


Kosovars, who have only limited access to information and public processes.

IFES Ltd has been active in Kosovo since 2000 with European funding (DFID and OSCE) to assist marginalised communities in Kosovo in making their voices heard and to take an active part and ownership in building Kosovo's democracy. From the start, IFES Ltd's approach has been 'kosovarisation' from the grassroots, based on long-term, step-by-step and inclusive capacity building. Each of the many communities in Kosovo has its own needs and concerns and requires targeted and tailor-made responses. IFES Ltd's methodology is centred on a multi-ethnic and gender-balanced pool of local outreach trainers and a province-wide network of partner NGOs. The trainer teams consist of local experts, reflect the ethnic composition of Kosovo and interact with citizens exclusively in their local languages. Trainers have specialised in working with target groups such as ethnic communities, women, youth and people with disabilities.

The trainers and partner NGOs have launched several large-scale information campaigns to engage rural and disadvantaged communities in dialogue about the roles of voters and active citizens and most recently about the applicability of basic human rights in Kosovo, an unprecedented activity in the province. Each seminar lasted for at least one hour and produced intense discussions with participants. IFES Ltd educated voters for all three elections in Kosovo since 2000, culminating in a campaign that reached over 90,000 voters in close to 90% of all villages in Kosovo in only 10 weeks, ahead of the 26 October 2002 Municipal Elections. Carefully designed deployment plans ensured that almost 50,000 voters reached were from non-Albanian communities, including 99% of all villages in mainly Serb North Mitrovica.

IFES Ltd also started the first-ever Kosovo-wide citizen advocacy campaign in early 2002. Trainers encouraged citizens to identify their community needs and provided them with the tools to actively lobby their authorities. IFES Ltd monitored over 250 advocacy cases, most of which have since been implemented successfully. One third of all cases were of inter-ethnic character, often bringing Serbs and Albanians together to advocate for a common need. As a result, the IFES Ltd programmes contributed to bringing citizens closer to their local government, which is an achievement in a society with no previous experience in accessible government and active citizen participation.

The IFES Ltd trainer pool is the only single resource in Kosovo that is able to reach all areas and villages of the province in large-scale endeavours and under demanding timelines. It is also the only group that has developed firmly entrenched contacts directly and exclusively with rural and disadvantaged communities. Consequently, demand for this resource has increased: the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK) has repeatedly used IFES Ltd's trainer pool for its outreach activities and surveys. OMiK has recently tasked IFES Ltd with a four-month citizen empowerment programme to develop citizen guides and assist citizens in effectively using governmental and judicial channels. IFES Ltd has started using its outreach methodology in other countries in Southeast

Europe and the Caucasus and hopes to contribute to the integration and empowerment of marginalised groups on a larger scale. 

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SALVADORANS WITH DISABILITIES MONITOR ELECTION ACCESSIBILITY


by Keenan Howell

More than 100 Salvadorans with disabilities were trained and accredited to monitor El Salvador's March 16 legislative and municipal elections in an historic effort to study and document whether citizens with disabilities have an equal opportunity to exercise their right to vote. The observer teams visited polling stations in San Salvador and Santa Ana and presented a report to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal of El Salvador, identifying architectural and administrative barriers



to full participation and recommending specific reforms to ensure greater electoral access for people with disabilities. The human impact of the effort cannot be quantified but emerged in anecdotes told by the observers, many of whom reported a new level of dignity and self-esteem. One observer said that his family had never before seen him as capable of participating in such an activity.

This unique effort was undertaken by the Cooperative Association of Pro-Integral Rehabilitation Independent Group (ACOGIPRI), a Salvadoran NGO that specializes in disability issues, with the support and cooperation of the TSE, as part of IFES' Global Initiative to Enfranchise Citizens with Disabilities. It was funded through a grant from the Swedish government.

The election observers included citizens with physical disabilities, including the blind and the deaf, marking the first time in El Salvador's history that citizens with different disabilities came together in a proactive effort to make their electoral system more inclusive. As Eileen Giron Batres of ACOGIPRI stated, "Democracy can only be built with the participation of all, otherwise democracy is not genuine." To learn more about the IFES disability initiative, see www.electionaccess.org. 

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