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# POLICY BRIEF

## Language and Dignity

Disability Representation in Official Documents, Media  
and Social Discourse

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## List of Abbreviation:

| No | Acronym | Full Form                                    |
|----|---------|----------------------------------------------|
| 1  | MR      | Mentally Retarded                            |
| 2  | MRC     | Mentally Retarded Centre                     |
| 3  | MR&PH   | Mentally Retarded and Physically Handicapped |

## Background and Rationale:

On one hand, people with disabilities have to cope with their impairments in their interaction with largely inaccessible built environment and negative societal attitudes which reflect in the shape of attitudinal barriers which render them 'disabled'. On the other, they have to cope with unrelenting juggernauts of linguistic oppression which finds expression through spoken words, idioms, proverbs and jokes depicting not only people with disabilities in negative light but are also used to depict state of ignorance of others through disability conditions.

There is simply no let-up for people with disabilities as they have to face this linguistic oppression on daily basis by common people, government departments, politicians and elected representatives and even civil society organizations who claim to change the world for the better. This linguistic oppression not only adversely impacts their mental health but also creates deep implications for their inclusion in society, exercise of their basic rights and enjoyment of fundamental freedoms on equal basis with others.

The language used to depict people with disabilities is a social construct which can and should be changed. It is in this context that Accountability Lab Pakistan, in collaboration with Accessibility Centre, has developed this policy brief for elected representatives, public officials and media persons to use people-first language to counter linguistic oppression to describe people with disabilities.

## Disability Vocabulary in Public Discourse and why it Needs to be Dismantled

There are many shades of vocabulary to describe people with disabilities. At times, they are described through disability vocabulary which is reductionist or euphemistic and at times through outright derogatory language. Pity oriented and inspirational language is also used to describe people with disabilities.

The first step to solve any social issue is to see and frame the issue in an objective manner and the disability issue is not an exception. In this context, it is of vital importance to understand as to how officially sanctioned and socially accepted disability vocabulary is harmful and detrimental to the cause of persons with disabilities and how it is being used and disseminated through print and electronic media.

Following are the categories of disability vocabulary found in official documents, print and electronic media and in daily discourse along with reasons as to why the words/expressions and terms used need to be replaced with neutral and accurate words and terms to describe persons with disabilities:

## Reductionist and Derogatory Terms in Institutional Naming and Official Records

There are commonly used words and expressions which reduce people with disabilities to such an extent that, at best, describe them through their disability condition and at worst, take from them even their human identity. Then there are words and expressions to describe them as a group of people who 'suffer'; a group of people who are 'victims' of circumstances. At the same time, some of the terms are not only reductionist, but are outrightly offensive and derogatory that are widely used in media and official documents.

Our media does not use harmful disability vocabulary in isolation. The federal and provincial governments are part of the problem rather than being part of the solution with regard to use and dissemination of harmful disability vocabulary. As inappropriate reductionist terms are imbedded in the formal names of institutions, service categories, statistical records and departmental communication,



these expressions are repeatedly reproduced through budgets, admission forms, websites, correspondence, policy papers, media reports and routine public communication.

Among the most egregious examples is the expression “deaf and dumb” to describe people with speech and hearing impairments. In the material reviewed, this expression appears most clearly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where it is used in official and institutional naming. Examples include Govt Institute for Deaf & Dumb, Malakand; Govt School for Deaf & Dumb Children, Gulbahar, Peshawar; Govt Institute for Deaf & Dumb, D.I. Khan; Govt School for Deaf & Dumb Children (Female), Mardan; and Govt School for Deaf & Dumb Children (Female), Kohat. It also appears as a departmental category through Deaf and Dumb Schools and Deaf & Dumb Centers.

At the federal level, the expression “deaf and dumb” does not appear in the current examples reviewed, but reductionist and impairment-focused terminology is still used for people with speech and hearing impairments. Federal records refer to the National Special Education Centre for Hearing Impaired Children, H-9, Islamabad, and use “hearing impaired children” and “hearing impairment” in institutional communication.

Instead of using rights-based terms such as “people with intellectual disabilities” or “children with intellectual disabilities,” official and institutional records continue to use expressions such as “mentally retarded,” “mental retardation,” “MR,” “MRC” and “MR&PH.” Current Khyber Pakhtunkhwa official records use the category “Mentally Retarded & Physically Handicapped Children” and list institutions such as Govt MR&PH Center, Nowshera; Govt MR&PH Center, Dir Upper; Govt Centre for MR&PH Children, Haripur; Gomal Special Education Center (MRC), D.I. Khan; and Special Education Center for MR&PH, Chitral. Federal records also use expressions such as “children with mental retardation,” “Intellectually Challenged Children,” and “children with Intellectual Disabilities” within the same institutional description.

The reductionist term “handicapped” also remains visible in institutional names and official classifications. At the federal level, examples include National Special Education Centre for Visually Handicapped Children, G-7/2, Islamabad, and National Special Education Centre for Physically Handicapped Children, G-8/4, Islamabad. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa official records also use Visually Handicapped Centres as an administrative category and list Special Education Center for Visually Handicapped Children, Charsadda, and Nishtar Special Education Center for Visually Handicapped, Mardan.

Official records also use impairment-first administrative categories such as “hearing impaired children,” “visually impaired children,” “physically disabled children,” “mentally challenged children” and “slow learners.” In Punjab, these categories appear in official departmental sources and the Punjab Special Education Policy 2020, which records Institutions for Hearing Impaired Children, Institutions for Visually Impaired Children, Institutions for Physically Disabled Children, Institutions for Mentally Challenged Children, and Institutions for Slow Learners. Related departmental records also use expressions such as Institutions of Slow Learners Children, Slow Learner, HIC and PHC in admission and curriculum material.

The terms “disabled persons,” “disabled children” and “disabled patients” also appear in welfare, health, education and rehabilitation records. Examples include Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons, Vocational Training Centre for Disabled Persons, Quetta, Vocational Training Centre for Disabled Persons, Khuzdar, Special Education Complex for Disabled Children, Mastung, Rehabilitation Centres for Disabled Persons, Special Education Centres for Disabled Persons, and Balochistan Disabled Complex for Special Education.

## Euphemistic Terms in Institutional Naming and Official Records

In sharp contrast to outright offensive and derogatory terms, federal and provincial governments swing to another extreme. Euphemistic expressions such as “special persons,” “special children,” “students with special needs” and “differently-abled persons” to describe persons with disabilities.

These expressions appear in official documents, programme material and institutional naming at both federal and provincial levels.

The problem with these euphemistic expressions is that they replace disability with vague and sentimental language which has no value for persons with disabilities. The entire focus is shifted on people with disabilities and their abilities, away from their disabilities which they face owing to societal barriers.

At the federal level, examples of institutional naming include National Training Centre for Special Persons, National Institute for Special Education, and Home for Special Persons. Federal programme and policy material also uses expressions such as “students with special needs,” including in material linked with the Benazir Income Support Programme and education-related policy documents. The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training also uses the expression “special persons.” These examples show that federal records continue to rely on “special” as a substitute for rights-based language such as “persons with disabilities,” “children with disabilities” or “students with disabilities.”

Provincial records also follow the same pattern. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the expression “special children” appears in the naming and communication of the Special Education Complex, Peshawar.

In Sindh, government awareness material uses the expression “differently-abled persons.” This popular euphemistic term shifts attention away from barriers in society by suggesting that disability is simply a different form of ability. Similar euphemistic framing appears at the federal level in the expression “differently-abled communities,” used by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination.

## Impact of Official Reductionist and Derogatory Terms on Media Reporting

The genesis of derogatory expressions can be traced in reductionist terms in official records and institutional naming pertaining to people with disabilities. As official records and institutional naming often use reductionist and derogatory terms to describe persons with disabilities, this language also influences print and electronic media.

No wonder we see media sensationalising disability, using impairment as the primary identity, linking disability with helplessness or dependency, presenting disability as individual tragedy, associating disability with violence or criminality, and using outdated medicalised or insulting expressions.

Following are the main categories of the way media depicts persons with disabilities:

### Depiction of People with Disabilities as Victims:

As official records and public communications reduce people with disabilities to mere disability conditions and do not see as human beings, this has far reaching consequences in terms of their depiction in the media. One of these consequences is their depiction in media as symbols of misfortune, helplessness or personal tragedy.

Media also frames ‘helplessness’ and ‘victimhood’ owing to the lack of understanding about lived experiences of persons with different disabilities. For example, a person who is blind or deaf by birth,

cannot be described as ‘deprived of sight or hearing as the person never had the faculties of seeing or hearing in the first place.

The most common expression for people with disabilities is “Mazoori ka shikar” (afflicted with disability) when depicting them as a group of people.

People belonging to each disability category are depicted through the prism of victimhood. Persons with visual impairments are often described as “nabeena pan ka shikar” (afflicted with visual impairment) and persons with physical disabilities are described as “jismani mazoori ka shikar” (afflicted with physical disability).

Persons with hearing disabilities are described as “quwwat-e-samaat se mehroom” (afflicted with hearing impairment) and persons with intellectual disabilities are described as “zehni mazoor” (mentally challenged or disabled).

English language media also uses expressions such as “suffering from,” “afflicted with,” “victim of” and “wheelchair-bound” to describe persons with disabilities. The expression “wheelchair-bound” is particularly problematic because it portrays wheelchair users as confined, helpless or restricted.

Taking queue from official records and public communications, print and electronic media “uses such reductionist terms as the disabled,” “PWDs,” “physically challenged,” “visually challenged,” “mentally challenged,” “physically impaired,” “visually impaired” and “speech and hearing impaired.” Some of these expressions may appear polite, technical or administratively convenient, but they continue to classify people primarily through impairment.

## Inspirational Framing of Persons with Disabilities

The pendulum swings from framing persons with disabilities as victims to yet another extreme when persons with disabilities are depicted as ‘heroes’ through inspirational language. The problem with such language is that it romanticises disability and places an unrealistic burden of expectations on them. More importantly, as in the case of euphemistic terms, inspirational framing shifts attention away from structural barriers, discrimination and inaccessible environments that restrict equal participation in society.

In Urdu media and public communication, expressions such as “ye afrad hamaray liye misaal hain,” (these people are an example for us), “society ke liye roshan misaal” (a bright example for the society), and “bahimmat afrad” (courageous people) are used to present persons with disabilities mainly as examples of courage, motivation or moral inspiration. In English-language media, similar expressions include “special students displayed exceptional abilities,” “special children showcased extraordinary talent,” “students inspired the audience,” “despite disabilities,” “inspirational performances,” “special persons can do extraordinary things,” “motivation for society,” “special persons are talented people,” “turn disability into opportunity,” “special abilities” and “high-achieving special students.” These expressions may appear positive, but they often make disability the basis for praise and exceptional treatment rather than recognising persons with disabilities as ordinary rights-holders.

Media also portrays persons with disabilities through struggle, inspiration or comparison with non-disabled persons. For instance, The Express Tribune used the heading on March 8, 2018: “International Women’s Day: Wheelchair-bound, Lozina ‘walks taller’ than able-bodied persons”. If we look closely, the phrase “wheelchair-bound” frames the wheelchair as confinement, while “walks taller” creates an inspirational contrast with “able-bodied persons.”

The worst kind of objectification of persons with disabilities is carried out through their depiction of performing ordinary tasks. For example, the News used “Braving all odds, disabled girl pursuing studies at Islamia College” on November 11, 2018. Such headings frame education or participation as exceptional personal courage. This framing comes at the cost of neglecting accessibility needs, reasonable accommodation and institutional responsibility to support the exercise of these rights.

## Sensationalising Disability

Sensationalism can be attributed to the nature of the beast but when it comes to the depiction of persons with disabilities, media takes it to next level. Media employs both the derogatory language for people with disabilities and disability itself as a sensational hook. Instead of presenting the person, relationship or event in ordinary human terms, media often makes disability the central point of curiosity. For example, Dunya News published a story with the heading “Goongi behri American ko goonga behra Pakistani dulha mil gaya” on November 9, 2016. The heading uses offensive terms “goongi behri” for the woman and “goonga behra” for the man. Similarly, The Express Tribune published story with the heading “American blind girl travels to Pakistan to marry visually impaired cricketer” on November 30, 2018. The marriage in both cases is presented as unusual mainly because persons have speech and hearing impairments and visual impairments.

Disability condition is presented as the main attraction in both the stories whereas it is not the case for both couples.

## Using Disability as the Primary Identity

People have multiple identities and same is the case with people with disabilities. They are citizens, officials, students, teachers, voters, labourers, so on and so forth. Their impairments should not be treated as a defining identity, but media uses disability as the first and most visible identity of the person. That is why, in many headings, impairment appears before name, citizenship, age, role, profession, family context or the actual event. For example, Express News carried a story with the heading “Goonga behra Pakistani naujawan 7 saal baad Bharti jail se raha” (Eng: A speech and hearing impaired Pakistani is released from Indian captivity after seven years) on December 20, 2021, and Jang carried the same heading on December 21, 2021. Similarly, Dunya News Urdu published a story with the heading “Goonga behra shakhs darya-e-Sutlej mein beh kar Kasur pohanch gaya” in July 2023. In both stories, the persons are introduced through “goonga behra” before stories explain detention, return, movement across the river or other circumstances.

At times media doubles down on the description of persons with disabilities by adding layers of disability identities for the same person for sensational reporting. For instance, Dunya News published the heading “Goonga behra mazoor naujawan train ki zad mein aa kar jaan bahaq” (Eng: A speech and hearing-impaired disabled youth dies after hit by a train) on June 18, 2025. The heading combines “goonga behra” with “mazoor”. The heading uses multiple impairment-based labels before the reader even reaches the fact of the accident. The person reported in the story is framed almost entirely through disability.

## Using Outdated and Offensive Expressions

Both Urdu and English media use expressions that are outdated, offensive or derogatory to report persons with different disabilities. Urdu examples include “goonga”, “behra”, “goonga behra”, “andha”, “apahaj”, “langra”, “loola” and “tonda.”

English examples include “deaf and dumb”, “deaf and mute”, “crippled”, “handicap”, “mentally retarded” and “mentally disabled.”



## Platitudes and Patronising Language

Talk is always cheap, costs nothing and politicians are well versed in using platitudes for persons with disabilities. Media publishes these platitudes without holding politicians accountable. That is why media carries expressions such as “mazoor afrad hamari family hain” (Eng: People with disabilities are like our families), “haath pakar kar sarparasti karni chahiye” (Eng: should be supported by hand-holding them), and “khusoosi afrad ki kafalat awaleen tarjeeh”, (Eng: taking care of the disabled should be our priority).

Similar English expressions include “destitute and helpless,” “poor disabled people” and “deserving disabled citizens.” These expressions frame disability through need, poverty and dependency rather than rights, accessibility, inclusion and equal participation.

This pattern is also visible in media headings. For example, Dunya News used “Ghareeb khandanon, nabeena, apahaj aur mazoor afrad ki falah ke liye qaumi samaji iqtisadi registry...” on July 17, 2016. It is obvious to see how people with disabilities are depicted as a group requiring welfare, rather than framing disability as a rights and accessibility issue.

## Linking Disability with Violence or Criminality

Media reporting often dehumanises persons with mental health issues. For example, the story published in Dunya News using the heading: “Nawabshah: Mentally retarded mother kills two daughters” on August 7, 2018. In this heading, the obsolete expression “mentally retarded” appears at the beginning of the crime story. As result, this story ends up creating a direct association between disability or presumed mental condition and violence.

## Using Disability as Central Identity in Violence Against Persons with Disabilities

When a person with disability is victim of violence or crime, media often makes disability the central point of the story instead of violence, abuse or sexual assault against persons with disabilities.

For example, Dawn published “Mentally-challenged woman ‘raped’ by kin in Lodhran” on June 20, 2024. The central issue of the story is alleged sexual violence, police registration of the case, medical examination and arrest of the suspect, but this is not the way it is reported in this story. Disability is made the headline identity of the survivor by placing “mentally-challenged woman” at the beginning of the heading in the story. The report also describes the survivor as “mentally and physically challenged.”

Similarly, Dawn published “Police file FIR over rape of disabled 14-year-old girl in Punjab’s Hafizabad” on June 15, 2025. The heading and the report is problematic at many levels. The story and the heading uses “disabled 14-year-old girl” as the main identifier whereas it is a story about the rape of a child with disability.

These are just two examples from Dawn but print and electronic media regularly frames stories about persons with disabilities in this manner where the core issue are of alleged sexual assault of people with disabilities, registration of FIR, protection of the family and arrest of the suspect, but the headings place disability at the centre of the story.

## Sight-Splaining and the Myth of Inner Vision

Another problem in the media’s depiction of persons with visual impairments is sight-splaining. The focus of sighted people is on explaining blindness mainly through their own imagined experience of darkness, fear, helplessness or exceptional ability. In case of media, it is extremely detrimental to the cause of people

with visual impairments. Instead of focusing on accessibility, education, Braille literacy, mobility, technology, employment and other material barriers faced by blind people, media turns blindness into a metaphor. It first presents blindness as darkness and then compensates it through inner vision, courage, sharper senses or resilience.

Two examples from English dailies would suffice here. On October 28, 2024, an English daily published a story titled “Khaas Foodz offers a unique dinner experience with a side of empathy with Dining in the Dark.” The story asked sighted people to imagine being blindfolded and stated that, for blind people, “the blindfold never lifts, and the darkness becomes your reality.” It says that the visually impaired founders “didn’t let the darkness define them,” which presents them as enterprising, but it also approvingly repeats the unscientific claim that “the blind have sharper hearing and awareness.”

Similarly, another story titled “World Braille Day celebrated,” published on January 5, 2026, repeats the trite and tiring theme “Not disabled by sight, but enriched with insight.” The story describes it as reflecting the “intellectual strength, resilience, and inner vision of the blind community.” The reporter should have focused on Braille literacy, accessibility, education and the practical barriers faced by blind people. Instead, the story peddles the oft-repeated and all too familiar idea of “inner vision” through the sight-versus-insight metaphor.

## Equating Disability with Ignorance and Stupidity

Offensive and derogatory disability terms are not only used to describe persons with disability but to depict state of ignorance and stupidity of non-disabled persons. Disability conditions are often used as a metaphor for ignorance, stupidity or inability to understand. This practice is harmful because it treats blindness, deafness, speech impairment and other disabilities as symbols of ignorance, incompetence or lack of awareness.

One of the clearest examples appeared in a public service message aired by Geo in 2009 in relation to elections and voting. The message included the sentence: “Taleem ke beghair insaan andha, goonga aur behra hota heh.”

This sentence is problematic at two levels. First, it uses words such as “andha,” “goonga” and “behra,” which are insensitive and derogatory. What is even more sinister about this sentence is that it equates lack of education with disability condition and vice versa. Needless to say, it reinforces negative perceptions about persons with disabilities.

This pattern is also common in political communication and is not limited to any one political party. Across party lines, political actors and their supporters have used expressions such as “andha,” “goonga,” “behra,” “deaf,” “dumb” and “blind” to accuse opponents, governments or institutions of ignorance, indifference, or failure to understand public issues.

The most egregious expressions are those that combine several disability terms to describe ignorance and institutional indifference. Phrases such as “hukumat awam ke masail k hawalay say andhi, goongi aur behri ho chuki hai,” “adalatain andhi, goongi aur behri hain,” and “Aqwām-e-Muttahida andhi, goongi aur behri ho gayi hai” use blindness, deafness and speech impairment as symbols of ignorance, silence and inaction.

Such expressions are not harmless figures of speech. Such language reinforces the false idea that disability means ignorance, helplessness or incapacity.

## Legal Framework and Disability Language

It needs to be understood that the issue of disability language in official records, institutional naming and media reporting is not merely a matter of politeness or preferred vocabulary. It is linked with legally recognised rights to dignity, equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, communication, participation and protection from harmful social attitudes. Therefore, it needs to be understood as to how people with disabilities are described and defined under international and national laws.

Pakistan is a State Party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Pakistan signed the Convention on September 25, 2008 and ratified it on July 5, 2011. The Convention recognises that persons with disabilities include persons with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. This definition is important for language reform because it shifts the focus away from the person as the “problem” and towards the barriers created by society, institutions, communication systems and attitudes.

We have already seen how disability-related language as a barrier in the form of linguistic oppression that affects inclusion, dignity and the exercise of rights by persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, the Convention is based on respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy, non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, respect for difference, equality of opportunity and accessibility. These principles are directly relevant to disability language as objectives of this convention will only be achieved if public institutions and media actors to move away from derogatory, euphemistic, pity-based, sensational towards rights-based terminology.

Terms such as “deaf and dumb,” “mentally retarded,” “crippled,” “apahaj,” “goonga behra,” “mazoori ka shikar,” “wheelchair-bound,” “special persons” and “differently-abled” conflict with a dignity-based and rights-based approach because they reduce persons with disabilities to impairment, charity, tragedy, abnormality or exceptionalism.

Article 5 of the Convention requires equality and non-discrimination. It recognises that all persons are equal before and under the law and are entitled to equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination. This means that state institutions should not use language that reinforces unequal treatment or discriminatory assumptions. Official records, institutional names, forms, websites, service categories and public communication should therefore use terminology that recognises persons with disabilities as rights-holders.

Article 8 of the Convention requires States Parties to raise awareness throughout society regarding persons with disabilities and take measures to combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities in all areas of life. Most importantly for media and public communication, Article 8 specifically calls for encouraging all organs of the media to portray persons with disabilities in a manner consistent with the purpose of the Convention. This provides a clear legal basis for discouraging language that sensationalises disability, uses disability as the primary identity, links disability with helplessness or criminality, or presents persons with disabilities as objects of pity or inspiration.

At the national level, the ICT Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2020 recognises equality and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities and requires the government to ensure that every person with disability has the right to be respected for individual dignity and to participate in educational, social,

economic, cultural and other activities without discrimination. It also prohibits public and private institutions from discriminating against persons with disabilities or violating their rights.

## Recommendations

Disability language reform will require sustained efforts involving federal and provincial governments, disability councils, media organisations, civil society organisations, organisations of persons with disabilities, editors, reporters, public officials and political actors. The following recommendations are proposed in this regard.

### 1. Development of Disability Language Guidelines

Federal and provincial Councils on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, established under their respective laws, should develop comprehensive disability language guidelines for use in official records, institutional naming, public communication, media reporting and social media content. These guidelines should cover both English and Urdu terminologies and should clearly identify harmful, derogatory, reductionist, euphemistic, pity-based, inspirational and medicalised expressions that should be avoided.

The guidelines should promote people-first language. In English, expressions such as “persons with disabilities,” “children with disabilities,” “students with disabilities,” “persons with visual impairments,” “persons with speech and hearing impairments,” “persons with physical disabilities,” “persons with intellectual disabilities” and “persons with psychosocial disabilities” should be used according to context.

In Urdu, rights-based expressions should also be standardised and promoted. For example, “maazoor afraid” should be replaced with “afraid baaham mazoori” where appropriate.

### 2. Training of Editors, Reporters and Social Media Teams

Media organisations, press clubs, journalist unions and journalism training institutes should conduct regular training sessions for editors, reporters, headline writers, anchors, producers and social media teams on rights-based disability language. These trainings should explain why expressions such as “deaf and dumb,” “mentally retarded,” “crippled,” “goonga behra,” “andha,” “apahaj,” “mazoori ka shikar,” “wheelchair-bound,” “special persons” and “differently-abled” are harmful, and how they can be replaced with accurate and respectful alternatives.

Training should focus particularly on headlines, tickers, captions, video descriptions and social media posts, because these are often the most visible parts of media reporting.

Reporters and editors should be trained not only to avoid offensive words, but also to avoid harmful framing. Disability should not be used as a sensational hook, the primary identity of a person, a symbol of helplessness, a metaphor for ignorance, or a marker of inspiration merely because a person with disability performs an ordinary activity.

Social media teams of media organisations should also be included in these trainings. Many harmful expressions are reproduced through X posts, Facebook captions, YouTube titles, thumbnails and short video descriptions. A story may be carefully written, but its social media caption may still use offensive, sensational or reductionist language. Media houses should therefore ensure that disability-sensitive editorial review applies equally to print, broadcast and digital platforms.

### 3. Feedback to Editors and Reporters through Social Media

Civil society organisations, organisations of persons with disabilities and disability rights activists should provide regular feedback to editors, reporters, anchors, producers and social media teams when harmful



disability language appears in news reports, headlines, tickers, captions, videos or social media posts. The purpose of this feedback should be corrective and rights-based, not merely critical.

When offensive, derogatory, euphemistic, pity-based, inspirational, sensational or medicalised language is used, the relevant media outlet should be informed through X, Facebook and other social media platforms. The response should identify the problematic word or expression, explain briefly why it is harmful, and suggest a respectful alternative. For example, if a report uses “deaf and dumb,” the response should recommend “person with speech and hearing impairment” or “deaf person,” depending on the context. If a report uses “mentally retarded,” the response should recommend “person with intellectual disability.”

Such feedback should tag the relevant media organisation, editor, reporter or official account where appropriate.

## About Accountability Lab Pakistan

Accountability Lab Pakistan (ALP) is an Islamabad-based local think-and-do tank focused on making governance work for people by supporting active citizens, responsible leaders, and accountable institutions. Our approach reimagines how accountability can be built and sustained, envisioning a governance ecosystem where resources are used effectively, decision-making is inclusive and evidence based, and public institutions respond to citizen needs.

Distinct from traditional approaches, ALP positions accountability as a cross-cutting value embedded across governance systems. This includes work spanning public sector reform, civic engagement, human rights, service delivery, and institutional strengthening. Through knowledge production, leadership development, innovation and institutional reforms, ALP contributes to shaping more transparent, responsive, and resilient governance structures.

ALP's work is anchored in strengthening the relationship between citizens and the state by advancing institutional effectiveness, public trust, and inclusive governance. By integrating research, practice, and coalition-building, the Lab supports reform processes and contributes to a more accountable and responsive governance ecosystem in Pakistan.