. Special T-Shirts were got prepared and worn by the staff and students of CRC, Sundernagar under the SVEEP programme.



HOARDING DEPICTING SIGN LANGUAGE OUTSIDE THE GOVT. SCHOOL SUNDERNAGAR

BLOCK No.-38

जानिये कैसे दे
अपना **वोट**



मुख्य निर्वाचन अधिकारी सिंगावल प्रदेश
National Helpline Number: 196-123-1234

लोक सभा निर्वाचन- 2019
सूची-2019 अंतरिम सूची

सूची-2019 अंतरिम सूची के अनुसार, अंतरिम सूची की प्रतिलिपि सार्वजनिक प्रदर्शन के लिए प्रकाशित की जा रही है।
प्रकाशित तिथि: 17.05.2019

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मुख्य निर्वाचन अधिकारी सिंगावल प्रदेश

H.P.

HOARDING DEPICTING SIGN LANGUAGE OUTSIDE THE ELECTION OFFICE

SHIMLA



HOARDING DEPICTING SIGN LANGUAGE OUTSIDE THE BUS STAND

SUNDERNAGAR



SENSITIZATION PROGRAM



SENSITIZATION PROGRAM



SENSITIZATION PROGRAM



SENSITIZATION PROGRAMME

4. Rallies & street plays

For generating awareness among the public series of rallies & street plays were held/played at various places on various days. The participants wore specially printed T-shirts displaying message to vote.

Hand-outs and pamphlets were distributed among public. People were sensitized for voting through social media.



AWARENESS RALLY BEING LED BY THE NODAL OFFICER



AWARENESS RALLY



AWARENESS RALLY BY STAFF & STUDENTS



STREET PLAY AT BUS STAND SUNDERNAGAR



STREET PLAY AT BUS STAND SUNDERNAGAR



STREET PLAY IN THE MAIN MARKET SUNDERNAGAR



STREET PLAY IN THE MAIN MARKET SUNDERNAGAR

5 Media coverage

The Nodal Officer, Sh. Manjeet Singh Saini, Asstt. Prof. cum Officer Incharge, CRC Sundernagar was also invited by all India Radio Shimla regarding a live programme on accessible voting for PwDs. The event was duly covered by various media houses.

[SHORT AWARENESS VIDEO](#)

[Sequence web quality.mp4](#)

6 Training Polling parties

A total of 1338 Presiding Officers, Polling Officers and other personnels were sensitized towards the voting procedure of Persons with Disabilities at Govt. Polytechnic Sundernagar on 6 & 7 May 2019. The polling officials were sensitized towards Indian Sign Language and the Braille in brief. They were also provided with Braille alphabet charts and oriented with the Braille Ballot Paper.



TRAINING TO THE POLLING PARTIES ON RIGHT TO VOTING OF PWDS



TRAINING TO THE POLLING PARTIES ON RIGHT TO VOTING OF PwDs



TRAINING TO THE POLLING PARTIES BY NODAL OFFICER ON BRAILLE SIGNAGE



TRAINING TO THE POLLING PARTIES ON RIGHT TO VOTING OF PWDS



TRAINING TO THE POLLING PARTIES ON SIGN LANGUAGE

- 7 **Preparing voter slips, voters guide and signage features for PWDs**

The Nodal Officer was entrusted the responsibility of getting the voter slips, voters' guide and signage features prepared for all the all the PwDs of Himachal Pradesh. This also included the printing of voter slips and voters guides for all about 5500 Visually Impaired voters of the state. These were got printed at Central Braille Press, NIEPVD Dehradun. Signage's in braille were also printed which were used at all the booths across state.



लोक सभा निर्वाचन- 2019

सुगम मतदान हेतु

सर्वजन-बाधितों एवं मतदान अधिकारियों की सहायता हेतु सामान्य सांकेतिक निर्देश:-
मतदान अधिकारियों क्रमांक - 01 हेतु

नमस्कार	मतदान	केंद्र पर	आपका	स्वागत है।
कृपया	अपना	वोटर/ मतदान	कार्ड/ पहचानपत्र	दिखाइये।

मतदान अधिकारी क्रमांक - 02 हेतु

कृपया	अपना	बायां हाथ	दायां/ उंगली कीजिए	यहै	हस्ताक्षर कीजिये या जंगल लगाइये	पवी	प्राप्त कीजिये।

मतदान अधिकारी क्रमांक - 03 हेतु

कृपया	पवी	दीजिये।	मतदान	प्रकोष्ठ में/ केंद्र में	जाकर	मतदान कीजिये	बटन दबाइये।

संश्लेषित।

संश्लेषित निर्वाचन अधिकारी विभाग सचिवालय, देहरादून।
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कन्यादादा।

मुख्य निर्वाचन अधिकारी हिमाचल प्रदेश

