

Making a Difference
Citizen’s and their organisations and networks contributing to change
OWA PPA 2008-9: Case study 31

Title of Case Study:	The Right to Vote for Blind Citizens in El Salvador 15,000 blind people vote using Braille in March 2009 elections
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1. PPA partner name	One World Action
2. Countries highlighted in case study	El Salvador

The Right to Vote for Blind Citizens in El Salvador – 15,000 blind people vote using Braille in March 2009 elections

ASCES (Asociación de Ciegos de El Salvador, the Association of Blind People of El Salvador)

In El Salvador the majority of blind people entitled to vote, approximately 32,000, remain largely disenfranchised from political life. This is due to various factors, including inaccessible voting procedures, a lack of understanding by election and polling station staff on how to address access issues, blind people being unaware of their civil and political rights and the extreme levels of poverty in which many blind people live.



It was only in 2000 that people with visual impairment and blind people could vote in secret, previously they were dependent on friends or family members or on polling station officials. This was thanks to the development of the “sobre tifológico” (a type of Braille ballot) which was developed by Julio Cesar Canizalez, the General Secretary of ASCES and which was made official by

the government in 2000 and was then piloted in 19 of the 262 municipalities of the country.

With funding from the DFID PPA the use of the Braille ballot was extended



nationwide in the most recent elections. ASCES (Asociación de Ciegos de El Salvador, the Association of Blind People of El Salvador) undertook a series of activities in the run-up period to the municipal elections which took place in January 2009 and the parliamentary and Presidential elections which took place in March 2009. Some 125 people

involved in running the election process, such as officials of the Supreme Electoral Court, the police, voting station tellers, polling booth officials and the Scouts Movement (who traditionally help people out at polling stations), were trained on the rights of disabled people, how to assist blind people and the correct use of Braille ballots. In the case of the polling booth officials and tellers they then replicated their training with their counterparts across the country. Additionally, 40 blind people were trained on the legal framework that mandates the rights of blind people, the electoral process in El Salvador and how to use the Braille ballot papers. In support of the training, the Supreme Electoral Court produced radio and TV “spots” (broadcasts) which encouraged blind people to come forward to vote.

A Braille printer was bought specially designed for producing ballot papers. Over 60 members of ASCES worked intensively to produce over 30,000 ballots in Braille and 2,000 instruction leaflets over a period of a month (the time between nominations closing and the election). These leaflets included information on how to vote using the Braille ballots, how the election process works, as well as information on the rights of blind people. These ballots were distributed to nearly all the municipalities of El Salvador. ASCES estimates that 15,000 blind people voted using the Braille ballot which represents 60% of those blind or visually impaired people who read Braille.

As a measure of the success of the project ASCES was awarded the 2008 prize for best practice by CONAIPD, the government agency responsible for implementing legislation and policy concerning disability.

Background information:

ASCES is a partner of One World Action and a founder member of CCODIS, the Consortium of Disabled People's Organisations and Organisations for Disabled People for Disabled People's Rights, which is also supported through One World Action's PPA with DFID. Through CCODIS this experience will be shared, and hopefully replicated, in other Central American countries. Thanks to this project El Salvador now joins the six countries in Latin America which have Braille ballot papers.