

BOOK REVIEW

C OHAJUNWA, K DUBE & E CHITANDO (EDS) *RELIGION, DISABILITY, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA (2025)*

*Thina Mthembu**

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1 Introduction

Religion, disability, and sustainable development in Africa, edited by Chioma Ohajunwa, Kudakwashe 'AK' Dube, and Ezra Chitando, constitutes a significant contribution to the scholarly discourse on the intersections of disability, religion, and development within the framework of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ The book presents a comprehensive examination of the complex relationships between disability, religion, and development in select African countries, thereby advancing our understanding of the critical role that religion plays in shaping the experiences of persons with disabilities in these contexts. With a specific focus on countries in the Global South, particularly in Eastern and Southern Africa including Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya, Eswatini, and others, this book brings together a diverse range of voices and perspectives to explore the multifaceted ways in which disability, religion, and development intersect.

* LLM, LLB, BA (UKZN).

1 The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the world's roadmap for ending poverty, protecting the planet and tackling inequalities. The SDGs offer the most practical and effective pathway to tackle the causes of violent conflict, inequalities, climate change and environmental degradation and aim to ensure that no one will be left behind. They reflect an understanding that sustainable development everywhere must integrate economic growth, social well-being and environmental protection. Sustainable Development Goals <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-goals/> (accessed 10 October 2025).

The standalone introductory chapter serves as a foundational introduction, in which the editors, draw extensively on the research of the late Dr Sinenhlanhla S Chisale, an African scholar who firmly believed ‘in the power of religion to contribute to human dignity, human flourishing and development’.² In her writings Chisale acknowledged that ‘religion has been known to cause division and exclusion’, she however also acknowledged ‘that [religion] has the capacity to promote unity and inclusion’.³ As such, she argued that it is a worthwhile endeavour ‘to cultivate and emphasise the redemptive windows that are available in [religion]’ especially for persons with disabilities.⁴ Chisale’s work challenges the conventional understanding of the dynamic between disability and poverty as two factors that tend to exacerbate each other, she contested this stance by asserting that it is crucial ‘to balance the discussion of disability and poverty with an understanding of how persons with disabilities generate their own livelihoods within their communities’, which can help achieve the inclusivity that has been a longstanding goal for the disability community.⁵ While Chisale’s scholarship does not link directly with religion, disability and sustainable development it does reveal a clear theme of development centred on inclusivity, empowerment, and dignity for persons with disabilities, catalysed by religion and the role it plays in their lives.⁶

The remaining 16 chapters are organised into four thematic sections, each of which examines the SDGs, disability, and religion in the context of specific issues, including poverty, health, gender, and various disciplines such as eco-justice, education, and indigenous religions. This review will provide an analysis of the book’s key themes, arguments, and contributions to the field, highlighting its relevance to ongoing conversations about disability, religion, and sustainable development in Africa, rather than offering a detailed discussion of each chapter.

2 The context of poverty and socio-cultural factors

The first collection of chapters sheds light on the multi-layered relationship between the SDG’s, disability, poverty and religion. In Chapter 3, Loreen Maseno and Vugutsa Beatrice Lukalo’s descriptive research methodology meticulously dissects the complex ways in which negative societal attitudes, stigma, and exclusionary practices aggravate poverty and marginalisation, offering the reader a poignant examination of the lived

2 C Ohajunwa, K Dube & E Chitando (eds) *Religion, disability, and sustainable development in Africa* (2025) 5.

3 As above.

4 As above.

5 As above.

6 Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 10.

experiences of persons with disabilities in Kenya. Their analysis further reveals that persons with disabilities are often perceived as ‘incomplete and incapable of agency’ leading to their exclusion from mainstream society. This in turn perpetuates a rancorous cycle of poverty, that results in persons with disabilities facing significant barriers in accessing their human rights associated with education, employment, and social services.⁷ Maseno and Lukalo also astutely observe that naive religious perceptions further entrench stigma and marginalisation.⁸

Similar sentiments are found in Makomborero Allen Bowa’s research, which is grounded in qualitative research methods, utilising a multi-method approach that includes descriptive views, observations, and a thorough literature review on disability representation in the Old Testament of the Hebrew Bible, a revered sacred text in both Judaism and Christianity. The chapter also relies on the social model of disability and Nancy Fraser’s social justice theory to analyse the data.⁹

Bowa highlights the Old Testament’s contradictory portrayal of disability, featuring both discriminatory texts¹⁰ and non-discriminatory passages,¹¹ he argues that such contradictory perspectives have contributed to the exclusion, poverty, deprivation and perpetuating of negative and discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities in many African societies.¹² He instead advocates for reform through harnessing the potential of religious texts to be the catalyst for social change, allowing for a paradigm shift in societal attitudes towards disability.¹³

Through the lens of Nancy Fraser’s social justice framework, which emphasises recognition, redistribution, and representation, Bowa seeks to challenge stigmatising attitudes and promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. This approach prioritises meaningful participation and inclusivity, transforming religious discourse from a source of exclusion to a powerful tool for social justice and empowerment.¹⁴ Bowa’s chapter underscores the significance of addressing the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in order to achieve the SDG’s by promoting a positive and inclusive approach to

7 L Maseno & VB Lukalo ‘Disentangling disability in Africa: A panoramic view from critical disability studies on religion, disability and poverty in Africa’ in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 38-39.

8 Maseno & Lukalo (n 7) 39.

9 M Bowa ‘Positive perspectives on disability in the Old Testament: Pathways to breaking the disability-poverty nexus and leaving no-one behind in Africa’s quest to achieve sustainable development’ in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 23.

10 Leviticus 21:16-23, Leviticus 22:21-22, and Deuteronomy 28:28.

11 Leviticus 19:14 and Deuteronomy 27:18.

12 Maseno & Lukalo (n 7) 27.

13 Maseno & Lukalo (n 7) 33.

14 Bowa (n 9) 22-23, citing N Fraser *Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalising world* (2010).

disability through the usage of positive interpretations of sacred texts given the significance of religion in most societies.

Gubela Mji's chapter about the African Network for Evidence to Action in Disability (AfriNEAD)¹⁵ highlights the importance of decolonising disability research and adopting an African-centric approach. Mji argues that dominant Western perspectives in disability research have led to the marginalisation and exclusion of persons with disabilities in Africa. To address this, AfriNEAD seeks to create a body of knowledge that considers disability from an African perspective, guided by African principles such as ubuntu, which emphasises collective consciousness and community-driven initiatives. It is submitted that AfriNEAD's approach of providing a platform for like-minded individuals to participate in dialogue on disability-centric issues allows room for the creation of customised solutions that cater to the unique requirements of persons with disabilities in various settings.

3 The context of health and well-being

The book's next section explores the intersection of health and well-being within the context of the SDGs, disability, and religion. Swabra Nakawesa and Ephraim Lemmy Nuwagaba explore the intersection between disability, religion and the SDGs within the context of Covid-19 using a literature review style methodology. Their review considers the challenges faced by persons with disabilities because of this intersection and calls for a critical reassessment of religious belief systems and the (re)development of intervention strategies to allow for the promotion of inclusivity. The chapter highlights current trends in African religiosity (homing in specifically on Christianity and Islam) and disability, noting amongst other things the 'increasing influence of Pentecostal and charismatic movements that emphasise divine healing and miracles'.¹⁶ While these movements often stem from positive intentions, Nakawesa and Nuwagaba argue that they can have adverse consequences for persons with disabilities, exacerbating stigma. However, the authors also identify a positive consequential trend which is a growing push for inclusivity within faith communities, with many proactively adapting to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities.¹⁷

15 G Mji 'The African Network for Evidence-to-Action in Disability (AfriNEAD) on its quest to be a Regional Disability Network guided by African wisdom' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2). AfriNEAD is a flagship project of the Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation Studies at Stellenbosch University, and its aim is to translate research into evidence-based advocacy, practice and policy – particularly in the pan-African context so as to better the lives of persons with disabilities, AfriNEAD - Home page <https://blogs.sun.ac.za/afriNEAD/history-of-afriNEAD/> (accessed 24 October 2025).

16 S Nakawesa & EL Nuwagaba 'Exploring the intersection of disability and religion in the context of Covid-19 and sustainable development in Africa' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 88.

17 Nakawesa & Nuwagaba (n 16) 90.

From a pandemic perspective Nakawesa and Nuwagaba argue that Covid-19 exposed the inadequacies of healthcare systems for persons with disabilities, highlighting that the one-size-fits-all pandemic response overlooked their unique needs, even with basic measures like sanitation equipment which was often inaccessible because of its structural build. They further contend that the pandemic intensified social isolation for a group already experiencing isolation thus furthering the marginalisation of persons with disabilities.¹⁸

The remainder of the chapter explores the vulnerabilities faced by persons with disabilities through various theoretical frameworks including religion, the social model of disability and the African philosophy of ubuntu to identify strategies for supporting and empowering persons with disabilities during and after the Covid-19 pandemic (and future calamities) ultimately promoting inclusivity in achieving the SDGs.¹⁹ Nakawesa and Nuwagaba highlight the dual role of religion in disability discourse, serving as both a positive force for change and a potential source of stigma. They note that religious institutions could leverage their influence to disseminate information and support persons with disabilities but also acknowledge that certain interpretations of religious texts can perpetuate negative attitudes towards disability, such as interpreting disability as a consequence of sin or punishment.²⁰

The authors then present the social model of disability as a practical tool for emancipation. Nakawesa and Nuwagaba also explore the ubuntu philosophy, which prioritises 'communal benefit and collective well-being'.²¹ However, they note that the Covid-19 pandemic presented challenges to such an approach, given its emphasis on social distancing and limiting gatherings. In closing Nakawesa and Nuwagaba contend that integrating religious conceptualisations, the social model of disability, and the ubuntu philosophy offers a more comprehensive and effective framework for advancing disability rights.²²

Ronald Julius Mbaos's²³ Chapter 9 offers a complementary yet distinct perspective on the role of faith-based organisations in promoting the SDG's, focusing specifically on the real-world efforts of Christian and Muslim faith-based organisations in implementing specifically SDG's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8 in Tanzania.²⁴ In his writings Mbaos critiques the Neo-

18 Nakawesa & Nuwagaba (n 16) 92-94.

19 As above.

20 John 5:14.

21 Nakawesa & Nuwagaba (n 16) 96.

22 Nakawesa & Nuwagaba (n 16) 97.

23 RJ Mbaos 'Sustainable Development Goal achievements for people with disabilities in Africa: The role of Christian-Muslim religions in Tanzania' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 138.

24 Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent work and Economic Growth).

Pentecostal movement's misinterpretation of Christian biblical texts so as to place emphasis on miraculous intervention, which can sometimes blame persons with disabilities when they are not miraculously healed from their disability following healing-directed prayers.²⁵

Chapters 7 and 8 employ a literature review methodology to investigate novel topics, advancing the discussion on religion, disability, and the SDGs. Notably, they explore epilepsy within African indigenous religions and care development for elderly persons with disabilities through Botho ethics which is a corollary of ubuntu philosophy.²⁶

In Chapter 7, Sifiso explores the complex relationships between faith, spirituality, and disability, with a specific focus on epilepsy within Shamanism, Rastafarianism, and Christianity. Shifting the discussion slightly from Christianity, which has been examined extensively in this review, Sifiso sheds light on other distinctive perspectives including Shamanism and Rastafarianism. According to Sifiso, Shamans are typically marked by having overcome significant physical, mental, or neurological challenges, which are seen as transformative experiences that grant them supernatural and healing powers. Instead of being viewed as victims of their conditions, they are regarded as powerful figures who have conquered their 'afflictions'. This experience is what typically allows them to assume leadership roles within their tribes.²⁷ Conversely, Rastafarianism champions acceptance, inclusivity, and moral wellbeing, rejecting colonial influences and promoting natural healing practices, including the use of cannabis combined with hibiscus, to treat epilepsy and other health issues.²⁸ By examining these distinct religious contexts, the chapter highlights the many ways in which faith shapes the experiences of persons with disabilities in Africa.

In Chapter 8, Tshenolo J Madigele and Elizabeth P Motswapong underscore the critical intersection of disability and aging, highlighting that aging can be a disabling experience due to declining physical and cognitive functionality.²⁹ The authors emphasise the need for inclusive care development, underpinned by the botho ethics philosophy, which advocates for 'collective responsibility' and prioritises the active participation of elderly individuals with disabilities in shaping their own

25 Mbao (n 23) 142.

26 Botho is derived from a Setswana saying, 'motho ke motho ka batho', translated as follows: 'A person is a person through and because of other persons.' Botho aims at maintaining social cohesion. KT Resane 'Theology and botho/ubuntu in dialogue towards South African social cohesion' (2022) 78 *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* a7677.

27 M Sifiso 'Understanding epilepsy in the context of African indigenous religions' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 107.

28 Sifiso (n 27) 109-110.

29 EP Motswapong & TJ Madigele 'Care development: Botho ethics, ageing and disability' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 117.

care.³⁰ Recognising the disproportionate impact of poverty, gender stereotypes, and societal attitudes on the elderly, particularly women, the authors stress the importance of context-specific interventions that address the complex needs of this demographic.³¹ Focusing on the Sub-Saharan African context, with particular emphasis on Botswana, the chapter highlights the role of religion and other stakeholders in promoting the well-being of the elderly and advocates for a collaborative approach to ensure 'healthy and happy aging', with the voices of the elderly at the forefront of strategy development and intervention.³²

4 The context of other disciplines

The next section of the book takes an interdisciplinary approach. In Chapter 11, Bridget Nonde Masaiti and Sophia Chirongoma explore the experiences of persons with disabilities in rural Zambia, highlighting their needs in education, religion, socialisation, health, and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). An analysis of key instruments such as the *Zambian Persons with Disabilities Act*³³ and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*³⁴ reveals the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in accessing essential services, 'partly due to inaccessible ecological landscapes'.³⁵ The chapter also draws on qualitative findings from a Disability Inclusion Training Workshop held in Zambia, the purpose of which was to inform attendees about the rights of persons with disabilities particularly in relation to essential services, education, and healthcare. In this chapter the authors unpack Conradie's theoretical framework on 'the whole household of God'.³⁶ This framework is then interlinked with Chisale's 'African women's theology of disability'.³⁷ Overall, Masaiti and Chirongoma's work highlights the need for ecological justice that prioritises the needs and

30 Motswapong & Madigele (n 29) 118-119.

31 Motswapong & Madigele (n 29) 120-122.

32 Motswapong & Madigele (n 29) 124.

33 *The Zambian Persons with Disabilities Act*, 2012.

34 UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 24 January 2007, UN Doc A/RES/61/106 (2007)* <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unga/2007/en/49751> (accessed 26 October 2025).

35 BN Masaiti & S Chirongoma 'Eco-justice and disability inclusion in Lusaka, Zambia: Towards an African women's theology of disability' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 168.

36 According to Conradie 'the earth and everything in it is the whole household of God', see EM Conradie 'The whole household of God (Oikos): Some ecclesiological perspectives (Part 1)' (2007) 94 *Scriptura*, 1-9. Cited in Masaiti & Chirongoma (n 35) 169.

37 According to Chisale, African eco-feminist theology provides a framework for rethinking human relationships with the earth, emphasising liberation, harmony, and stewardship. It challenges patriarchal systems, promoting egalitarian communities that value interconnectedness and sustainability, and seeks to create a more just and harmonious world. SS Chisale 'Disabled motherhood in an African community: Towards an African Women theology of disability' (2018) 52 *Die Skriflig* <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v52i1.2375> (accessed 19 October 2025).

dignity of all individuals, particularly those who are most vulnerable such as persons with disabilities.

Nwacoye Gladness Mpya's work in Chapter 13 speaks to the need to address the lack of representation of the lived African experience in disability centric research as it was discussed at the 10th AFRINEAD conference hosted in Cape Town, South Africa under the theme: 'Disability unplugged focusing on the essential concerns of individuals with disabilities in Africa'.³⁸ In his contribution Mpya argues that the dominance of Global North perspectives in disability discourse 'overlooks African experiences and contexts, perpetuating stereotypes and limiting opportunities for persons with disabilities'.³⁹ In response thereto, Mpya calls for more context-specific approaches that consider local socio-economic and political factors.⁴⁰ To this end, Mpya suggests the implementation of Basotho indigenous religion principles together with the African philosophical principle of ubuntu to reimagine the disability discourse as one that promotes inclusive education and disability rights particularly in South Africa.⁴¹

Chapter 10 presents a compelling analysis of the intricate relationships between disability, law, and religion in Zimbabwe. Therein, Joseph Muyangata posits that the constitutional amendments made by Zimbabwe in the year 2013 marked a significant milestone in recognising the rights of persons with disabilities because it incorporated various demands from the disability community.⁴² However he submits that despite this constitutional change persons with disabilities including those with invisible disabilities,⁴³ continue to face significant challenges due to societal attitudes and perceptions.⁴⁴ Muyangata further notes that out of a total of 17 SDGs only five goals directly address the needs and rights of persons with disabilities.⁴⁵ To address this, Muyangata suggests a critical review of disability interpretation from a religious perspective, leveraging

38 NG Mpya 'The interplay of South African indigenous religions, disability and the Sustainable Development Goals: Reconceptualising disability in inclusive education' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 196.

39 As above.

40 As above.

41 In the Basotho religion, disability is perceived as a manifestation of the will of God, emphasising a positive attitude that encourages the integration of children with disabilities. Similarly, the ubuntu philosophy, with its emphasis on interconnectedness and community, offers a framework for fostering inclusivity and acceptance through its core belief of 'I am because we are'. See Mpya (n 39) 198.

42 J Muyangata 'An examination of the relationship between disability, law and religion: The Zimbabwean disability practice' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 151.

43 Invisible disabilities are disabilities that are not immediately apparent. An invisible disability is classified as a physical, mental or neurological condition that is not visible from the outside yet can limit or challenge a person's movements, senses or activities. Muyangata (n 42) 153.

44 Muyangata (n 42) 152.

45 Out of a total of 17 SDGs only five Goals directly address the needs and rights of persons with disabilities namely, Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

the SDGs to promote religious and legislative inclusivity, Muyangata's recommendations include making houses of worship accessible including 'properly marked signage', and enforcing the implementation of the Constitution of Zimbabwe together with 'adopting a multifaceted approach that combines religious and legal strategies to protect the rights of persons with disabilities'.⁴⁶

In Chapter 12 Pamela Nizeyimana, Ojok Patrick and Victor Locoro explore the intersection of religion, disability and education in Uganda, focusing on the challenges and opportunities that emerge from Christian, Muslim, and African traditional ideologies, particularly in the context of inclusive (religious) education.⁴⁷ The authors rely on a qualitative methodology, reviewing relevant literature and engaging with religious leaders and persons with disabilities to uncover the textured interpretations of disability across these religious traditions.⁴⁸ The authors stress the importance of reasonable accommodations in educational settings, especially in religious institutions, and advocate for representation within curricula.⁴⁹ Moreover, they call on faith-based institutions to spearhead such inclusive education initiatives, setting a precedent for others to follow.⁵⁰

Lastly, the authors examine disability models, critiquing the social model's limitations and argue that this model overlooks the physical and emotional realities of impairment.⁵¹ As a solution they suggest the limits model which advances that being human inherently involves limitations and dependencies, whether physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual and because of this the theory insists that instead of seeing limits as unusual we should recognise them as a natural part of being human. This perspective encourages us to rethink our assumptions about what is 'normal' and to find value in the limitations that reveal our true nature and our relationship with God.⁵² Overall, this chapter contributes to an earlier discussion on disability, religion, and education, emphasising the need for critical dialogue and contextualised approaches to foster inclusive faith communities and educational systems. However, this chapter distinguishes itself by emphasising the catalytic role of religious institutions in promoting inclusive education highlighting their potential to drive meaningful change in learning environments.

46 Muyangata (n 42) 163-164.

47 P Nizeyimana, O Patrick & V Locoro 'Religion, disability and education in Africa: Perspectives from Uganda' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 186-187.

48 As above.

49 Nizeyimana, Patrick & Locoro (n 47) 190.

50 Nizeyimana, Patrick & Locoro (n 47) 191.

51 As above.

52 As above.

5 The context of gender

The concluding section of this book explores the intersection of the SDG's, disability, and religion through a gendered lens.

In Chapter 15, Telesia K Musili explores the intersection of disability, gender, and religion in the context of SRHR. The chapter highlights the significance of international instruments, such as the CRPD in promoting disability rights inclusion in Kenya but notes that despite these efforts persons with disabilities particularly women, continue to face exclusion and marginalisation in accessing their SRHR.⁵³ Utilising a qualitative approach, Musili uncovers their struggles and praises their resilience in seeking sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information despite encountering numerous challenges, including inaccessible healthcare facilities, lack of accommodations and judgmental attitudes from healthcare workers. To this effect the chapter contemplates the concept of the 'disabled God', where Jesus Christ 'embodies solidarity with all individuals, regardless of their abilities'. By invoking this concept, Musili advocates for the dismantling of negative stereotypes surrounding disability, ultimately calling for the full inclusion of women with disabilities in accessing essential SRHR and information. The chapter also expands the concept of inclusion through a framework known as the 'theology of belonging' to challenges the adequacy of policies and rhetoric that prioritise inclusion alone. Musili argues that inclusion, while important, often fails to address the fundamental needs of persons with disabilities, whereas a belonging approach would encompass a deeper sense of acceptance, worth, and dignity that goes beyond physical or social inclusion.⁵⁴

Chapters 14 and 16 both scrutinise the pressing issue of gender-based violence (GBV) a topic of importance more specially in the African context where patriarchal norms, societal expectations, and weak institutional frameworks often exacerbate the vulnerability of women and girls, particularly those with disabilities.

In Chapter 14, Sonene Nyawo critically examines the intersection of disability and GBV in Eswatini, synthesising existing research to reveal the pervasive forms of abuse faced by women (particularly emotional abuse) noting that despite the prevalence of abuse in general, its impact on women with disabilities remains largely unaddressed, mainly due to a deeply ingrained culture of silence rooted in societal norms. This silence, according to Nyawo, is perpetuated by women's perceived minority status

53 TK Musili 'Women with disability's access to sexual reproductive health and well-being in Nairobi, Kenya: Towards a theology of belonging' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 232.

54 Musili (n 53) 244.

and often reinforced by marriage.⁵⁵ Nyawo further highlights that even though the law does provide recourse, only a few women mostly in urban areas, are willing to report abuse. Women in rural areas face greater challenges due to indigenous laws that are often 'unsympathetic' to women and less likely to convict men of abuse, compared to modern court systems which may still typically impose light sentences.⁵⁶ Additionally, Nyawo contends that culture perpetuates oppressive stereotypes by assigning gendered roles from a young age, leading to the internalisation of these roles and the idolisation of men over women, this is especially evident in cultural practices pertaining to land ownership.⁵⁷ Nyawo concludes by proposing solutions that emphasise strengthening collaborative efforts among key stakeholders, aligning with the SDG's emphasis that sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing gender inequalities, particularly in the context of GBV.⁵⁸

In Chapter 16, John Oluwajana explores the role of Pentecostal churches in combating GBV noting that these churches are well-positioned to address GBV due to their influence and emphasis on social transformation. To this end the chapter highlights the church's endeavours through advocacy work, including awareness campaigns, policy advocacy, and integration of gender sensitivity into theological education.⁵⁹ However, Oluwajana also identifies challenges, including financial constraints, limited resources, and entrenched cultural norms.⁶⁰ Oluwajana further exposes the internal contentions within the faith highlighting that some Pentecostal denominations still over emphasise the notion of divine healing, which as previously pointed out can have a negative impact on persons with disabilities.⁶¹ Instead, the chapter highlights the importance of acknowledging the inherent dignity of persons with disabilities by involving them in church activities and leadership roles.⁶² In his closing Oluwajana contends that Pentecostal churches can drive social change by leveraging their influence and collaborating with governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), underscoring the crucial role of partnership and collaboration in both effectively addressing GBV and achieving the SDG's.⁶³

In the final chapter, Mwawi N Chilongozi provides a poignant exploration of the lived experiences of women with obstetric fistula, a

55 S Nyawo 'Disability, gender-based violence and development in Africa: The case of Eswatini' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 219.

56 Nyawo (n 55) 220.

57 As above.

58 Nyawo (n 55) 228.

59 J Oluwajana 'Transformative work of Pentecostal groups in addressing gender-based violence against people living with disability in Nigeria' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 249.

60 Oluwajana (n 59) 252.

61 As above.

62 As above.

63 Oluwajana (n 59) 256.

disability that profoundly affects their physical, emotional, and social well-being. Through a qualitative study employing a narrative and storytelling approach, Chilongozi sheds light on the complex and often debilitating consequences of this condition, which is often caused by poorly performed surgery or prolonged obstructed labour without medical intervention.⁶⁴

Chilongozi's analysis reveals the intricate relationships between culture, religion, and disability, particularly in the Malawian context. The study highlights the significance of religion in shaping societal norms and morals, while also underscoring its potential to perpetuate ableist notions and reinforce patriarchal structures that subordinate women. The author argues that religion and culture can be 'a double-edged sword', promoting community and social cohesion while also perpetuating harmful practices that undermine women's dignity.⁶⁵ The study also highlights the therapeutic value of storytelling and narrative approaches in promoting healing and empowerment because by sharing their stories and experiences the women in the study were able to find solace and support in the company of others who have undergone similar experiences.⁶⁶

6 Critique and conclusion

This book provides a comprehensive and thought-provoking exploration of *Religion, disability and sustainable development in the Africa[n]* context, shedding light on the complex interplay between cultural norms, religious beliefs, and the experiences of persons with disabilities. The qualitative approach adopted by most chapters offers a rich and detailed understanding of grassroots efforts to achieve the SDG's, particularly through the work of Pentecostal churches and forums like AfriNEAD. The emphasis on invisible disabilities and the spectrum of disability experiences is a significant contribution, highlighting the need for inclusive and responsive legislation and policy development that acknowledges the diverse needs of persons with disabilities.

One of the standout aspects of this book is its exploration of disability from diverse religious perspectives, including Christianity, Islam, Rastafarianism, and shamanism. This multifaceted approach underscores the importance of understanding the role of religion in shaping attitudes towards disability and promoting social inclusion. The critique of the social model of disability by one of the chapters is also noteworthy, highlighting the need for ongoing reflection and evolution in our

64 MN Chilongozi (2025) 'Obstetric Fistula – A disability that affects the health and well-being of women: Reflections from the Malawian context' in Ohajunwa, Dube & Chitando (n 2) 266.

65 Chilongozi (n 64) 268.

66 Chilongozi (n 64) 273.

approaches to addressing the complex and changing needs of persons with disabilities.

While the book excels in many areas, there are some notable omissions that warrant attention. The African Disability Protocol, for instance, could have featured more prominently in the discussions, given its significance in shaping disability rights on the continent and its potential for forging meaningful Global South perspectives. The Protocol's emphasis on the rights of persons with disabilities to participate fully in society, access education, health, employment, and live free from discrimination and violence, resonates strongly with the book's themes.⁶⁷ Its inclusion would have added depth and context to the analysis.

Additionally, the treatment of harmful cultural practices,⁶⁸ particularly in the context of women's SRHR, feels somewhat underdeveloped. While the book touches on these issues, a more detailed and nuanced exploration would have been beneficial. A dedicated chapter on this topic would have provided an opportunity for a more in-depth analysis of the complex power dynamics and cultural norms that perpetuate these practices.

The absence of a concluding chapter is also notable, leaving readers without a comprehensive summary of the key takeaways and future directions. This omission slightly detracts from the book's overall impact, particularly given the thoughtful introductory chapter that sets the stage for the rest of the volume. A concluding chapter would have provided an opportunity for the editors to synthesise the key findings and themes, highlight the implications for policy and practice, and identify areas for future research.

Despite these few limitations, this book is a valuable contribution to the field of disability studies, offering insights that can inform policy, practice, and advocacy efforts. Its focus on the intersection of religion and disability is particularly noteworthy, highlighting the potential for faith-based organisations to drive positive change in the lives of persons with disabilities. As the 2030 deadline for the SDGs approaches, this book serves as a timely reminder of the importance of inclusive and responsive approaches to disability and development.

67 Article 3 (participation), Article 5 (non-discrimination), Article 10 (education), Article 17 (health), Article 19 (employment).

68 Article 11.