


# Chapter 8

## Integral Disability Terminology as a Strategy for Advancing the Rights of Persons With Disabilities in South Africa:

### A Critical Analysis of Language, Policy, and Inclusion in the South African Disability Rights

Rudorwashe Hungwe

 <http://orcid.org/0009-0009-6874-419X>

*Durban University of Technology, South Africa*

#### ABSTRACT

*In South Africa, persons with disabilities have historically faced stigma that limits their access to fundamental rights. Social, systemic, and structural barriers, particularly the language used in public discourse, have reinforced this marginalization. Despite South Africa being a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), negative labels and misconceptions about disability persist in legislation and society. While the Constitution and related laws provide some recognition of disability, their terminology often focuses narrowly on physical and mental impairments, leaving other disabilities underrepresented. This study examines the use of positive, inclusive language in legal and policy frameworks as*

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-7842-8.ch008

*a strategy to promote the rights of persons with disabilities. Applying the concept of integral disability, the study demonstrates how language can be transformed to support sustainable social and legal change.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Historically, disability has been a highly contested and misunderstood concept, shaped by social attitudes, cultural beliefs, and institutional practices. In South Africa and globally, disability discourse reflects the values, power dynamics, and biases of the society in which it develops. As Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) notes, “*language reflects the social context in which it is developed... and plays an important role in strengthening the values and attitudes that lead to discrimination*” (DPSA, n.d.). The terminology societies choose—whether inclusive or pejorative holds transformative potential: it can either reinforce exclusion or advance dignity, equality, and participation.

Despite progressive constitutional frameworks and expanding international norms, many rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs) remain insufficiently realized. Systemic, societal, and legislative barriers continue to impede PWDs’ ability to access opportunities and participate fully in society. Notably, global and local discourses have historically framed disability in clinical and welfare-oriented terms, often depicting PWDs as dependent, passive, or burdensome (World Health Organization, 2011). Such framings shape legislation, perpetuate stigma, and influence public policy.

The World Health Organization estimates that 15% of the global population lives with some form of disability, with higher prevalence in low- and middle-income countries (World Health Organization, 2011). In South Africa, 7.5% of the population, approximately 4.5 million individuals—are estimated to have disabilities (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Historically, many of these individuals were marginalized, institutionalized, or subjected to derogatory labels that entrenched exclusion (Swartz, 2009). South Africa’s transition to democracy, along with policy frameworks such as PEPUDA (2000), marked the beginning of efforts to address these injustices. However, persistent negative terminology and outdated conceptualizations within legislation undermine full rights realization.

Against this backdrop, the integral disability approach offers a holistic and transformative lens. Grounded in the work of Lessem, Schieffer, and others, it conceptualizes disability through interconnected human, social, cultural, ecological, and systemic dimensions. This approach challenges reductionist definitions and calls for language that recognizes PWDs as indispensable contributors to society—integral to community life, social development, and human flourishing.

6 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/integral-disability-terminology-as-a-strategy-for-advancing-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-south-africa/413386](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/integral-disability-terminology-as-a-strategy-for-advancing-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-south-africa/413386)

## Related Content

---

### Women's in Leadership Position "Issues and Challenges"

Getachew Alebachew Mekonnen (2019). *International Journal of Political Activism and Engagement* (pp. 25-38).

[www.irma-international.org/article/womens-in-leadership-position-issues-and-challenges/227752](http://www.irma-international.org/article/womens-in-leadership-position-issues-and-challenges/227752)

### Assessing the Challenges of Community Participation to Accelerate Service Delivery in Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality

Nandiswa Mpolweni and Martin Kabange (2026). *Enhancing Democratic Governance and Citizen Participation in Developing Countries* (pp. 171-200).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/assessing-the-challenges-of-community-participation-to-accelerate-service-delivery-in-nelson-mandela-metropolitan-municipality/409584](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/assessing-the-challenges-of-community-participation-to-accelerate-service-delivery-in-nelson-mandela-metropolitan-municipality/409584)

### Autism Spectrum Disorder Detection Using Hybrid Bagging Classifier

Santhi Selvaraj, S. Selva Nidhyanathan, G. Logatheja and D. Stebi (2026). *Use and Abuse of AI in Warfare, Human Development, and Social Justice* (pp. 95-120).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/autism-spectrum-disorder-detection-using-hybrid-bagging-classifier/397523](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/autism-spectrum-disorder-detection-using-hybrid-bagging-classifier/397523)

### Decentralization and District-Level Decentralization in Amhara Region

Besfat Dejen Engdaw (2021). *International Journal of Political Activism and Engagement* (pp. 1-16).

[www.irma-international.org/article/decentralization-and-district-level-decentralization-in-amhara-region/270706](http://www.irma-international.org/article/decentralization-and-district-level-decentralization-in-amhara-region/270706)

### A Policy Manifesto for Antiracist Teacher Professional Development

Jenice L. View, Elizabeth K. DeMulder, Stacia M. Stribling and Laura L. Dallman (2021). *Research Anthology on Empowering Marginalized Communities and Mitigating Racism and Discrimination* (pp. 247-276).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/a-policy-manifesto-for-antiracist-teacher-professional-development/277568](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/a-policy-manifesto-for-antiracist-teacher-professional-development/277568)