

## ***Book Review***

Mitra, S. 2018. *Disability, Health and Human Development*. Palgrave MacMillan: New York.

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*Disability, Health and Human Development* is one in the series of books by Palgrave entitled *Studies in Disability and International Development*. It provides a theoretical lens on disability and a way of thinking about and analyzing how it is affected by intersecting factors. The approach and the analysis could be drawn upon to consider how to develop higher education policy to be inclusive and developmental of students with disabilities.

Using her expertise in development economics, Mitra expertly captures the intricacies of international development and methodically uses data to expose the exclusion of people with disabilities in development agendas of four East African LICs (low-income countries): Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda. In this open access book, Mitra discusses the phenomenon of disability through the lens of her interactional HMD (human development model), which is mostly premised on the tenets of Sen's (cited in Mitra 2018) capability approach. This quantitative study is a continuation of Mitra's work focused on disability and wellbeing. She initiates conversations about the integral role of poverty, thereby engaging the philosophy of critical disability studies and expanding the human rights discourse.

In a book format, Mitra skillfully presents empirical research, analyzing four extensive national datasets on disability in the four LICs. She examines the connection between disability and 'health deprivations' (p. 13) that characterise disability experience in these nations. Through a social justice lens, issues regarding accessibility, equality, and functional living are discussed throughout the seven chapters. Mitra describes six 'functional difficulties' in which people with disability experience hardships - 'seeing, hearing, walking, remembering, selfcare, and communication' (p. 5). She explains the variances within these difficulties that foster inequalities which affect human wellbeing. Mitra carefully expounds on the concept of wellbeing as measured by 'capabilities (practical opportunities) and/or functionings (achievements)' (p. 4), and emphasises the mutually impacting relationship between wellbeing, impairments, and health.

Mitra argues that development cannot be disassociated from disability, which must be examined through the eyes of 'age, gender, health, and poverty' (p. 6). She further asserts that disability is perpetuated amidst extreme poverty, death, despair, and extreme deficits in job opportunities, healthcare, and the economy. With this work, Mitra raises questions about the value, goal, and knowledge communicated by data, regarding the users, and explores



the consequences of generating and using data in developing nations. The results presented are applicable to other LICs including LMICs (low- and middle-income countries). Many LICs/LMICs are signatories to the 2006 CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities); yet, many of the policies derived from data lack the underpinning expertise in developing from data to content in order to generate effective and relevant policies. By analyzing this published data, Mitra dismantles institutionalised injustices and proffers that her HDM offers a deeper and broader approach to analysing disability than existing models do. For her, the book is crucial because of the need for research connecting disability and deprivations, the high probability of increasing impairments and ill health, and the inadequate policies governing disability in LICs/LMICs.

In Chapter One, Mitra provides comprehensive background and rationale for the study, describing the phenomenon of disability. She explains terminology and provides an illustrative explanation of the HDM, its primary tenets 'wellbeing, resources, conversion functions, and agency' (2018: 9). The distinguishing elements of the conceptual premises underpinning HDM and its comparison with established models of disability are presented in Chapter Two. Mitra then describes the research context (Chapter Three), outlining the measurement tools, the datasets and relevant cultural contextual information. Chapters Four, Five, and Six detail the quantitative analysis of the study presenting literature reviews, methods, and results. The results she reviews in these chapters are the widespread 'functional difficulties' (2018: 5) in the countries, associated inequalities, and a comparison of personal wellbeing and related outcomes, respectively. Mitra submits only the most important results in Chapter Seven and reiterates that disability is multifaceted, underscoring the reality of disadvantageous disability policies within development agendas in LICs. She cautions that this trend will continue if the emphasis is on removing obstacles, and disabled people are viewed as an 'oppressed minority group' (2018: 6). Mitra emphasises the value of using 'functional difficulties' (2018: 5) as a metric for disability and makes a call for inclusion and preventative measures to ameliorate 'deprivations' (2018: 13) associated with impairments and ill health.

This is a powerful empirical study, painting a picture of the disability experience in four LICs and validating the need for mixed methods in international development research. Participants are followed for only two years, but readers should be able to sufficiently understand the message being conveyed about the life of persons with disabilities in LICs. The analysis is applicable cross-culturally and even in HICs (high income countries). Mitra offers new perspective to established theories and uses HDM to efficiently compare concepts and models and critique foundational assertions and assumptions regarding their applicability in LICs/LMICs. Basing the HDM on the capability approach lays the foundation for a guiding analytic tool in critical scholarship about human development and disability. This enables realistic comprehension and allows the frequently overlooked intersecting factors to be included in analysis in ways that are necessary for policy creation in LICs/LMICs.

Mitra's rich text required much repetition of content which may confuse readers as they try to make connections and she wisely focuses only on economics and wellbeing. For readers less knowledgeable about development economics, the text may be challenging. For persons interested in disability in LICs/LMICs, this is new opportunity to understand the related dynamics of intersectionality. Including comparative graphics for the substantive information aids the readability and comprehension by making content more visually accessible to non-quantitative readers. Although qualitative analysis would be a natural extension that would strengthen the secondary data, this book is a valuable resource for researchers, disability activists, scholars, and students of development economics, and/or disability. Mitra has initiated a critical pathway for merging disability studies and economic advancement in LICs/LMICs while emphasising the message of a persistent dilemma. Protecting people is essential to national development and the treatment of people with disabilities by venture capitalists who are more interested in profits than people cannot be overlooked.

*Reviewed by*

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## References

United Nations. 2006. Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html> (accessed 11 November 2019).