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The politics of social protection in Nepal: State infrastructural power and implementation of the Scholarship Programme

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Abstract

This paper explores the dynamics shaping the implementation of Nepal's School Scholarship Programme, an educational assistance programme that provides cash stipends to primary and secondary students of marginalised communities. Drawing on fieldwork in four districts – Ilam, Saptari, Lalitpur and Jumla – this paper makes two distinct arguments. First, it highlights the importance of infrastructural power to the implementation of social transfers – especially the limited capacity of higher levels of the state to monitor effectively the actions of lower levels. Second, it concludes that programme design can compensate for some of the limitations of state infrastructural power – especially the use of categorical targeting to distribute scholarships that has emerged from social justice framing of the scholarship programme. The limitations of state infrastructural power are especially keenly felt with respect to the disbursement of scholarships. As such, limited state infrastructural power leads to delayed and reduced payments that are likely to undermine the potential of the programme to effect social justice.

Keywords: Nepal, School Scholarship programme, infrastructural power, categorical targeting, social protection, policy framing

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Abbreviations and acronyms

BPEP	Basic Primary Education Programme
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CPN–M	Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist
CPN–UML	Communist Party of Nepal – Unified Marxist Leninist
DEO	District education office
DoE	Department of Education
DSMC	District Scholarship Management Committee
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESID	Effective States and Inclusive Development
FGD	Focus group discussion
GoN	Government of Nepal
ICG	International Crisis Group
IEMIS	Integrated Educational Management Information System
KII	Key informant interview
MoE	Ministry of Education
MNO	Mongol National Organisation
NC	Nepali Congress
NCP	Nepal Community Party
NEFIN	Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities
NPC	Nepal Planning Commission
NPR	Nepalese Rupees
PPTS	Pro-Poor Targeted Scholarship
PTA	Parent teacher association
RP	Resource person
SSI	Semi-structured interview
SSMC	School-level scholarship management committee
SMC	School management committee
SSRP	School sector reform plan
VDC	Village development committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USD	United States Dollar

1. Introduction

Social protection schemes have emerged in Nepal as a crucial national priority and a means of making the Nepali state both inclusive and effective. Two distinct sets of literatures have emerged to explain the growth of social protection in Nepal. One strand focuses on the adoption of such schemes, affirming that these have emerged as a response to chronic social exclusions in the country (Kabeer, 2009) with the intention to foster nation-building and political healing (Koehler and Mathers, 2017). These studies also affirm the important role played by the social and political movements to put pressure on the Nepali state to ensure inclusive programmes (Lawoti, 2013, Hangen, 2010) and strengthen the process of democratisation (Drucza, 2017). The second strand of the literature focuses on the impact of social protection schemes. These literatures point to the ways in which these schemes strengthen the relationship between states and citizens (Drucza, 2019), have a positive impact on beneficiaries' lives (Sijapati, 2017) and offer different avenues for state–citizen engagement (Pradhan, 2019).

By drawing attention to the varied capacities, discourses and interests at different layers of state bureaucracy, this paper explores the complex dynamics shaping the implementation of education assistance in Nepal, popularly known as the 'Scholarship Programme'. This programme provides cash stipends to primary and secondary students of marginalised communities. The Scholarship Programme exemplifies the 'protective' dimension of social protection, designed as it is to provide recipients relief from deprivation (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, 2009). Furthermore, by promoting education among historically oppressed groups, the Scholarship Programme emphasises the 'transformative' dimension of social protections (Sijapati, 2017). Its multi-faceted dimension makes the Scholarship Programme a crucial component of social protection schemes in Nepal, and it demands to be studied more extensively than at present.

The effective implementation of national social transfer programmes such as the Scholarship Programme places demands on state capacity and necessitates a variety of actions throughout the programme implementation process and at different levels of the state. States must generate valid data to select the beneficiaries of social transfers. They must ensure that conditionalities, if any, are met. They must develop and operate monitoring mechanisms. Comprehensive information needs to be disseminated to target populations to access the services. And, finally, the services need to be delivered on time and to the populations identified as eligible recipients of welfare. These distinct functions place varied demands on the capacity of the state to translate commitments by national government into effective distribution of social transfers. Effective implementation at all the stages of the programme is crucial for the realisation of the intended objectives and, ultimately, to assess the claims of these programmes as instruments of social inclusion.

To analyse the implementation process, this paper draws on Michael Mann's (1984: 113) concept of state infrastructural power – its logistical capacity to implement a

political decision across the national territory. It brings this perspective into conversation with Migdal's insight that, rather than a unitary actor, the state should be conceptualised as a network of distinct organisations, each of which has their own interests, incentives, ideas and capacities (Migdal 2001). As such, the motivations of the different agencies that comprise the state and the relations between the component parts of the state are vital factors shaping the state's infrastructural power (Migdal, 1988; Soifer, 2015; also see Soifer, 2008; and Soifer and vom Hau, 2008). The capacity of state agencies, and their interest in implementing the programme, evolves differently across the departments and tiers of the state. Thus, higher-tier states may often appear more coherent than those at lower tiers. In addition, different tiers of the state may frame social problems differently and justify the rationale for implementation accordingly. These insights assume particular significance in the context of the political instabilities that have marked Nepal's recent history. While the central state in Nepal consolidated around commitments to social inclusion, the local state was adversely affected by protracted uncertainty. These processes of state-formation are key to understanding the infrastructural power of the state, the relative capacities of different components of the state, and the implementation process of social protection schemes. Departing from characterisation of states as 'strong' and 'weak' or successful and failed (Collier et al., 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012), we benefit from the insights offered by a growing body of literature that challenges such dichotomies (Mazarr, 2014; Tikuisis et al., 2015; Grimm et al., 2014; Carment et al., 2009; Grävingholt et al., 2012; Ferreira, 2015). Insights from this literature allow us to step beyond characterisations of Nepal as exemplifying 'state failure' (Riaz and Basu, 2007) or 'state fragility' (FSI, 2020), despite significant improvements noted.

The analysis that follows examines the differential interests, ideas and capacities of three distinct levels of the state bureaucracy: (1). the central state; (2). the local state; and (3). the everyday state. In doing so, it notes the ways in which they have a varied impact on the implementation of the programme, thereby drawing attention to the disaggregated nature of state infrastructural power. Beyond the central state and the districts that comprise the local state, the schools that constitute the everyday state play a vital role in the implementation of the Scholarship Programme and give concrete shape to abstract central policy in their encounters with students. Such everyday state actors perform a pivotal role in determining state practices, thus contributing significantly to our understanding of the state (Lipsky, 1980). Schools distribute scholarships to the students, thus making them the state agencies that interface with citizens on a daily basis. Schools are thus essential to an understanding of the ways in which the Scholarship Programme operates on an everyday basis.

This paper makes two distinct arguments. First, it highlights the importance of infrastructural power to the implementation of social transfers. In particular, the main implementation failings of the Scholarship Programme can be attributed to the relations between state agencies and the limited capacity of higher levels of the state to monitor effectively the actions of lower levels. One notable source of divergence between these state agencies is the different ways in which the Scholarship Programme is framed by different state actors, suggesting that different narratives, as well as material interests,

of state actors can limit the infrastructural power of the state. Second, the research concludes that programme design can compensate for some of the limitations of state infrastructural power. In particular, the framing of the Scholarship Programme in terms of advancing social justice has resulted in the use of categorical targeting to distribute scholarships to *all* girls and historically marginalised castes. This categorical targeting considerably limits the logistical demands placed on the state in comparison with poverty targeting and, as such, is more in line with the limitations of state infrastructural power in Nepal.

The paper proceeds by presenting an overview of the design and origins of the Scholarship Programme, highlighting the use of the scholarships as a means of overcoming social injustice by focusing on marginalised social groups. It then outlines the methodology pursued in the research and the rationale for selection of case studies of implementation. The main analytical sections examine the process of implementing the Scholarship Programme across the disaggregated levels of the state, focusing on two main issues: first, how the distribution of scholarships and the application of targeting and conditionality criteria are shaped by distinct narratives used to justify the programme; and, second, how the limited infrastructural power of the state contributes to major problems with the disbursement of the scholarships.

2. Nepal's School Scholarship Programme

The Scholarship Programme is a nation-wide educational assistance programme that disburses cash stipends to primary and secondary students of marginalised communities in state schools. The Scholarship Programme entails an annual cash stipend of: (i) between NRs 400 and 600 per annum for Dalit and girl scholarships; (ii) NRs 1,700 per annum for 'poor and talented' students in secondary level; and (iii) NRs 1,000-1,500 per annum for girl students in Karnali zone, including Jumla district. It also covers students from marginalised communities, students with disability and students from families affected by conflict. The scholarships operate under the School Sector Development Programme. The Ministry of Education disburses the funds to district education offices,¹ from where they are allocated to all state schools in the district. In the schools, the stipends are disbursed to eligible children, preferably in the presence of their parent or legal guardian. This stipend is expected to cover children's education-related costs, over and above the free primary education to which they are entitled. It is estimated that the scholarships reach at least 3 million children, out of a total of 7.4 million children enrolled in grade 1-12² (DoE, 2017b; DoE 2018c). The School Sector Development Plan (2016/17-2020/21) has budgeted a total of NPR 40,516 million (USD 386 million) for scholarship and incentive programmes. This amounts to 6 percent of the total education budget for the period (SSDP 2016: 110). These

¹ Since the state restructuring of 2017, the funds are now disbursed to municipalities, who then allocate these to schools under their jurisdiction.

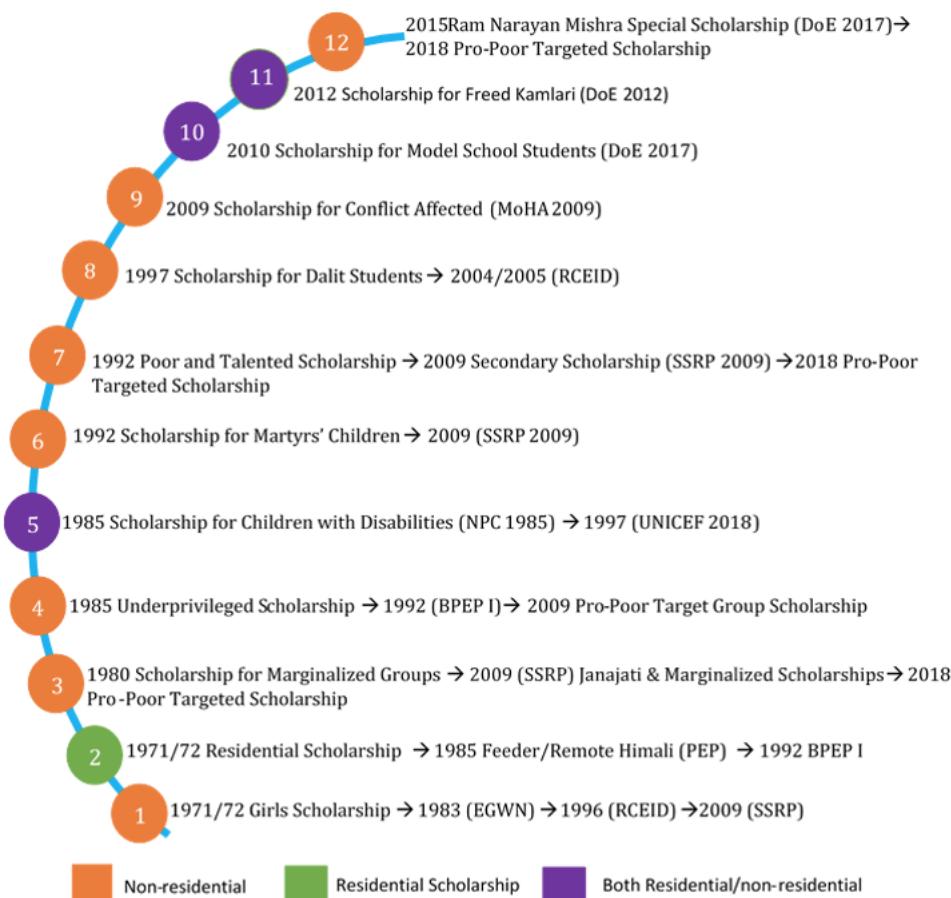
² According to Education Status Report 2016-17, the scholarship was distributed to 810,700 Dalit students, 31,787 students with disability and 2,205,046 girl students, in addition to other targeted scholarships, such as martyrs' children and Ramnaryan Mishra special scholarships (DoE, 2017b: xii).

scholarship programmes are considered one of the largest social protection programmes in the education sector (GoN, 2014).

The Scholarship Programme targets support to multiple groups and categories, reflecting the programme's multiple objectives and framings. Indeed, the dominant framing of the programme has evolved over time, from a limited focus on productive investment in their education and protection of the poorest, to the pursuit of social justice as a means of addressing historical marginalisation. As we will discuss in Section 4 below, scholarships were first introduced under King Mahendra in the 1960s, with the intention of projecting the image of the king as pro-development (*vikas premi*, which literally translates into 'development lover'). At this stage, scholarships were primarily framed as a productive intervention, prioritising key economic sectors. For example, the Second Five-Year Development Plan, starting in 1962/63, had provision for scholarships in higher studies, especially in engineering, agriculture and medicine (NPC, 1962).

Under King Birendra, Mahendra's son and successor, who ascended the throne in 1972, scholarships were extended as part of the liberalisation reforms and introduction of free primary education in the Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (1975/76–1979/80) (Shakya, 1977; Whelpton, 2005; Acharya and Bennett, 1981). Scholarships at this time retained their productive emphasis and were extended to poor but talented students to cover their educational expenses, as well as being extended to some girl students, as part of a residential programme that promoted and trained women as teachers, in part based on the influence of Queen Aishwarya (Dahal, 1975). Over time, the Scholarship Programme has expanded to cover different historical marginalised groups, including all Dalit students, all girl students, all students from highly marginalised communities, and all students in Karnali region (which includes Jumla district). In 2011, the girl student scholarship was expanded from 50 percent coverage and extended to 100 percent of the girls enrolled in community schools (ERDCN, 2011). Figure 1 below shows the gradual emergence and expansion of the school scholarship programme.

Figure 1: Emergence of different types of scholarship in Nepal



Adapted from: Shakya (1977); NPC (1985); RCEID (2003); MoE (2009); MoE (1984); MoE (1999); MoF (1992); MoF (2009); DoE (2012); DoE (2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2017f; DoE (2015), DoE (2016) and DoE (2018a).

3. Methodology

This paper draws on fieldwork in four districts:³ 1) Ilam; 2) Saptari; 3) Lalitpur; and 4) Jumla (See Figure 2). The four districts are located in four distinct regions of Nepal, each uniquely situated within the historic process of state formation. Lalitpur district abuts the national capital of Kathmandu. Its proximity to Kathmandu, the centre of the high-caste Khas Hindu Nepalese state-formation for over 200 years, has contributed

³ It should be noted that, during fieldwork, Nepal underwent a major transition in governance, establishing a federal state that transferred responsibility for the Scholarship Programme from the districts to elected municipalities. The reinstatement of elected local governments, disbanded since 1999, meant that our fieldwork was undertaken at a time of flux, and the situation is likely to have changed by the time this paper is published.

Figure 2: Map of research sites



to a relatively high level of state infrastructural power, including a greater presence of state institutions in the district, as indicated by such indices as number of schools and student–teacher ratios in schools. Likewise, state infrastructural power in Ilam district, located in Nepal’s far east, resulted from a process of increasing state control over the communal lands of the indigenous Limbu community. Distinct from both these processes, state-formation in the southern district of Saptari exemplifies neglect by the state and limited infrastructural power, as illustrated by low student–teacher ratios, and the appalling levels of poverty and illiteracy. State infrastructural power in the mid-western district of Jumla is impacted by the region’s geographic remoteness from Kathmandu. Despite having been the centre of the sprawling 12th century ‘Khas kingdom’, the district rapidly declined in importance once the centre of political gravity shifted to Kathmandu in the 18th century. The variations in the infrastructural power of the state find resonances in contemporary socio-economic indices, as demonstrated in Table 1 below.

The balance of social power varies considerably in districts across Nepal (see Table 2). Members of the historically oppressed Tamang community in Lalitpur, for example, remained largely apathetic to the political churning around them during the ethnic movements of the 1990s (Carter Center, 2003). Likewise, members of the Kami, Sarki, Damai and other oppressed Dalit communities in Jumla remained largely aloof from the Maoist movement whose strongholds lay in the vicinity. By contrast, members of the historically oppressed communities, such as the Limbu in Ilam and the Yadavs and Tharus in Saptari, actively participated in and often led ethnic, linguistic and caste movements directed against the political domination by the ‘high caste’ Khas leadership of the Nepali state.

Table 1: Socio-economic indices of research districts

S.N.	Particular	Ilam	Saptari	Lalitpur	Jumla	National total
	Province	1	2	3	6	
1	Total population	290,254	639,284	468,123	108,921	26,494,504
2	Total schools	432	449	184	156	29,035
3	Total students	60,123	129,475	44,157	38,999	6,062,806
4	Development assistance (USD million)	4.487	8.483	15.787	5.991	-----
5	Child malnutrition	46.1	33.9	16.2	54.1	40.5
6	Poverty rate	7.3	39.5	7.6	49	23.5
7	Total teachers	2,352	2,575	1,813	811	152,480
8	Student–school ratio	139	288	240	250	209
9	Student–teacher ratio	26	50	24	48	40
10.	Life expectancy	67.95	71.34	70.3	63.14	
11.	Adult literacy	73.46	45.44	79.68	44.43	65.9
12.	Mean year of schooling	4.74	3.21	6.47	2.62	
13.	Per capita income	1,260	801	1,894	1,007	1,160
14.	HDI	0.518	0.437	0.601	0.409	0.574

Source: Adopted from Department of Education (DoE) (2018), Ministry of Finance (MoF) (2018) and Sharma, Guha-Khasnobi, and Khanal (2014).

In selecting these districts, we expected to find variations in the implementation of the Scholarship Programme between districts, with better implementation in districts with higher levels of infrastructural power, such as Ilam and Lalitpur, and considerably worse in those with more limited infrastructural power, such as Saptari and Jumla. However, the analysis that follows did not suggest significant differences in implementation. Rather, all four districts faced similar challenges in the disbursement of the scholarships.

Table 2: Social composition of research districts

	Ilam	Saptari	Lalitpur	Jumla	Nepal
Region	East	East	Central	Mid- west	
Population	290,254	639,284	468,132	108,921	26,494,504
Proportion of population speaking Nepali	43	79	48	99	45
Ethnic composition (top three)	Rai: 24 percent Limbu: 16 percent Brahman: 14 percent	Yadav: 16 percent Tharu: 12 percent Muslim: 9 percent	Newar: 33 percent Chhetri: 19 percent Tamang: 13 percent	Chettri: 60 percent Brahman: 11 percent Thakuri: 7 percent	Chhetri: 17 percent Brahman: 12 percent Magar: 7 percent
Ethnic diversity index	86.7	93.0	63.9	58.1	93.4

Source: CBS (2014).

Table 3: Total budget allocated (Nepalese Rupees, in hundreds) by type of scholarships and district through municipalities/rural municipalities

Types of scholarship	Ilam	Saptari	Lalitpur	Jumla
Scholarship for girl students (1-8)	8,397	13,674	7,031	4,992
Scholarship for Dalits (1-8)	1,502	14,929	1,762	2,943
Scholarship for Dalits (9-10)	131	729	177	165
Scholarship for student with disability (1-12) non-residential	1,770	3,928	169	1,192
Scholarship for student with disability (1-12) residential	2,400	3,480	0	2,600
Feeder hostel	800	0	0	800
Himali residential	0	0	0	2,800

Source: Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (2019).

In all four districts, significant educational budgets were allocated to the school Scholarship Programme. Table 3 shows the total budget allocated to the municipalities and rural municipalities for scholarships in the four research districts for the fiscal year 2018/19. The highest amount of budget was allocated to scholarships for girl students. This was followed by scholarships for Dalit students. The data from the Education Budget 2018/19 shows that the budgets allocated to the different districts are commensurate to their population (See Table 2 above). These municipalities Scholarship Programmes are considered one of the largest social protection programmes in the education sector (GoN, 2014).

As part of our fieldwork, we gathered existing district-level official statistics on the coverage of the scholarship schemes. This was followed up by a survey that entailed

in-depth interviews with 367 parents/guardians. The study also interviewed 89 key informants, including bureaucrats, activists, academics and politicians. In addition, we also interviewed 26 school stakeholders, such as head teachers, teachers and members of the school management committees (see Table 4 for district-wise details).

Table 4: Respondent coverage across research districts

SN	Research method	Ilam	Saptari	Lalitpur	Jumla	Total
1	Key informant interview	25	24	14	26	89
2	School stakeholder interview (head teachers, teachers, SMC members)	5	14	3	4	26
3	Parent survey	100	128	55	84	367

4. The politics of design and policy making

While the Scholarship Programme has a long history, over recent decades the provision of scholarships has expanded massively and the programme has shifted in emphasis, from a dominant focus on productive investment to one centred on social justice. The Scholarship Programme was introduced by the state under the reign of King Mahendra (1955-72), in order to increase literacy, school enrolment and educational attainments. Such programmes were embedded within narratives of modernisation and development. In 1961, King Mahendra formed the Nepal All Round National Education Committee, which eventually led to the Education Act and education regulations of 1971. Nepal's Five-Year Development Plans after 1960 prioritised education, with an emphasis on the Scholarship Programme. For example, the Second Five-Year Development Plan provided for scholarships in higher studies, especially in engineering, agriculture and medicine (NPC, 1962). The Third Five-Year Development Plan emphasised girls' education, teachers training programme, and hostel facilities for students from remote areas (NPC, 1965). In the words of a former National Planning Commission chairperson,

‘Education emerged as one of the most important agendas under King Mahendra. He wanted the country to modernise. You could only modernise by eradicating illiteracy. He knew a breakthrough could only be achieved by educating people.’⁴

When the western-educated King Birendra ascended the throne in 1972, he continued with his father’s liberal educational policies (Shakya, 1977; Whelton, 2005; Acharya and Bennett, 1981). Policies such as girls’ scholarship schemes were incorporated within the Equal Access of Women to Education Project (EAWEP). The National Education System Plan (1971-1976) included two types of scholarship: 1) to cover educational expenses for poor and talented students; and 2) to cover hostel charges.

⁴ KII 111_ Kathmandu_ 13 August 2018.

The following decade witnessed the gradual shift from the mere productivist orientation of the scholarship programmes to a greater orientation towards social justice. Responding to increased opposition movements, as well as democratisation of the political system, King Birendra introduced scholarships targeted towards members of marginalised communities. For example, the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (1980/81-1984/85) included the provision to provide scholarships to 430 children of marginalised communities, such as Koche, Meche, Chepang, Chhantel, Jirel and Gaine, among others (NPC, 1980). The Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985-1990) included the provision of free education to children with disability, scholarship provision for female students, and 110 scholarships for students from remote areas (NPC, 1985).

The emphasis on social justice deepened considerably in the 1990s (Koehler, 2011; Sijapati, 2017; Drucza, 2019). This shift reflected the democratic transition, the Maoist People's War between 1996 and 2006 and the subsequent reconciliation efforts. The transition resulted in a democratic constitution of 2007 that ensured basic fundamental rights and included a special provision to protect the interests of women, children, people with disability, and economically, socially and educationally backward communities. For example, scholarships were extended to: girl students of 65 districts on a quota basis and to all enrolled girl students of 10 remote districts in 2009; children of families affected by the Maoist insurgency; and, in 2012, to students who had hitherto been bonded labourers (traditionally known as Kamlari and Kamaiya). The eventual promulgation of the 2015 Constitution mainstreamed the political discussion on issues of inequitable resource distribution, ethnic/caste discrimination and demands for greater social inclusion (Thapa and Sijapati, 2003; Thapa, 2017; Bennett et al., 2006). As one former education minister and CPN (Maoist) party leader said,

‘The concept of inclusive scholarship by the state emerged after the Maoist People's War for the *utpidit* (oppressed) groups. After the People's War, the government established constitutional provisions for scholarships.’⁵

These movements not only influenced the government's plans and programmes but also those of the donors (Thapa and Sijapati, 2003; Thapa, 2017; Bennett et al., 2006; Murshed and Gates, 2005; Riaz and Basu, 2007). The commitment of the central state to the Scholarship Programme was consolidated by the support of donors such as World Bank, UNICEF, JICA, UNDP, DANIDA and ADB. As such, key informants⁶suggested that the domestic priorities in favour of scholarship programmes were aligned with the social sector focus of donors.

As such, the Scholarship Programme performs both symbolic and instrumental roles. Symbolically, it illustrates the commitment to social inclusion by the central state in Nepal, which, at least rhetorically, distinguishes the central state of republican Nepal from the monarchy. Instrumentally, the programme addresses the political demands made by marginalised groups. Nonetheless, the rapid expansion of the Scholarship

⁵ KII 103_ Kathmandu_ 20 August 2018.

⁶ KII 107_ Kathmandu_ 28 August 2018.

Programme, and its shift in emphasis over time from a productive to a social justice framing, raises questions regarding how these changes have affected the process of implementation. The existing literature sheds light on several aspects of the programme's implementation and differential performance on different aspects of the programme. Official reports (DoE, 2011; DoE, 2017a) aver that the programme enables the state to respond to inequalities in educational opportunities. Indeed, most observers concur that the Scholarship Programme positively impacted educational opportunities, especially for girls and Dalits (DoE, 2011; DoE, 2017a; Jnawali, 2010), although some suggest that more could be done (DoE, 2017a). However, several reports criticise the programme's low and shallow coverage (Drucza, 2017), polarised views of its very desirability (Bhusal, 2012), and the categorical targeting of social groups (Carter Center, 2013). Reports also highlight the problems of coordination between different state organisations that adversely impact the delivery of the programme. These problems range from limited internal coordination within the educational bureaucracy (DoE, 2010) to a mismatch between funds available and number of students eligible for scholarships (DoE, 2011). Such commentaries indicate the mixed ability of the state in Nepal to implement and manage the Scholarship Programme. It is to these issues that the paper now turns.

5. Distributing scholarships: Shifting frames

This section examines the processes by which scholarship recipients are selected for inclusion in the programme in the four case study sites, encompassing both targeting and the application of conditions related to school attendance. A key factor shaping this process is the limits to state infrastructural power and, in particular, the limited ability of higher levels of the state to ensure effective implementation at the district level. One of the key sources of divergence between levels of the disaggregated state concerns the narratives and framings that officials use to justify the Scholarship Programme and the influence this has on their decision-making on the implementation process. As discussed in Section 4, at the national level, the Scholarship Programme is justified in relation to distinct rationales – namely, as a productive intervention and as a means of addressing social marginalisation, with the dominant framing of the programme shifting over time from productivism to social justice. With the shift to a social justice framing, the programme design increasingly utilises categorical targeting to identify the majority of scholarship recipients. As such, all the girl students, Dalit students and students from Karnali zone received the scholarship, while individual targeting is limited to the 'poor and talented' scholarship, mainly targeting secondary-level students. Teachers are responsible for identifying eligible students in their schools and, following approval by the scholarship management committee, the school submits the list of recipients to the education officer at the district. The district then compiles the total number of eligible students in the district and submits this list to the central state for the release of the budget.

5.1 Tension between productive and social justice framing

While the dominant emphasis of the Scholarship Programme is now centred on social justice, the previous emphasis on the use of scholarships as a productive intervention

remains, to a certain degree. These remnants are most visible in the Scholarship Directive 2017, which mandates a minimum attendance criterion. As discussed in Section 4 above, scholarships were first introduced in the education sector with an overall objective to increase education enrolment and attendance. This emphasis on school attendance still continues as a condition for scholarship transfer, albeit only on paper. Other studies on school scholarship programme (Acharya, 2007; DoE, 2018b) also note these tensions between social justice and productive impetus. For example, GoN (2017: 59) notes that ‘our education system itself still values merit-based performance right from the early grades, scholarship schemes that do not consider improvement in educational achievement as its primary focus’.

One important by-product of the shift towards a social justice framing is the lower logistical demands presented by the targeting process. Unlike poverty targeting, which requires the state to generate detailed information regarding the income, consumption or assets of individuals, categorical targeting of the majority of recipients means that eligible students are easily identifiable by teachers, without any need to submit documentation or generate additional information. Our research in the four districts shows that there were no specific criteria followed for the selection criteria for girls and Dalit scholarship. For example, according to the School Scholarship Management Directive 2017, proof of government-recognised Dalit identity and poor economic condition is required along with an application for Dalit scholarship. However, our study shows that no such documents or applications were submitted by the majority of students. Teachers and members of school management committees informed us that they never asked for documents, since the students lived in the same community as them and they could verify the students' family background and status. Moreover, students' surnames were often taken as a proof of their caste identity.

The relative ease of identifying students based on categorical targeting, where the boundaries of the group are relatively clear, made it possible for schools to take such decisions with little controversy or contention. While the focus of the Scholarship Programme and the coverage of particular groups was motivated by the claims of historically marginalised social groups, as discussed above, the design is also well attuned to the limited infrastructural power of the state in Nepal. The central state's programme criteria also mandated that the local state and the school limit each student to one type of scholarship, with no overlap in the beneficiaries. Indeed, our study finds that all schools stringently followed this instruction and avoided duplication in the distribution of cash. For example, a Dalit girl student can claim a scholarship under either the Dalit or the girl child criterion, not both. Cash is usually distributed to the students directly at school, although it is not uncommon for the monies to be disbursed to their parents. These operations suggest that, at least in terms of coverage, the guidance laid out by the central state is followed by subordinate tiers.

While at the national level the social justice framing has attained prominence, as reflected in the programme design, this change in priorities is not uniformly reflected across the levels of the state. Despite the central state's commitment to social inclusion, and its continued assurance of the Scholarship Programme, the central state

was unable to enforce its framing of the Scholarship Programme as a commitment to social inclusion upon the local state. In particular, district- and local-level actors continued to emphasise the productive potential of the scholarships as a means of enhancing literacy rates, attainment of schooling and developing a productive labour force. A district education officer (DEO)⁷ in Saptari district claimed that the scholarship boosted enrolment rate among Dalits and girls, as per the government policy and goals. A bureaucrat⁸ in Ilam, emphasising the need for expanding the Scholarship Programme, mentioned, ‘Our leaders are educated and know that our country will not develop without education. So they give special importance to education’. Similarly, a state bureaucrat, in Saptari, shared that there were more parents during the scholarship distribution than any other school event.⁹ Students who did not come throughout the year actually turned up on the scholarship distribution day.¹⁰ While the local state has retained the condition of school attendance in the programme design, this productive focus has been downplayed by the central state, in favour of a focus on social justice. At the local level, scholarships continue to be seen as an important intervention to encourage all children to complete school education, so that they may become productive citizens. Such a productive focus frames students from marginalised groups as a ‘problem’ to be addressed and social programmes as a way to transform them ‘into better, more productive members of society’ (Hickey, 2008: 353). Therefore, in all four district, resource persons (RPs) are deployed by the DEO to ensure that schools follow the scholarship guidelines on attendance.¹¹

The mistrust between different levels of government also seems to adversely impact the effective implementation of the programme. A headteacher in Saptari accused the ward chair of asking for a bribe when the scholarship fund was deposited in the school bank account by the local body.¹² Similarly, an RP in South Lalitpur accused the headteacher of accumulating scholarship money over the years in the school bank account, instead of distributing it fully to the targeted groups.¹³ An education expert¹⁴ in Kathmandu complained of high corruption regarding scholarships in community schools. In his words,

‘In most schools, Dalit and girls rarely receive full amount of allocated scholarship. Scholarships money is allocated from the central government based on the number of students in the targeted group. There are many cases of schools making a long list of students to receive larger sum of scholarship fund and they only distribute it to a few to show that they distributed’.

⁷ KII 32_Saptari_ 26 November 2018.

⁸ KII 17_Ilam_ 23 November 2018.

⁹ KII 69_Saptari_ 27 November 2018.

¹⁰ KII 52_Saptari_ 19 November 2018; SSI 32_Saptari_ 26 November 2018.

¹¹ KII 87_Lalitpur_ 7 December 2018; KII 87_Lalitpur_ 7 December 2018; KII 73_Lalitpur_ 3 October 2018.

¹² SSI 39_Saptari_ 2 December 2018.

¹³ KII 9_Ilam_ 16 November 2018.

¹⁴ KII 112_Kathmandu_ 5 July 2018.

The focus on the productive contribution of the programme at the district level did not, however, translate into decisions taken at the level of the everyday state. In particular, school officials ignored official criteria requiring attendance requirements that might exclude significant members of these communities from obtaining scholarships. To do so, they took advantage of ambiguity in the programme guidelines. Both the School Scholarship Management Directives 2017 and Programme Implementation Guidelines of 2015 and 2016 stipulated that 80 percent attendance is required of scholarship recipients. However, no such criteria are mentioned in the 2017 Programme Implementation Guidelines, which the schools had chosen to follow. For example, in Saptari district, an RP¹⁵ explained that they did not follow the 80 percent attendance requirement. As such, the schools utilised contradictory policy directives to the advantage of students, by using the most inclusive criteria possible. According to a headteacher in Saptari,

‘.... [the] government tells us to give it to those with 75 percent attendance, but it is not possible for us. No student would ever meet the criteria. We are compelled to give it to those (students) who come for 15-20 days but also to those who do not come at all.’¹⁶

The decision to ignore the condition of school attendance – and with it the productive framing favoured by district officials – was based on a competing framing of the programme at the level of the everyday state. Instead, schools prioritised the care and support of programme recipients, in order to be as inclusive as possible when it came to disbursing scholarship. To this end, the schools ignored requirements for students to present official documentation.¹⁷ The survey results also corroborate the findings. Scholarships that did not require selection include scholarship for girl students, Dalit students, ‘endangered’ communities, scholarship for martyrs’ children, and conflict-affected children. As shown in Figure 3, the majority of the children submitted no formal documentation to receive scholarships across the sites.

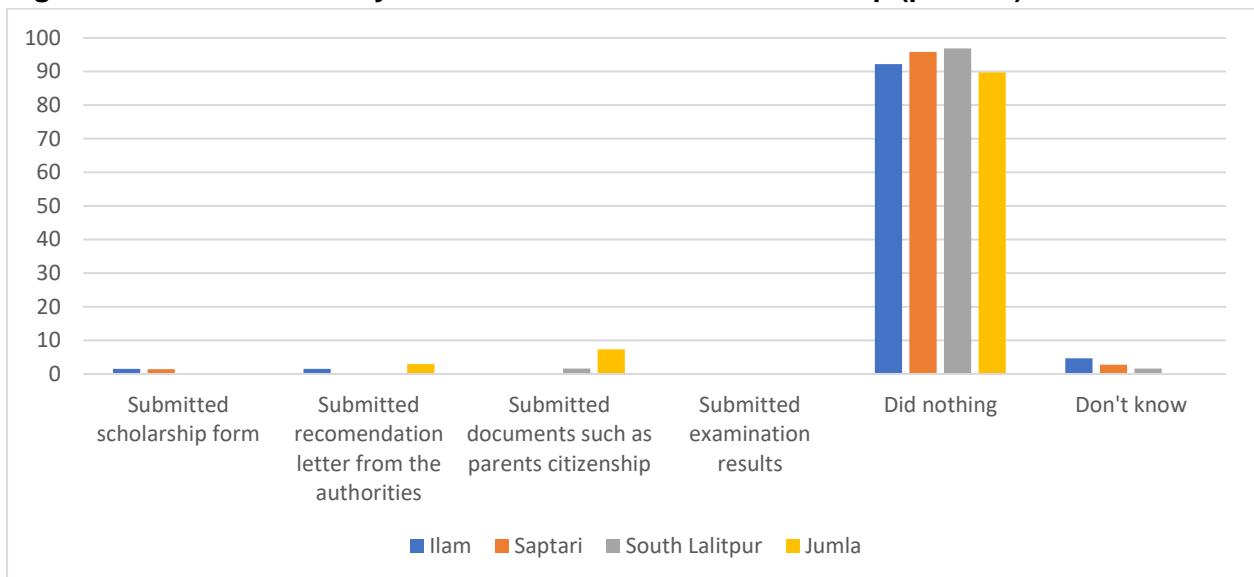
The scholarships are therefore increasingly framed as a means of pursuing social justice and overcoming past marginalisation. This reframing has led towards categorical targeting which reduces the logistical burdens on a state with limited infrastructural power. In spite of these changes, however, significant challenges in programme implementation remain that impede the effective distribution of the

¹⁵ Resource persons are former teachers who are responsible for supervising and providing support to the schools. They were the intermediary between the schools and district office (before transition).

¹⁶ SSI 32_ Saptari_ 26 November 2018.

¹⁷ Exceptions to the above norms may be noted. With regards to the scholarship for students with disability, the school considers the level of disability as the basis for giving the scholarship and students need to provide a disability card authorised by the government. A copy of this card and a letter stating that the child is a student in the respective school has to be sent to the district but now also to the local body. Thus, official documentation is required, and provided, for the provision of scholarships under the disability criterion.

Figure 3: Activities done by the students to receive scholarship (percent)



Source: ESID survey (note: multiple responses).

scholarships. In particular, a major challenge has been that of making the transfers to students on time and in full. The state's inability to do so ultimately comes down to limits in the infrastructural power of the state.

5.2 Significance despite its small amount

As discussed in the previous sections, the Scholarship Programme amounts to between NRs 400 and NRs 1700 per annum. State bureaucrats and school authorities complained that this amount of scholarship was too little.¹⁸ Some school authorities said that the scholarship of NPR 400 was not adequate to buy uniforms or stationery for the year. A headteacher in Ilam and a guardian in South Lalitpur went to the extent of suggesting that students could earn around NPR 800-1000 a day working as a labourer in construction or in the field, compared to the annual amount they would receive under the scholarship.¹⁹ Since the scholarship amount is small, many view it as a mere act of symbolism.

¹⁸Quote from a SMC head in Saptari, '*I do not think the money is adequate. Before, clothes could be bought with 200/300 but now it takes about 1,000 and the sewing cost alone is 200/300, so I think it would be adequate if it was 1,000'* –KII 60_Saptari_ 21 November 2018; KII 51_Saptari_ 18 November 2018; SSI 30_ Saptari_ 23 November 2018; KII 63_Saptari_ 23 November 2018; KII 66_Saptari_ 24 November 2018; SSI 31_ Saptari_ 25 November 2018; SSI 10_ Jumla_ 17 November 2018; KII 1_ Ilam_ 14 November 2018; KII 9_ Ilam_ 16 November 2018; informal conversation 4_ Ilam_ 17 November 2018; KII 8_ Ilam_ 17 November 2018; KII 15_ Ilam_ 20 November 2018; KII 16_ Ilam_ 23 November 2018; informal conversation 25_ Ilam_ 24 November 2018, KII 23_ Ilam_ 28 November 2018; informal conversation 12_ Ilam_ 28 November 2018; KII 19_ Ilam_ 24 November 2018; SSI 35_ South Lalitpur_ 8 December 2018; KII 91_ South Lalitpur_ 9 December 2018; KII 97_ South Lalitpur_ 10 December 2018; KII 88_ South Lalitpur_ 9 December 2018; KII 93_ South Lalitpur_ 9 December 2018.

¹⁹ '*400 rupees is inadequate and even a question bank cost 600 rupees and if the students go to construction work (dhalaan) they earn 800 rupees*' - deputy head teacher in Ilam; '*What can you get with 400 (400 le k huncha)? It will buy you one time meal. Even a notebook costs about 50 rupees. The wage for a day's labour in the field is 1,000 rupees*' – parent in South Lalitpur.

Nevertheless, although the amount is little, it has provided help to very poor families to buy uniforms and stationery.²⁰ School authorities, state bureaucrats and elected representatives in all four research sites agreed that the scholarship provided great support to children. In Jumla, the research team found overwhelmingly positive responses towards the programme, as the scholarship amount was higher (due to the region's remoteness) and was sufficient to cover school materials. In Saptari, Ilam and South Lalitpur districts, parents and school authorities often shared that the poor felt the state was at least giving them something, rather than nothing.²¹ A poor Dalit mother in Ilam, whose daughter received scholarship, explained,

‘It is okay. Even if it is that much, it is enough. It gives relief to poor. It is enough to buy copies for two to four months. It brings smile in difficult times’.²²

Despite attempts to frame the Scholarship Programme as a means of overcoming historical injustice, the reality of the low level of transfers threatens to undermine the transformative potential of the programme. At the same time, as we have seen above, even the minuscule amounts of funds made available under the Scholarship Programme are appreciated by members of marginalised communities because of the opportunities (albeit limited) they provide.

The implementation of the Scholarship Programme reflects competing frames of social justice and productivity. The significance of the programme, despite the low amounts of the scholarship, also frames the discussions around it. The inability of the state to resolve these tensions limits its infrastructural power. This is further aggravated by the logistical challenges of monitoring, database management and timely disbursal of budgets. These issues are discussed in the following section.

6. Distributing scholarships: Logistical challenges

The lack of attention to the productive aspects of the programme at the level of the everyday state was also enabled by the weak infrastructural power of the state, both in terms of the ability of higher levels of the state to monitor the behaviour of lower levels, and the inability of the everyday state to implement policy. According to the School Scholarship Management Directive 2017, the district scholarship management committee (DMSC) is responsible for monitoring the distribution of scholarships and overseeing the school-level scholarship management committee (SSMC). However, the school-level SSMCs were not formed (or, if they had been formed, they were not

²⁰ A Dalit father in Ilam shared that the scholarship is enough to buy pens and pencils for a poor family.

²¹ Direct quote by a teacher in Saptari, ‘When the students receive money, students are also happy, parents are also happy. They say we could buy copy, pen and bag with this. The government at least did this much’ - KII 63_Saptari_ 23 November 2018; KII 52_Saptari_ 19 November 2018; direct quote by RP at Saptari ‘The guardians are excited on day they receive it, stating they at least received something instead of nothing’. - KII 64_Saptari_ 24 November 2018.

²² Informal conversation 10_ Ilam_ 21 November 2018.

active) in any of the schools studied in the four districts. Similarly, at the district level, the RPs and school superintendents who were responsible for monitoring the scholarships were not clear about their role. Indeed, headteachers of the study schools in our research sites told us that they rarely saw the school superintendents. When the RPs did visit schools, they were only interested in collecting school-level data rather than monitoring the distribution of scholarships. The directive mandates that school-level social audit committees submit a report on scholarship distribution to the DEO. However, our study found that the reporting mechanism is neither clear nor effective at the research sites.

6.1 Challenges of monitoring

The practice at the local level also provides evidence of a longstanding pattern wherein the state has a more limited presence in more marginalised and remote communities, which are consequently less likely to be regularly monitored. Head-teachers reported that the RPs visited schools based on the proximity and convenience of the school location. As such, schools closer to the highway were more frequently visited than those that were far away. In remote Jumla, the head-teachers reported that the RPs stopped visiting the school once they moved away from the locality.

The limited infrastructural power of the state was also clearly visible at the level of the everyday state. Some schools in Saptari district did attempt to enforce attendance in their classes on the basis of the official criteria for the disbursal of the scholarship. Scholarships for girls and Dalit students would only be disbursed to students attended at least 80 percent of the classes during the previous academic year. However, the school realised that no student would ever meet the criteria. Furthermore, the parents and guardians of students protested the attendance criterion, as a result of which the schools discontinued the requirement.²³ Thus, despite the school attempting to enforce a rule of attendance for the programme, they failed to do so in the face of societal opposition. Many of our key informants reported that keeping attendance as a criterion led to disagreements between school authorities and guardians as well as cases of students fighting with each other.²⁴ As one headteacher told the research team: 'When we do not give scholarship to students with irregular attendance, their guardians quarrel with us'.²⁵ According to an education sector expert in Kathmandu: 'Central government creates popular campaigns and declares commitments. By the time the policy reaches the ground level, it hardly remains the same.'²⁶

This analysis therefore highlights the limited ability of higher levels of the state to monitor lower levels of the state, to ensure their compliance with programme

²³ SSI 32_Saptari_ 26 November 2018; SSI 39_Saptari_2 December 2018; KII 64_Saptari_ 24 November 2018; KII 65_Saptari_ 24 November 2018; informal conversation 27_Saptari_2 December 2018.

²⁴ SSI 32_Saptari_ 26 November 2018; SSI 39_Saptari_2 December 2018; KII 64_Saptari_ 24 November 2018; KII 65_Saptari_ 24 November 2018; informal conversation 27_Saptari_2 December 2018; KII 60_Saptari_ 21 November 2018.

²⁵ SSI 32_Saptari_ 26 November 2018.

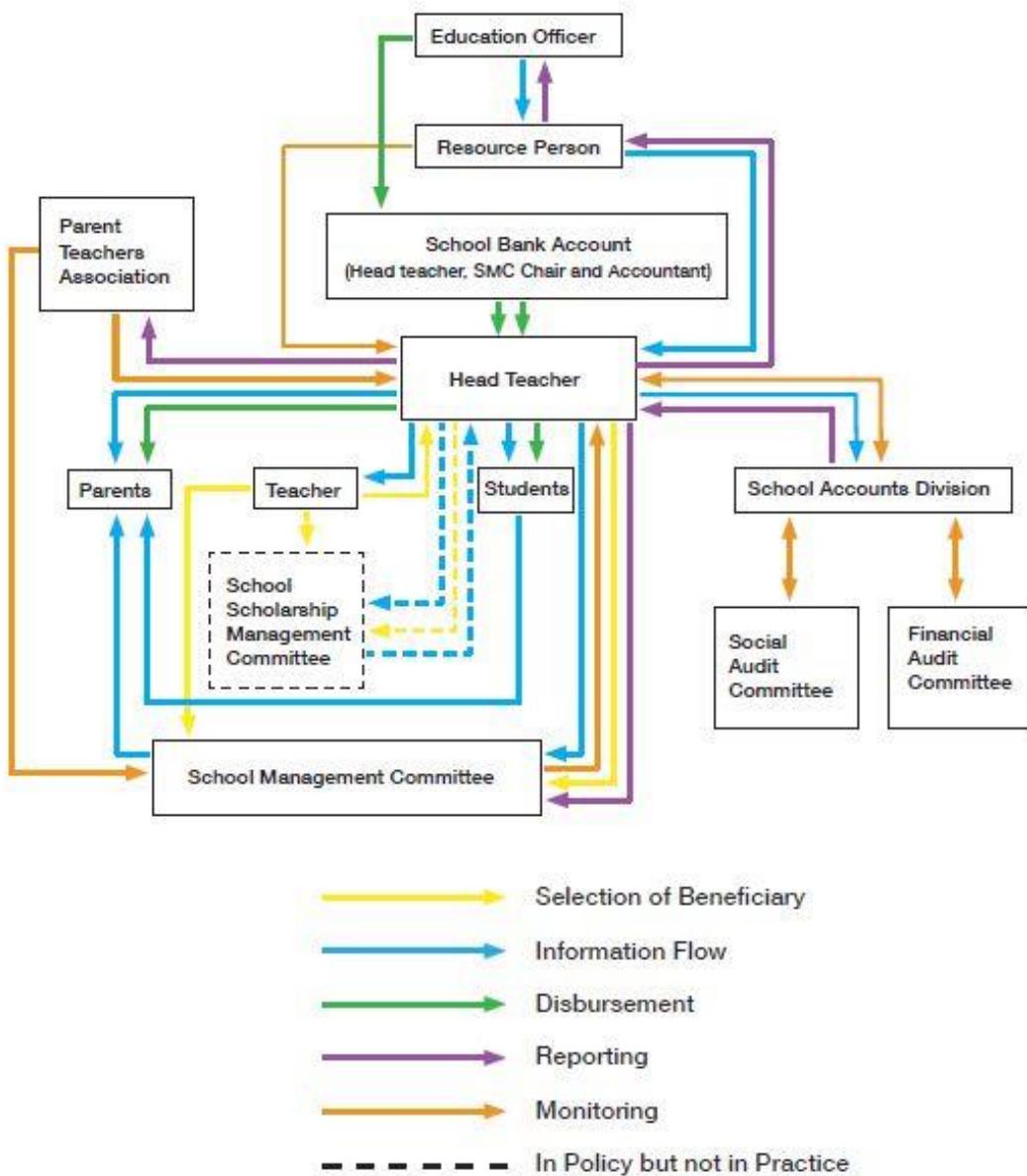
²⁶ KII 112_Kathmandu_ 5 July 2018.

guidelines, and an inability to appreciate the local realities of programme implementation. Regarding the scholarships, an important source of divergence between levels of the state, and a source of weak state infrastructural power, concerns the narratives used to frame the programme. While social justice is now the dominant framing of the Scholarship Programme at national level, district officials instead tend to prioritise the productivist framing, emphasising the scholarships role in promoting school attendance and literacy. At the level of the everyday state, schoolteachers differ again, bypassing attendance rules to maximise inclusion in the programme. Overall, this limited state infrastructural power has little effect on the selection of recipients, since the boundaries of target groups are relatively clear. Nonetheless, limited state oversight does translate into a lack of enforcement of attendance requirements and monitoring the actual disbursement of the transfers.

A number of individuals are involved in the administration of the programme, as we can see from Figure 4. These individuals include not only bureaucrats, such as the DEO, but also headteachers, RPs and members of the SMCs. Information flows (blue arrows) from the DEO to the RP but scholarships are disbursed (green arrows) direct from the DEO to the school (who then disburses the scholarship to students or parents). The disbursement is monitored (golden arrow) by the RPs, parent teacher associations (PTAs) and the SMCs. The school reports (purple arrow), via the headteacher, to the SMCs, the PTAs and the RPs, to the DEO. Crucially, although the DEO receives reports about the disbursement of the scholarship, s/he does not have any monitoring role vis-à-vis the schools.

The governance structure to oversee the disbursement of the Scholarship Programme illustrates the weakness of state infrastructural power in Nepal. The DEO and their team of RPs were simply not equipped to deal with the volume of monitoring and reports from the schools. On average, it appeared from our interviews that each DEO was responsible for the supervision of at least 20 RPs. Each RP in turn was responsible for a cluster of 20 schools. It was estimated that each DEO was thus responsible for monitoring and reporting 400 schools, and thousands of students (See Table 2 above for total number of scholarships in each district). However, as mentioned above, with the restructuring of the state, this situation is likely to change, with more power being devolved to elected municipalities.

Figure 4: Scholarship distribution process



6.2 Difficulty in maintaining the database and timely release of budgets

The implementation of the Scholarship Programme was impeded by the inability of the state – at both central and local levels – to maintain a database of students. The challenges faced by the DEOs to provide up-to-date information on the number of students in a timely manner hinders the central state's ability to release the full budget to the district in time. This inability reflected the weak logistical capacity of the state. The DEOs were responsible for maintaining the Integrated Educational Management Information System (IEMIS),²⁷ the electronic software for recording school data.²⁸ As

²⁷ This electronic reporting system was introduced in 2015 and replaced Flash I and Flash II forms that schools used to report two times a year to the district education office via the resource person. Until last year, IEMIS was a desktop version and this year it is web version.

²⁸ School data includes students' name, ethnicity/caste, date of birth, parents' name, grade, scholarship type received by the student, examination marks, teacher's information, etc.

can be expected, this data management software has placed an increased demand on the DEOs.

The DEOs struggle to maintain the IEMIS, for various reasons. First, not all schools in their jurisdiction have access to computers, electricity or staff with adequate computer skills. Second, and as a consequence, schools sometimes submitted their data in print rather than using the software. For example, one primary school head- teacher in Ilam told us that he had to walk 40 minutes to the nearby secondary school, which was their closest access to a computer. A similar story was shared by the headteacher of a primary school in Jumla:

‘It is challenging to fill EMIS data for the primary school like ours. We do not have the facility of electricity/solar and computer. Also, there is no person in school who could do such technical work. I go to the cyber in headquarter along with all required document/information to fill IEMIS data every year and pay for it.’²⁹

The varied formats and timescales in which schools supply their data places an extra burden on DEOs as they struggle to standardise the data. In some cases, like Jumla, even the DEO do not have reliable electricity and internet connectivity. Connectivity issues prevent DEOs from receiving the most up-to-date data from schools and to report such data to the central state. This makes it impossible for DEOs to maintain a consistent database for the calculation of target groups for *all* the schools in the district. Given the logistical difficulties, schools were able to share student data only by the end of the first quarter of the academic year. The DEOs managed to collate the data from all the schools within their jurisdiction by the third quarter. Thus, it was often the case that the central state received the data for scholarship recipients almost at the end of the academic year. It was not uncommon for schools to receive the allocated funds towards the *end* of the academic session or even in the following academic year, thus considerably delaying the entire scholarship cycle. These logistical problems meant that there was always a discrepancy between the student data in IEMIS and actual students in the school.

As discussed above, there is often a mismatch between the number of eligible students and the actual budget that is released to a school. The scholarship amount released to the school account is often up to 50 percent less than the actual number of students in the schools.³⁰ Under such circumstances, the headteacher and the SMC consult with the guardians to distribute a reduced scholarship equally to all eligible students, a practice called *damasahi* in Nepali.³¹ Headteachers in Jumla³² district and Lalitpur³³

²⁹ Informal conversation 15_Jumla_ 30 November 2018.

³⁰ KII 55_Saptari_ 20 November 2018; KII 54_Saptari_ 20 November 2018; KII 60_Saptari_ 21 November 2018; KII 64_Saptari_ 24 November 2018.

³¹ KII 63_Saptari_ 23 November 2018; KII 65_Saptari_ 24 November 2018.

³² KII 26_Jumla_ 14 November 2018.

³³ KII 87_Lalitpur_ 7 December 2018; KII 87_Lalitpur_ 7 December 2018; KII 73_Lalitpur_ 3 October 2018.

district and SMC chair in Saptari³⁴ district confirmed this while distributing the scholarship. Another illustration of this mismatch was provided in Jumla district, where the scholarship amount is sometimes released in two instalments (75 percent and 25 percent) over two different academic years.³⁵ For ease of distribution, the schools distribute the scholarship in one lump sum after they received the second tranche. Such funding inconsistencies often lead to confusion and a lack of trust amongst the beneficiaries. These limitations in the logistical capacity of the state lead to delays and confusions that threaten the social significance of the Scholarship Programme in terms of either inclusion or productivity.

7. Conclusion

Social protection programmes have proliferated across the world as important interventions led by states to promote social inclusion. The case study of Nepal's Scholarship Programme highlights the importance of shifting narratives, competing frames and the logistical challenges of shaping the implementation of social protection programmes. As this paper shows, the infrastructural power of the state and its logistical capacity influence the successful implementation of such initiatives. A careful analysis of the emergence of the Scholarship Programme during the 1960s reveals its embeddedness in narratives of modernisation and development espoused by the monarch, thus shaping its productive framing. In response to democratisation and social movements during and after the 1990s, narratives of social justice permeated the Scholarship Programme. It was during this period that categorical targeting became the characterising feature of Scholarship Programmes in the country.

Tensions between the productivist and social justice framings continue to mark the implementation of the Scholarship Programme. On the one hand, scholarships are primarily viewed as a productive investment that would enhance the literacy rates and human capability of students in rural areas. As such, Scholarship Directive 2017 mandates minimum attendance criteria for the disbursement of scholarships. On the other hand, scholarships are also perceived as representing the state's commitment to social inclusion in response to the political demands of historically marginalised groups. Schools navigated these tensions by distributing scholarships irrespective of the attendance conditionalities. The result was to broaden inclusion, rather than use the scholarship as merely an incentive to raise attendance. The framing of the Scholarship Programme towards achieving social justice has led to the programme adopting the use of categorical targeting to distribute scholarships to *all* girls and historically marginalised castes, potentially placing fewer demands on the limited infrastructural capacity of the state.

Nevertheless, limited infrastructural power continues to undermine the implementation of the programme, with relatively uniform problems evident across research sites. The turn to categorical targeting and the relative clarity of group boundaries has reduced

³⁴ KII 59_Saptari_21 November 2018; KII 60_Saptari_ 24 November 2018; KII 65_Saptari_ 24 November 2018; KII 66_Saptari_ 24 November 2018.

³⁵ KII 48_Jumla_ 28 November 2018; KII 35_Jumla_ 19 November 2018.

the logistical challenge to the state, with the result that the research found little evidence of problems with targeting. However, the limitations of state infrastructural power are especially keenly felt with respect to the disbursement of scholarships. The lack of physical infrastructure as well as limited bureaucratic capacity and oversight meant that districts struggled to maintain up-to-date data on eligible recipients in their districts. As such, limited state infrastructural power led to delayed and reduced payments that are likely to undermine the positive contributions of the programme to either address social injustice or make productive investments.

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