The Democratization of Inclusive Education: Political Settlement and the Role of Disabled Peoples Organizations

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Abstract: Inclusive education is a core initiative of United Nations organizations and national governments around the world. In this article, we chronicle the development of a 2019 inclusive education policy in Lesotho by examining the role of organizations of persons with disabilities (DPOs) and their policy advocacy. A standpoint epistemological approach is used, relaying the direct experiences of DPO leaders. We frame these events through political settlement theory, which states that when there is a policy conflict, settlements are drawn between powerful actors (governments) and those advocating for change. This typically occurs when the political or economic price of ignoring or suppressing advocacy groups becomes too high for governments to bear. In this study, a DPO successfully advocated for a new policy through media campaigns, direct engagement of government officials, leveraging donor support, and arguing for accountability around international treaty commitments. The political settlement of DPO and government in Lesotho is instructive about new ways in which inclusive education policies are being developed in the wake of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and increased DPO activism.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for "quality" education for all children by the year 2030. Quality is conceptualized in several ways in the goal's targets, but for the first time in a mainstream set of broad-based educational goals set by the United Nations, the term "inclusive" has been described as a dimension of quality. The words "inclusion" and "inclusive" are used 40 times in the 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations General Assembly 2015), yet the term is not fully conceptualized in the document. UNESCO's recent *Global Education Monitoring Report* aligned with the SDGs, and provided a broad definition of inclusive education that advocated for an education

> that enables every child, youth and adult to learn and fulfil their potential. Gender, age, location, poverty, disability, ethnicity, indigeneity, language, religion, migration or displacement status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, incarceration, beliefs and attitudes should not be the basis for discrimination against anyone in education participation and experience" (UNESCO 2020: 20).

Despite its broad conceptualization, the Global Education Monitoring Report acknowledges that when scholars and policies address inclusion, narratives frequently focus on issues of access to education in mainstream national education settings, i.e., regular schools, for children with disabilities (UNESCO 2020). The call for greater inclusion of children with disabilities in schools is intended to redress drastic inequities faced by this population. For example, Mizunoya, Mitra, and Yamasaki (2018) found that in some countries, more than half of children with disabilities have never been to school at all. When children do gain access to specialized or mainstream schools, their educational needs are often misunderstood or face bullying in classrooms (Norwich and Kelly 2004). For children with disabilities, inadequate

accessibility in schools either means that they are excluded from learning opportunities completely (Mizunoya et al. 2018), face discrimination or bullying in schools (Norwich and Kelly 2004) or exist as provisional citizens in classrooms, integrated only if they can conform to the standards and expectations of normative classrooms (Rodriguez and Garro-Gill 2015, Slee 1998). For these reasons, education policy has been one tool that governments have used to draw attention to, and facilitate resourcing of, inclusive education.

Historically - especially in the Global South - inclusive education policy development has relied on engagement between governments and external specialists. These specialists often consult with global governance organizations and are tasked with providing technical assistance for policy development and implementation. This eventual uptake of exogenous ideas is often referred to in comparative education literature as policy borrowing (Phillips and Ochs 2004, Urwick and Elliott 2010). In the past two decades, nearly 2,000 education plans, policies, or strategies worldwide have made mention of inclusive education (UNESCO, n.d.), indicating that it is an initiative that has gained global notoriety and significant policy spread. Scholars have documented how policies develop through a process of international "attraction" by governments to adopt policies from elsewhere (Phiilips and Ochs 2004) and how teachers grapple with policies once in place (Ball 1993). However, the role of local representational politics - especially as it relates to inclusive education policy development - is an understudied phenomenon.

This article examines how representational advocacy, i.e., policy maneuvering by representatives of a particular population, were instrumental in the development of a new inclusive education policy. In 2019, Lesotho passed an inclusive education policy for the first time in its history. The country had historically had an inclusive education strategy that dated

back to the 1990s (see Mariga and Phachaka 1993, Urwick and Elliott 2010). Unlike the original strategy that was initiated by Lesotho's then monarch and taken up by its government with the support of international aid agencies, much of the advocacy for the 2019 policy was undertaken by persons with disabilities themselves. Advocacy was primarily undertaken by organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), more commonly known by members of these organizations as disabled persons organizations (DPOs).[1] Disability Rights Fund (2021) explains that DPOs are:

> representative organizations or groups of persons with disabilities, where persons with disabilities constitute a majority of the overall staff, board, and volunteers in all levels of the organization. It includes organizations of relatives of PWDs (only those representing children with disabilities, people with intellectual disabilities, and/or the Deafblind) where a primary aim of these organizations is empowerment and the growth of self-advocacy of persons with disabilities (¶ 1).

Slee (2004) argued that inclusive education is an ideological project centered on the politics of recognition. In looking at the project of schooling, he identified that schools have never been meant for "all" and that education systems are very adept at sorting and excluding those who do not fit existing educational structures. For this reason, Slee warned readers about the false discourses of harmonious and diverse constituents coequally creating educational cultures, and acknowledged that true representation in educational systems, by any non-normative population, may require a degree of social antagonism (see also Booth, 2018).

In the sections below, we chronicle the passage of the policy through the standpoint of two activists, highlighting the events through a lens of political settlement theory – a theory that

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[1] Recently DPOs have been referred to by some United Nations entities as Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), which uses people first language. However, we use DPO here as it is the terminology most frequently used by the organizations themselves.

posits that political change occurs when powerful actors (typically in government) "settle" by enacting or changing policies when the cost of maintaining the status quo becomes too expensive. In this case, the educational activists were seeking a form of inclusive education that allowed for children to attend schools in their home communities, feel safe within schools, and provide appropriate accommodations when everyday pedagogies were inaccessible to them.

According to Khan (2010), costs that lead to settlement by governments may be economic or reputational. In such cases, Khan theorizes that governments may acquiesce to the demands of activist bodies if the risk of maintaining current conditions is too high. This specific case informs political settlement theory as well as highlights a shift in discourse in development theory. Historically, marginalized groups have been asked to participate and share their perspectives in development initiatives (see Chambers 1993). Recent evidence, however, points to a shift from participation to representational negotiation by these same groups in policy development (Hickey, Bukenya and Sen 2015).

Theoretical Framework: Political Settlement Theory

As noted above, political settlement is a process whereby powerful (often governmental) and less powerful actors reach some form of agreement on policy or strategy through negotiation after or in place of political conflict. According to Hirvi and Whitfield (2015), these negotiations take place within institutions, or between groups within societies negotiating for resources and often benefitting from their relative power. Hirvi and Whitfield (2015: 139) explain that this political and institutional negotiation "creates a kind of equilibrium, as the distribution of benefits reinforces the distribution of power in society, which persists for a period of time".

Political engagement, according to Leftwich, is "processes of conflict, co-operation and negotiation on making decisions about how resources are to be owned, used, produced and distributed" (2004:101). Hickey et al. (2015) applied Leftwich's conceptualizations of politics and attached them to the word "inclusion" in development, highlighting that the concept of inclusion may require a vying for resources by different constituencies. The political nature of inclusion was further explained by Gupta and Vegelin (2016), who differentiated "social inclusion" as a process of welcoming and accommodation for excluded individuals to join existing structures from "relational inclusion", which examines the power and resource relations that created exclusion in the first place and pursues differential or affirmative action resourcing to counteract exclusion.

Khan (2010) acknowledged the political nature of change and predicted one way in which this happens is through settlements among actors. Political settlement theory is explicitly based on power and how power dynamics work in governments and among governments' clients. Khan (2010) identified that power traditionally resides among those with the most wealth and highest levels of income and status in society, but such power can be disrupted by less powerful groups that can organize or leverage external support. Realignment of resources, according to Khan, occurs when the enforceability of current power arrangements becomes too costly (economically or politically) and a new settlement emerges. Often, settlements present a minimum level of redistribution needed to establish or re-establish the economic and political viability of powerful groups.

The role of DPOs in the development of inclusive education worldwide can be characterized by Khan's (2010) explanation of power, stability, and conflict concerning educational plans:

If a significant group refuses to accept the distribution of benefits generated by the institution, it can begin to undermine its enforcement in a variety of ways ranging from attempting to change the rule through legal processes, violating some or all of the rules and accepting the consequences, or by engaging in open conflicts. All these responses imply costs for all those involved. The transaction costs of enforcement are likely to go up depending on the intensity of the resistance and political stability can decline to different extents depending on the strategies of resistance and confrontation that are deployed by different parties (2010: 23).

In the following paragraphs, we briefly recount how DPOs came to take on the role of inclusive education advocates and changemakers. DPOs have been involved in advocacy work for decades worldwide, including advocacy for the passage of the 2006 United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*, which has now been ratified by 182 nations around the world (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2020). The following sections tie together political settlement theory, disability rights discourses, and advocacy for inclusive education from a national case example in Lesotho.

DPOs and Disability Rights

DPOs are not new partners in development or social policy development, however, their role has evolved over the past several decades. Meyers (2014) argued that the advent of DPOs in the Global South was an importation from political organization models that were effective in the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom. During the time of civil rights struggles in both countries, persons with disabilities identified themselves as equal rights-bearers within their respective countries and organized for social change. Such political organization either occurred through groups of people with specific disability identities (e.g., persons who were deaf, blind, or

had physical disabilities) or, later, through umbrella, pan-disability organizations that saw power in numbers for articulating demands (Fleisher and Zames 2001).

Disability rights organizations in the Global North were further able to move their agendas through the conceptualization of the "social model of disability". This model was articulated first by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) (Baldwinson 2019) and later expanded by Disability Studies scholar Michael Oliver (1996). The social model upended a long tradition of understanding disability as a medical condition by considering bodily impairment and societal barriers/stigma as separate items, arguing that disability occurs as a result of the limitations society places on individuals with impairments, rather than vice versa. This model was later acknowledged by the World Health Organization (2002) reframing its stance on disability to focus on a "biopsychosocial model", which considers both impairments of functioning and environmental barriers to societal participation (including issues of accessibility, prejudice, and ableist laws). However, Oliver and Barnes suggested that the biopsychosocial model remains committed, at least in part, to medical models and fails to provide enough acknowledgement of the social and political dimensions of societal disablement.

The focus on social and rights models started nearly 50 years ago by UPIAS fueled a shift in perspective of persons with disabilities and their advocates away from passive recipients of services to active voices in political processes. James Charlton's book *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment* (1989) documented a reframing of disability by advocates as an issue of social oppression rather than a result of pathology or inability of an individual with a disability to function in society. Charlton acknowledged disability as a political issue on a world systems level, arguing that "everyday life is informed by where and how individuals, families and communities are incorporated into a world-system dominated by the

few" (24). Charlton went on to explain that the status of persons with disabilities could be considered either sociologically ostracized or politically "superfluous" (24), necessitating a change.

Over time, DPOs began to fill a political void and demand more, drawing on inspiration from early disability rights movements in the US and UK. In the Global South, however, the role of DPOs has not always been strictly rights-based advocacy. In a forthcoming chapter, Mehrotra (in press) indicates that in the South Asian context, disability advocacy groups are often on the front lines of service provision and rehabilitation efforts, in addition to engaging in rights-based activities. According to Mehrotra, medical-social model dichotomies are often blurred in settings where both rehabilitative options and rights are both in short supply. Meyers (2014) found that in some cases, funding agencies influenced the focus of DPOs beyond what Mehrotra called a broad-based "social development issue" into strictly rights-based approaches. In an ethnographic study of Nicaraguan DPOs, Meyers found that funding agencies had "a narrow concern with political empowerment that did not resonate with a local focus on addressing material needs" (459).

The limitations of human rights models and disability are well-documented. Meekosha and Soldatic (2011), for example, highlighted that human rights models for disability do not often acknowledge the role that colonization itself plays in disablement. In such cases, human rights agendas seek to label governments as human rights abusers but do not acknowledge how Northern oppression (through invasions, environmental degradation, and unfair economic conditions) may create impairment in the Global South. Indeed, in Lesotho, the focus of this country, there are frequent mentions in media about men returning from South Africa with mining injuries, children exposed to malnutrition due to a lack of redistributive or social

protection policies, and unsafe working conditions – for primarily women - in internationally-owned textile factories. Disablement might happen in any of these instances but is not the typical focus of disability human rights agendas.

This article, however, focuses on formal education of children, with and without disabilities. Acknowledging the ongoing influence of powerful global actors to shape educational directions of both governments and large donor organizations worldwide (Zapp and Dahmen 2017), the following section will outline the gradual politicization of DPOs, what this means for inclusive education, and how political settlement may produce new opportunities that have hitherto been missing from the discourse and practice of inclusive education. This contemporary review begins with the CRPD, arguably the strongest international policy related to disability that has ever been drafted by the United Nations, its member states, and disability advocates (Mégrét 2008). In this section, we argue that the political power described by Khan (2010) is spelled out in this international agreement and its supporting documents and allows for points of leverage by DPOs in shaping national inclusive education policy.

<center>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</center>

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is a multilateral human rights treaty first introduced to the United Nations by the Government of Mexico. Herro's (2019) tracer interviews of participants in the pre-negotiation stage of the treaty revealed that some believed the Convention represented a new opportunity for Mexico, under its new Fox administration, to signal to the world that it was interested in human rights in general, and especially for persons with disabilities who are over-represented among the world's economically poor (Kayess and French 2008). The original resolution to develop the convention was put forth in 2001 and 19 other nations co-sponsored with Mexico.

Throughout the pre-negotiation process, advocacy groups and organizations of persons with disabilities pushed national delegations to support the treaty. At one point during the pre-negotiation process, advocacy groups went as far as issuing public badges of honor and dishonor to highlight national delegations' actions toward the proposed treaty. Countries with dishonorable badges often worked quickly to repair reputational damage (Herro 2019).

The CRPD represented a paradigm shift in discursive framing of disability by explicitly addressing societal inclusion as a human rights issue. The Convention, according to Mégrét (2008), is an instrument that ensures "plural rights". Mégrét argued that "(s)pecific instruments are needed not only to adapt the existing language of rights but because there is a dimension of the experience of specific groups that is inherent to them and which almost requires the creation of new rights" (2008: 496). Mégrét points to rights such as autonomy, living in community, and participation in political life that are not highlighted in human rights treaties like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but are germane to the experience of persons with disabilities. McCallum (2010), however, argues that the CRPD does not introduce new rights but accentuates that persons with disabilities have been historically excluded from civil, political, economic, and social rights long promised by United Nations treaties. McCallum argues that instead of introducing new rights, CRPD "seeks to enhance the realization of people with disabilities of existing human rights" (6). Like many legal instruments, scholars have interpreted the Convention's aims and scope differently, but there is widespread agreement among disability scholars that it represented a new era in disability rights through its explicit language about specific rights that persons with disabilities can expect to enjoy by nature of their humanness (Mégrét 2008) and by the enforceability of these rights at the state and international levels among ratifying nations (McCallum 2010).

To address rights-based and standpoint gaps, the Convention, through Article 4 - General Obligations, mandates that persons with disabilities be closely consulted and actively involved in the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement various articles of the CRPD (United Nations 2006: Art.4). Article 33 on national implementation and monitoring also mandates that DPOs be involved and participate fully in the monitoring process (United Nations, 2006 Art 3.3). Globally, the disability advocacy organization Disability Rights Protection International (DRPI) has produced a set of tools that can support monitoring of laws and policies, personal experiences with disabilities, and societal attitudes (DRPI 2010, Sampson 2015). At the national level, DPOs have been an integral part of the development, implementation and monitoring of the CRPD and inclusive education.

Once the Convention was finalized and nations began ratifying it, gaps became evident that needed further clarification. It took over a decade from the CRPD's inception to finalize its comments. General Comment No. 4, focused on education, received 88 written comments by over 90 organizations, individuals, and State parties before a smaller group finalizing its guidance. The final version of Comment 4 on Article 24, focused on the right to inclusive education. General Comment No. 4 explicitly details the important role of DPOs in inclusive education policy, implementation and monitoring. The articles first set out that DPOs, persons with disabilities and their families "must be recognized as partners and not merely recipients of education" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - OHCHR, 2016: 3). This includes active involvement in policy development as well as being consulted in Education Sector Plans that should be developed to indicate how countries will progressively realize their respective policies and the goal of universal inclusive education. The document further clarifies that DPOs should receive capacity building in policy advocacy to be able to

effectively consult on policies, implementation and monitoring of inclusive education. The CRPD's General Comment No. 4 further implores State parties to "ensure that information about the right to education itself, and how to challenge denial or violations must be widely disseminated and publicized to persons with disabilities, with the involvement of OPDs" (OHCHR 2016, pg. 21).

General comment No. 4 also emphasizes the important role that DPOs should play in monitoring of policy including involvement in the development of disability-inclusive indicators to assess the implementation of the SDGs. The document states "Persons with disabilities, through OPDs, should be involved in both the determination of the indicators as well as the collection of data and statistics" (United Nations, 2016:24). Although the guidance in both the CRPD and General comment No. 4 is clear, the reality is that many DPOs are not part of either policy development or monitoring. The role of DPOs in policy development and monitoring is emerging, but gaps remain. For example, a 2018 study conducted by the United States-based DPO, United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD), found that of the 50 of DPOs worldwide surveyed, only 39 percent of DPOs received any training on how to monitor the CRPD and develop alternative monitoring reports to submit to the CPRD Committee (Shettle, Hayes and Hodge 2018). Despite gaps, the policy and political space for DPOs in inclusive education is emerging and is mandated in CRPD. The following section will provide evidence of this, with a case example from Lesotho.

National Case Example: Lesotho

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an important treaty because it provides an opportunity for activists in signatory countries to make legal arguments for activities such as inclusive education. The role of persons with disabilities has become central in

this activism. Within the 163 countries that signed the Convention, DPOs may have increasing mechanisms to use rights discourses to advocate for change. Unlike previous roles as "participants", DPOs also have the power to disrupt educational planning and monitoring arrangements that have heretofore been driven by governmental policy experts and external technical assistance. Indeed, as DPO presence emerges worldwide, these organizations have begun to negotiate new settlements related to educational policies related to inclusion. In this section, we highlight how DPO engagement and negotiation drove the language for Lesotho's new inclusive education policy (Ministry of Education and Training 2018).

Lesotho's inclusive education policy was written in 2018 and released publicly in November 2019. As a country, Lesotho has had an inclusive education strategy since the early 1990s. Mariga and Phachaka (1993), for example, traced the Government of Lesotho's first conversations about education for children with disabilities to the late 1980s when King Moshoeshoe II (Lesotho's monarch at that time) called for its government to 'do more' for children with disabilities.

King Moshoeshoe II's pronouncement and subsequent initiatives through his charitable organization *Hlokomela Bana* (care for people) inspired action within Parliament to develop a suitable way to educate children with disabilities. At this time, children who were blind and deaf were already being educated in church-sponsored residential schools in the cities of Maseru and Leribe. In what might be observed as a "policy window" (see Kindgon 1995), Mosheshoe II's push to action led to Lesotho's early participation in policy borrowing (Phillips and Ochs 2004). Inspired by outside consultants, Lesotho's Ministry of Education and Training adopted a strategy of inclusion that was growing as a global norm (in part due to the popularity of UNESCO's 1994 *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*) and partially

because of what Phillips and Ochs (1994) call "internalisation" of international policy discourse. Two of the original driving factors in Lesotho's strategy were its commitment to children living in their home communities and extended family networks as well as an acknowledgement that Lesotho is predominantly a rural country and constructing special education centers was not cost-effective (Johnstone and Chapman 2009).

The strategy continued through the 1990s and into the early 2000s through a series of in-service education workshops, typically one week in duration, for teachers in Lesotho's 10 districts that were provided by the Ministry of Education, often with financial support from international donors. In time, the pace of the Ministry's one-week in-service workshops slowed, and a study in the mid-2000s revealed that the pace of workshops could never reach the number of schools that were intended to be inclusive (Johnstone and Chapman 2009). Beginning in the late 1990s and extending through the present, an alternative to in-service training was the development of a special education program at Lesotho College of Education (Lesotho College of Education, 2016).

Lesotho's strategy was considered bold and earned it a level of reputational authority in its region. According to Steiner-Khamsi (2016), pinning local policies to global norms is one way that governments can certify their national agendas. Such policy borrowing has been the case since Lesotho's first strategy and has continued through today. At the same time, Lesotho's strategy was acknowledged for its innovativeness (Johnstone and Chapman 2009), it also was criticized by educational experts who questioned the country's capacity to provide quality educational opportunities for children with disabilities. Urwick and Elliott (2010), for example, critiqued the strategy for being overly linked to international human rights "orthodoxy", without considering "evidence" and local context (146). The authors argued that

The Lesotho experience highlights the folly that is too often present in attempts to

import western theorising and orthodoxy into the educational practices of low-income

nations (Grigorenko 2007). The severe constraints under which Lesotho operates are

such that the grand inclusion programme of the 1990s, fuelled by the rhetoric of

human rights, had little chance of taking hold and was very unlikely to serve the needs

of those with complex disabilities (146).

Mosia (2014) further noted that Lesotho's strategy was untenable because of a lack of

capabilities by teachers to facilitate inclusive classrooms.

Noticeably absent from these critiques, however, is the analysis of the politics of policy

development or critical assessments of how disability is understood in Lesotho. Urwick and

Elliott (2010) acknowledged that an umbrella DPO, Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled

(LNFOD), was involved in Lesotho's original strategy development in the late 1990s – along

with "influences from a Canadian consultant" (2010: 142), but little is known why it took nearly

three decades for Lesotho to produce a comprehensive inclusive education policy and how the

language of its new strategy came to pass.

Further, although much of the analysis of inclusive education has taken place through

comparative, policy, or resourcing lenses, there is some evidence to suggest that what Miles

(2000) calls "cultural" understanding of disability are nuanced and complex. For example,

Lesotho was identified as one of 25 countries in Africa in which persons with albinism have

faced abuse or have been murdered (Nkrumah 2019) and have faced abuse or neglect at home

(UN Population Fund in press). For example, interviews for a disability analysis in Lesotho (in

press) revealed a variety of reasons why abuse and neglect may occur. There is a segment of the

population that believes disability is a curse and may draw upon traditional medicines to "cure"

disabilities. Neglect also occurs, however, when parents must leave the home to find work and do not have adequate childcare. Some of the children who have faced neglect are school-aged but were turned away from local schools for admission. The situation for children with disabilities is nuanced and complex and informed by socioeconomic conditions. According to a recent SINTEC report (2020), households with persons with disabilities are often larger, have more dependents, and have less dietary diversity. All of these conditions may cause economic and interpersonal strain.

At the same time, impairment in rural communities is often considered a banal part of the human condition. Broad initiatives related to human rights, in some communities, are irrelevant in the sense that disability is not considered a barrier to participation in rural life. Sefotho (2021) for example, reports on how impairment in one community was considered simply one of many features of a community member and that community belongingness was not impacted by impairment status. Indeed, for every interpersonal story of oppression and abuse in Lesotho, there is likely another of inclusion and belongingness.

In the reporting above we seek to avoid both essentializing 'exotic' representations of cultural constructions of disability that are often highlighted in comparative education research, such as a focus on curse narratives. At the same time, we point to instances of community inclusion but do not wish to paint all of Lesotho's rural responses to disability as loving and inclusive. At the aggregate level, the situation is complex and punctuated by both horrific cases of abuse and opportunities for inclusion.

Implications for the educational participation of children with disabilities are further complicated by Lesotho's long entanglement with Christian missionaries and their schools. Upon independence, Lesotho's government envisioned education as a "three-legged pot" supported by

the government, church, and parents, but the Government of Lesotho has slowly sought greater control over curriculum, teacher training, and policy (Mokotso 2016). One example of this is the case of children with disabilities, who historically have been educated and boarded in church-run special schools. The inclusive education strategy was one example of an initiative intended to provide the Government of Lesotho greater control over educational processes in its country. Even with greater control, however, children with disabilities are enrolled at disproportionately lower rates than their non-disabled peers. Such was the reason for the policy advocacy highlighted in this study.

Locally-based organizations (such as DPOs) can both acknowledge interpersonal and cultural understandings of disability that outside agencies cannot and can also advocate for structural changes that can promote and reinforce greater inclusivity at the national level. LNFOD, the nation's largest DPO, served on both the original "Special Education Steering Committee" and trained both teachers and activists in Lesotho's original inclusive education strategy of the 1990s and early 2000s (Khatleli et al. 1995). Over time, however, Lesotho's bold vision of inclusivity gradually eroded as new special residential schools began to arise around the country, sometimes with church backing and other times run by social entrepreneurs with charitable connections around the globe (United Nations Populations Fund in press). Midway through the 2010s, LNFOD began to identify limitations of the decades-old strategy and a gradual policy preference shift away from inclusive education toward a special education model, which relied on separate schooling for children with disabilities.

Standpoint Epistemology and the Politics of Inclusive Education

Although some documentation exists, little is still known about Lesotho's inclusive education strategy and eventual 2019 policy from the perspective of DPOs. This section draws

upon standpoint epistemology to interpret the events from the mid-2010s to present concerning the evolution and eventual passage of Lesotho's Inclusive Education Policy through a lens and perspective of political organization of DPOs, activated through disruption of status quo, and eventual settlement in a new policy.

Standpoint epistemology foregrounds the lived experience and situated knowledge of individuals. In this case, Nkhasi Sefuthi provides a historic overview of the political engagement of a DPO through their lived experiences. The perspectives written in this interview were compiled through a series of two interviews between Christopher Johnstone and Sefuthi, followed by an additional interview with a second policy advocate. Johnstone conducted the interview, transcribed data, and analyzed for content. Sefuthi biographical experience was the core data source for this article, and thus he was considered an author not a research participant. Sefuthi then added further perspective and nuance to the first draft of this article and identified a second activist to interview for additional perspective. Standpoint epistemologies have been embraced by feminist (O'Brien Hallstein 2000) and disability studies (Buzzanell 2003) scholars as a means of both centering the experience of groups marginalized in research and identifying the unique standpoints of individuals. They are not meant to generalize, but to locate specific perspectives. We argue that the standpoint of DPO leaders can provide an important vantage point for understanding how DPOs, buttressed by international treaties (CRPD) and through their activism, are democratizing and politically influencing inclusive education policy.

Policy Development and the Standpoint of a DPO

This section relays the first-person perspective of Sefuthi and is supplemented by interview data with another DPO leader who participated in policy development processes in Lesotho. Sefuthi led the DPO effort for inclusive education policy development in Lesotho. The

standpoint data below tell the story of Lesotho's political development of inclusive education policy. In this case, first-person narratives are the data that relay an example of DPO engagement in policy development.

> [Sefuthi]: We could already see that there were some limitations in terms of understanding the concept of inclusive education, especially from government officials, because they were still holding on to some special education[2] concepts, which they thought were quite important and should not be left behind.

The process of political engagement began with pre-engagement work by LNFOD and its partners. Understanding how the government conceptualized inclusive education was a starting point. In this case, government officials embraced a model of special education, which would deliver educational opportunities through segregated sites or alternative curricula. LNFOD's vision of inclusive education focused on a singular adaptable curriculum that would be accessible, even with accommodations, to students with disabilities. The next step for the DPO, after acknowledging the differences in conceptualizations of educational goals, was direct engagement. Sefuthi below describes how this started, with further strategic insights provided by another informant for this article, who at the time of policy negotiations was serving as Executive Director for the Lesotho National League of Visually Impaired Persons (LNLVIP).

> [Sefuthi]: We got some support from our partners and we tried to organize required meetings with different stakeholders for the development of this policy. And we also presented a lot of papers before the senior management of the Ministry of Education,

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[2] 'Special education' here refers to segregated education of children with disabilities, often in residential settings away from their home communities. The curriculum in such settings is often center-based and not linked to the national curriculum.

trying to explain concepts they didn't understand or maybe they didn't care that much

about them.

LNFOD and partners (including LNLVIP) learned quickly how to gain the attention of powerful

actors who could sway policy. According to the former director of LNLVIP, investing in

conference rooms improved both the legitimacy and attractiveness of the negotiations to various

actors. LNLVIP observed that "when the meeting was not held in a nice place" such as LNFOD

offices, lower-level government representatives would attend, but if the meetings "were in

hotels, I want to assure you that a bigger number of people came from the ministry and other

stakeholders" (personal communication, Thabiso Masenyetse, April 23, 2021). Sefuthi

commented that information exchanges then evolved into public awareness campaigns, designed

to put reputational pressure on the government to take policy action, similar to the way advocacy

groups used reputational pressure to push for approval of the CRPD over a decade earlier.

> [Sefuthi]: We had to make a lot of noise. If it were not for that noise, I don't think the
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> policy would have been adopted, because we had to speak over the radio and speak on
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> television, in newspapers, telling about the need for government to adopt this, trying to
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> push the government so that they need to speed up this process.
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> If it were not for the advocacy from LNFOD and these partners, this policy would not
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> have been developed by the Ministry of Education. Even though they (MOET) saw a
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> problem that the children were struggling to learn…, they were still complacent, and
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> (believed) that children who can succeed will still succeed (regardless of other support
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> measures). It was a kind of 'survival of the fittest' model whereby those (students) who
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> are powerful are able to break through and those that remain, they will fall. Indeed, the

government, as we know, is charged with development of policies and it has been doing

this work for other groups, but for persons with disabilities it looks like we may be the

ones who have to ask for this policy and its implementation, and if not then it will not be

done...[3]

The final quote by Sefuthi demonstrates how inclusive education policy development is

emerging as a political act. Although disabled activists were among the first to advocate for

special education and special needs education in the US and UK respectively, LNFOD

demonstrates how inclusive education policy hinged on rights-based frameworks are emerging

through political activism of OPDs in new settings such as Lesotho.

The Price of Advocacy

Eventually, the policy passed. In 2019, Lesotho launched its first-ever inclusive education

policy. The policy includes direct quotes from the CRPD about how inclusive education is

defined and will be overseen by the Special Education Unit of the Ministry of Education and

Training (Government of Lesotho, 2019). A brief settlement was reached. The government

avoided reputational damage of appearing to be disinterested in the needs of children with

disabilities. After policy passage, LNFOD acknowledged the role they played as both difficult

and necessary.

[Sefuthi]. Our advocacy is not without challenges. Sometimes challenging issues such as

asking the government to put into place inclusive education has not been easy because

sometimes the government feels like we are fighting them. If we are asking them for the

design and implementation of inclusive education, and then we are citing some of the

statistics that show that children with disabilities are not accessing education, sometimes

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[3] Referring to the experience that if people with disabilities do not take up the advocacy for inclusive education policy, it may not occur.

they take it negatively instead of taking it positively. So, they will pass policy but with some issues. In this sense that they were not happy that we raised that issue, but now they are only doing it now because there is public pressure for them to do it.

So, it is not like we are their friends, or they like us because we are helping them to achieve what they should be doing. They don't consider it to be their work, rather they feel like we are too inquisitive, and we are making things difficult for them, that is the attitude. They never acknowledge our role in advocating for things such as policy but rather they would just accept this simply because someone, maybe a (development) partner or someone from outside may acknowledge what we are doing, but we have never gotten any acknowledgement from any government department. Despite everything we have done for this country, we are not seen favorably at all.

Sefuthi's quote above demonstrates that advocacy and political pressure comes at a price. Public challenges of powerful actors may result in political wins but can also leave activists in difficult positions with their governments. Although LNFOD's leadership laments the lack of acknowledgement from government officials, Lesotho's DPO leaders also know they played an important role in their nation's history. The former director of LNLVIP, who identifies as having a disability, concluded "If not for DPOs the world would be very difficult, with no light at all" (personal communication, Thabiso Masenyetse, April 23, 2021).

Summary

Policy advocacy is not a new phenomenon in inclusive education. However, the case of LNFOD and inclusive education represents an interesting occurrence of political settlement that emerged through a confluence of global and local events. This case highlights the confluence of

1) framing of inclusive education as a human rights issue, 2) an increased willingness of DPOs to advocate for these rights through direct engagement with government ministries and public awareness campaigns, and 3) a willingness of international donors and development partners to fund convening meetings to help facilitate advocacy, yet not be conversation leaders. The case of LNFOD demonstrates that DPOs are openly sharing lived experiences of persons with disabilities to exert reputational pressure on a government. In this case, such pressure was accompanied by rights-based discourses of inclusive education and an insistence that governments live up to their international commitments (such as the CRPD). In this national case example, LNFOD made "noise" when they were dissatisfied with a gradual slippage into a special education model in Lesotho and its government's satisfaction with such slippage.

Discussion: Making Noise, Making Peace, then Making Noise Again

The theory of political settlement is a useful tool to explain the development of inclusive education policies as they relate to children with disabilities. Although recent conceptualizations of inclusive education are broad and focus on universal conceptualizations of *all*, much of the research and policies that draw on the discourse of "inclusion" still have a strong focus on children with disabilities (UNESCO, 2020). The reason for these discourses, according to LNFOD and other activists, is simple. The Sustainable Development Goals and other global education proclamations have made a "quality turn", whereby governments and international organizations are increasingly shifting their efforts beyond access goals to examining quality (Sayed and Moriarty, 2020: 194-5). For students with disabilities, however, access is still a fundamental issue, making inclusive policies imperative.

Although inclusive education has been a structure that has been recommended by United Nations proclamations as early as 1994 (UNESCO 1994), data from Lesotho indicate that special

education is still seen as an attractive option by governments. This often occurs even when governments have signed international treaties committing to inclusion. Readers should also note that inclusive education is generally not considered the best option for children who are deaf unless there is a substantive opportunity for students to use sign language for academics and socialization (World Federation of the Deaf 2018). The authors of this paper do not advocate for inclusive education for children who are deaf unless it is in a sign language immersive environment.

Despite what appears to be widespread support for inclusive education - as it is spelled out in the Convention's Article 24 and General Comment Number 4 - inclusive education still appears to be an elusive goal for governments worldwide. The most frequently cited reasons for this are a lack of resources and a lack of technical expertise (Urwick and Eliott 2010). In this article, however, we argue that another answer may be a lack of political will on the part of governments to develop policies and implement this educational approach. This political landscape is increasingly informed by DPO activity.

In the case of Lesotho, if the view that inclusive education is an unattainable goal is accepted as a policy truth (see Urwick and Elliott 2010), then political settlement theory and advocacy of DPOs provides a counterpoint. In this case, there was a gradual governmental and societal acceptance that allowed for slippage to segregated education. This slippage occurred from what was once considered a progressive inclusive strategy. It was at this point that LNFOD began to "make noise" and push for a new policy that directly spelled out new terms and conditions for inclusive education in Lesotho.

The disruption caused by LNFOD, an organization that has been around for decades, can be explained in many ways. First, as indicated above by both Meyers (2014) and Mehrotra (in

press), one of the roles that DPOs are now playing is that of a political instigator. This role has been critiqued by Meyers and Mehrotra as the importation of rights agendas driven by global or external organizations. The interaction and between LNFOD and its international supporters bears further investigation and follow-on study, as would a study that considered other actors such as the church, parents, or teachers. In this study, international actors appeared to be supporting LNFOD's work by providing resources for high-level meetings. This finding differs from other research in this area. For example, Wenbi (2009) found that there was complete erasure of disability in large NGO agendas, and when the present was characterized by neocolonial discourses. The involvement of outside actors appears to align more closely with Meyers' (2014) assertion that global disability advocacy and United Nations organizations often shout through a "megaphone" about rights, and structure activities and inputs so that local DPOs act as an "echo chamber" for global initiatives rather than assert or determine their own agendas. There was no direct evidence in this study that LNFOD was coerced into using rights language. Instead, such language appeared to be a tool for LNFOD to secure resources for their agenda and the type of policy outcome its membership desired.

These findings represent a nuanced connection between national political action and international supporters. At no time in the conversation with Sefuthi or Masenyetse imply that international agencies were applying pressure to LNFOD or LNLVIP to carry out global agendas while leaving behind local initiatives. However, the language of the CRPD and the commitments that the Government of Lesotho made to the Convention were used as points of leverage to push for an inclusive education policy and articulate a vision of inclusion in Lesotho. Financial support was provided by outside agencies to incentivize government participation in negotiations. It is unclear from this study whether such support would have been provided for

other locally initiated activities. In the events leading up to policy change, LNFOD worked tactically through local media outlets and aimed at shifting public opinion about disability and inclusive education by applying reputational pressure on the government. This activity was reported to be an initiative devised and implemented by LNFOD alone based on their knowledge of what might be most effective in the context of Lesotho.

In conclusion, as Bebbington (2015) and Hickey et al. (2015) argue that the concept of inclusive development is increasingly informed by representational politics. Such politics elevate the role of organizations like DPOs from mere participants in policy processes to powerful actors who can disrupt an accepted policy status quo. In this case, the tactical approach made by LNFOD was to leverage international resources and treaties and connect with local stakeholders through mass media to shape public opinion. In the case of Lesotho, the first political settlement was reached, as the country's new inclusive education policy was launched in 2019, with language that reflected a rights-based perspective on inclusive education for children with disabilities. At present, momentum from the policy launch has led to new excitement, but LNFOD is already raising concerns about a lack of an implementation plan and may soon again "make noise" to create circumstances for political settlement on an implementation strategy.

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