

BOOK REVIEW

T CHATAIKA (ED) *THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF DISABILITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA* (2019)

Yvette Basson*

(Routledge, 2020) 386 pages, ISBN: 9780367580599

1 Introduction

It may be argued that the legislative foundation of disability rights in Southern Africa has improved significantly in the last decade. Many Southern African countries have signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD),¹ and the adoption of the African Disability Protocol² by the African Union in 2018 was a significant step towards achieving equality for persons with disabilities in Africa. The lived experiences of persons with disabilities in Southern Africa and the continued barriers to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in various spheres of life tell a somewhat different story.

To date, there has been a dearth of works emphasising the daily life of persons with disabilities living in the Global South.³ While legislative and policy developments are necessary, one cannot ignore the fact that societal attitudes towards persons with disabilities cannot be legislated away. An emphasis on investigating the real-life position of persons with disabilities in the Global South is therefore critical.

* LLB, LLM (cum laude), LLD (University of the Western Cape). Senior lecturer, UWC.

1 UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Resolution/adopted by the General Assembly, 24 January 2007, A/RES/61/106 (2007).

2 African Union, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (29 January 2018).

3 One of the notable exceptions is S Grech (ed) *The critical handbook disability in the Global South* (2016).

The *Routledge handbook of disability in Southern Africa* is a cross-cutting, interdisciplinary volume which aims to provide insight into the lived experience of disability in the Global South. The *Handbook* presents the reader with a wide array of material, from first-hand accounts from persons with disabilities to theoretical perspectives and the exegesis of inclusion of persons with disabilities in various spheres of life in Southern Africa.

The *Handbook* is arranged into themes, and the work therein follows these themes in their subject matter. These themes are: disability inclusion, ICT and sustainable development; access to education; religion, gender and parenthood; tourism, sports and accessibility; and narratives from disability activists on societal attitudes towards disability, media advocacy, accessible housing and social exclusion. Each of these themes covers a topic which has historically proved problematic for persons with disabilities in Southern Africa.

The overarching theme and purpose of the *Handbook* is to highlight the need for inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life. A clear need for the prioritisation of persons with disabilities when making decisions on education, tourism, sports, and many other aspects of life becomes apparent upon a reading of the *Handbook*. Each chapter in turn highlights aspects of the broader themes and elucidates the challenges and successes experienced in these.

2 Overview

Within the broad themes named above, the *Handbook* is divided into seven parts, each of which contain a number of chapters. These chapters are written to further the understanding of the broader theme within a specific Southern African country or region.

Part 1: 'Disability inclusion and sustainable development' is arguably the roadmap to the rest of the *Handbook*. Part 1 touches on key issues such as the history of the compilation of the *Handbook*, the use of certain terminology and ultimately focuses on disability inclusion and the promotion of sustainable development. Tsitsi Chataika writes in Chapter 1 that the chapters in the *Handbook* are 'extraordinary opportunities to make general observations about the field and to stress, rank, order or otherwise analyse various perspectives that are most important to understanding the subject matter at hand'. Each subsequent chapter is therefore not meant to be a comprehensive discussion of the subject matter, but rather to initiate conversations and highlight areas for improvement.

In Chapter 2, Mari Koistinen considers the mainstreaming of disability based on studies conducted in Malawi and Mozambique in developmental projects by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs),

which were spearheaded by the Disability Partnership Finland (DPF). The argument is made that disability is a developmental issue, and the author emphasises certain issues that have been found to be critical in mainstreaming disability in the aforementioned countries. An example of such an issue is the provision of training on the rights of persons with disabilities.

Similarly, Nkhasi Sefuthi and Masekana Sekoankoetla reflect on the development of a National Disability Mainstreaming Plan in Lesotho. Chapter 3 provides a historical perspective of the position of persons with disabilities in Lesotho and then the historical process of developing the National Plan. This process, and the concomitant challenges and successes, can be used by other countries and fora which are attempting to mainstream disability through the implementation of a national policy.

Nehemiah Chivakandikva, in Chapter 4, identifies how the power and agency of youth with disabilities can be grown through the use of participatory theatre. Theatre for Development (TfD) is an important tool in developing characteristics such as creativity, self-esteem and civic mindedness. The author then interrogates the lack of TfD discourse in Zimbabwe, and the consequences of such for youth with disabilities in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 5 considers the development and implementation of policies aimed at the social inclusion of persons with disabilities during conflict transformation. Rebecca Irvine draws on the experiences of South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Angola in conflict transformation and how these processes have informed the relationship between persons with disabilities and sustainable communities. Countries having undergone conflict transformation present a unique opportunity for change and to address historic inequalities.

In the final chapter in Part 1, Chapter 6, Jorge Manhique and Anthony Giannoumis discuss the experience of persons with disabilities in Mozambique when using information and communication technology (ICT). Accessibility of this technology is established as a condition for enjoying all substantive rights as set out in the CRPD. The use of ICT is thus discussed in the context of the implementation of the CRPD in Mozambique with support from empirical data obtained from key stakeholders in ICT.

The *Handbook* builds on the issues of inclusion and sustainability in Part 2: 'Access to education'. The authors of the chapters in this part discuss various issues related to access to education of persons with disabilities, including early childhood development, primary education and secondary education. Christine Peta reflects on the outcomes of an ongoing study of women with disabilities in Zimbabwe and their access to early childhood education in Chapter 7. The author considers the access to

early childhood education of 15 women with disabilities and the consequences of a lack of such access on outcomes in later life.

The inclusion of Deaf children into mainstream and special schooling in Zimbabwe is analysed in Chapter 8 by Martin Musengi and Barbra Nyangairi. The schooling experience of 18 Deaf school-leavers is shared, with particular emphasis on which schools were inclusive of children with disabilities. The training of teachers and the availability of teaching materials is discussed insofar as it affects the participation of Deaf children in learning activities.

The role of the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) in the promotion of inclusive education in Zambia forms the focus of Chapter 9. A group of researchers (Gloria Azalde, Jacob RS Malungo, Nchimunya Nkombo, Sarah Banda, Ravi Paul, Chibesa Musamba and Arne H Eide) analysed the data collected in the Zambia National Disability Study and concludes that the ICF can create opportunities for children with disabilities to reach their full potential through the creation of enabling environments in schools.

In Chapter 10, Sitshengisiwe Gweme and Tsitsi Chataika consider the implementation of the special class model in three randomly selected primary schools in Hwange, Zimbabwe. The selection criteria for the special class model are dyslexia and dyscalculia. The attitudes towards these special learning difficulties and the lack of understanding of these criteria are examined and the impact on access to the special class model is interrogated.

Part 3: 'Inclusion in higher education'. The continued exclusion of persons with disabilities from higher education in Southern Africa is emphasised in this part of the *Handbook*. To this end, Knowledge Matshedisho considers the policies and provision of support to students with disabilities in Southern Africa. Chapter 11 emphasises the difficulties in accessing higher education and the exclusive nature thereof. The international and national disability rights templates are considered in the context of disability and access to higher education.

Chapter 12 shows the level of inclusion of persons with disabilities in higher and further education institutions in South Africa. Anlia Pretorius, Diane Bell and Tanya Healey focus on the lived experience of students with disabilities in higher education. In particular, the argument is made for a framework relating to inclusivity and accessibility that can be implemented in the higher and further education sector.

Part 4: 'Disability, employment, entrepreneurship and community based rehabilitation' emphasises the importance of sustainable development in employment and entrepreneurship issues related to persons with disabilities. Chapter 13 explores the impact of community-

based rehabilitation (CBR) for inclusive social development in Southern Africa. Kayi Ntinda, Elias Mpofu, Helen Dunbar-Krige, Messiah Makuane and Veronica Umeasiegbu consider the experience of several Southern African countries in implementing CBR and the consequent impact on full participation of persons with disabilities in society.

The employment options for persons with disabilities are explored in Chapter 14. John Charema considers the impact of a range of institutions and factors which influence the employment of persons with disabilities in Southern Africa and draws lessons on these based on specific examples from Southern African countries. The issues of employment and social discrimination are also explored, and the role that self-employment and entrepreneurship can play in alleviating these challenges.

Phillipa Mutswanga, in Chapter 15 considers the empowerment of Deaf persons through guidance and counselling on their socio-economic potential. Mutswanga identifies disparities between the chosen educational subjects and the expressed vocational desires of 50 Deaf students and uses a framework to identify these disparities.

Part 5: 'Religion, gender and parenthood' focuses on these socially loaded issues in the *Handbook*. The intersection of religion, gender and parenthood with disability are explored within the context of inclusive sustainable development. The impact of Judaeo-Christian and African traditional religio-cultural practices on persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe is explored by Francis Machingura in Chapter 16.

In Chapter 17, Elina Lehtomäki, Mari-Anne Okkolin and Magreth Matonya consider the intersection of gender and disability in the development of education in Tanzania. The authors argue that the intersection of gender and disability in the development of inclusive education policies requires renewed attention on a global scale. The analysis of gender and disability could then inform policies related to education and equity in Southern Africa.

The concept of intersectionality is further explored by Tafadzwa Rugoho and France Maphosa in Chapter 18. The authors examine the reasons for the continued marginalisation of women with disabilities in Zimbabwe. The implementation of laws and policies relating to gender and disability is interrogated by the authors, who identify certain areas in which women with disabilities in Zimbabwe can achieve better self-representation.

Chapter 19, by Joanne Neille, identifies the challenges faced in the identity formation of rural based persons with various disabilities when seeking to exercise their sexuality, intimate partner experiences and parenthood, including pregnancy experiences. The findings of this empirical study with 30 participants from South Africa include the

existence of both contextual and stereotypical beliefs about the sexuality of persons with disabilities and a higher risk of experiencing violence. The implementation of human rights policies and how these in practice translate contextual beliefs on sexuality, intimacy and parenthood is questioned.

Part 6: 'Tourism, sports and accessibility'. Within Part 6, the need to increase accessibility to sports is discussed, as is the continued discrimination against persons with disabilities in the tourism industry. Chapter 20 provides insight into the disability policies implemented in the tourism industry in Southern Africa. Oliver Chikuta and Forbes Kabote refer to policies from Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe and the implementation of legal frameworks related to persons with disabilities in tourism in each.

Bhekuzulu Khumalo, Johan van Heerden and Thomas Skalko analyse a survey conducted on wheelchair basketball facilities in Zimbabwe in Chapter 21. The authors used an assessment tool designed to set standards for accessibility of buildings by persons with disabilities. Eleven wheelchair basketball facilities were inspected. The authors then make recommendations based on these inspections which deal primarily with the inclusion of persons with disabilities when designing such facilities.

The issue of access to assistive devices for children with posture support needs is discussed by Margaret Linegar, Megan Giljam, Shona McDonald and Ronique Walters in Chapter 22. The need for a holistic approach to mobility needs and the implementation of such an approach in South Africa is discussed. The authors put forward the argument that the use of an appropriate wheelchair is a fundamental right and is fundamental to the well-being of a person with a mobility impairment.

Part 7: 'Narratives from disability activists' is the culmination of the *Handbook*. Each of the following chapters provides the lived experience of a person who is deeply involved in the disability rights movement in various capacities. These narratives range from the story of a life lived as a person with a disability (by Irene Sithole in Chapter 23) to the establishment of a television programme aimed at disability advocacy in Zimbabwe (in Chapter 24, by Lovemore Chidemo, Agness Chindimba and Lincoln Matongo). The importance of accessible housing for persons with disabilities is emphasised by disability advocate Edmore Masendeke in Chapter 25. The author gives scope to the right to live independently as enshrined in article 19 of the CPRD.

The story of evolution from legal practitioner to disability rights activist is told by Abraham Mateta in Chapter 26. The author is a blind person, and he shares his own experience as a person with a disability who is an activist. Another deeply personal story is shared by Rachel Kachaje

in Chapter 27. Therein, the author details how her Christian faith has informed and guided her life, included becoming disabled and living a purpose-driven life as a woman with a disability in Malawi.

The conclusion of the *Handbook* is found Chapter 28, where the editor draws together the lessons, best practices, challenges and opportunities highlighted by the authors. Tsitsi Chataika expresses the hope that readers are challenged by the content of the *Handbook* and are inspired to engage in their own disability rights advocacy in the future.

3 Conclusion

In many instances when disability rights discourse is published, it is bogged down by legalese or politically loaded language. While such writing has its place, this *Handbook* provides a much more accessible and, often, emotive glimpse into the need for inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society. The overwhelming impression is one of authenticity and empathy, without being condescending or treating persons with disabilities as 'lesser than'.

The authors are honest and realistic about the existing challenges and ongoing marginalisation facing persons with disabilities, without falling into the pessimistic trap that nothing can be changed. The works in the *Handbook* provide a plethora of talking points for all manner of interested parties, inter alia, policymakers, legislators, academics, politicians, activists, and healthcare professionals. The *Handbook* makes an important and significant contribution to disability rights discourse that includes the lived experiences of persons with disabilities. It can therefore be said that the *Handbook* is essential reading for any person involved in disability activism in Southern Africa.

The authors and editor are to be commended on a well-conceived, topical discussion on disability rights discourse in the Global South.