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# SPOTLIGHT: Fiji

## Inclusive Electoral Policies for Persons with Disabilities

### Setting the Scene

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During elections, persons with disabilities faced many challenges to exercise their voting rights, including physical barriers to access the polling venue. They were not allowed to have a support person to assist them cast their votes as presiding officers performed this task instead. Starting from the 2018 general elections, the disability movement in Fiji has worked with the Fijian Elections Office to create more inclusive electoral processes.



### Who led the cause?

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The Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF) led a group of organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) with the support from four affiliated organizations and technical assistance from the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF). This achievement also entailed a collaboration with the Fiji National Council for Persons with Disabilities.



**“We are very fortunate in Fiji that we have managed to form this working relationship with organizations of persons with disabilities and I am very thankful that we are taking a very collaborative role in realizing the rights of every individual in Fiji.”**– Supervisor of Elections

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# Milestones 2018-2022

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- 1. Ahead of the 2018 general elections, FDPF gathered stories from voters** across the country to identify the barriers they faced to exercise their right to vote.
- 2. FDPF met with the Fijian Election Office to share stories they had gathered, leading to the creation of the Election Disability Access Working Group Committee** in 2019 to foster collaboration to ensure accessible elections.
- 3. In preparation for the 2022 general elections, a Terms of Reference was signed** in November 2021 between the Fijian Elections Office and the Election Disability Access Working Group, which committed the government to develop more inclusive and accessible electoral processes.
- 4. The 2022 general elections marked an improvement in accessibility** thanks to the adoption of disability-inclusive measures, such as voter instruction booklets with candidate information printed in Braille and large fonts, the installation of ramps, and election officers trained to help persons with disabilities.

## Why is this win so important?

- Efforts have been made to make electoral processes more accessible for persons with disabilities.
- OPDs are at the forefront providing solutions for disability-inclusive elections.
- The legal capacity of persons with disabilities is recognized by national authorities.
- The above signifies progress towards a more inclusive society where persons with disabilities have equal opportunities, participation, and access to essential services and decision-making processes.

## DRF/DRAF Contribution

A DRF/DRAF grant supported the initial establishment of the Working Group, which continues to exist today. The Working Group directly led to the inclusion of postal voting in the 2022 national election as an option for persons with disabilities who were previously unable to access the polling stations.

