Contribution to the Call for Inputs

Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Equal Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Political Life

Submitted by: Somaliland Disability and Handicap Organization (S.D.H.O)

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1. Background

The Somaliland Disability and Handicap Organization (S.D.H.O) is a national, representative disabled persons' organization committed to promoting the rights, dignity, and inclusion of persons with disabilities. Founded by and for persons with disabilities, S.D.H.O advocates for equal opportunities in education, health, livelihoods, governance, humanitarian action, and public participation.

Political participation is a fundamental human right enshrined in Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). It obliges States to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate fully and effectively in political and public life, including the right to vote, be elected, and engage in public service.

However, despite these international commitments, persons with disabilities in Somaliland continue to face entrenched exclusion not only in political life but also in humanitarian and development responses, which directly impact their ability to exercise political agency, leadership, and civic participation.

2. Key Barriers to Political Participation and Inclusion

2.1 Political Participation Barriers

- Legal and Policy Gaps: Electoral frameworks lack clear provisions ensuring accessibility and reasonable accommodation. No quotas or affirmative action measures exist to guarantee disability representation in elected bodies.
- Physical Inaccessibility: Voting stations, campaign venues, and public offices are not accessible for wheelchair users, blind persons, or those with mobility impairments.
- Information and Communication Barriers: Electoral information is rarely produced in Braille, sign language, or easy-to-read formats. Lack of assistive technologies hinders independent participation.
- Socio-cultural Stigma: Disability is often perceived as incapacity, resulting in families and communities discouraging political engagement. Women with disabilities face double discrimination.
- Economic Exclusion: Limited economic resources prevent persons with disabilities from contesting elections or participating in campaigns.

2.2 Humanitarian and Development Inclusion Barriers

- Limited Inclusion in Humanitarian Plans: National and international humanitarian response plans (such as the Somalia 2025 HNRP) often lack explicit disability-sensitive provisions.
- Barriers to Accessing Aid: Distribution points for food and relief items are physically inaccessible. Communication on aid delivery is rarely accessible to blind, deaf, or intellectually disabled persons.
- Aid Diversion and Discrimination: Reports indicate persons with disabilities are frequently deprioritized in aid distribution, sometimes excluded altogether due to stigma or

perceptions of dependency.
- Exclusion in Development Programs: Development interventions (skills training, livelihoods, climate resilience) often overlook persons with disabilities. Lack of disaggregated data means their needs are invisible to planners.
- Interconnection with Political Exclusion: Exclusion from humanitarian and development decision-making further undermines persons with disabilities' political participation.

3. Case Studies and Good Practices

Case Study 1: S.D.H.O's Grassroots Dialogues
In 2024, S.D.H.O facilitated community consultations in Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao. Persons with disabilities reported being denied access to both polling stations and humanitarian aid distribution sites due to inaccessibility and discriminatory practices. These dual exclusions demonstrate the interconnectedness of political and humanitarian marginalization.

Case Study 2: Advocacy for Inclusive Humanitarian Planning
S.D.H.O worked with local authorities to advocate for disability inclusion in municipal-level emergency planning. While early progress has been made, humanitarian actors continue to lack the tools and resources to implement inclusive responses systematically.

Case Study 3: Regional Good Practice – Kenya and Uganda
- Kenya: Constitutional provisions guarantee representation of persons with disabilities in elected bodies.
- Uganda: Disability councils participate in national disaster and humanitarian planning.
These cases show how political and humanitarian inclusion can reinforce each other and strengthen accountability.

4. Recommendations

For Governments and Election Management Bodies:
- Align electoral laws with CRPD Article 29 to guarantee accessible and inclusive participation.
- Establish quotas or reserved seats for persons with disabilities.
- Ensure physical accessibility of polling stations, campaign venues, and government buildings.

For Humanitarian and Development Actors:
- Mainstream disability inclusion across humanitarian response plans, including the Somalia 2025 HNRP.
- Ensure aid distribution points are accessible and provide materials in multiple formats (Braille, sign language, easy-to-read).
- Monitor and address aid diversion and discrimination affecting persons with disabilities.

- Collect disability-disaggregated data to inform programming and policy.

For Political Parties:
- Incorporate disability inclusion in party manifestos.
- Provide mentorship and nomination opportunities for candidates with disabilities, especially women and youth.

For Civil Society and International Partners:
- Support capacity building for persons with disabilities to engage in both politics and humanitarian response leadership.
- Fund awareness campaigns to challenge stigma against persons with disabilities as leaders and aid recipients.
- Promote regional exchanges to share best practices on inclusive governance and humanitarian response.

5. Conclusion

The exclusion of persons with disabilities from political life is compounded by their marginalization in humanitarian and development responses. Without addressing both dimensions, persons with disabilities will remain unable to exercise their rights to equal representation, leadership, and decision-making.

The Somaliland Disability and Handicap Organization (S.D.H.O) emphasizes that breaking the glass ceiling requires inclusive political reforms, humanitarian accountability, and development equity. By ensuring accessibility, combating stigma, and adopting disability-responsive policies, governments, humanitarian actors, and development partners can uphold the principle of “Nothing About Us Without Us” and secure meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in every sphere of public life.

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