

## BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS

Rioux, Marcia H., Pinto, Paula C and Parekh, Gillian, Eds. (2016) *Disability, Rights Monitoring and Social Change: Building Power out of Evidence*. Published by Canadian Scholars' Press. 322 pages. ISBN: 9781551307411

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The year 2016 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the resolution that led to the establishment of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)*. As celebrated by the United Nations Office of High Commission for Human Rights, the CRPD fundamentally changed the position of persons with disabilities across the globe. It has been a major success, particularly when compared to other treaties, instruments and mechanisms within the UN Human Rights Frame given its broad scale adoption. In a few years, a significant number of nation-states have signed up to these disability rights obligations, with many moving on to full ratification. In turn, there have been significant gains for persons with disabilities. The CRPD has been more than a legal instrument. It has provided a new normative framework to advance the social, cultural, economic, civil and political positioning of persons with disabilities. Changes to a range of state institutions, processes and instruments have occurred with emerging empirical evidence suggesting that persons with disabilities have been afforded greater levels of representative and participatory access to state power than ever before. The publication of the book *Disability, Rights Monitoring and Social Change: Building Power out of Evidence*, comes at a key historical moment for the global disability rights movement and its local actors, advocates and allies. The book is an outcome of Disability Rights Promotion International, a network of disability rights scholars, researchers, advocates, activists and allies, funded by the Swedish International Development Agency. The book, therefore, has a strong focus upon disability rights within the global South, offering a rich plethora of disability rights initiatives emerging from the field as real life examples of possibilities, particularities and participatory actions.

The global examples of disability rights monitoring captured, I would suggest, are clearly illustrative of what Balakrishnan, Heintz and Elson (2016) suggest is necessary when grounding state laws, policies and processes in international human rights instruments. Balakrishnan and colleagues strongly recommend the establishment of a normative evaluative framework that underpins the monitoring of rights realization at the local scale. The signing and ratification of UN human rights treaties, conventions and instruments does not necessarily mean the progressive realization of such rights (Fukuda-Parr 2012). There are multiple tensions and complexities within the national scale. States are contested political spaces; money, power, and interests can recant from previous gains. Consequently, it is imperative to monitor state actions and instrumentalities to ensure that the retrogression of

rights does not occur. Civil society actors need a set of deliberative, participatory and representative instruments to monitor, document and report (and hence, make public) state actions, mechanisms and processes. This is necessary to ensure that states remain accountable to its citizenry. As UK disability rights advocates and activists have documented, it is not enough to assume that states will work towards their obligations (Rolnik, 2014). Civil society must be astute to ensure that progressive realization is a material reality, and not just a utopian ideal

*Disability, Rights Monitoring and Social Change: Building Power out of Evidence* directly addresses this very issue for the CRPD. Documenting a comprehensive set of case studies, the methodologies adopted and the participatory engagement of DPOs, the book clearly highlights the critical importance of civil society monitoring of the UNCRPD and its implementation on the ground. Working across a range of locales, each of the chapters draw attention to the participatory processes involved in effective monitoring of the disability rights progression realization and retrogression. No single area of policy, process or programming is privileged. Equal coverage is provided. An extensive breadth of government instrumentalities are examined; from constitutional and legal institutions and mechanisms, through to fiscal policy and budget analysis and finally, social provisioning and programming. Real case studies are deeply examined, revealing the tensions, contradictions and possibilities of the rights framework for persons with disabilities. Indeed, it provides a very useful tool kit for disability civil society actors and their allies engaged in monitoring the state processes of rights realization.

One of the most interesting components of the book is the marking out of differing civil society collaborations and organisations involved in the rights monitoring process. For example, Chapter 6 (by Natalia Angel-Cabo) and 12 (Jose M Vera) provide an excellent example of regional civil society collaborations to advance disability rights. These chapters outlining the Latin American context, elucidate the layering of disability rights frameworks and the opportunities that such layering provides. Drawing upon differing case examples, these chapters reveal the differing ways Latin American disability rights civil society organisations have progressed various claims, so that they are able to achieve strategic outcomes at the regional scale at the same time as local outcomes. Whilst they have not always been successful, the case studies provide disability civil society actors with some key insights into the relational/inter-dependent structure of local, national and regional governance and what can be achieved when working at across scales.

Chapter 2 by Lauro L. Purcil Jr. provides an excellent example of the significance of national fiscal policy and budgets to disability rights realization. While this has been a well-established feature of the women's movement within the global South (see Walby, 2005), it has not been something that the disability rights movement has too readily adopted. In reviewing material for this book review, I was surprised to find only a Side-Event at the 9th

Session of the Conference of State Parties to the CRPD. However, as emerging Indonesian scholar, Antoni Tsaputra, is arguing in his PhD research, fiscal allocations under centralized budgeting processes are necessary for cash transfer payments for personalized supports *and* to ensure that public infrastructure, developments and institutions are disability accessible, participatory and inclusive. Purcil Jr. in this chapter clearly highlights the ways in which disability civil society organisations can harness differing fiscal frameworks to analyse existing budgeting measures, monitoring government fiscal allocations towards disability inclusive and participatory citizenship. This example also demonstrates the significant relationship between national fiscal policy, local rights implementation, and international civil society reporting.

The book offers a rich engagement across a range of Human Rights instruments that are of direct relevance to progressive disability rights realization, particularly within the global South. Rarely do we see disability rights books directly engage with the issue of Indigeneity. Chapter 15 by Huhana Hickey directly addresses the concerns of Indigenous persons with disabilities and the conflicts that may arise with the coalescing of collective culture rights and individual disability rights. Hickey's exposition of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UNCRPD outlines nuanced debates surrounding this interstice. This is a very welcomed chapter and provides a platform for further discussion and deliberation in the area.

These small examples are representative of the innovations available for scholars, researchers, advocates and allies seeking to understand, document and progress disability rights realization. Collectively, the chapters are a rich expose of the possibility of disability rights monitoring, how it might be undertaken, and practices of participatory engagement to ensure that DPOs are active agents in monitoring processes. While they all foreground the significance of the UNCRPD, many of the chapters work in dialogue with other core Human Rights Instruments, such as The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Declaration of Human Rights. Core issues of concern in areas such as violence against women with disability and gendered-disability equality are addressed. Strategies for monitoring are outlined, enabling others to examine the relevance of such processes within their own context. It is this key feature that is probably the most useful for advocates and allies; a rich source of nuanced and novel innovations to actively enable the successful monitoring of disability rights.

Given this depth of analysis, I have no hesitation in recommending this book as a key reader for disability scholars, researchers, advocates and practitioners. While it does not have all of the answers, the book is an excellent platform to think through the requirements of highly effective monitoring, documenting and report, with the aim to hold states to account.

## References

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