



**A Booklet on:
Political Rights of Women and
Persons with Disabilities in Ethiopia**

**For
Network of Ethiopian
Women's Associations (NEWA)**

**Prepared by
Yohannes Mersha Belete Consultancy Firm**



**November, 2025
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**



NEWA

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DISCLAIMER

This IEC booklet, “Political Rights of Women and Persons with Disabilities in Ethiopia,” provides simplified information to enhance public understanding of key legal and policy frameworks. It is intended to raise awareness, support advocacy efforts, and promote inclusive political participation by translating complex laws into accessible messages.

The content is developed for the aforementioned purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the authors and publishers do not guarantee completeness or currentness of the information. Users should consult official legal documents and qualified legal professionals for authoritative guidance.

The interpretations and explanations in this booklet reflect the authors’ analysis and may not represent the official positions of any institution or partner.



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Abbreviation and acronyms

ACDEG – African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance

ACHPR – African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CRPD – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CSOs – Civil Society Organizations

FDRE – Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

IEC – Information, Education, and Communication

IGAD – Intergovernmental Authority on Development

MAPUTO Protocol – Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa

MoWSA – Ministry of Women and Social Affairs

NAP-GE – National Plan of Action for Gender Equality

NEBE – National Election Board of Ethiopia

NEWA – Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations

OPDs – Organizations of Persons with Disabilities

PWDs – Persons with Disabilities

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN – United Nations

UN Women – United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women



SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale

Inclusive political participation is universally recognized as a fundamental pillar of democratic governance, social justice, and sustainable development [1, 2]. Empirical evidence from across the globe provides a compelling case for the inclusion of women and persons with disabilities (PWDs) in political life. Studies by the World Bank and UN Women consistently show that higher representation of women in parliament is associated with increased public health spending and more inclusive social policies [3, 4]. Similarly, the meaningful participation of PWDs leads to more comprehensive approaches to accessibility and social protection, as evidenced by countries that have systematically included them in governance structures [5].

However, significant challenges persist globally. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2024), women occupy only 26.9% of parliamentary seats worldwide [6]. The situation for PWDs is even more concerning, with a 2023 report by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems indicating that over half of all countries lack adequate provisions for accessible political participation [7].

In Ethiopia, these global challenges manifest through a complex interplay of progressive legal frameworks and persistent implementation gaps. The FDRE Constitution (1995) provides strong guarantees for political participation [8], reinforced by Ethiopia's ratification of CEDAW (1981) [9] and CRPD (2010) [10], and the adoption of continental instruments such as the Maputo Protocol. National policies like the Revised National Election Proclamation No.1394/2025 and the draft National Disability Policy (2021) further demonstrate the country's commitment to inclusive governance.

Despite these robust legal foundations, evidence reveals substantial barriers to implementation. Data from the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) and civil society reports indicate that while women have achieved notable representation at the federal parliamentary level, their presence in regional councils, local administrations, and political party leadership remains limited. For PWDs, who constitute an estimated 15–17% of Ethiopia's population, exclusion is particularly acute. Accessibility audits conducted in 2022 found that over 70% of polling stations presented physical barriers for voters with mobility impairments [11], while the absence of voter education materials in accessible formats systematically disenfranchises citizens with visual, hearing, or intellectual disabilities.



The need for this Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) booklet arises from three critical gaps identified through this document. First, there exists a substantial gap in public understanding of the legal frameworks that guarantee political rights. Second, implementation challenges persist, including deeply entrenched cultural barriers, inadequate enforcement mechanisms, and inaccessible political infrastructure. Third, there is a notable absence of tailored educational materials designed for Ethiopia's diverse audiences, including policymakers, political parties, women leaders, PWDs, and the general public.

This comprehensive booklet addresses these gaps by harmonizing existing legal provisions, clarifying state and societal obligations, and proposing practical solutions to foster greater inclusion in Ethiopia's political landscape. Developed for the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA), this bilingual resource translates complex legal instruments into accessible knowledge, serving as both an educational tool and an advocacy instrument. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues discussed, readers are encouraged to review the complete legal framework documents in their entirety. By empowering diverse stakeholders with clear, actionable information, this booklet aims to transform legal entitlements into meaningful political participation, thereby strengthening the foundations of Ethiopia's democracy and ensuring that all citizens can contribute to shaping their nation's future.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE IEC BOOKLET

General Objective

The overarching objective of this IEC booklet is to promote understanding and awareness of the legal frameworks that safeguard the political rights of women and persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Ethiopia.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this booklet are to:

- Raise awareness of key legal frameworks at international, continental, and national levels supporting the political rights of women and PWDs.
- Highlight rights and obligations, including voting, candidacy, and participation in decision-making.
- Identify implementation challenges and propose actionable solutions.



- Enhance understanding of how these frameworks impact women's and PWDs' political participation; and
- Support advocacy efforts by providing user-friendly IEC materials for policymakers, political parties, women leaders, Women Rights Organizations, OPDs, CSOs, and the general public.

1.3 Significance of the IEC Booklet

The significance of this IEC booklet is to enhance understanding and awareness of the legal and policy frameworks that protect and promote the political rights of women and PWDs in Ethiopia. It seeks to transform complex legal and policy information into simple, practical, and accessible messages that inspire action, advocacy, and accountability. By providing bilingual (English and Amharic) content, the booklet aims to reach a broad range of users, from grassroots communities to high-level decision-makers, ensuring that all stakeholders have the knowledge and tools necessary to promote inclusive political participation. The booklet serves as both an educational resource and an advocacy instrument, bridging the gap between Ethiopia's legal commitments and the lived realities of women and PWDs regarding political participation.



1.4 TARGET AUDIENCE AND USERS

This booklet is designed for a wide range of stakeholders engaged in promoting inclusive political participation, governance, civic engagement, and human rights. Its primary audiences include:



**POLICYMAKERS
AND GOVERNMENT
INSTITUTIONS**

To strengthen the integration of gender and disability inclusion within governance structures, electoral laws, and political systems of Ethiopia.



**POLITICAL PARTIES
AND ELECTORAL
BODIES**

To promote equitable representation and accessibility within party structures and election processes in Ethiopia.



**CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANIZATIONS
AND NETWORKS**

Including women's organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), to support advocacy, awareness, and leadership training initiatives.



**WOMEN LEADERS
AND ACTIVISTS**

To empower emerging and existing women leaders to claim their political rights and engage meaningfully in decision-making spaces across all regions of Ethiopia.



**COMMUNITY LEADERS,
EDUCATORS, AND
MEDIA PROFESSIONALS**

To facilitate inclusive civic education and amplify messages of equality and participation at community and national levels.



**GENERAL
PUBLIC**

To improve understanding of the importance of inclusive political participation for democracy, social cohesion, and sustainable development.



**INTERNATIONAL
PARTNERS**

To enhance global collaboration and technical support for inclusive political participation, promoting best practices, resource mobilization, and policy coherence on gender and disability inclusion.



1.5 Methodology and Sources of Information

The development of this IEC booklet was guided by a participatory and evidence-based approach. It involved a systematic review of relevant international, continental, and national legal instruments, as well as empirical evidence, complemented by consultations with experts.

Key steps in the process included:



- **Desk Review:** Examination of primary documents such as the UDHR—1948, CEDAW—1979, CRPD—2006, Maputo Protocol—2003, African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance—1981, and Ethiopia’s FDRE Constitution—1995. National policies, proclamations, and strategies related to gender equality, disability inclusion, and political participation were also reviewed. Moreover, Empirical studies were reviewed to identifies gaps, and presents clear guidance to promote inclusive political participation for women and PWDs in Ethiopia.

- **Content Development:** User-friendly and bilingual text was developed to ensure clarity and accessibility for wider audiences.

- **Review and Validation:** Draft materials were reviewed by experts and practitioners in gender, disability, and political inclusion to ensure accuracy, relevance, and inclusiveness.

1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOKLET

This booklet is structured to guide the reader logically from foundational concepts to practical actions. It begins with an introduction to the importance of inclusive political participation, followed by a detailed explanation of conceptual overview and the relevant legal frameworks at international, continental, and national levels. Subsequent sections analyze the implementation gaps and challenges, then outline clear pathways and recommendations for different stakeholders to address these barriers. Finally, the booklet concludes with a call to action and provides reference or end notes.



SECTION II: CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

2.1 Understanding Political Rights and Participation

Defining Political Rights and Participation

Political rights are a set of fundamental human rights that enable individuals to engage in the governance of their country, influence public decision-making, and participate in shaping policies that affect their lives. These rights are essential for sustaining democracy, ensuring accountability, and promoting equality in society. Political rights are not privileges; they are entitlements guaranteed to every citizen, regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, or social status [12, 13].

At their core, political rights include:

- **The Right to Vote:** Every citizen has the right to participate in free, fair, and regular elections. Voting is the most direct way for citizens to express their preferences and hold leaders accountable. For women and persons with disabilities (PWDs), this means having accessible polling stations, clear information on candidates, and opportunities to engage in voter education programs.
- **The Right to Stand for Election:** Citizens have the right to run as candidates for public office. This allows individuals, including women and PWDs, to directly shape policy and represent their communities at local, regional, and national levels. Ensuring this right requires removing barriers such as discriminatory laws, inaccessible facilities, or political practices that favor certain groups.
- **The Right to Join or Form Political Parties:** Political parties are the main platforms through which citizens organize, debate ideas, and advocate for policies. Women and PWDs should have equal opportunities to participate in party leadership, influence party platforms, and access resources to campaign and mobilize support.
- **The Right to Participate in Public Decision-Making:** Beyond formal elections, political rights encompass involvement in public consultations, councils, committees, and advisory bodies. Participation at these levels allows citizens to contribute to policy formulation, budgeting, and monitoring of government programs.
- **The Right to Access Information and Political Education:** Political rights include access to clear, accurate, and timely information about laws, elections, public policies, and governance structures. Awareness of these rights empowers women and PWDs to engage confidently in political and civic activities [13].



Political Participation: More Than Voting

While voting is often the most visible form of political participation, meaningful participation goes far beyond casting a ballot. It includes:

- **Leadership and Representation:** Serving in elected or appointed positions at local, regional, or national levels [12].
- **Advocacy and Civic Engagement:** Organizing or joining campaigns, forums, and movements that promote social and political change [13].
- **Policy Monitoring and Accountability:** Participating in oversight mechanisms to ensure that public resources are used equitably and policies reflect citizens' needs [14].
- **Community Mobilization and Awareness:** Educating others about political rights and encouraging engagement, especially in marginalized communities [15].

In Ethiopia, political rights are guaranteed under the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), which explicitly provides for equality and inclusion in political participation. Articles 35 and 41 affirm that every citizen has the right to participate in public affairs, vote, and seek election without discrimination [12]. These constitutional guarantees also extend to women and PWDs, ensuring that they have equal opportunity to influence the country's political life.

2.2 WHY POLITICAL INCLUSION MATTERS

Political inclusion is essential for ensuring that all citizens, regardless of gender, disability, or social background, can participate meaningfully in governance and decision-making processes. Inclusive political participation strengthens democracy, promotes social justice, and leads to more responsive and equitable policies [17, 18].

Strengthening Democracy and Representation

The development of this IEC booklet was guided by a participatory and evidence-based approach. It involved a systematic review of relevant international, continental, and national legal instruments, as well as empirical evidence, complemented by consultations with experts.

Key steps in the process included:

- Countries with higher representation of women in parliament often prioritize policies on health, education, and social welfare [19].
- Including PWDs in political decision-making helps ensure that accessibility, inclusion, and social protection are integrated into public programs [20].



In Ethiopia, efforts to increase women's representation at local and national levels, such as reserving seats for women in some councils, have shown that when women are empowered to participate, policies become more community-oriented and inclusive [21].

Advancing Social Equity and Justice

Political inclusion is a matter of human rights. Excluding women or PWDs from political life reinforces historical inequalities and social marginalization. When these groups are empowered to participate, it challenges stereotypes, reduces discrimination, and promotes social justice [22].

- Women leaders can advocate for issues that disproportionately affect women, such as maternal health, childcare, and gender-based violence [23].
- PWDs can push for policies that address accessibility barriers, equal employment opportunities, and social protection programs [24].

Promoting Economic and Developmental Outcomes

Inclusive political participation has a direct impact on national development. Research shows that diverse leadership leads to better policy outcomes, particularly in sectors like education, health, and economic empowerment [25]. For example:

- Policies designed with input from women and PWDs often better address issues like inclusive education, accessible infrastructure, and social safety nets [26].
- Political inclusion of marginalized groups enhances economic opportunities by ensuring that laws and programs target systemic barriers to employment, entrepreneurship, and public services [27].

In Ethiopia, inclusive governance aligns with national development priorities and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially:

- SDG 5: Gender Equality
- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions [28].

Fostering Civic Engagement and Accountability

When women and PWDs are included in political processes, governance becomes more transparent and responsive. Their participation helps hold leaders accountable, ensures that public resources are allocated fairly, and strengthens community trust in political institutions [29].

Practical examples include:

- Local councils where women are actively involved in budget planning, ensuring that funds are allocated for community needs such as schools and health centers [30].



- PWD representatives advocating for accessible polling stations and inclusive communication during elections, ensuring no citizen is excluded from the democratic process [31].

Overcoming Social and Cultural Barriers

Political inclusion also challenges traditional norms and attitudes that limit participation. In many communities, social expectations may discourage women or PWDs from taking on leadership roles. Representation in political spaces serves as a powerful example, inspiring others to claim their rights and actively engage in civic life [32].

By promoting political inclusion, Ethiopia can cultivate a culture of equality, respect, and empowerment, ensuring that political processes are not only legally inclusive but also socially embraced [33].



SECTION III: KEY LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

This section discusses the international, continental, and national legal and policy frameworks that form the foundation for inclusive political participation of women and PWDs. These frameworks collectively establish the rights, obligations, and institutional mechanisms that promote equality, non-discrimination, and democratic representation in Ethiopia.

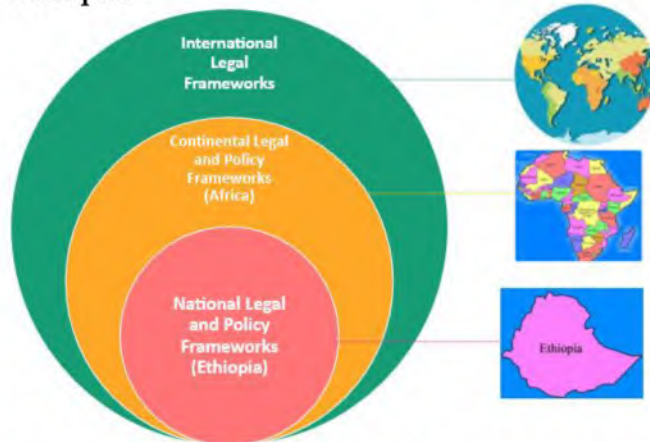


Figure 1: Key Legal Frameworks for Inclusive Political Participation of Women and PWDs

3.1 INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

International legal frameworks provide the foundation for protecting and promoting the political rights of women and persons with disabilities. These instruments create binding obligations for states, including Ethiopia, to ensure inclusive participation, equality, and non-discrimination in political and public life. Below is a detailed presentation of the key international instruments and frameworks.

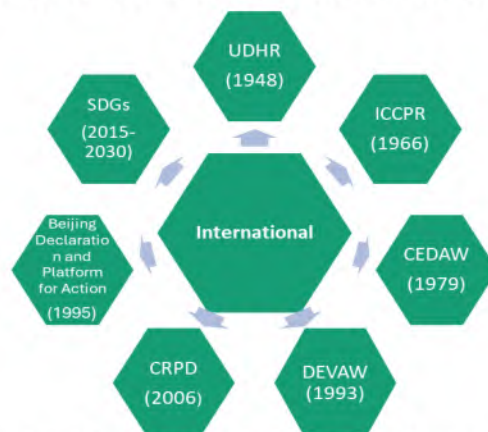


Figure 2: Key International Legal Frameworks for Inclusive Political Participation of Women and PWDs



Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)—1948

The UDHR, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, establishes the fundamental principles of human rights for all individuals. It provides a universal framework for protecting civil, political, social, and cultural rights and serves as a guiding standard for states in promoting equality and inclusion [34]. Key provisions relevant to political participation include:

- **Article 21: Right to participate in government:** This article affirms the right of every person to take part in the government of their country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives. It also guarantees the right to access public service and participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives [34].
- **Equality principle:** The UDHR emphasizes that all individuals are entitled to their rights without discrimination based on sex, disability, race, or other personal characteristics, ensuring that marginalized groups, including women and PWDs, are recognized as full participants in political life [34].

For Ethiopia, the UDHR provides a universal standard that underpins national efforts to promote political inclusion. By guiding the development of laws, policies, and governance practices, it supports initiatives that remove barriers and expand opportunities for women and PWDs to participate meaningfully in public and political life.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) —1966

The ICCPR, adopted in 1966, is a core international human rights treaty that elaborates on civil and political rights and is legally binding for ratifying states. It establishes fundamental guarantees for the participation of all citizens in public and political life [35]. Key provisions relevant to political inclusion include:

- **Article 3:** The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the present Covenant [35].
- **Article 25: Right to participate in public affairs:** This article guarantees every citizen the right to vote in elections, to stand for election, and to participate in public affairs, including policymaking and governance, without discrimination of any kind [35].
- **Obligation to ensure equality:** The ICCPR requires states to remove legal, social, and institutional barriers that prevent marginalized groups, including women and PWDs, from exercising their political rights. It emphasizes equal access to political participation as a cornerstone of democratic governance [35].

For Ethiopia, the ICCPR strengthens the legal foundation for promoting the full and meaningful participation of women and PWDs in governance and public life.



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) —1979

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, is the principal international treaty dedicated to protecting and promoting women's rights. It emphasizes the elimination of discrimination against women in all spheres of life, including political and public participation [36]. Key articles related to women's political empowerment include:

- **Article 7: Political and public life:** This article calls on states to ensure that women enjoy equal rights with men to vote in elections, stand for election, and participate in policymaking and public administration at all levels [36].
- **Article 4: Temporary special measures:** CEDAW supports the use of temporary special measures, such as quotas or affirmative action programs, to accelerate the representation of women in political and decision-making positions, particularly where historical or structural inequalities exist [36].

By ratifying CEDAW, Ethiopia has undertaken binding obligations to remove legal, social, and cultural barriers that limit women's political participation. The Convention provides a framework for promoting gender-sensitive policies, fostering inclusive governance, and enhancing women's leadership in political institutions.

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) — 1993

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, is a key international normative framework dedicated to addressing and eliminating all forms of violence against women. It recognizes violence against women as a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and as a major obstacle to the achievement of gender equality, development, and peace. DEVAW provides a comprehensive definition of violence against women, encompassing physical, sexual, and psychological harm occurring in the family, the community, or perpetrated or condoned by the state [37]. Key provisions of DEVAW relevant to women's rights and empowerment include:

- **Article 1: Definition of violence against women:** This article defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering, including threats, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty [37].



- **Article 4: State responsibilities:** DEVAW calls upon states to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, and punish acts of violence against women, and to develop policies, legal measures, and support services to protect survivors and eliminate such violence [37].

Although DEVAW is not a legally binding treaty, it serves as an authoritative global standard guiding national legislation, policy development, and advocacy efforts. In countries such as Ethiopia, DEVAW complements binding instruments like CEDAW by reinforcing state commitments to address gender-based violence, thereby creating an enabling environment for women's participation in political, social, and public life free from fear and coercion.

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

Adopted in 2006, the CRPD provides a comprehensive global framework for protecting and promoting the rights of PWDs. The Convention emphasizes the importance of full inclusion and equal participation of PWDs in all aspects of society, including political and public life [38]. Key provisions include:

- **Article 6: Women with disabilities:** This article recognizes that women and girls with disabilities face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. It requires States Parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement, and empowerment of women with disabilities, enabling them to enjoy and exercise all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others [38].

- **Article 9: Accessibility:** This article obliges States Parties to take appropriate steps to ensure that PWDs have equal access to the physical environment, transportation, information and communications, and other public facilities and services. Ensuring accessibility is essential for enabling independent living and full participation in all aspects of life, including political engagement [38].

- **Article 29: Political participation:** This article guarantees the right of PWDs to participate fully in political and public life. It affirms their right to vote, stand for election, and engage in public decision-making processes on an equal basis with others [38].

- **Accessibility and support:** States are required to ensure that PWDs have access to the physical, informational, and institutional resources necessary to exercise their political rights. This includes accessible polling stations, information in appropriate formats, and assistance where needed [38].



- **Non-discrimination principle:** The CRPD underscores that PWDs must not face exclusion, marginalization, or discrimination in political and public participation because of their disability [38].

- **Reasonable Accommodation:** The CRPD requires States Parties to provide reasonable accommodation to ensure that persons with disabilities can enjoy and exercise their rights on an equal basis with others. This includes necessary and appropriate adjustments that do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden and that enable PWDs to access political processes, participate in public decision-making, and engage in civic activities effectively [38].

By ratifying the CRPD, Ethiopia is obligated to remove both structural and attitudinal barriers that limit the political participation of PWDs. The Convention provides a practical roadmap for creating inclusive democratic institutions and promoting equal opportunities for all citizens, including PWDs.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—1995

Adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action serves as a landmark international framework for advancing women's rights and empowerment. It places particular emphasis on promoting women's full participation in political and public life as a cornerstone of sustainable development and democratic governance [39]. Key directives include:

- **Critical Area of Concern G —Elimination of discrimination in political processes:** The Declaration calls on states to remove all barriers, whether legal, cultural, or institutional, that prevent women from participating equally in political decision-making, ensuring that women can exercise their political rights without prejudice or hindrance [39].

- **Critical Area of Concern G —Promotion of women's representation:** Governments are urged to adopt concrete measures such as affirmative action, quotas, leadership training, and mentorship programs to increase the number of women in both elected and appointed positions at local, regional, and national levels [39].

- **Critical Area of Concern G —Capacity-building and policy reform:** The Platform for Action provides practical guidance for countries like Ethiopia to reform governance structures, develop gender-sensitive policies, and create supportive environments that enable women to engage meaningfully in political processes [39].

By implementing these directives, Ethiopia can strengthen its commitment to gender equality, enhance women's leadership in governance, and contribute to more inclusive and representative political institutions.



Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) —2015-2030

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal framework for sustainable development and social inclusion [40]. Several goals are directly linked to political participation and inclusive governance:

- **Goal 5 – Gender Equality:** Ensures women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life [40].
- **Goal 10 – Reduced Inequalities:** Promotes equal opportunities and the social, economic, and political inclusion of marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities [40].
- **Goal 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions:** Calls for the development of inclusive, accountable, and representative institutions at all levels to ensure participatory governance and access to justice for all [40].

SDGs reinforce the principle that inclusive governance and political participation are global obligations. By promoting gender equality, reducing inequalities, and strengthening institutions, they provide a comprehensive framework for advancing the political inclusion of women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. As a signatory nation, Ethiopia draws on the SDGs to guide national efforts toward equitable political representation, participatory governance, and social inclusion.

Summary: Key Rights and Obligations under International Instruments

International legal frameworks collectively require states to:

- Guarantee the political rights of women and PWDs without discrimination.
- Remove legal, social, cultural, or physical barriers that limit participation.
- Implement affirmative actions and special measures to address historical and structural inequalities.
- Provide accessible information, civic education, and support to ensure meaningful participation.
- Monitor and report progress to international bodies, such as CEDAW and the CRPD committees.

For Ethiopia, these instruments provide the legal foundation to harmonize national laws, policies, and programs with international standards and strengthen inclusive governance.

3.2 CONTINENTAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS (AFRICA)

Africa has developed a robust set of continental legal instruments and policy frameworks to promote human rights, democracy, and inclusive political participation. These frameworks complement international treaties and guide member states, including Ethiopia, in ensuring the political rights of women and PWDs. The six main continental legal and policy frameworks are presented in detail below.

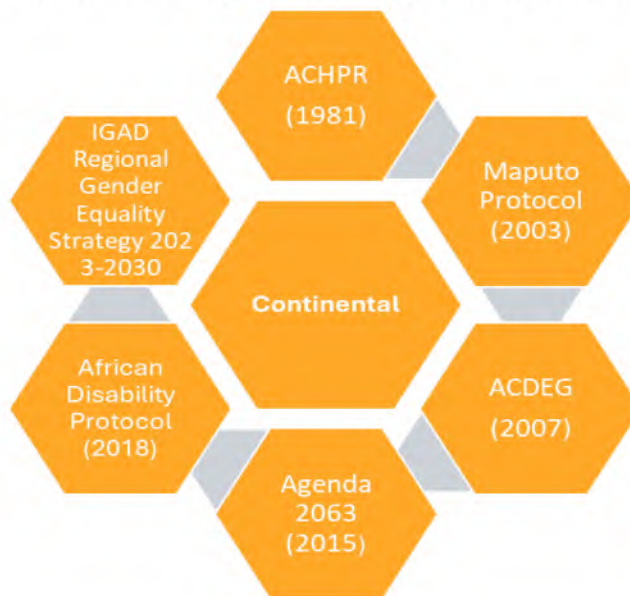


Figure 3: Key Continental Legal and Policy Frameworks for Inclusive Political Participation of Women and PWDs

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)—1981

The ACHPR was adopted in Nairobi, Kenya, on 27 June 1981 by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which is now the African Union (AU) [41]. It is the primary human rights instrument of the African continent that promotes equal participation in politics. Key provisions include:

- **Article 13:** Recognizes the right of every citizen to participate freely in the government of their country [41].
- **Article 2:** Prohibits discrimination of any kind, including on the basis of sex or disability [41].
- **Article 9:** Affirms the right to participate in the cultural, economic, and political life of the community [41].

The ACHPR establishes the principle that inclusive governance is a continental obligation and provides a legal basis for promoting women's and PWDs' political participation in Ethiopia.



Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)—2003

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, commonly known as the Maputo Protocol, was adopted in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2003 by the African Union (AU). It is a landmark continental instrument specifically addressing women's rights and gender equality [42]. Relevant provisions include:

- **Article 2:** Calls for the elimination of discrimination against women in all spheres of life [42].
- **Article 5:** Requires states to take measures to eliminate harmful traditional and cultural practices that negatively affect women's rights, health, and well-being [42].
- **Article 9:** Guarantees women's right to participate in the political process and to hold leadership positions at all levels [42].
- **Article 10:** Encourages states to adopt affirmative measures, such as quotas, to ensure women's representation in elected and appointed offices [42].

Ethiopia ratified the Maputo Protocol, committing to adopt measures that remove barriers to women's political participation and increase their representation in leadership roles.

African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG)—2007

ACDEG was adopted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2007 under the auspices of the African Union (AU). It is a key continental instrument promoting democratic governance, electoral integrity, and inclusive political participation [43]. Key provisions include:

- **Article 3:** Democracy requires active and inclusive participation of all citizens, including women and marginalized groups [43].
- **Article 8(2):** States parties shall adopt legislative and administrative measures to guarantee the rights of women, ethnic minorities, migrants, PWDs, refugees, displaced persons, and other marginalized groups [43].
- **Article 9:** Promotes civic education and measures to enhance participation of women and PWDs in governance and elections [43].
- **Article 29:** Calls on states to encourage full and active participation of women in the electoral process and ensure gender parity in representation at all levels [43].

The ACDEG reinforces the principle that inclusive governance is a continental obligation. By explicitly addressing the rights and participation of women, PWDs, and other marginalized groups, it provides a strong legal framework to guide and promote their full political engagement in Ethiopia.



Agenda 2063—2015

Agenda 2063 was adopted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 31 January 2015 by the African Union (AU) as a strategic framework for Africa's socio-economic transformation, including political governance [44]. Key gender and disability commitments include:

- **Aspiration 6** emphasizes “an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for persons with disabilities.” [44].
- **Flagship Goal 7** calls for full gender equality in all spheres, including political leadership [44].

By integrating Agenda 2063 into national plans, Ethiopia commits to long-term strategies for inclusive political participation

Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (African Disability Protocol) —2018

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (African Disability Protocol) was adopted by the African Union (AU) at its Heads of State and Government Assembly on 29 January 2018 in Addis Ababa. It is a regional human rights instrument that promotes the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by persons with disabilities, including their political participation and involvement in governance [45]. Key provisions include:

- **Article 3:** Highlights equality, non-discrimination, and full participation of persons with disabilities in all areas of life, providing a foundation for both political participation and governance [45].
- **Article 4:** Obligates States Parties to adopt legislative, administrative, and budgetary measures to promote participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes at all levels, including political and governance structures [45].
- **Article 5:** Ensures political participation and engagement in governance cannot be hindered by discriminatory laws, customs, or practices [45].
- **Article 29:** Guarantees persons with disabilities the right to participate in the political life and governance of their country on an equal basis with others, including the right to vote, to be elected, and to take part in the formulation of government policies and decision-making. States Parties are required to adopt legislative, administrative, and other measures to ensure accessibility of voting procedures, polling stations, information, and electoral materials, and to eliminate discrimination within political parties and public institutions [45].

The Protocol affirms that inclusive governance is a continental obligation and provides a legal framework to promote the political participation of persons with disabilities in Ethiopia.



IGAD Regional Gender Equality Strategy 2023–2030

The IGAD Regional Gender Equality Strategy 2023–2030 was adopted by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to promote gender equality and women’s participation in all aspects of public life across its Member States. It is a regional policy framework that emphasizes women’s equal access to political and decision-making processes [46].⁵ Key provisions include:

- **Strategic Action 1:** Improves gender representation in government, public administrative bodies, committees, and the judiciary by setting gender equality targets and implementing positive action measures where necessary [46].
- **Strategic Action 2:** Addresses formal barriers to women’s political participation, including discriminatory laws, electoral systems, media bias, and limited access to finance and resources [46].
- **Strategic Action 3:** Collects gender-disaggregated data and builds evidence to guide policies and programmes supporting women’s leadership and participation in governance [46].

The Strategy establishes the principle that inclusive political participation is essential for sustainable development and provides a regional framework to support women’s representation and leadership in Ethiopia and other IGAD Member States.

Summary: Rights and Obligations Emerging from Continental Instruments

Continental instruments collectively require member states, including Ethiopia, to:

- Ensure equal political rights for women and PWDs.
- Remove structural, social, and cultural barriers that hinder participation.
- Implement affirmative measures such as quotas or reserved seats.
- Promote accessible electoral processes and civic education.
- Monitor progress and report to African human rights and governance bodies.

For Ethiopia, these continental frameworks reinforce international commitments and provide additional guidance for harmonizing national laws and policies with African standards.

3.3 NATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS (ETHIOPIA)

Ethiopia has developed a range of national legal and policy instruments to promote inclusive political participation, in line with its international and continental commitments. These frameworks recognize the rights of women and PWDs to vote, stand for election, and participate in public decision-making, while emphasizing equality, accessibility, and empowerment.



Figure 4: Key National Legal and Policy Frameworks for Inclusive Political Participation of Women and PWDs

The National Policy on Ethiopian Women (1993)

The National Policy on Ethiopian Women (1993) provides the first national framework for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment [48].

- It recognizes women as active agents in political, economic, and social development [48].



- It calls for the establishment of gender equality structures at multiple levels of government, including Women's Affairs Departments (WADs) in federal ministries, Regional Women's Affairs Bureaus (RWBs), and coordination offices or focal points at zonal, woreda, and kebele levels, to ensure effective implementation, monitoring, and accountability of gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives [48].
- It mandates government institutions to mainstream gender across all sectors [48]. The policy laid the foundation for women's political inclusion and participation in decision-making processes across Ethiopia.

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) (1995)

The FDRE Constitution (1995) is the supreme law of the country and provides the legal foundation for political participation:

- **Article 25:** Guarantees all persons equality and equal protection under the law; prohibits discrimination on grounds such as sex, religion, ethnicity, or disability [47].
- **Article 35:** Ensures equality of women and men; protects women in marriage, family, and property matters; safeguards against harmful traditional practices; guarantees full participation in political, social, and economic life [47].
- **Article 36:** Protects children—including girls—from exploitation, abuse, and harmful practices, indirectly supporting the political and social empowerment of young women [47].
- **Article 37:** Protects elderly persons and persons with disabilities from discrimination; guarantees their full participation in social, economic, and political life [47].
- **Article 41:** Affirms every citizen's right to vote, to stand for public office, and to participate in public decision-making [47].
- **Article 52(4):** Mandates measures to ensure gender equality in political representation and leadership [47].

The Constitution establishes the principle that all citizens, including women and PWDs, have equal rights and opportunities to engage in political life.



The National Social Protection Policy (2014)

The National Social Protection Policy (2014) promotes social inclusion and participation for vulnerable groups, including women and PWDs [49].

- It links social protection with empowerment through access to decision-making and governance.
- It promotes community participation in social and political processes.
- It supports the creation of inclusive environments that reduce barriers to participation [49]

The policy recognizes that sustainable social development depends on the full inclusion of all citizens in governance and public life.

The Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 1064/2017

The Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 1064/2017 strengthens equality and inclusivity within the public service.

- **Article 13(3):** Authorizes preferential recruitment of women and members of underrepresented nationalities in the civil service [50].
- **Article 70(13):** Imposes disciplinary penalties for sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace [51].

It promotes fair representation of marginalized groups in leadership and decision-making positions.

This proclamation advances inclusive governance by ensuring equal opportunity and representation for women and PWDs in public service.

The Electoral, Political Parties Registration, and Election's Code of Conduct (Amended by Proclamation No. 1394/2025)

Proclamation No. 1394/2025 amends key provisions of the earlier Electoral, Political Parties Registration, and Elections Code of Conduct Proclamation, which is formally known as: Proclamation No. 1162/2019 (the foundational law), later revised by Proclamation No. 1235/2021 (a temporary amendment), and now substantially updated by Proclamation No. 1394/2025. The 2025 amendment to Ethiopia's electoral and political-parties legal framework introduces stronger provisions to promote inclusivity, fairness, and equal political participation:

- **Article 4:** Requires political parties to adhere to democratic principles and ensure internal inclusivity in their structures, leadership, and decision-making processes [53].
- **Article 15:** Strengthens the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities by lowering support-signature requirements and removing other structural barriers to candidacy [53].

The amended proclamation modernizes Ethiopia's political and electoral system by promoting meaningful representation, safeguarding equal political rights, and ensuring that political parties reflect the country's social diversity.



The Draft National Disability Policy (2021)

The National Disability Policy (2021, Draft) promotes the rights, dignity, and inclusion of persons with disabilities in all spheres of life.

- It mandates removal of legal, institutional, and physical barriers to participation.
- It guarantees access to information, communication, and political platforms.
- It promotes consultation and participation of organizations representing persons with disabilities in governance [54].

The policy reaffirms Ethiopia's commitment to ensuring that PWDs can engage fully in political and public life.

The NEBE Gender and Inclusion Strategy (2021)

The NEBE Gender and Inclusion Strategy (2021) provides a practical framework for mainstreaming gender and disability inclusion in the electoral process.

- It promotes equal participation of women and PWDs as voters, candidates, and election officials
- It mandates accessible election materials and gender-sensitive voter education.
- It outlines preventive measures against discrimination and gender-based violence during elections [55].

The strategy institutionalizes inclusion within the electoral system and supports fair and representative elections.

The Ten-Year Development Plan (2021–2030)

The Ten-Year Development Plan (2021–2030) is Ethiopia's strategic framework for inclusive and sustainable development.

- It identifies gender equality, inclusive governance, and disability empowerment as national priorities.
- It emphasizes political participation and leadership of women and marginalized groups.
- It links inclusive governance with transparency, accountability, and equitable development [56].

The plan envisions a democratic and inclusive Ethiopia where all citizens can influence governance and national development.



Institutional Mechanisms for Promoting Gender and Disability Rights

Several institutions and bodies support the implementation of legal frameworks [57]:

- **Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA):** Coordinates gender-related policies and programs, including women's political participation initiatives.
- **National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE):** Ensures fair and accessible elections, promotes voter education, and monitors inclusion of women and PWDs.
- **Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and Women's Networks:** Advocate for inclusive policies, capacity-building, and awareness campaigns.
- **Parliamentary Committees:** Monitor compliance with gender equality and disability inclusion in political institutions.

Summary: Rights and Obligations Emerging from National Legal and Policy Frameworks

Under Ethiopian law, all citizens, including women and PWDs, are guaranteed the following political rights and responsibilities:

- **Voting rights:** Citizens have the right to participate in free and fair elections at all levels (FDRE Constitution, 1995, Article 38; Revised National Election Proclamation No. 1162/2019).
- **Candidacy rights:** Citizens have the right to stand for elections and seek public office (FDRE Constitution, 1995, Article 38; Political Parties Registration Proclamation No. 1163/2019).
- **Participation in decision-making:** Citizens have the right to engage in local councils, advisory bodies, and public consultations (FDRE Constitution, 1995, Article 55; National Policy on Ethiopian Women, 1993; National Disability Policy, 2021 Draft).
- **Civic responsibilities:** Citizens have the duty to stay informed, promote inclusive participation, and respect the political rights of others (FDRE Constitution, 1995, Articles 34 & 38).

These rights are guaranteed alongside corresponding duties to respect the law, uphold democratic processes, and actively contribute to inclusive governance.



SECTION IV: IMPLEMENTATION GAPS AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

Despite Ethiopia's strong legal and policy frameworks, women and PWDs continue to face multiple barriers that limit their political participation. Understanding these challenges is essential for designing effective strategies to promote inclusion, equality, and empowerment.



Figure 5: Barriers to Political Participation for Women and PWDs



4.1 STRUCTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

In Ethiopia, structural and institutional factors limit meaningful political participation of women and PWDs:

- **Limited Representation:** Despite constitutional guarantees and gender quotas in local councils, women remain underrepresented in higher-level political positions and party leadership structures. Persons with disabilities are seldom represented in political offices or decision-making bodies [58].
- **Inadequate Implementation of Disability Policies:** Ethiopia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and established disability-inclusive laws, but many polling stations and party offices remain inaccessible. Assistive devices and reasonable accommodations for candidates with disabilities are often lacking [58].
- **Fragmented Institutional Coordination:** Multiple institutions, including the National Electoral Board, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, and disability-focused agencies, work on inclusion, but coordination is weak, resulting in inconsistent enforcement of policies [59].
- **Limited Monitoring and Accountability:** Mechanisms to track inclusion and enforce political rights for women and PWDs are often under-resourced, leading to gaps between legal guarantees and actual practice [60].
- **Distorted Perceptions:** The misinformed criticism of institutions working on women's issues, labeling them as mere political tools [60].
- **Knowledge Gaps and Resource Limitations:** There is a significant knowledge gap regarding the political and electoral rights of women and persons with disabilities (PWDs). Furthermore, persistent resource limitations hinder efforts to empower these groups, restricting their ability to participate meaningfully in political processes and elections [60].

4.2 SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ATTITUDINAL CHALLENGES

Social norms and attitudes in Ethiopia continue to create barriers to participation:

- **Gender Stereotypes:** Patriarchal norms prioritize men in leadership roles and discourage women from running for office or participating in political debates [61].
- **Stigma Against PWDs:** Misconceptions about the abilities of persons with disabilities limit their acceptance as candidates or leaders [62].



4.3 ACCESSIBILITY AND INFORMATION BARRIERS

Practical challenges reduce opportunities for political engagement:

- **Physical Accessibility:** Many polling stations, party offices, and political meetings in Ethiopia remain inaccessible to persons with mobility impairments, especially in rural or conflict-affected regions [63].
- **Information Gaps:** Political campaign materials, voter education programs, and legislative documents are often unavailable in accessible formats such as audio, or simplified Amharic and local languages [64].
- **Digital Divide:** Limited access to technology, internet connectivity, and digital literacy restricts engagement in online platforms, civic forums, or advocacy

4.4 CONFLICT-RELATED BARRIERS

Instability in certain regions significantly affects inclusive political participation in Ethiopia:

- **Restricted Access to Political Spaces:** In conflict-affected areas, such as parts of Tigray, Oromia, Amhara, Somali, and Benishangul-Gumuz, women and PWDs may be unable to safely reach polling stations, attend political meetings, or participate in campaign activities due to insecurity [65, 66]
- **Displacement and Migration:** Armed conflict often forces communities to flee, resulting in IDPs who lose access to voting rights, party membership, and civic engagement opportunities [66].
- **Disruption of Electoral Processes:** Conflicts can lead to election postponements, cancellations, or interruptions, limiting opportunities for citizens to exercise their political rights and reducing overall participation [65].
- **Targeted Violence and Intimidation:** Women leaders and PWD candidates may face direct threats, harassment, or attacks aimed at deterring them from political involvement. Political violence may be gendered or disability-specific, compounding exclusion [66].
- **Psychological and Social Impacts:** Conflict generates fear, trauma, and mistrust, which can discourage women and PWDs from engaging in political life even after violence subsides [66].
- **Limited Access to Resources and Support:** Conflict disrupts essential services, political party support, and civic education programs, leaving marginalized groups without the information, networks, or logistical support needed for meaningful participation [66].



5.5 DIGITAL-BASED VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

The growing use of digital platforms for political engagement introduces new barriers for women and PWDs in Ethiopia

- **Online Harassment:** Women and PWDs candidates or activists are often targeted with threats, offensive comments, and trolling on social media platforms. These attacks can be gendered, disability-specific, or both, creating fear and discouraging public political expression [67].
- **Cyberbullying and Defamation:** Misuse of digital platforms, including the spread of false information, doctored images, and defamatory statements, can damage reputations, undermine credibility, and reduce confidence in political engagement. Such attacks can disproportionately affect women and PWDs in leadership positions [67, 68].
- **Access Inequalities:** Many women and PWDs, particularly in rural Ethiopia, face limited access to smartphones, computers, reliable internet, and digital literacy training [67].
- **Lack of Digital Safety Measures:** Platforms and institutions often provide limited protection or guidance for safe online participation, leaving marginalized groups vulnerable to harassment, surveillance, or exclusion [67, 68].

5.6 INTERSECTIONAL BARRIERS OF GENDER AND DISABILITY

Women with disabilities in Ethiopia face compounded barriers that combine gender, disability, socio-economic status, and geographic factors:

- **Economic Barriers:** Campaigning and political engagement require financial resources that women with disabilities often lack, limiting competitiveness [69].
- **Work-Life Balance and Care Responsibilities:** Women with disabilities may face additional caregiving or mobility challenges, making it harder to balance political responsibilities with domestic obligations [70].
- **Exposure to Harassment and Discrimination:** Women with disabilities are more vulnerable to verbal, psychological, or physical harassment and discrimination, both in communities and political parties [70].
- **Limited Access to Support Networks:** Mentorship, party networks, and peer support may be inaccessible, reducing opportunities for political engagement [69].
- **Socio-Cultural Stigma:** Patriarchal and ableist attitudes discourage women with disabilities from political participation and undermine public confidence in their leadership [69, 70].
- **Digital and Information Barriers:** Lack of adaptive technologies, accessible campaign materials, and digital literacy prevents full participation in online political spaces [70].



SECTION V: PATHWAYS TO INCLUSIVE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Creating an inclusive political environment for women and PWDs requires coordinated, multi-stakeholder engagement. Inclusive participation is not only a legal obligation but also strengthens democracy, representation, and social cohesion. This section details stakeholder-specific pathways, combining policy, practice, and advocacy measures to foster meaningful political engagement.



Figure 6: Pathways to Inclusive Political Participation



5.1 PATHWAYS FOR POLICY MAKERS AND GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

Government institutions provide the structural foundation for inclusive political participation. Their commitment to enforcement, accessibility, and accountability ensures that legal rights are realized in practice.

Legal and Policy Enforcement

- Implement and enforce constitutional and legal provisions guaranteeing equal political rights for women and PWDs.
- Review electoral, party, and local governance laws to identify and address gaps in inclusion.
- Strengthen enforcement mechanisms, including compliance monitoring and sanctions for non-compliance.
- Example: NEBE and regional bureaus conducting accessibility audits of polling centers and enforcing inclusive election guidelines.

Accessibility Measures

- Ensure government buildings, polling stations, and public forums are physically and digitally accessible.
- Provide reasonable accommodations, such as sign language interpreters, braille ballots, and tactile voting devices.
- Adopt ICT-enabled systems for accessible voter registration and political communication.
- Example: Piloting accessible voting procedures in selected woredas before nationwide scale-up.

Awareness and Civic Education

- Launch nationwide civic education campaigns emphasizing political rights and equal participation.
- Integrate gender equality and disability inclusion into school civics curricula and public service training.
- Organize town halls and community forums that explain political rights, voting procedures, and accountability mechanisms.
- Example: Regional women's and social's affairs offices collaborating with media houses to promote women's leadership stories.



Accountability and Monitoring

- Track and publish data on women's and PWDs' representation in elected and appointed positions.
- Establish independent oversight bodies to assess compliance with affirmative action measures.
- Create citizen feedback channels for reporting barriers to participation.
- Example: Local government helpdesks and hotlines where PWDs can request electoral support or report accessibility gaps.

5.2 PATHWAYS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND ELECTORAL BODIES

Political parties and electoral institutions act as the gatekeepers to leadership opportunities. Their internal policies and practices largely determine whether women and PWDs can advance within political systems.

Inclusive Candidate Selection

- Adopt transparent and merit-based nomination procedures that promote women's and PWDs' candidacies.
- Set party-level quotas or targets for women and PWDs in leadership positions and candidate lists.
- Publicly disclose progress on inclusivity commitments.
- Example: A political party reserving 30% of district-level leadership positions for women and at least one seat for PWD representatives.

Capacity Development and Support

- Offer leadership, public speaking, and campaign management training to aspiring women and PWD candidates.
- Establish mentorship and peer-learning programs linking experienced leaders with new entrants.
- Provide financial or logistical support to help marginalized candidates participate in campaigns.
- Example: NEBE's partnership with CSOs to deliver leadership workshops for women and youth candidates.



Institutional Culture Change

- Promote inclusive and respectful party cultures through internal policy reform and sensitization training.
- Ensure party offices and meeting venues are accessible to PWDs.
- Regularly assess internal barriers that discourage women's and PWDs' participation.
- Example: Political parties including disability inclusion guidelines in their constitutions and policy documents.

5.3 PATHWAYS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOS) AND NETWORKING

CSOs and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) are essential bridges between policy and practice. They mobilize communities, advocate for reform, and hold institutions accountable for inclusive governance.

Advocacy and Rights Promotion

- Conduct policy advocacy for legal and structural reforms that enhance participation of women and PWDs.
- Raise awareness on political rights at the community level through workshops, media campaigns, and outreach programs.
- Example: Organizing forums with community leaders to explain the importance of gender quotas and accessible elections.

Capacity Building and Mentorship

- Train women and PWDs in leadership, public speaking, civic engagement, and policy analysis.
- Support candidate readiness programs, including guidance on electoral procedures and campaign strategies.
- Identify the specific needs, priorities, and preferences of marginalized groups.



- Build an information system capacity to organize, manage, and use information effectively for advocacy, policy development, and monitoring of political participation.
- Example: OPDs running “Leadership Labs” to prepare PWDs to stand for elections, including practical guidance on accessibility needs.

Community Mobilization

- Engage religious leaders, traditional authorities, and community influencers to challenge cultural norms that restrict women and PWDs’ political participation.
- Facilitate participatory platforms such as focus groups, roundtables, and community forums for women and PWDs to voice concerns.
- Example: Local CSOs partnering with schools and youth groups to foster early political engagement among girls and young people with disabilities.

5.4 PATHWAYS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS, EDUCATORS AND MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

Community leaders and media shape public attitudes and promote societal norms that either enable or hinder inclusion.

Awareness and Social Norms

- Promote positive representations of women and PWDs in politics through media campaigns, radio programs, and local storytelling.
- Challenge discriminatory narratives, myths, or stereotypes that discourage inclusive political engagement.
- Example: A local radio program highlighting successful women leaders and PWD politicians, demonstrating feasibility and impact.

Citizen Engagement and Oversight

- Integrate messages of equality and inclusion into religious sermons, community teachings, and school lessons.
- Facilitate citizen forums to discuss political issues and evaluate local governance performance.
- Encourage community leaders to monitor election processes, party practices, and local council decisions for inclusivity.
- Encourage schools to engage students in civic clubs promoting respect, cooperation, and leadership.
- Example: Teachers incorporating discussions on democratic values and equality



5.5 PATHWAYS FOR GENERAL PUBLIC

The general public in Ethiopia plays a vital role in advancing inclusive political participation. Citizens' awareness, attitudes, and collective actions determine whether women and PWDs can meaningfully engage in governance and decision-making. Building inclusive democracy requires citizens who respect diversity, reject discrimination, and actively support equal participation.

Inclusive Civic Mindset

- Promote respect for women and PWDs as capable leaders and decision-makers at all levels of governance.
- Challenge harmful beliefs and cultural stereotypes that limit women's and PWDs' political participation.
- Use community conversations, Equb, Idir, coffee ceremonies, and local gatherings to discuss the value of inclusion and equal political participation and leadership.
- Example: Youth and women's groups in kebeles organizing community dialogues to highlight positive examples of women councilors and PWD representatives.

Active Engagement and Accountability

- Exercise voting rights responsibly and support inclusive candidates and political parties that prioritize gender equality and disability inclusion.
- Participate in public consultations, woreda council meetings, and community dialogues to express opinions and demand inclusion in governance.
- Monitor election processes and report cases of discrimination, inaccessibility, or exclusion to local authorities or election boards.
- Example: Community members volunteering to assist voters with disabilities during election days and ensuring accessible polling centers.

Solidarity and Collective Action

- Form or join community associations, youth groups, and women's forums that promote political awareness and participation.
- Work with local CSOs and faith-based organizations to promote civic education and peaceful political engagement.
- Model tolerance, dialogue, and mutual respect during political discussions to strengthen social cohesion.
- Example: Community coalitions partnering with local radio programs to promote peaceful elections and inclusive political participation.



5.6 PATHWAYS FOR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

International partners play a complementary role by providing technical expertise, comparative learning, and financial support. Their contributions can strengthen national efforts toward gender and disability inclusion in politics.

Technical Assistance and Knowledge Sharing

- Provide policy advice and technical support on inclusive electoral systems, governance, and leadership development.
- Facilitate exchange programs and learning visits to countries with successful inclusion models.
- Example: Demo Finland, UNDP and UN Women supporting NEBE in integrating accessibility standards into election management systems.

Monitoring and Reporting

- Support data collection, research, and evaluation of inclusion programs. For instance, establishing robust gender-disaggregated data collection and dissemination mechanisms, and promoting the conduct of research and studies.
- Share international benchmarks and lessons learned to inform Ethiopia's reform processes.
- Example: International IDEA partnering with Ethiopian institutions to monitor gender parity in local elections.

Resource Mobilization and Partnerships

- Fund national and community-based initiatives that promote inclusive political participation.
- Provide grants, scholarships, or fellowships for emerging women and PWD leaders.
- Example: Development partners supporting national leadership academies for women and youth with disabilities or partnering with CSOs to run nationwide civic education and women and PWDs focused political leadership programs.



5.7 CROSS CUTTING PATHWAYS: ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION

Effective advocacy and communication ensure that stakeholders' efforts translate into meaningful political participation for women and PWDs across Ethiopia.

Inclusive Communication Approaches

- Ensure accessibility through braille, large print, audio, and Ethiopian Sign Language.
- Conduct community-based outreach with religious institutions, grassroots associations, local councils, and kebele leaders.
- Use participatory workshops, focus groups, and interactive sessions to gather feedback from urban and rural populations.
- Leverage digital platforms, radio, and national and community TV channels to reach diverse audiences across Ethiopia.

Sample Advocacy Materials

- Posters: "Your Voice, Your Vote: Women and PWDs Matter in Politics!"
- Flyers/Leaflets: Summarize rights and provide guidance on registering, candidacy, and participation.
- Media Content: Radio, TV, and social media campaigns showcasing successful women and PWD leaders.

Key Messages for Stakeholders

- Recognize women and PWDs have the right to vote, stand for office, and participate in decision-making at federal, regional, and local levels.
- Inclusive political participation strengthens democracy, representation, and social cohesion.
- Legal, structural, and physical barriers, including gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination, can be addressed through targeted, context-sensitive measures.
- Challenging patriarchal and ableist beliefs as well as other socio-cultural barriers is essential to creating an environment where women and PWDs can participate meaningfully in politics.
- Affirmative actions such as gender quotas, disability-inclusive facilities, and accessible electoral processes help level the playing field.
- Leadership training, mentorship, and civic education are key tools for empowering women and PWDs to participate effectively in politics, with special attention to women with disabilities who face multiple layers of marginalization.
- Legal enforcement and awareness-raising are essential for meaningful inclusion.
- Coordinated action by government, political parties, CSOs, communities, and international partners is critical.
- Monitoring, feedback, and accountability mechanisms ensure rights are realized and sustained.



SECTION VI: CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION FOR INCLUSIVE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

6.1 Conclusion

Inclusive political participation of women and PWDs is essential for building a democratic, equitable, and accountable society. Ethiopia has adopted comprehensive legal and policy frameworks at international, continental, and national levels to guarantee these rights. However, persistent implementation gaps, socio-cultural resistance, accessibility challenges, conflict-related barriers, and limited awareness continue to restrict meaningful participation.

This IEC booklet consolidates these frameworks, identifies barriers, and proposes practical pathways to action. It serves as both an educational and advocacy tool that promotes understanding of rights and obligations, strengthens awareness, and encourages collaborative efforts toward inclusive political participation.

6.2 Summary of Key Insights

Legal Foundations

Ethiopia's commitment to inclusive political participation is grounded in the following international, continental, and national frameworks that collectively guarantee equality, non-discrimination, and representation for women and PWDs:

International Frameworks

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006)
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015–2030)

Continental and Regional Frameworks

- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR, 1981)
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol, 2003)
- African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG, 2007)
- Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want (2015)



6.3 Call to Action for Inclusive Political Participation

For Policymakers and Government Institutions

Enforce existing laws and policies, improve institutional coordination, and ensure that political spaces, polling centers, and public offices are accessible to all citizens.

For Political Parties and Electoral Bodies

Adopt fair nomination processes, apply gender and disability quotas, and provide leadership training and mentorship for women and PWD candidates.

For Civil Society Organizations and OPDs

Advocate for reform, deliver civic education and leadership programs, and support community-based initiatives that challenge discrimination and raise awareness.

For Women Leaders and Role Models

Mentor emerging leaders, serve as advocates, and create platforms for collective action and solidarity among women and PWDs.

For Community Leaders, Religious and Traditional Authorities, and Educators

Promote inclusion through community dialogues, religious gatherings, and school civics education to challenge stereotypes and foster civic responsibility.

For Media Professionals

Showcase positive images of women and PWDs in politics, counter misinformation and online abuse, and promote inclusive representation.

For the General Public

Support inclusive candidates, exercise voting rights responsibly, reject discrimination, and engage in community-level civic activities that promote equality.

For International Partners

Provide technical, financial, and knowledge-based support to strengthen national systems, monitor inclusion, and promote policy coherence.



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