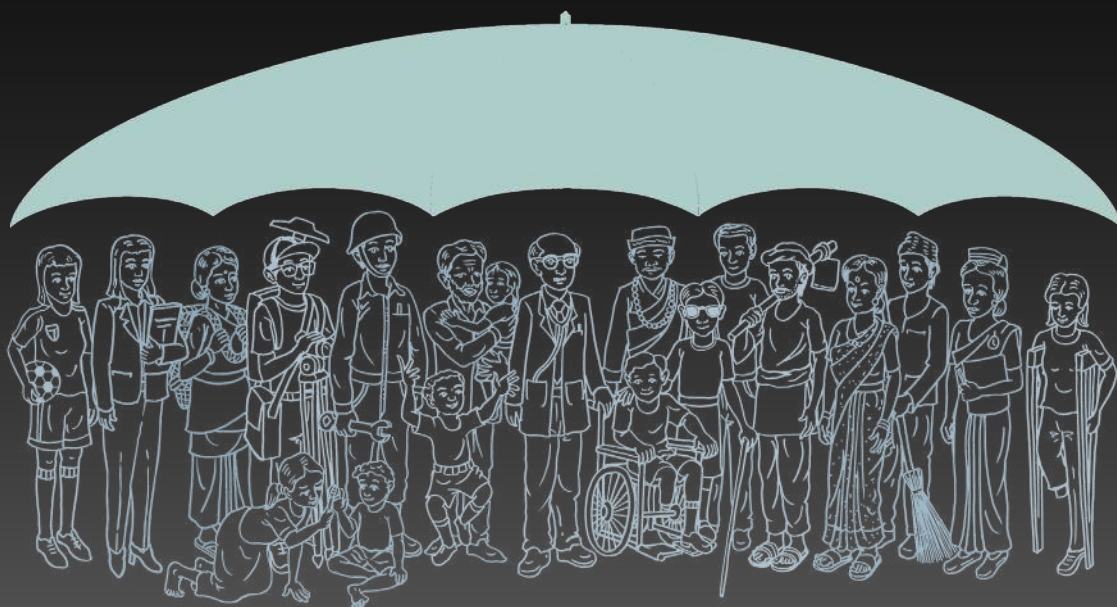


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# Glimpses on Emerging Alternative Living and Care Arrangements for Elderly People in Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores emerging alternative living and care arrangements for elderly people beyond the family, in Nepal. Family-based care and support for the old in Nepal are no longer guaranteed. Elderly people are abandoned or neglected mainly due to massive outmigration of the young and demographic change. As a result, demand for place in old age homes and care centres is rapidly increasing. Exploratory visits at six different institutions, expert interviews and informal conversations with elderly residents and their relatives offered a first-hand insight into these institutions. Equipped with only the most basic facilities, lack of trained personnel, and major financial reliance on donations, old age homes that receive mainly destitute people, are overstretched and have long waiting lists. This exploratory study concludes that emerging alternative elderly living and care arrangements are much needed in Nepal and that the current facilities are rudimentary. However, the negative picture of old age homes painted by the public media is inaccurate. The study found that elderly people and close relatives are grateful for new options. The increase in the number of such institutions indicates a transformation in attitudes towards intergenerational relations and elderly support options beyond the traditional extended family.*

## 1. Introduction

In many countries of the Global South, improved access to health care, better nutrition, education, and family development programmes have caused substantial decline in fertility and mortality, and significant increase in the life expectancy of people. This demographic trend results in population ageing throughout the world. In Nepal, the outmigration of young and working-age people is additively accelerating population

ageing. The current demographic change has resulted in a different family surrounding for the elderly. Multi-generational households, where young and old generations co-habit, are diminishing. Family-based elderly care is no longer guaranteed (Subedi, 2005; Yarger & Brauner-Otto, 2014; Khanal et al., 2018; Speck & Müller-Böcker, 2020).

Narratives are widespread, highlighting that elderly people in Nepal are increasingly neglected by their children and



grandchildren and that old age home serves as the only option for refuge. Headlines like *Elderly abandoned by their own children seek refuge in Devghat* (Khatriwada, 2015), and articles about marginalised, abandoned or unappreciated elderly people (Bhandari, 2019; Poudel, 2020) are frequently published in Nepalese media. Every once in a while, reports about old age homes (OAH) and their dilapidated infrastructure like, *Things are improving at the Pashupati Home for the elderly, but conditions remain bleak* (Sijapati, 2019), can be read in the media. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the care situation for the old creating even more precarious conditions (e.g., Awale, 2020; Shrestha, 2021; see a summary in Box 1 under section 4.1).

To date, not much is known about elderly-care arrangements and institutions in Nepal. A survey conducted by Acharya (2008) in seven OAHs in Kathmandu valley identified problems and challenges of elderly homes and the old. The results indicated that “in number of respects, elderly homes are favorable for the residents and the society as a whole despite of some problems, particularly for those who are uncomfortable living with their family” (Acharya, 2008: 211). Likewise, Chalise (2014) and Chalise & Lamsal (2017) examined the physical and mental health of elderly residents in Devghat and Pashupati Bridhasram and diagnosed severe mental problems, finding that over 50 per cent of residents suffered from depression. Rai et al. (2018) investigated in five different OAHs in Kathmandu valley witnessed abuse over elderly people by their children. They found neglect and emotional abuse, followed by physical abuse, to be the most common experiences. Similarly, Khanal et al. (2018) investigated several OAHs in Kathmandu valley and assessed the effect of children’s

migration on elderly people. Emigration of the young is an important driver for the elder people to move to OAHs and that the absence of children was often cited as the reason for various problems, especially emotional ones. A more recent study provides the collected volume of Brosius and Mandoki (2020) titled *Caring for Old Age*. The collection gives an overview on ageing and care in South Asia and discusses new ways of ageing, looking at the situation in a holistic transcultural perspective. By profoundly exploring elder people’s life in primarily urban areas, they talk about so-called novel “elderscapes” where they reside and spend their time.

These studies however do not address or investigate the institutions and its infrastructure per se. What is missing in the scientific literature is a more detailed description of living and care alternatives for older people who cannot rely on family care anymore. To extend the limited knowledge, we ask: What care and support alternatives exist for the elder people beyond the family in Nepal? How are OAHs and day care centers (DCCs) organised and financed? How does infrastructure and staffing look like, and who is using these alternative care approaches? The paper adds to the knowledge of the nascent phenomenon of OAHs and DCCs in Nepal and the very scarcely available literature and data on this topic. On the backdrop of negatively conveyed images of these emerging institutions by the media, we attempted to get a first-hand glimpse into these institutions that provide accommodation and support for the old. Further, we reveal the challenges and problems that hold back the improvement of the services of these institutions for the old. With this paper we aim to fill a gap in literature that to date has not been paid much attention in the context of

demographic change and population ageing in the Global South.

## **2. Methods and Materials**

Nepal is undergoing a demographic transition in a relatively short period of time. Fertility and mortality rates have decreased markedly since the 1980s. In 2011 the population growth rate was 1.35 per cent compared to 2.25 per cent a decade ago (GoN, 2014). This indicates a stagnating population growth with, simultaneously, a shift to an ageing population. Life expectancy has almost doubled since census recording began in the 1950s, from 36.6 years to 66.6 years in 2011 (GoN, 2014). In 2019, 2.5 million people, or 8.67 per cent of the total population (29.1 million), were estimated to be 60 years or above.

Foreign migration and internal rural-urban movements are key factors of Nepal's demographic change and its implications pose several challenges, especially for the elderly. The massive outmigration of young and middle-aged people contributes to an uneven distribution of age groups. Proportionally large numbers of old people are found particularly in the Hills and Mountain regions. These regions have a reputation of being "toothless villages" (Speck, 2017: 430), "overburdened with the proportion of older people" (Subedi, 2005: 16).

The absence of younger people and socio-economic change impact traditional family arrangements and diminish elderly care by younger family members (Yarger & Brauner-Otto, 2014). A recent study by the authors (Speck & Müller-Böker, 2020) shows that a trend towards declining support and care is both experienced and perceived by elderly villagers. The implicit inter-generational contract (Kabeer 2000), that parents take care of children and vice versa when they are old, no longer necessarily applies. Many older people reported to have challenged their

children and in-laws over living arrangements and financial constraints in old age.

The implications of labor outmigration are evident at the local level by a decline of subsistence farming, because the remaining older people in the village are less capable of doing farm work (Khanal & Watanabe, 2006; Jaquet et al., 2016;). Land ownership is also less important than it used to be, due to alternative income opportunities beyond agriculture. Consequently, land has lost its importance in securing support and care for the elderly from inheriting sons (Paudel et al., 2014; Speck, 2017). Changes in family roles and composition are also triggered by migration: roles, responsibilities and work are reallocated among those who remain at home. In many cases, roles of the daughters-in-law has increased significantly within the family and society. Women take over the responsibilities and management while their husbands migrate. The elderly people in this situation experience a decline in their solid social status within the family. For the eldest male in what was formerly a strongly patriarchal and hierarchical family, these changes mean the loss of position as a household head (Goldstein & Beall, 1982; Kaspar, 2005; Speck & Müller-Böker, 2020). The combination of these factors is detrimental to older people, particularly with regard to the provision of old-age care and support by the family (see Speck, 2017).

In accordance with the political declaration of the Madrid International Action on Ageing (MIPAA; UN, 2002) that pushes the idea of well-being in old age, Nepal issued its own Senior Citizens Act (SCA) in 2006 (GoN, 2006). The MIPAA (under priority direction 3) and the SCA support the provision of financial security and health services for elderly people, and the establishment of homes and living arrangements to "ensure enabling environments". This is thought to enhance elderly people's capabilities

at home, housing safety, maintenance of comfortable home conditions, emotional and psychological security at home, care in the community, and prevention of neglect, abuse and violence in old age (UN, 2002).

Nonetheless, the SCA shows that the Nepalese government strongly relies on care and support of senior citizens<sup>1</sup> by the family. The SCA emphasises: “It shall be the duty of each family member to maintain and care [for] the senior citizen according to the economic status and prestige of the member” (GoN, 2006: 4). Further, the *Muluki Ain* (section 10B, National Code of Nepal; GoN, 2019: 240) states, regarding the partition of property, that a son or daughter is responsible for the care of parents. Beyond family care, the SCA mentions day care centers, which may be established across the entire country. These “care or day service centers for older people” (GoN, 2006: 14) should be options for families who cannot take care of their elder family members, and “the concerned care center may keep such senior citizen by collecting the required expenses from such member” (GoN, 2006: 14 f).

Hence, since 2017, four ministries of the government (Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Urban Development; Ministry of Federal Affairs) have been involved in ageing issues, specifically to provide financial resources for such centers mentioned in the SCA and old people’s homes (NHRC, 2018). There are only a handful OAHs which are financially supported by the Government of Nepal (see table 1). Elderly institutions are not systematically monitored by government authorities. According to a report by the Nepal Human Rights Commission in 2018, a total of 85 OAHs and 119 DCCs for elderly people in

Nepal accommodate 1559 individuals: 932 women and 627 men (NHRC, 2018).

Further, concessions are offered for older people, such as discounts on bus fares (50% off), free or reduced costs for health services (Pun et al., 2009) and priorities for elderly people whenever public services are provided (drinking water and electricity). Specific hospitals and health services consider discounts and give priority to the elderly people (GoN, 2006: 6). Pension payments are another effort of the government to support elderly people financially. Nepal introduced a universal non-contributory social pension, the Senior Citizens Allowance in 1995. The allowance currently comprises a monthly cash transfer of 4000 NPR [33.25 USD] (The Himalayan Times, 2021) available to all those aged 70 years<sup>2</sup> or above (GoN, 2012; Samson, 2012). However, implementation of the payment and distribution are not without difficulties as services cannot be properly implemented due to infrastructural and personnel constraints, or geographic remoteness (Speck, 2021).

As provisions and efforts from the state are inadequate, voluntary sector organisations of civil society have resumed responsibility to meet the rising demand of the ageing population in a society that is increasingly losing familial support. A couple of federations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) represent the interests of the elderly. The most important organisation is the National Senior Citizen Federation (NASCIF), a consultant and lobbying group for ageing-related affairs, supporting the government to develop ageing-related policies and programmes, providing workshops and is active in raising awareness on ageing. There are 66 district associations to strengthen collaboration among single

<sup>1</sup> Senior citizens and elderly people are used interchangeably, both terms defined as individuals aged 60 years or elderly.

<sup>2</sup> Dalit and inhabitants from the Karnali region are eligible for the social pension from the age of 60 years (Samson 2012).

social organisations working on ageing-related issues.

This explorative study gives a glimpse of topic of alternative living and care arrangements for the elderly people beyond their family. In 2017 and 2018 we visited six different OAHs and DCCs. This study cannot provide an all-encompassing account across the country but gives a first-hand idea on this scarcely researched, but important topic.

Media coverage and internet search provided the names of two institutions; the remaining were identified via word-of-mouth.<sup>3</sup> We targeted different social institutions covering different standards, organisation forms, services and provisions for the old, sponsorship and finances, staffing and volunteers, capacity and facilities, and their development histories. However, we did not include high standard private institutions that are generally out of reach for ordinary citizens. Finally, we could visit a total of six OAHs and DCCs for data collection.

A total of 13 expert interviews were conducted: Eight semi-structured qualitative expert interviews (Bogner et al., 2009) were conducted with people responsible at the six visited institutions. Additionally, five expert interviews were carried out with the chairperson of NASCIF, representatives of three NGOs (Ageing Nepal, Hope Hermitage, Nepal Participatory Action Network NEPAN), and one representative of a government unit (Ministry of Women Children and Social Welfare, MoWCSW<sup>4</sup>). All interviewees confirmed their consent that data and pictures taken from the institutions can be used for research and publication. The interviews were conducted either in English, transcribed by Speck, or Nepali, transcribed

by her field assistant. Text data was then categorised according to Mayring (2010), a systematic textual analysis of the transcripts and aims at extracting and summarising the most relevant information on the institutions to illustratively describe them.

The visits, a kind of guided walk-through of the old-age facilities (Bernard, 2006: 352; Kumar, 2002), allowed us to gain visual impressions and identify problems and opportunities, for example adequacy or accessibility of rooms and infrastructure. We inspected the premises one by one, guided by the managers who provided additional information and explanation about the facilities and services. Sometimes, residents joined our meetings in the main office, had a short talk with us or introduced the spaces where they eat, sleep, and pass their time. This information gained by unstructured observation and informal interactions during the guided walks, were recorded in a field notebook and analysed thereafter in supplementation and in alignment of the expert interview data (Bernard, 2006). Further, a review of ageing-related laws and regulations, and brochures and leaflets from the institutions, complemented the data collection. Additionally, we used data from previous fieldwork where elderly villagers were asked about their opinions on OAHs in urban areas (Speck, 2017).

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Glimpses of novel care and living arrangements for the old

The oldest OAHs were developed at auspicious places such as river conjunctions and *ghat*<sup>5</sup>. These are places where elderly people, especially those belonging to high Hindu castes, renounce the earthly life and spend

3 Most OAHs and DCCs are located in urban areas (Ojha 2018; The Himalayan Times, 2020).

4 From March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018 the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare changed to Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen (GoN 2020a).

5 Ghat is a bathing-place with steps leading into river, used for religious purposes and cremation. Within Nepal, Devghat, Mulghatko tamor, Galesvar, and Ridi hiko kali gaudaki are such famous places.



their last days. Nonetheless, it is not always a free decision to separate from the family and go on a spiritual retreat: some older people may be forced to leave for other reasons (Michaels, 2020: 289 f). For older people who were abandoned or neglected by their family members in the past or had no children to do the traditional death rites, the only option was to live in the shelter houses of these auspicious places. There, they received donations, mainly food, for their everyday needs.

One famous religious place is *Devghat*, at the junction of the rivers *Seti Gaṇḍaki* and *Kṛishṇa Gaṇḍaki*. Today, three retirement homes are located there, the oldest being the state-run *Devghat Society Welfare Centre* (The Himalayan Times, 2018). In Kathmandu valley, the most important Hindu religious site and cremation ground is *Pashupatinath* (Figure 1). The country's first official OAH is located within the premises of the *Pashupatinath Area Development Trust* and is managed through the MoWCSC (see section 4.1).



Figure 1: Entrance of the Pashupati Bridhasram (Kathmandu, 2017, photo by S. Speck).

More recently established OAHs and DCCs have different origins (see section 4.2). Except for the *Pashupati Bridhasram*, all establishments originate from civil society organisations, religious bodies and community initiatives or were founded by private sector initiators. Most are registered at the Social Welfare Council, a government body that coordinates and facilitates NGO-work in Nepal. The genesis of *Pashupati Bridhasram* with its embeddedness in the famous Hindu temple complex and its strong historical entanglement with Hindu concepts of life cycles, constitutes a special case.

### 3.1.1 The Pashupati Bridhasram: A place for the old in Kathmandu

The *Pashupati Bridhasram* is located within the *Pashupatinath* temple premises. The complex *Pañcadevi paṭhsala* with five shrines at the center and a *dharmasala* (shelter for Hindu devotees and pilgrims) were constructed in 1881 during the reign of King Surendra Shah on the temple grounds (Michaels, 2020). elderly people increasingly started to stay for longer, not only because they wanted to spend their last days close to the deities, but because they had nowhere else to stay (interview 10, 2017). In the past, charitable people and Christian Missionaries of Charity looked after the elderly people on site. In the 1970s, one of the authors met a German nurse of the Mother Teresa Order, who regularly visited to provide basic medical treatment. She reported that she took several elderly people to the nearby hospital, when she thought they had treatable diseases. In 1976/77, the Royal Government of Nepal, from necessity, turned the place into an old people's home named *Pashupati Bridhasram*<sup>6</sup>. In 2017, 186 elderly people (108 female, 78

<sup>6</sup> Bridhasram = old people asram; the term asram means "to exert oneself" derived from the Sanskrit root *shram*. According to Chandra and Sharma (2006: 173), "Ashrama literally means a step in the journey of life" (Chandra p.173). The term asram connotes to of exertion, or striving after a goal in a disciplined

male) resided at the *asram*.

The *Pashupati Bridhasram* is financially supported by the MoWCSC; however, Manoj Kumar, chief of the office at the *Pashupati Bridhasram*, explained that private donations and voluntary work are of utmost relevance:

Without donations and voluntary work, it would not be affordable to maintain the *asram* for the older people. The majority of the expenses the OAH has are covered by daily donations of private persons, relatives, tourists and devotees who visit the *Pashupatinath* temple (interview 10, 2017).

The residents do not have to pay fees for staying in the *asram*, however, it was not clear if residents continue to receive their old-age allowance or if this money is collected by the OAH for exchange of the “free residence” at the *Pashupati Bridhasram*. According to Kumar, residents receive their old-age allowance every four months. He explained that there is an ATM nearby, within easy reach for elderly residents and beneficiaries of the old-age allowance. However, some media (Dhungana, 2019) and a few residents claim that they are prevented from receiving the old-age allowance, or are not aware they were eligible to receive this pension money.

“Not every elderly person gets the opportunity to stay with us”, Kumar explained. Only people of 60 years or above, with no children at all, or no sons, who were picked up from open streets by social workers or the police, or who can no longer take care of themselves, are allowed to stay at the *Pashupati Bridhasram*. Administrative procedures and conditions of admission are

lengthy: first, the applicant’s living conditions are investigated and evaluated by employees of the *Bridhasram* and the MoWCSC; second, the applicant needs to turn up for an interview and explain the situation; finally, admission is granted to the old people’s home at *Pashupatinath*.

All residents receive free health check-ups three times a year, organised and implemented by volunteer physicians. In health emergencies, residents are transferred to the nearby Stupa Community Hospital, where all elderly patients receive half-price medical treatment. The remaining costs are covered by the OAH. Entertainment programmes or activities at *Pashupati Bridhasram* are limited, however, visits to the nearby temples are highly appreciated. Residents pass their time doing household chores, washing, cleaning and cooking. Some residents reported selling handicrafts, such as traditional carvings or weavings, for additional income. The majority enjoy chatting to visitors, either their relatives or children but mostly foreign tourists and visitors to *Pashupatinath*, some of whom also make donations.

The buildings on *Pashupatinath* grounds provide rooms equipped with simple setups, mostly simple beds and chairs, and maybe a wardrobe. The facilities contain several obstacles such as door sills and stairs that are difficult for older people to pass. Rooms are poorly insulated and unheated during the winter, sanitary facilities are practically non-existent, except for a simple toilet and a water pump. Except for a simple open dining hall, only outside space, verandas and covered resting places (Nep. *pati*), are available. There is a separate section at the *Bridhasram* for around 40 disabled or bedridden people who need special care around the clock. Unfortunately, people are not allowed to visit this section. Before the earthquake in April 2015, capacity in *Pashupati Bridhasram* was

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manner. Such a goal can be “ascetic and oriented towards the acquisition of spiritual power; it can be yogic, which is a method of self-development; or it can apply to philosophical reflection on the deeper significance of life and the world” (Johnston and Renkin, 2000: 94).

236 people; in 2017 only 186 old persons could be accommodated due to the damage to the building. The damaged areas are no longer habitable and financial resources to rebuild them are lacking.

Kumar mentioned that is a shortage of general staff and of professionals trained in geriatrics, on-site there are only 29 permanent staff. Caretakers are often volunteers from overseas or also nursing students or college students who help cook, clean and entertain residents.

We briefly present each social institute in this section before a summary of other aspects such as equipment and staffing, occupancy, provisions and services for the elderly follow. Table 1 gives an overview of the most relevant facts of the studied OAHs and DCCs. Very few information was extractable from leaflets, if the institutions had any at all, we present in the following the content collected through expert interviews and guided walks through the facilities.

### Box 1: Coronavirus, *Pashupatinath* and Older People

The novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has not spared in Nepal. People aged 60 years or over are especially vulnerable to the disease caused by coronavirus, COVID-19, which causes an aggravation of pulmonary disease, asthma and pneumonia (Mitchell, 2020). National and regional lockdowns in Nepal and Kathmandu valley have been implemented repeatedly to prevent mass spread or to reduce infections through close contact among individuals. The *Pashupati Bridhashram* has therefore been closed to visitors and volunteers to protect the older residents. While the strict measures are necessary, it has significant adverse implications for the financial situation of the institution and for those staying at the OAH as they no longer have any contact with the outside world. The residents are no longer permitted to visit the temple as they did before the pandemic. In the pre-corona scenario, residents enjoyed support and interactions from volunteers, visits from foreign and local tourists, and from devotees visiting the *Pashupatinath* temple grounds. With no tourists and visitors due to the coronavirus restrictions, the many conversations, support and donations from outside are lacking. Not only financial donations but also donations of other materials such as clothes, blankets, or food and beverage and fresh fruits are no longer available. The lockdowns in Kathmandu badly hit the financial situation of the OAH as it mostly relies on daily donations to keep the place up and running. Financial donations reportedly decreased by almost 70 per cent compared to pre-lockdowns (Lama, 2020).

#### 3.1.2 Arrangements for the old in Kathmandu Valley and Pokhara

Besides *Pashupati Bridhasram*, we visited four additional homes for the elderly to collect detailed information: *Pokhara Bridhasram* in Pokhara, *Nishaya Sewa Sadan*, *Hope Hermitage Elderly Care* (HHEC) and *Siddhi Saligram Bridhasram* in Kathmandu Valley. The *Jestha Nagarik Milan Kendra* is a day care center only and is located in Pokhara.

*The Nishaya Sewa Sadan* has been operating since 2003 under the national umbrella organisation NASCIF. Around 400 local members financially support and sympathise with the idea of providing a place for homeless and vulnerable elderly people. A life membership is given to local residents in exchange for a one-time payment of 5'000 NPR (42.6 USD), however a secure place at the OAH is not guaranteed once they get old as waiting lists are long and currently 39 people reside here.

The *Pokhara Bridhasram* welcomes homeless and disabled elderly people excluded from their families. The chairperson explained that the *asram* was established by his father providing help for the destitute and poor elderly people. Constantly expanding the buildings, the home occupies 70 residents. Beyond cash donations, individuals or private organisations also contribute clothing, blankets, snacks and drinks, and sometimes full meals.

The *Hope Hermitage Elderly Care* is doing a pioneering work in dementia, which though increasing is not yet well known in Nepal. Since there were practically no nurses or caregivers around ten years ago familiar with dementia, the HEEC themselves started to provide workshops and training for (young) urban women in cooperation with other NGOs to train professional staff. The HEEC provides residential care for 26 elderly people, and home-based care.

The *Siddhi Saligram Bridhashram* opened for senior citizens in Bhaktapur in 2005, was founded by the *Siddhi* Memorial foundation. It provides permanent and temporary residence, and day care for those living with families but preferring additional company and entertainment. A German NGO, *Nepalhilfe Beilngries* supports the foundation. The home provides space for maximum 60 elderly people.

*Jestha Nagarik Milan Kendra* is a faith-based community organisation dedicated to the welfare and integration of elderly people. Elderly people increasingly started to meet at Bindabasani temple to spend their days together because with adults at work and children at school, no one was at home. The DCC provides entertainment and daily tea and snacks for the elderly visiting the place.

## 3.2. Condition of admission at the OAHs and DCCs

Admission to the OAH and DCC are regulated differently. The *Nishaya Sewa Sadan* only takes elderly people who are transferred by their relatives or neighbors, because the OAH wants to avoid them from being abandoned at the OAH. For residents whose children work abroad the OAH demands an initial fee of around 30'000 to 50'000 NPR, depending on the financial situation. The *Pokhara Bridhasram* accepts all destitute and homeless elderly people. Many residents were picked up on the streets and transferred to their home by the police; others were transferred from hospitals directly to the *bridhasram* because no family members turned up to bring them home after treatment. The HHEC takes only elderly people with highly advanced dementia. In most institutions, they stay without charge if they lack savings or income and/or have no children, or sons, are widowed or have experienced physical violence at home. The *Siddhi Saligram Bridhasram* OAH and DCC only accommodates elderly people who have not suffered physical abuse or neglect, because it aims to support families with morally impeccable motivations. The OAHs charge relatively low residence costs except for the *Siddhi Saligram Bridhasram*, where residents have to pay a maximum of 800 NRP per day. In the day care options elderly people enjoy services and facilities free of cost.

## 3.3 Services and provisions at the OAHs and DCCs

All OAHs provide twice-daily meals, and afternoon-snacks and tea. However, some interviewees said meals are unbalanced and do not meet dietary needs because of limited financial resources. All five homes contain at least one covered common *pati* (resting place), room or hall where residents read, pray, meditate, chat or sing (see Figure



Table 1: Overview of the six visited OAHs and DCCs in the study.

Name, Location, Year of establishment	Type of setup (OAH, DCC)	Financial sponsorship	Staffing	Charges, Condition of admission	Capacity: Bed occupancy, Infrastructure	Residents: socio-demographic background, origin
<i>Pashupati Baidhāśram</i> Social Welfare Centre Elderly's Home <i>Pashupatiānāth</i> , Kathmandu *1976/77	OAH: public, managed by MoWCSC	MoWCSC	• 29 permanent staff of which 9 are professional caretakers	• Free residence • 60 years old	• Max. capacity: 230 • 186 residents (108 ♂, 78 ♀) • Waiting list	• From all over the country
<i>Nishapā Sewā Sadan</i> – Center for the Helpless Śaṅkharṇul, New Bāneswar, Kathmandu *1991	OAH: non-profit and non-governmental community organisation	• Mainly donations • Government: 500'000 NPR p.a. • Legacy of Swiss couple	• 11 permanent staff	• Free residence* • NDA • 60 years old • Transfer by relatives needed	• Max. capacity: 41 • 39 residents (34 ♂, 5 ♀) • Waiting list	• From immediate neighborhood • Homeless old people
<i>Pokharā Baidhāśram</i> <i>Pokharā</i> Aged Shelter Sitapaila, <i>Pokharā</i> *1997	OAH: non-governmental social organisation	• Private donors (80%) • Government (20%, 2017: 1.5 Mio. NPR for construction)	• 7 permanent staff	• Destitute for free • If residents can afford: 10'000 NPR p. mo., or 50'000 NPR initial fee	• Max. capacity 60 • 70 permanent residents (60-97 years) • Waiting list	• Socially deprived and destitute old people
<i>Hope Hermange Elderly Care</i> (HHEC) Senior Citizens' Home, Club & Day Care Center Lazimpat, Kathmandu *2017	OAH & DCC: non-profit, social service-oriented NGO, strategic partner of government since 2015	• Private donors • Red Book Fund of Government	• 17 permanent trained staff • 90 trained caregivers	• Monthly fee NDA • Patients with dementia • DCC open to all • In-home care	• Max. capacity: 22 • 26 residents • Waiting list • In-home care within Kathmandu	• Residents from Kathmandu • In-home care within Kathmandu
<i>Siddhī Saigārām Baidhāśram</i> Senior Citizens Home Bhimsenshān, Bhaktapur *2005	OAH & DCC: managed by <i>Siddhī</i> Memorial Foundation	• NGO <i>Nepalilife</i> <i>Beingsries</i> • Private donors	• 5 trained nurses • 20 employees for residential home	• OAH: max 800 NPR • DCC participation free • 60 years old	• Max. capacity: 60 • 36 permanent residents at OAH • 50-70 old people at DCC per day	• Residents from Bhaktapur • Older people, childless, or disabled older people
<i>Jetha Nāgarik Milan Kendra</i> Senior Citizens' Meeting center Bindabasini Temple, <i>Pokharā</i> *2014	DCC: faith-based organization, managed by the Bindabasini temple	• Donations from devotees at Bindabasini temple (30'000 NPR daily)	• 1 staff per 10 people • 5 committee members, all in duty of the DCC	• 70 years old • Participation free	• 50-60 old people at DCC per day	• From neighborhood surroundings
*Those elderly people with migrant children have service on payment which is dependent on the salary, i.e. how much they can afford.						

2). Leisure activities include guided yoga sessions and meditation, or religious chanting (Figure 3 and 4). Excursions with employees or volunteers to sacred sites or elsewhere are provided by the *Nishaya Sewa Sadan*, *Pokhara Bridhasram* and the *Siddhi Saligram Bridhasram*. The DCC at Bindabasani temple offers small programmes such as participating in religious instructions at the temple and excursions to sacred sites. During the winter, elderly participants benefit from being indoors as the rooms are heated. The *Hope Hermitage* in Kathmandu and the *Jestha Nagarik Milan Kendra* in Pokhara provide physical therapy for movement and exercise. Volunteer doctors at all institutions provide medical check-ups for all residents and beneficiaries every three or six months. These include blood pressure-, eye- and ear- checks, and minor on-site medical treatments.

### 3.4 Equipping and staffing at the OAHs and DCCs

Infrequently mentioned by institution managers, but remained obvious, was the inadequate infrastructure in most OAHs and DCCs. Elderly people have limited mobility, or have specific hygiene requirements, for example in case of incontinence. There is an almost complete lack of suitable beds, stair handrails, ramps or passageways without door sills. It was emphasised several times that professionally trained, qualified geriatric care staff are lacking and national availability is scarce, a serious issue in an ageing society (Rai, 2014; Dolker, 2017; Gautam, 2018). The few well-trained care workers increasingly seek jobs abroad (see also Dolker, 2017). Only, the HEEC can rely on well-trained staff: in 2017, the institution had a pool of 90 trained and educated caregivers, available on call whenever needed.

At *Nishaya Sewa Sadan* we witnessed a group of college students, who came to work off their social service hours as part of

their obligatory community work (Figure 2). Some of the youngsters immediately started cleaning residents' rooms; others chatted with residents; the rest played ball in the garden. *Nishaya Sewa Sadan* occasionally benefits from volunteer work by nurses and doctors from nearby hospitals, and the *Pokhara Bridhasram* can count on nursing students from nearby schools. Only *Siddhi Saligram Bridhasram* relies on support from Western volunteers (Figure 3). The chairperson of the institution said: "We do not want to have local volunteers. They lack the knowledge on how to take care of the old" (interview 10, 2017).



**Figure 2:** Older women who are grateful for the opportunity to stay at *Nishaya Sewa Sadan* (Kathmandu 2017, photo by S. Speck).



**Figure 3:** Residents at *Siddhi Saligram Bridhasram* attend singing holy chants (Bhaktapur, 2017, photo by U. Muller-Boker).



**Figure 4:** Female residents of the Pokhara Bridhasram wash their plates after dinner (Pokhara, 2016, photo by S. Speck).

### 3.5 Reasons for staying in an OAH or DCC

All reasons reported by experts and residents for staying at an OAH related to family backgrounds. Those admitted range from the destitute and homeless to those with intact families: Some people have no family or spouse; others only have daughters who – in line with the patrilocal tradition – were staying with in-laws. Others sought support and care outside the family because they felt neglected or unwelcomed. Abuse, violence and conflicts within families were often other reasons for leaving home.

However, the absence of children due to out migration was a major driver. Labor migration has significantly influenced traditional living arrangements. Households are shrinking and elderly people often maintain rural houses and land, caring for pre-school children, while adult children, mostly sons, go abroad to study or work (see also Speck & Müller-Böker, 2020). The proportion of young women working or migrating (e.g., Maharjan, 2015) is also increasing, as is urbanisation for the education of children. This empowerment of daughters-in-law is not always welcomed by in-laws, whose own old-age care is impacted.

Elderly economic hardship is common among the residents of OAHs,

elderly social security is limited, and familial financial support is not guaranteed. Therefore, many elderly people are dependent on the support of the institutions for their old. However, the main explanation for staying in an OAH or DCC was that living conditions are hampered by dwindling support from adult children. The need for extra-familial institutions were both stated and discernible from the OAH waiting lists.

### 3.6 Contested perceptions of care arrangements beyond the family

The demand for non-family-based elderly-care is increasing, although the Nepalese government is not supportive of this development. The Civil Code of 1963 (GoN, 2019) complies with the traditional ‘family first’ mode of elderly care, which, also, the state does not have to fund.

Discussions about institutionalised elderly care mainly take place in the media. The *Pashupati Bridhasram* especially is strongly criticised for bad infrastructure and poor service, including lack of adequate and healthy food, and not enough rooms and beds. The media is disparaging to alternative care-options, stressing that children used to feel responsible for and respect the elderly. Media narrative suggests Nepal is not prepared to institutionally care for the elderly (Pant, 2016; Pun, 2014). The chairperson of Ageing Nepal, Krishna M. Gautam, depicts this issue:

(...) Old people are no furniture, you cannot move them around wherever you feel, you know. And you cannot treat older people like furniture, oh, now let’s put him or her in the OAH, ah let’s put him there (...) you know, you see when you take a plant, put in new place, abruptly, it dies! (interview 7, 2016).

In remote rural villages, we talked with old people about alternative elderly care. Religious sites and cremation grounds were known, where older people traditionally

Residents we talked to during the visits were mostly satisfied with OAH life. Many could not look after themselves anymore as they got old: Cooking, walking and daily chores became difficult to manage and without support or family members at home during the day due to school and work, many reported they were happy that they've been admitted or provided the opportunity to stay at a place where they are looked after and respected. Also, family members we spoke to were grateful for a safe place for their parents. However, the dilemma of being unable to care for parents because of work or financial and material scarcity was obvious. It is worth noting that OAH residents experience great solidarity and support by persons who are not directly related to them. Nepali friends and interviewees said they would gladly support such institutions because they sympathise elderly people, and it would benefit their own *dharma*.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study gives first hand insights into six old-age institutions in Kathmandu Valley and Pokhara. Rising demand for elderly care outside the family is an inevitable result of an interplay of social, economic and demographic components, including labor migration and changing lifestyles among the young (Speck & Müller-Böker, 2020). The Nepalese state still favors traditional modes of elderly care. State social protection and security measures for the old are insufficient or non-existent. Nevertheless, nascent planning by the government for OAHs has been started by

the MoWCSC and the supplement of “Senior Citizen” in the designation of the MoWCSC in 2018 (GoN, 2020a) shows that the aging population phenomenon is recognised. The MoWCSC plans “model villages for senior citizens and disabled people in all provinces” with 17.5 million NPR already allocated (The Himalayan Times, 2020).

We observed that operating OAHs and DCCs face huge financial and personnel challenges. Most institutions depend on private donations and are not, or are only minimally, supported by the government. Poor basic infrastructure and untrained personnel affect residents' health and well-being. Services are limited to the minimum, due to a lack of financial and personnel resources. Volunteers are welcomed, however managers and other permanent OAH staff seldom know when and how many volunteers will come or what kind of services they will provide. Additionally, the high dependency on volunteers presents risks, as the COVID-19 pandemic shows (see box 1). However, despite these shortcomings, the long waiting list of the visited institutions for people who want to stay at the *bridhasrams* reflects the great demand. It seems that residing in an OAH or spending the day in a DCC are good options, an alternative to arrangements within the family.

We propose to assess the trend towards OAHs and DCCs not as synonymous with offloading older parents without reason or care, although there are exceptions, but as attempts to support parents by other means beyond the family. The family is not a crumbling institution that no longer takes care of the old (Speck & Müller-Böker, 2020) but, in our view, is merely undergoing a transformation during which new options must be found to care for the old. For Nepal, where community-based organisations are deeply rooted and successful (e.g., *ama samaj*, mother's group), we see considerable potential for home- and community-based care arrangements for the elderly people.

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# Review and Assessment of Public Expenditure on Social Assistance in Nepal\*

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper provides an overview of the social protection programmes and expenditure trends over the ten-year period (FY2011-FY 2020) and presents an assessment of the social assistance programmes. The aim of the paper is to critically review the expenditure and assess the social assistance programmes in Nepal in terms of their coverage, adequacy, and outcomes. The paper uses quantitative data to analyse the expenditure trend and presents a qualitative assessment of social assistance relying on existing data and literature. At 3.9 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in FY 2019, Nepal spends a substantial amount of its budget on social protection. There is a sound legal basis for social protection programmes. However, the policy and institutional landscape remains fragmented and there are gaps in terms of its coverage and adequacy. Existing programmes do not address all risks and vulnerabilities comprehensively or adequately, by design. Few programmes explicitly target the economically poor or aim to reduce poverty. Important coverage gaps remain among those eligible for existing programmes, mainly due to implementation challenges. In addition, they are not scalable in design, mainly in terms of responding to shocks. Spending is heavily skewed towards the elderly with relatively low spending on early childhood. Finally, the paper also presents simulations to show that the fiscal implications of reforms to address some of these challenges over the next 10 years which implies that the reforms would result in moderate increase in the expenditure.*

## 1. Introduction

Nepal has a long history of a range of social protection programmes including cash and in-kind transfers, cash for work, scholarships, midday meals and health subsidies. These programmes are at addressing life cycle

risks, social exclusion and other types of vulnerabilities. However, comprehensive review of expenditure on social protection programmes and analysis of the policies and programmes is rare. A public expenditure review (PER) assesses the efficiency,

\* This paper draws largely from Pandey et al., (2021). *Nepal - Social Protection: Review of Public Expenditure and Assessment of Social Assistance Programs: Main Report: FY 2011-FY 2020*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

effectiveness, and equity of expenditures and their adequacy and sustainability relative to the sector's goals (World Bank, 2017). This paper attempts to review the public expenditure on social protection in Nepal.

Social protection here is defined as the set of programmes and systems that help individuals and households, especially the poor and vulnerable, reduce poverty, cope with crises and shocks, find jobs, improve productivity, and invest in health and education of their children, and protect the aging population (World Bank, 2012). It covers a range of programmes defined below:

- **Social insurance.** Typically includes contributory programmes such as public sector pensions, unemployment insurance, and health insurance.
- **Social assistance.** Noncontributory programmes, such as cash transfers, scholarships, health subsidies, and school feeding, including care services.
- **Labor market programmes.** Skills training, economic inclusion, entrepreneurship, job-search, and employment support programmes.

This paper provides an overview of social protection programme portfolio and the expenditure trends over the last ten years (FY 2011 – FY 2020). The expenditure on social protection has increased each year nominally, as well its share of GDP. Nepal spent an estimated 3.9 per cent of GDP on social protection in FY 2019 (Pandey et al., 2021).

Given the substantial expenditure, it is essential to analyse whether the existing set of programmes address the risks and vulnerabilities that people face and whether they are adequate and effective in mitigating the risks and promoting their resilience. The second part of the paper reviews whether these expenditures achieve the intended

outcomes to identify gaps and challenges in social assistance in Nepal. Chapters 3.1 and 3.2 refer to all social protection programmes, 3.3 and 3.4 delve deeper on social assistance. The paper shows that the existing programmes do not address all risks and vulnerabilities comprehensively or adequately by design. Few programmes explicitly target the poor or aim to reduce poverty. Coverage gaps also remain among those eligible for the programmes. Current spending is skewed toward the elderly with relatively little spent on early years. Besides, the programme outcomes could be improved if programmes were designed with flexibility to be scaled up in response to shocks and leveraged to promote economic inclusion. Finally, the increasing expenditure trend can raise questions about fiscal sustainability. The simulations presented in the study suggest that there is fiscal space to introduce the reforms to address some of these challenges.

## 2. Methods and Materials

The paper uses quantitative data for the expenditure trend analysis and conducts a qualitative assessment of social assistance relying on existing data and literature. The expenditure analysis focuses on the period covering FY 2011 to FY 2020 (allocation data for FY 2020) for national expenditure. The expenditure data was collected mainly from red books across the years from the Ministry of Finance and programme administrative data in some cases.

The assessment of social assistance is anchored in secondary data from various sources including various survey data and macroeconomic projections. Survey data used here include Annual Household Surveys (AHSs), National Living Standards Survey (NLSS), and National Labor Force Survey (NLFS) conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics, and Household Risk and Vulnerability Survey (HRVS) conducted by

the World Bank,<sup>1</sup> and Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019 conducted with support from United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

The paper presents analysis of expenditure trends, composition of programme expenditure across programmes and their life cycle. It also presents analysis of coverage of social assistance programmes among households across wealth quintiles based on survey data from HRVS 2019 and MICS 2019. The simulations of fiscal implications are based on estimates of coverage covered by the survey data, United Nations (UN) population projections, and macroeconomic projections of GDP and inflation.

Notably, the analysis focuses on pre-COVID-19 expenditures and does not directly reflect the impact of COVID-19. However, the analysis exposes the underlying structural issues in the policy, design, and delivery of social protection that limit the mobilisation of programmes and systems toward shock response in a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Overview of the social protection programs

Nepal has a wide range of social protection programmes which includes public pensions, cash transfers, cash for work, scholarships, midday meals, and health subsidies. The Social Security Allowance (SSA) is the largest social assistance programme in terms of both number of beneficiaries and expenditure. In FY 2022, it reaches over 3.5 million individuals, with a budget allocation of Nepalese Rupees

(NPR) 93 billion. Other key social assistance programmes include scholarships and midday meals implemented under the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MOEST); health schemes under the Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP); and the cash for work through the Prime Minister's Employment Programme (PMEP) under the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security (MOLESS).<sup>2</sup> Table 1 lists the key sets of programmes.

The smaller social assistance programmes include *Janata Awas Karyakram*, health subsidies including Poor Citizens Medical Treatment Fund (*Bipanna Nagarik Aushadhi Upachar Kosh*), Sanitary Pad Distribution Programme, Social welfare programmes under the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MOWCSC), *Garib Sanga Bisweswor*, public food distribution system, and disaster relief schemes. Nepal has a few labor market programmes as well that promote skills and entrepreneurship. The table below presents the list of key programmes of the Government of Nepal.

#### 3.2 Policy and institutional landscape

Many existing programmes originated during the budget speech of successive governments without a robust legal basis and clear policy direction. More recently, since the promulgation of the new Constitution, Nepal has a robust constitutional and legal basis for social protection. Right to social security, employment, education, health, food, and housing are fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. The Constitution also provides space for other fundamental rights reserved for Dalits, women, children, and senior citizens.

<sup>1</sup> The Household Risk and Vulnerability Survey (HRVS), a panel survey of 6,000 households in non-metropolitan areas in 2016 and 2018, covered six regular programmes (senior citizen allowance, single women allowance, disability allowance, child grant, safe motherhood programme and public works, and earthquake relief, and other emergency relief).

<sup>2</sup> Although it has elements of labor market programmes in its scope, PMEP is considered a social assistance scheme in this report as the current activities have been focused on providing cash for work and subsistence allowance to the unemployed.

**Table 1: Key social protection programmes in Nepal**

Program	Description
<b>Social Insurance</b>	
<b>Public Sector Pension</b>	Pensions to civil servants, army, police, armed police, and teachers who have completed minimum years of service: 20 years for civil servants, 16 years for the army and police and 20 years for Armed Police Force. Upon death of the beneficiary the spouse receives 50 per cent of the pension for life.
<b>Retirement Gratuity and other benefits</b>	Retirement gratuity to those who have completed at least 5 years of service. Also provided to non-civil servants. Accumulated leave, medical facility, staff facilities, and deceased staff assistance for all public sector employees.
<b>Employees Provident Fund</b>	Mandatory retirement savings scheme for all public sector employees. Other formal sector workers can participate voluntarily. The fund collects 10 per cent of the salary matched by the employer.
<b>Social Security Fund</b>	Contributory schemes for all workers to provide medical, health & maternity benefit, accident & disability benefit, benefit for dependent family members, and old age benefit.
<b>National Health Insurance</b>	Health insurance with coverage up to NPR 100,000 per household, and per individual for those over 70 years of age. The premium is fully subsidised for households identified as poor and individuals over 70 years of age.
<b>Social Assistance</b>	
<b>Social Security Allowances (SSA)</b>	Cash transfers to senior citizens, single women, those with disability, endangered ethnic groups, and children under the age of five (all Dalit children and those in selected 25 districts)
<b>Prime Minister's Employment Programme (PMEP)</b>	Cash for work programme intended to provide a minimum employment guarantee.
<b>Scholarships (15+ schemes)</b>	Scholarship to Dalits, girls, those with disability, conflict affected, martyr's children, freed Kamalari, and other groups
<b>Midday Meals</b>	Midday meal in schools for school-going children in early childhood development (ECD) to Grade 5
<b>Safe Motherhood Programme (Aama Surakshya Karyakram)</b>	Cash incentives to mothers to deliver at health facilities
<b>Labor market programmes</b>	
<b>Youth and Small Entrepreneur Self Employment Fund</b>	The fund provides collateral free loan up to NPR 500,000 for self-employment activities, which should be in commercial agriculture, agro-based industries or service sector, available to all unemployed aged between 18 to 50 years.
<b>Enhanced Vocational Education &amp; Training (EVENT II)</b>	Skills training and access to apprenticeships and job placement

Source: Different Ministries.

The Right to Employment Act 2018 has formed the basis for the new Prime Minister's Employment Programme (PMEP) launched in FY 2019. The Social Security Act 2018 provides a legal basis for the cash transfer programmes that have been in operation since 1995. Finally, the Contribution-Based Social Security Act approved in 2017 is the basis for a new set of contributory schemes including health and maternity benefits, accident insurance, and old age pensions to contributing workers launched in FY 2020.

However, there is no overarching social protection policy framework to bring together the various laws, policies, and programmes to deliver social protection. The

various legislations are largely independent of each other and serve to provide legal basis for specific programmes. For example, the right to employment law does not refer to the right to social security law. No national framework exists to ensure that all poor and vulnerable are covered with adequate levels of support. Absence of such a framework also means that there is a lack of coordination at policy making and implementation level which has led to some duplications, particularly in health-related social protection programmes, as well as clear gaps in coverage of the vulnerable. In addition to the national health insurance programme meant to cover all households, the Social Security Fund (SSF) includes

medical treatment and health schemes meant to cover all workers. These two schemes overlap in terms of target groups but have different premiums and cover different levels of expenditure: the national health insurance offers coverage of up to NPR 100,000 for a premium of NPR 3,500 for a family of five while the SSF scheme covers expenses up to NPR 100,000 for a contribution of 0.7 per cent of individual workers' salary.<sup>3</sup> Another gap is in terms of limited programmes for the working age poor.

Similarly, the institutional landscape is fragmented. The key programmes are managed by multiple agencies without effective coordination with each other. None of the implementing agencies have mandate for policy formulation across the social protection sector. The SSA are managed by the Department of National Identity and Civil Registration under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Prime Minister's Employment programme is under the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, and several other schemes are under ministries of health and education. There is no institutional mechanism to monitor overall benefits and outcomes at the household level. The National Social Protection Framework currently being drafted by the Government of Nepal could form the basis of integrated and effective social protection framework in Nepal.

### 3.3 National expenditure in social protection

The Government of Nepal spends a substantial and increasing amount on social protection. Nominal expenditure on social protection has grown over fivefold since FY 2010 reaching upto NPR 134.4 billion or 3.9 per cent of GDP and 11 per cent of the total government

3. The total contribution to SSF is 31 per cent which is divided as follows: old-age pensions (28.33 percent); accident and disability (1.40%); dependent family security (0.27%); and medical, health, and maternity (0.7% on medical and 0.3% on maternity).

expenditure in FY 2019. Social assistance expenditure increased from 0.9 per cent of GDP to nearly 1.4 per cent of GDP in the same period. The allocation in FY 2020 was about NPR 189.4 billion, an estimated 4.8 per cent of GDP (Figure 1). Assuming FY 2011 as the base year, real expenditure has also increased by over three times in 10 years period.

The increase in expenditure since FY 2017 has been mainly due to increase in the size of the SSA programme benefits and the increase in the benefit size of public pensions. With the increase of SSA benefits by one-third in FY 2022, the total allocation is estimated to be over NPR 200 billion.

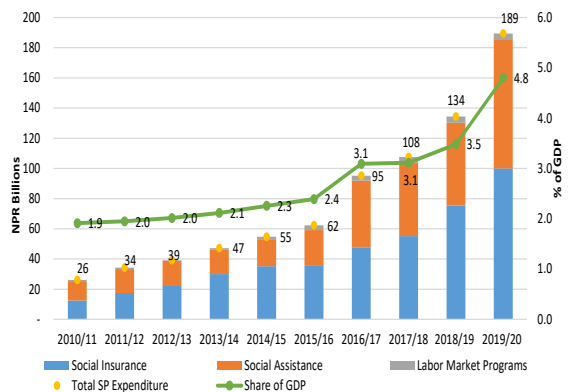


Figure 1: Social Protection Expenditures (Nominal and as Share of GDP) over the Last 10 Years

Source: Red Book, Ministry of Finance (MOF), various years.

The social insurance, composed mainly of public sector pensions, continues to constitute the largest share of social protection spending (56% of the total) followed by social assistance at 41 per cent of expenditure in FY 2019. Labor market spending remains low, accounting for only 3 per cent of the total social protection expenditures in FY 2019 (Figure 2).

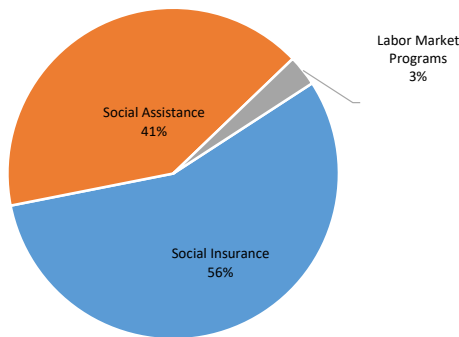


Figure 2: FY19 social protection expenditure by category  
Source: Red Book, Ministry of Finance, 2020.

The SSA is the largest social assistance programme with an expenditure of NPR 41.2 billion in FY 2019, which constituted 48 per cent of the total social assistance spending. In FY 2022, SSA is allocated at NPR 93 billion. Figure 3 shows the evolution of key programmes, with the total social assistance expenditure at the top of each column.

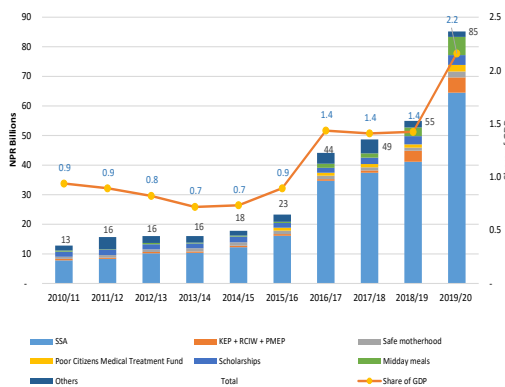


Figure 3: Trend of key social assistance expenditures (Nominal and as Share of GDP) over the last 10 years  
Source: Red Book, Ministry of Finance, various years and program reports.

At 1.4 per cent in FY 2019, Nepal spend a higher share of its GDP on social assistance than other countries in South Asia but at par with the average in lower-middle-income countries (1.4% of GDP) and just

below the average for all developing countries at 1.5 per cent of GDP (World Bank ASPIRE database) (Figure 4).

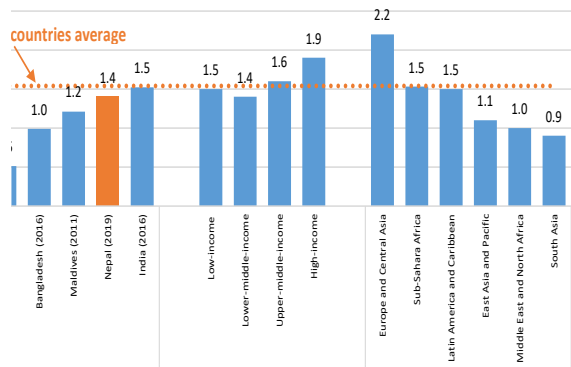


Figure 4: Social assistance expenditure as a share of GDP  
Source: World Bank, State of Safety Nets 2018.

### 3.4 Assessment of social assistance programmes

About one-third of the country's population is estimated to be covered by social protection programmes, with social assistance programmes' beneficiaries constituting around two-thirds of those covered.<sup>4</sup> The government's 15<sup>th</sup> Periodic Plan (FY 2020–2024) aims to cover 60 per cent of the population with some form of social protection within its five-year period.

Investment in social assistance in Nepal has helped achieve some notable gains. For example, safe motherhood programme is estimated to have led to an increase in the rate of facility delivery by 25.5 per cent points in Terai and 13 per cent points in hills and mountains (Ensor et al., 2017). Similarly, the child grant has helped increase rates of birth registration in districts where it is universal. Birth registration rates in Karnali and Sudurpaschim Province where child grant is universal are 84.4 per cent and 89.1 per cent respectively compared to the national rate of 77.2 per cent (MICS, 2019).



However, challenges remain in addressing all risks and vulnerabilities, in terms of coverage, adequacy, and impact. Existing programmes do not address all risks and vulnerabilities comprehensively or adequately, by design or due to challenges in implementation. This section focuses on analysing whether the main social assistance programmes are in line with existing vulnerabilities, and whether they are commensurate with the issues that they are designed to address.

### 3.4.1 Addressing poverty

While poverty declined significantly in Nepal in the 2000s, the national headcount poverty rate according to NLSS III (2010–11) was 25 per cent. Likewise, 17.4 per cent of the people are multidimensionally poor (NPC, 2021). In addition to chronic poverty, a large percentage of Nepali households are vulnerable to shocks—natural disasters, health, or economic shocks—which can exacerbate poverty (Walker et al., 2019).

The existing set of social assistance programmes does not effectively target or cover the poor and vulnerable, which limits their impact on poverty and vulnerability reduction. By design, most programmes focus on demographic categories associated with some vulnerabilities—the elderly, children, and so on—rather than the poor. Nepal does not have a cash transfer programme that is targeted to the poor, similar to the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) in Pakistan or the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* in the Philippines. In the absence of explicit goals to reduce poverty, there is little conversation about the impact of programmes on poverty. Few programmes explicitly target the economically poor or aim to reduce poverty. These include the PMEP, the flagship cash-for-work programme targeted to the working poor, which is still nascent and is not currently financed at the level required to

cover all those who may be eligible for the programme.<sup>5</sup>

Among the cash transfers, the child grant is the only programme which in practice disproportionately covers the poor, largely because it currently covers all Dalit children nationwide and all children in 270 local levels in selected 25 high-poverty districts.

According to HRVS, less than 40 per cent of the poorest asset quintile were covered by social assistance programmes in rural areas in 2018 (Walker et al., 2019) (Figure 5). The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019 suggests an improvement in the estimated coverage of households in the poorest quintiles: poorest quintile (51%) and second poorest quintile (43.6%) (CBS, 2020).

The SSA for the economically poor (SSAEP) which is included in the new Social Security Act 2074 (2018) is yet to be operationalised. The operationalisation of the proposed SSAEP and the expansion of the PMEP could support poor households at scale.

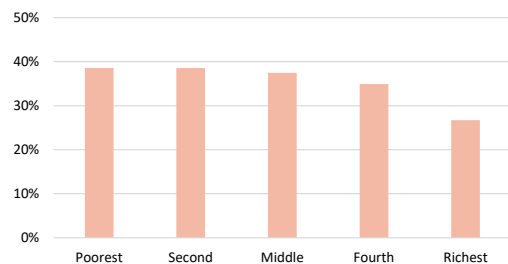


Figure 5: Coverage of social assistance by asset or wealth quintile

Source: HRVS (World Bank, 2019).

Coverage gaps remain among those eligible for existing programmes, mainly due to implementation challenges. Among the SSAs, coverage rates are particularly low

<sup>5</sup> The number of people who apply for PMEP greatly exceeds the government's target in the budget. For example, in FY 2021, about 750,000 individuals applied for minimum employment while the government target was to cover 200,000 individuals.



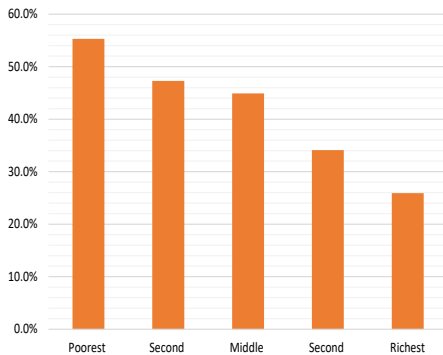


Figure 6: Coverage of social assistance by asset or wealth quintile

Source: MICS 2019 (CBS and UNICEF, 2020).

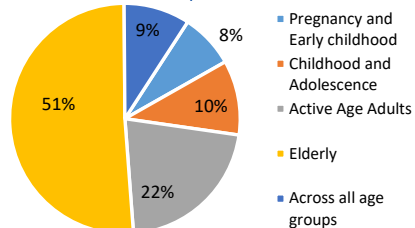
for the disability grant (estimates of under coverage range from 13 per cent (OPM, 2019) to 47 per cent (HRVS, 2019) as well as the child grant. Coverage of health-related shocks is also not adequate despite the high risks of catastrophic health expenditures due to an illness or injury. As a result, households had to bear 55 per cent of total health spending directly out of pocket in FY 2016 (MOHP, 2018). The national health insurance programme is supposed to eventually cover all households; however, the coverage remained around 16 per cent of households nationwide in 2020 (Health Insurance Board).

### 3.4.2 Addressing risks across the life cycle

Looking across the lifecycle, there are programmes that nominally address the risks across each stage. However, social assistance spending is heavily skewed towards the elderly, and the limited expenditure on early years and children limit the programmes' impacts on human capital development. Countries with advanced social protection systems typically have programmes centered on children in poor households aimed at promoting human capital. For example, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Programme in the Philippines provides conditional cash

grants to the poorest households with children to improve health, nutrition, and education of the children.

A. Total Social Assistance Expenditure



B. Per Beneficiary Social Assistance Expenditure

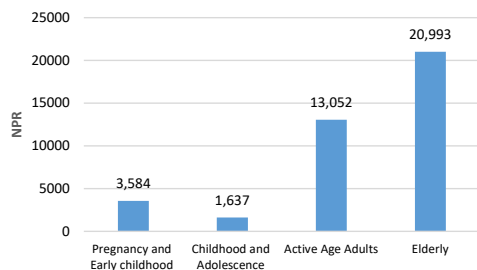


Figure 7: Total and per beneficiary social assistance expenditure by life cycle in FY19<sup>6</sup>

Source: Estimates based on Red Book, Ministry of Finance, various years and program reports.

In Nepal, over 50 per cent of the social assistance expenditure goes to the elderly who make up less than 20 per cent of the total beneficiaries. This disproportionate focus

6 Programs included (a) pregnancy and early childhood: safe motherhood programme and child grant; (b) childhood and adolescence: midday meals and scholarships; (c) active age adults: higher education scholarships, public works programmes, single women allowance, Garib Sanga Bisweswor programme; (d) old age: senior citizen allowance; and (e) across age groups: endangered ethnicity allowance, disability allowance, poor citizen medical treatment fund, Nepal food corporation, people's housing program, food subsidies, some programmes under the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare (MOWCSW). Senior citizen allowance in FY 2019 was NPR 2,000. The difference in per capita benefit would be starker in FY 2020 when the senior citizen allowance was increased to NPR 3,000.

on the elderly is mainly because benefits for children are significantly lower than senior citizen allowances. From FY 2022, the child grant benefit will be NPR 532 per month compared to senior citizen allowance which is NPR 4,000 per month (the child grant is also not yet nationwide). Figure 8 shows the evolution of the SSA benefits. Similarly, the scholarship for girls and Dalits for basic education is only NPR 400 for each year. These benefits remain low despite the growing consensus about the need to invest in early years for human development outcomes.

delivered COVID-19 relief by expanding existing programmes (Gentilini et al., 2020). Such expansion requires that the programmes are scalable in design.

Crucially, existing social assistance programmes do not have the flexibility in policy and design to be scaled up in response to shocks including national disasters, economic shocks or pandemics (Pandey and Lakhey, 2018). Programmes are designed to address chronic or static vulnerabilities and cannot scale up to respond to shocks.

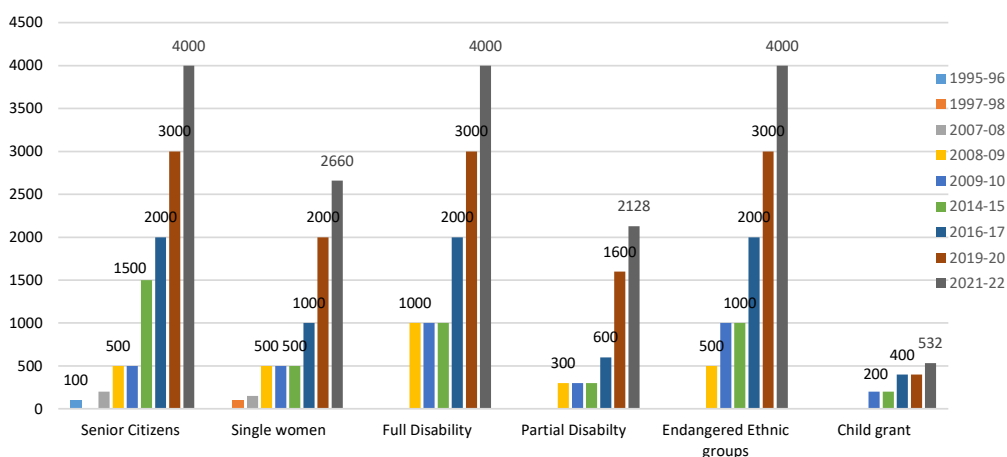


Figure 8: Evolution of monthly SSA benefits to different groups over the years (Nominal)  
Source: DoNIDCR.

### 3.4.3 Responding to shocks

Nepali households are highly exposed to shocks. According to HRVS, one in three households face at least one shock in any given year (Walker et al., 2019). However, shock response in Nepal tends to be ad hoc and implemented in parallel to the social protection programmes (Pandey and Lakhey, 2018). Social protection programmes and delivery systems – beneficiary registry, payment systems, etc. – can be mobilised to deliver response more efficiently (Bowen et al., 2020). Many countries around the world

For example, SSA provides cash transfers aimed to address demographic vulnerability such as age or disability and PMEP is meant to address chronic poverty. Neither of these programmes can expand during times of crisis to cover more beneficiaries or deliver additional benefits. Any response to a shock, like the economic impacts of COVID-19, is complicated by the absence of databases that would allow to quickly identify the most vulnerable, by the inability of existing programmes to temporarily add beneficiaries (or increase support to existing beneficiaries), and by the absence of a financing strategy which would ensure that contingent funds are readily available for these temporary measures.

#### **3.4.4 Promoting human capital and economic inclusion**

The Existing programmes focus on singular interventions (for example, providing only cash, service, or training on their own) and are implemented in isolation from each other, which limits their impact. Most vulnerabilities or low human capital outcomes are associated with multiple constraints, and the most effective programmes typically combine various elements—cash transfers plus information sessions on nutrition and care for early childhood development (ECD), training plus seed capital, and so on—to address these multiple constraints. For example, Bolsa Familia in Brazil explicitly specifies three conditions around school attendance, vaccination, and prenatal care for the cash transfer beneficiaries to ensure that cash is complemented with services essential for human capital.

To date, most existing programmes offer only one of the benefits—cash, service, or training. In addition, for early year programmes, interventions are not coordinated with each other to ensure that a child receives all the benefits and services for which s/he is eligible across social protection, health, and education categories. This is evidenced by starkly different coverage rates across programmes. For example, 77.5 per cent of children are now born at health facilities but the birth registration rate of children under 12 months is 59.5 per cent (MICS, 2019). Linking birthing centers to birth registration at wards would help increase birth registration rates.

Finally, current programmes do not focus on economic inclusion in a comprehensive manner, thus limiting

their transformational potential. Economic inclusion programmes are a bundle of coordinated, multidimensional interventions which include a combination of cash or in-kind transfers, skills training, coaching, access to finance, and links to market support. The interventions are aimed at supporting individuals, households and communities so they can raise their incomes, build their assets and strengthen their resilience (Andrews et al., 2021). The poor and vulnerable are more likely to be engaged in low-earnings informal jobs or subsistence activities. They typically face multiple constraints to improve their earnings, including low productivity, skills mismatch, limited access to information and the job market, limited assets and financing, and lack of socioemotional skills. Social protection interventions need to focus on addressing these multiple constraints in a comprehensive manner to enhance the income generating capacity of such groups. BRAC's Graduation approach provides such a holistic combination of interventions. The Ultra Poor Graduation programme for women under 50 combines transfer of productive asset such as livestock or partial loan; enterprise development training; financial services, life skills training in a range of topics related to child welfare, health, safety, and women's issues; household coaching on topics like financial management; community mobilisation; and links to health care, over a 24-month period (Andrews et al., 2021: 213).

While there is a range of livelihood programmes in Nepal, they tend to be limited in size and scope and fail to provide a comprehensive package. The existing skills training programmes tend to focus on urban and peri-urban areas and often do not reach the poorest.

### 3.5 Fiscal implications of social assistance reforms

Social assistance expenditure increased from 0.9 per cent to nearly 1.4 per cent of GDP between FY 2009 and FY 2019, with allocations for FY 2020 estimated at 2.2 per cent of GDP. This is likely to have increased further in FY 2022. This can raise concerns about the fiscal sustainability of these expenditures. Using empirical data, this section analyses how the fiscal burden of existing social assistance programmes could change over the next 10 years under different scenarios.<sup>7</sup> These simulations help assess the fiscal implications of social assistance reforms.

The scenarios presented seek to address two key challenges identified in the above analysis: the inadequate investments in children and the limited coverage of the poor, and limited impact on poverty. The scenarios simulate in turn the expansion of the child grant in benefit size and coverage, the expansion of the PMEP, and the initiation of the SSAEP. The projections cover the five largest programmes in terms of number of beneficiaries and expenditure (namely the SSA, including the SSAEP, scholarships, midday meals, the safe motherhood programme, and PMEP) and assume expenditures of all other programmes remain at their FY 2019 level in real terms. These five programmes constituted about 94 per cent of the total social assistance expenditure in FY 2019. These simulations consider expected demographic changes as well as projections related to GDP growth and inflation. All scenarios presented assume that benefits are indexed to projected inflation.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, while these scenarios are simple estimations, they suggest significant improvements in the impact of social assistance on poverty and vulnerability that can be achieved with moderate increase in expenditures. This is particularly the case if Nepal is able to progressively increase its resource mobilisation rate. Table 2 and Figure 10 summarise the fiscal impact of each proposed change as well as that of all these changes combined. Note that this simplified analysis does not take into account possible overlaps between beneficiaries of the PMEP and SSAEP, suggesting that the figures overestimate the actual cost. It also assumes full coverage of the PMEP and SSAEP and therefore overestimates the cost as large coverage gaps are likely to remain.

In scenario A, which is considered the baseline, each programme's eligibility and coverage rates are assumed to remain the same, and the benefit amount is indexed to inflation. The number of beneficiaries is assumed to grow in line with the population while the unemployment rate is assumed to remain the same. Total expenditure would increase from an estimated NPR 83 billion in 2020 to NPR 106 billion in 2025 and NPR 116 billion in 2030. According to the World Bank's economic projections, as a share of GDP, the cost would decline from 2.10 per cent in 2020 to 1.67 per cent in 2025 and 1.15 per cent in 2030 (World Bank, 2020). The nominal increase is driven by the increment in the number of beneficiaries, particularly senior citizens, as the population ages. The number of children is expected to decrease over this period, thereby reducing the number of beneficiaries eligible for child grant and scholarships (Table 2).

<sup>7</sup> Note that these estimates are based on data up to

FY 2020 and do not account for the increase in SSA benefits in FY 2022.

<sup>8</sup> The estimates presented here are taken from the Pandey et al.,(2021). Please refer to the report for details on the assumptions made as well as the

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methodology used to estimate the distribution of beneficiaries across quintiles used in this section. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/917101631781781565/Main-Report-FY11-FY20>

Table 2: Scenarios, Assumptions, and Impacts of Simulated Projections

	Scenarios (and Key Assumptions)	Cost as % of GDP			Gaps and Expected Impact
		FY20	FY25	FY30	
A	Baseline: Current programs, constant coverage rates, benefits indexed to inflation (changes in costs are linked to projected demographic changes and GDP growth)	2.10 <sup>1</sup>	1.67	1.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inadequate investment in children</li> <li>Limited coverage of the poor and limited impact on economic poverty</li> </ul>
B	B1: A + child grant increased to NPR 1,000 per month for current beneficiaries	+0.10 (2.20) <sup>2</sup>	+0.05 (1.72)	+0.03 (1.18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant impact on child nutrition</li> <li>Significant impact on birth registration</li> <li>Some impact on poverty as households with young children are poorer<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
	B2: A + nationwide child grant at NPR 1,000 per month	+0.75 (2.85)	+0.48 (2.15)	+0.27 (1.42)	
C	A + expanded PMEP Benefit of NPR 51,700 per year (100 days of work paid at minimum wage of NPR 517 per day); target population of all unemployed individuals in the bottom two quintiles	+0.24 (2.34)	+0.19 (1.86)	+0.13 (1.28)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant impact on economic/income poverty</li> </ul> <p>Assuming a household size of 4.6, the annual transfer value covers about 58 per cent of the 2010 poverty line of NPR 19,261 per person.</p>
D	A + SSA for the economically poor (SSAEP)				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant impact on economic/income poverty</li> </ul> <p>Assuming a household size of 4.6, the annual transfer value covers about 27 per cent of the 2010 poverty line of NPR 19,261 per person.</p>
	Benefit of NPR 2,000 per month; targeted to all households in the bottom quintile, excluding those that receive senior citizen or single women allowance	+0.40 (2.50)	+0.29 (1.96)	0.18 (1.33)	
	Total: A + nationwide child grant, PMEP, and SSAEP	+1.40 (3.50)	+0.96 (2.63)	+0.60 (1.75)	

Source: Pandey et al. (2021).

Scenario B seeks to address the inadequate investment in early years by increasing the child grant from NPR 400 to NPR 1,000 per month and expanding its coverage nationwide. Increasing the benefit for the current beneficiaries adds NPR 5 billion to the cost or 0.10 per cent of GDP in FY 2020 increasing the total to NPR 87 billion in FY 2020 and NPR 109 billion in 2025. Expanding the coverage of child grant nationwide at NPR 1,000 per month would increase the spending by 0.48 per cent of GDP in FY25 and 0.27 per cent in FY30. This would reach over 2.7 million children under five across the country (Figure 8).

Scenario C expands the coverage of the PMEP to cover all the unemployed in the bottom two quintiles. This implies an estimated number of beneficiaries of

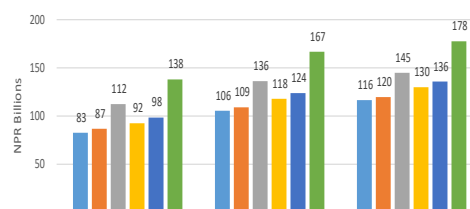


Figure 8: Projected Social Assistance Spending under Different Scenarios, Nominal and as Share of GDP.

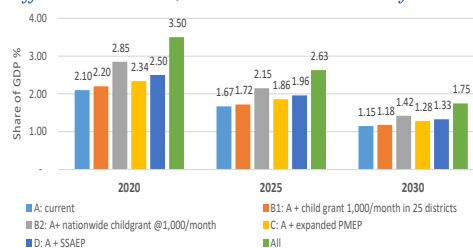


Figure 9: Projected Social Assistance Spending under Different Scenarios, Nominal and as Share of GDP.

Source: Pandey et al. (2021).

<sup>1</sup> The actual FY 2020 allocation is NPR 85 billion, about 2.2 per cent of GDP. The difference of NPR 2.5 billion between the actual and estimated based on beneficiary figures is likely owing to inefficiencies in some of the programs and discrepancies in population estimates across the main data sources: NLFS III and UN population estimates.

<sup>2</sup> Figures in parenthesis represent the total cost of SP including the proposed reform.

<sup>3</sup> Households with more than three children under the age of 6 have nearly three times the poverty rate (46.6%) compared to households with no children (12.3%).

370,000 individuals, a significant increase from the current coverage, aimed at 200,000 individuals in FY 2021. Each beneficiary is expected to work 100 days in a year. This would add NPR 9 billion or 0.24 per cent of GDP in 2020 but only about 0.13 per cent of GDP by 2030.

Scenario D simulates the rollout of the SSAEP, as per the 2018 Social Security Act. We simulate a scenario in which all households in the bottom quintile benefit from the SSAEP, with benefits of NPR 2,000 per month, excluding households who already benefit from senior citizen or single women allowances. This scenario shows that the rollout of the SSAEP would increase nominal expenditure by NPR 16 billion, or about 0.40 per cent of GDP in 2020. By 2030, it would only increase expenditure by 0.18 per cent of GDP.

Overall, introducing all these changes would result in moderate increases in the expenditure. In FY 2020, total social assistance is estimated to cost 2.10 per cent of GDP. Introducing all changes— expansion of the child grant benefit and coverage (scenario B2), the expansion of PMEP (scenario C), and introduction of the SSAEP (scenario D)—would increase the cost by 1.40 per cent to about 3.50 per cent of GDP in FY 2020. Even in this scenario, however, the cost as a share of GDP would decline to 2.63 per cent of GDP by 2025 and to 1.75 per cent by 2030. This suggests that the proposed reforms would not present a major fiscal challenge in the medium term. Focusing some of the programmes on the poorest households would create significant fiscal space, to enable the proposed changes. One way to create fiscal space could be to change the eligibility criteria of some programmes, to ensure that they are even more focused on the poorest and most vulnerable. To illustrate the types of potential savings which would be achieved, we simulate a fictional scenario

whereby allowances for senior citizens and single women would be provided only to those in the poorest two quintiles. In such a case, the total SSA cost would decrease by about NPR 45 billion (from NPR 68 billion to NPR 23 billion, see Figure 9 left panel). The difference could easily cover an increase in the child grant to NPR 1,000 per month as well as its nationwide expansion at that benefit level. Total cost would still decrease from NPR 68 billion to NPR 47 billion. Even assuming full coverage of SSA programmes (Figure 9, right panel), the targeting of senior citizen and single women allowances would be more than financing the expansion of the child benefit to NPR 1,000 per month for all children. While targeting benefits would be politically complex and require progressive implementation, the analysis serves to illustrate the possible savings and how these gains can be mobilised to address existing gaps.

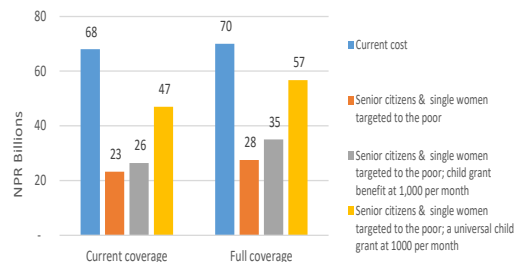


Figure 10: Cost of SSAs under Various Scenarios, FY20.

Source: Pandey et al.,(2021).

## 4. Conclusion

Nepal has a robust constitutional and legal basis for social protection. There are several legislations and programmes to translate the constitutional rights related to social protection enshrined in the constitution. However, there remains a need for an overarching policy framework to define the broad objectives of social protection to ensure that the various laws, policies, and



programmes do not always come together effectively to deliver the objectives.

The Government of Nepal spends a substantial and increasing amount on social protection. Nominal expenditure on social protection has grown over fivefold since FY 2010 reaching NPR 134.4 billion or 3.9 per cent of GDP and 11 per cent of total government expenditure in FY 2019. Of this, 1.4 per cent is spent on social assistance, which is higher than other countries in South Asia but at par with the average in lower-middle-income countries (1.4% of GDP) and just below the average for all developing countries (1.5% of GDP) (World Bank, 2018).

While investment in social assistance has achieved some notable outcomes, challenges remain in addressing the risks and vulnerabilities, in terms of coverage, adequacy, and impact. First, existing programmes do not effectively target or cover the poor and vulnerable, which limits their impact on poverty and vulnerability reduction. Few programmes explicitly target the economically poor or aim to reduce poverty. Operationalising the SSAEP and scaling up the PMEP would help address this. In addition, coverage gaps remain among those eligible for existing programmes. Simulations suggest that these are fiscally feasible.

Second, social assistance spending is heavily skewed toward the elderly, and the limited expenditure on early years and children limit the programmes' impact on human capital development. Reviewing the benefit amounts and coverage of existing programmes, such as the child grant, would help address this. Simulations suggest there is fiscal room to do this with phased expansion across the country.

Third, existing social assistance programmes, such as the PMEP and SSA, do not have the flexibility to be scaled up in

response to the shocks. Fourth, existing programmes focus on singular interventions (for example, providing only cash, service, or training on their own) and are implemented in isolation from each other, which limits their impact. Programmes for children could be coordinated around shared human capital objectives. For example, the child grant could be leveraged to facilitate access to information and training on good practice around early childhood development. It is also critical to coordinate the various programmes dedicated to early years—safe motherhood, birth registration, child grant, and early childhood education and development (ECED)—to ensure every child receives all the benefits s/he is eligible for by referring beneficiaries between programmes.

Finally, current programmes do not focus on economic inclusion in a comprehensive manner, thus limiting their transformational potential. In addition to deploying integrated programmes on a large scale, the government could also systematically integrate or link beneficiaries from existing cash transfer programmes or cash-for-work programmes with other services—skills, entrepreneurship, access to credit, and so on.

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# Impact of Social Protection Mechanism for Child Protection

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## ABSTRACT

Social protection schemes are designed to address the vulnerability of all the citizens through policy and programmes. As one of the integral agenda of the Government of Nepal, social protection programmes have covered a wide range of citizens through various schemes including cash, in-kind, and food transfers among others. Children, as the most vulnerable citizens needing support for growth, empowerment and sustenance, are the core recipients of the social protection programmes. Analysis of the current contribution of social protection programmes in child protection through the review of policy, programmes and budget allocated by the federal as well as provincial governments shows lack of compliance between the annual policy, programme and budget to shield children under social protection schemes. In addition, all the policy provisions haven't been exclusively supported by budgetary provisions. Though significant benefits and social security allowances have been placed for children covering education, health, protection, nutrition, and development, this study shows further need of investment on children focused programmes. Similarly, it reveals that though Dalits, girls, conflict-affected, martyr's children, children with disabilities and other most marginalised and disadvantaged are covered by the social protection programmes, a large part of the sexual and gender minority children have been excluded from these supports due to lack of awareness and accessibility to such schemes.

## 1. Introduction

Social protection can be defined as a set of public actions aimed at addressing poverty, vulnerability and exclusion as well as provide means to cope with major risks throughout the life cycle (UNICEF, 2017). The concept of social protection has long been used in the industrialised countries to help ensure that

the benefits of economic prosperity reach the poorest and most marginalised populations, helping to fulfill the internationally recognised right to a decent standard of living. It provides important aid to human beings to protect their lives through positive discrimination, including dignity and identity in society. Therefore, social protection programmes

are essential for securing against poverty, ensuring social justice, inclusive development and solidarity and harmony between haves and haves-not, government and citizens of a nation (Ref).

The constitution and legal instruments concerning social security of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Labor Organisation's (ILO) establish states under social protection, to protect their most vulnerable citizens (Lath & Pun, 2014). However, such protection is far from the norm for the majority of the world's population, both adults and children. As the woes and problems of human lives are as old as the beginning itself, the history of social protection dates back to the initiation of human civilization. The concept has been developed to protect from vulnerabilities, poverty and various forms of crisis. -. Social protection was first practiced by the developed countries to maintain lifestyle of the civilians by addressing poverty. Formal Social Security programme was started first in Germany in 1880's, with the goal of providing health insurance to sick workers (Lath & Pun, 2014). In 1905, France introduced an unemployment allowance system, followed by the United Kingdom in 1911, which implemented a health insurance, unemployment allowance, and senior citizen insurance or allowance programme (DFID, 2009). Similarly, in 1922, the Soviet Union established comprehensive social safety protection while the United States established unemployment, senior citizen, and retired personnel allowances, as well as insurance schemes (DFID, 2009). Social protection programmes are currently in place in a number of nations throughout the world.

The United Nations UDHR, 1948 has addressed the issues of social protection and since then, several subsequent declarations have covered social protection issues for individuals and groups of all ages

and backgrounds. Article 22 of the UDHR, 1948 guarantees that everyone, *"as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to the realisation, through national effort and international cooperation, and in accordance with the organisation and resources of each state, of the economic, social, and cultural rights indispensable for his/her dignity and the free development of his/her personality"* (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, p.6.) Article 25 (2), on the other hand, is dedicated to children and specifies that *"motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance"* (UNICEF, 2017). The implementation of Social Protection Convention, 1952 (No. 102) is the only international instrument that establishes a globally agreed-upon minimum criteria for all nine social divisions safeguarding (ILO, 1952). UNCRC recognises the child as a bearer of economic, social, and cultural rights, including the right to education, health care, and an appropriate standard of living, as well as the right to social protection (ILO, 1952).

In 1935, a social protection plan was launched with the goal of providing a lump sum annual amount to injured Nepali troops returning from World War I (ADB, 2014). The social protection measures were highlighted from the Sixth Plan (1980/81-1984/85) of the Government of Nepal, principally concentrating on cash transfers to address the challenges of poor and marginalised populations (ADB, 2014). The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 ensures the right to equality, and specifies social protection as fundamental rights (NPC, 2020).

This paper aims to analyse the impact of social protection mechanisms for child protection. Specifically, it intends to scrutinise the federal level and province level budget wise mechanisms to implement social protection programmes for the children.

## 2. Methods and Materials

This paper draws on review of relevant documents including policies, programmes and budget of the federal and provincial governments, reports prepared by various governmental bodies like the National Child Rights Council (NCRC) Commission, Nepal and various research papers of the development partners and international/national organisations. The annual provisions of the federal and provincial government were obtained through their respective websites. The situation report published by NCRC provided detail information on the child beneficiaries of the intervention within fiscal year 2019/20. Likewise, reports published by various development partners like the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Bank Group, World Health Organisation and Democracy Resource Center Nepal covered the information on children's rights, relevant provisions targeting children and social protection, as well as the budgetary provisions of federal, provincial and local government. Following in-depth study of the available documents, selected information was analysed and conclusions were drawn.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Social protection in South Asia

All countries in the South Asia are member states of CRC, and are thus obliged to implement the convention (Ref). Through relevant laws and government agencies, child protection services are regulated. South Asia has been making progress in strengthening the legal framework on protecting children. All South Asian countries have laws that prohibit use of severe forms of physical violence against children, however, Nepal and Pakistan's Sindh province are the only two regions that prohibits use of physical force against children, however light, in any situations. (UNICEF, 2020a). Furthermore, the countries in this region have taken

serious effort in identifying and prohibiting traditional harmful practices such as female infanticide in India and Nepal; dowry related violence in Bangladesh, India and Nepal; bonded labor in Nepal; exploitation of boys by men in Afghanistan (UNICEF, 2020a).

Child sensitive programmes in South Asia mainly target school going children. This means that there are few programmes that target children under the age of six compared to those above it. (IPC-IG, 2020). Moreover, it was also reported that access to education through cash transfer programmes and scholarships are the second most common type of programmes that support and assist children. All countries in South Asia, except for Afghanistan, have at least one non-contributory health insurance or cash transfer to support children's access to health care.

### 3.2. Legal provision on children and social protection

The transition to a federal governance system in Nepal presents a historic opportunity to recognise the importance of social protection in fulfilling the constitutional ideals of fairness, inclusiveness, and prosperity. The right to equality for all the citizens of Nepal has been guaranteed by the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 and all citizens are entitled to equal protection of the law. However, to empower, protect and develop citizens positive discrimination and special provisions to children among other socially and culturally backward groups has been guaranteed. The rights of children have been guaranteed as fundamental rights by the Constitution (The Constitution of Nepal, p. 25). Article 39 of the Constitution guarantees certain rights of children, covering holistic topics such as having the right to name and birth registration, right to education, health, maintenance, proper care, sports, entertainment and overall personality development; right to elementary child development and child participation etc. The role of Social Security and Poverty

Alleviation is shared by the federal power as mentioned in Schedule 5 as well as federal, province and local government as mentioned in Schedule 9.

Nepal is a signatory to the CRC, which was ratified on 14 September 1990. According to UNICEF, CRC is the most ratified treaty in history of human rights which has helped transform the lives of children from all around the world. As this is a legally binding document, the signatory states are bound to oblige with the rights and principles outlined in the convention. Article 27 of the convention stipulates that the *'right of every child to a standard of living is adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development'* (Convention on the Rights of the Child p. 8). To attain this right, countries formulate a range of means through their policies, which cannot be achieved without access to social security; including social insurance which has been recognised in Article 26 (Convention on the Rights of the Child p. 8). Moreover, it holds the government accountable as the framework establishes a legal mechanism if their rights are violated.

Following the ratifications of CRC, and other conventions such as the Forced Labor Convention 1930 (No. 29), Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (No.182), Nepal has undertaken numerous measures in protecting children's rights. Such measures include the Children's Act, 2018; Social Protection Act, 2018; Compulsory and Free Education Act, 2018; and Public Health Service Act, 2018 that constitutes provisions for social protection for children (Pun & Shrestha, 2020).

The Act relating to Children, 2018 of Nepal, recognizes people below 18 years of age as children. The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 has ensured the rights of children under the fundamental rights. Therefore, the

Government of Nepal has provided prime importance for social protection programmes. Among the 15 periodic plans, the recent Fifteenth Plan (2019/20-2023/24) has clearly emphasised the nation's vision, mission, goals and strategies while prioritising the social protection programme. Similarly, the Child Act of 2018 has defined over 18 categories of vulnerable children who require special state protection, including orphans, child in forced labor, children in conflict with the law, disabled and abandoned children, drug addicts, HIV/AIDS infected and affected children, and children affected by conflicts among others (DFID, 2009).

Social protection schemes aimed at children could play a pivotal role in preventing harmful outcomes such as underweight, unhealthy, eventually drop out from school, and be exposed to a dangerous or exploitative environment due to extreme poverty. Around 28.6 per cent of the Nepal's total population are multi-dimensionally poor and children below the age of 10 years are the poorest age sub-group with an MPI of 0.194 in 2014. (NPC, 2018 p. 17)

The Child Sensitive Social Protection (CSSP) (Save the Children, 2020) project began in Nepal in 2011 and is based on the belief that government social protection programmes play an important role in enhancing children's development. The CSSP policies and programmes address different patterns of poverty and vulnerability among children while also acknowledging their long-term developmental benefits through targeted investment. The voices and views of children as well as their families, considered under CSSP, aims to maximise positive impacts on the lives of children while minimising any negative impact on them. Moreover, CSSP is a proven approach in combating child poverty and vulnerability wherein it explicitly analyses and monitors the impact of social protection on children in various contexts

including age, gender, and different types of vulnerability (Save the Children, 2020).

Nepal was the first country to establish a social pension and execute a series of government funded social protection programmes (Rolene & Chettri, 2016). Over the last two decades, the Government of Nepal has prioritised social protection, while the number of programmes and investments in the social protection sector has also increased. There is still a significant gap in terms of understanding the approach on social protection programmes from the standpoint of children's wellbeing. The National Planning Commission (NPC) has drafted an Integrated National Framework on Social Protection to address these concerns (NPC, 2020).

Child's Act, 2018\_\_identifies vulnerable children which require special protection from the state as Article 7 explicitly specifies '*children with disabilities, war victims, displaced, under vulnerable conditions, or living on a street shall have the right to special protection as prescribed from the state for their secured future*' (Children's Act, 2018, p.5). Moreover, it ensures 13 rights to children, outlining the duty of the parents, institutions, media and state. Replacing the Children's Act 1992, it now has provisions related to child victims of violence and abuse and family-based alternative care.

Recognizing the vulnerable groups of the society, children are entitled to social security as mentioned in the Social Security Act, 2018. Article 9 specifies that children under the age of five who are from a specific backward region are entitled to a child nutrition allowance (Social Security Act, 2018, p. 3) marginal. This scheme was introduced to control malnutrition among children below the age of five.

The Compulsory and Free Education Act, 2018 ensures that every citizen has the

right to obtain equal and quality education. Article 20 of the Act guarantees that citizens have the "*right to acquire free education up to secondary level from the state*" (The Compulsory and Free Education Act, 2018, p.10). Moreover, along with free education, the government shall also provide textbooks and other educational materials for free. For ensuring education continuity among children of the backward communities of the region, the provision of scholarship has also been mandated.

Article 20 of Chapter 4 on the Act Relating to Rights of Person with Disabilities, 2017 guarantees the rights of children with disabilities and "*have the right to obtain an education, training, health, care, rehabilitation service, preparation for employment and opportunities of entertainment in order to assimilate in the society and make personal development* (Act Relating to Rights of Person with Disabilities, 2017, p.9)." Similarly, people with disabilities are entitled to free education and the government must "*provide education to the persons with disabilities through more than one means such as brail or alternative scripts, sign language, means of information technology and peer learning, in order to ease the imparting of education*" (Act Relating to Rights of Person with Disabilities, 2017, p.9/10) for as mentioned in Chapter 5, Article 21. Moreover, they are entitled to educational scholarships and quality education. The Act has classified disabilities based on severity; profound disability, severe disability, moderate (mid-level) disability and mild disability.

Apart from these acts, Government of Nepal has been sensitive in protecting children and as a result concern for children has been reflected in national development plans such as The Fifteenth Plan 2019/20-2023/24 which envisions "*a child-friendly society where the rights of the children are*



ensured” (NPC, 2020, p.270). In addition, National Child Policy, 2012 Child Labor Prohibition and Regulation Act, 2000, Local Self Governance Act, 2017, also provision child protection.

### 3.3 Overview of budget allocation on children

According to a budget brief of Nepal published by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2020b) social protection for different groups of people has been dispersed through 76 schemes which are spread across 29 programmes in 11 different ministries. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), Ministry of Education, Sports and Technology (MOEST) and Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) have the most beneficiary reach with 2, 3 and 5 major programmes under each ministry respectively (UNICEF, 2020b).

Moreover, the report also highlighted that 88 per cent of the social protection budget was allocated for the federal government whereas allocation for provincial government and local government remained 1 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively. Over the years, the budget transferred to the local levels has been increasing whereas it has been decreasing for the province.

Within the mid-February of fiscal year 2019/20 885,059 children have benefited from the social security programme (annual report, NCRC, 2021) in Nepal. Nepalese Rupees (NPR) 4 billion 248.33 million has been distributed for the social security of the children during this period. Last year, the number remained at 794,221. The number of children beneficiaries receiving the allowance and the average annual allowance have been provided in table 1.

Table 1: No. of children receiving social protection allowances, amount (NCRC, 2021).

Fiscal Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19		2019/20		
				Monthly	Yearly	Monthly	Yearly	Percentage
	(beneficiaries)			(NPR)		(NPR)		
Child Nutrition	521507	679715	736579	400	3540379	400	4248331	5.7

Source: NCRC, 2021.

Programmes targeting the protection of children such as school scholarships, school lunches, safe motherhood and mother-child nutrition support programmes can be placed under the social assistance pillar. In FY 2019/20, out of the total social protection budget, 58 per cent was allocated to social assistance (UNICEF, 2020b). However, only 4 per cent of it was allocated to programmes that were critical for child protection, whereas over 45 per cent of the budget was allocated for elderly allowance (UNICEF, 2020b).

The budget/expenditure statement does not include any type of scholarships and allowances for the families and children of martyrs, children affected by the conflict and sexual and gender minority children. It is estimated that the total number of children receiving this type of allowance is very low.

Table 2 shows the provisions covering children and social protection, in the policy, programme and budget allocated by the federal government for the fiscal year 2019/20.

Table 2: Social protection and security to Nepali citizens in their life cycle.

SN	Policy and programme	Budget Statement
Provisions related to health		
1	The major priority of the Federal Government is to save the lives of the citizens amid COVID-19 pandemic.	As per the life cycle approach to Social Security Program, 33 per cent of the social security funds are allocated for health check-up and nutrition during pregnancy, free immunisation in childhood, nutrition, etc.
Provisions related to education		
2	To increase the role of the state for effective implementation of fundamental rights.	In line with the above concept, approaches of social security and protection related to education have been added like provision of basic education and scholarships, education for youth, health and employment have also been increased by 33 per cent. NPR 1 trillion has been allocated for this.
3.	N/A	Budget for scholarships to protect the right to education of socio-economically marginalised and endangered communities including Chepang, Raute, Badi, Majhi, Musahar, persons with disabilities, families of martyrs, conflict victims, students of families victimised by COVID-19 and HIV / AIDS infected children has been arranged.  Arranged to provide scholarships to Dalit, Muslim women and free Kamalari women students in all subjects up to higher education and to ensure free education.
Provisions related to Child Protection		
4.	Point no. 6 of Item No. 2.8 under the heading of immediate relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation, make effective minimum nutrition programmes for pregnant and lactating women and malnourished children in Karnali and other areas with low human development index.	The amount of child protection grants for orphans, Dalits, children with disabilities and children from poor families has been increased by one third.
		NPR.1.20 billion has been allocated for women, children and senior citizens.
		Access to food and nutrition will be expanded to landless farmers, Dalits and economically and socially backward classes and communities in order to implement the government's resolution that no one will go hungry and no one will die of hunger. Hunger will be ended by providing food to individuals, families, classes and communities who are at risk of hunger and food insecurity.
		In order to improve the nutritional status of the children and to solve the problem of dropping out of school without completing the academic session, lunch programme will be conducted at public schools for all the children up to class 5. Approximately, 3.5 million children across the country will benefit from it.
		NPR 8 billion 730 million has been allocated to improve the nutritional status of the children and to solve the problem of dropping out of school without completing the academic session through lunch programmes at public schools for all the children up to class 5. Approximately, 3.5 million children across the country will benefit from it.
Common Minimum Programmes of the Federal Government		
9.	To make minimum nutrition programmes for pregnant and lactating women and malnourished children in Karnali and other areas with low human development index effective.	
10.	Declare to end the discrimination against Dalit, Tharu, Adivasi, Janajati, Muslim, poor, women, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, children, gender minorities, language and culture. (Statement by Finance Minister Shri Janardan Sharma "Prabhakar" on the Bill to replace the Finance Ordinances in the Federal Parliament (Fiscal Year 2021/22).	

Source: MoFAGA, 2021.

The social protection related provisions covering children in the annual policy, programme and budget of all the seven provincial governments have been highlighted below:

### **Province 1**

- Protecting citizens from COVID-19 has been the top priority of the provincial government. For that, programmes related to basic preventive awareness, maintaining sanitation and hygiene, environmental protection and nutrition of children will be led by provincial public health care centers and health posts.
- Adhering to the slogan, “When the mother’s womb is safe, an era is safe”, a province level nutrition food programme is planned to be conducted.
- The distribution of advanced nutritional supplements for pregnant, lactating mothers and infants up to five years of age will be conducted in around eight districts under the multilateral nutrition programme.
- School nursing education will be expanded in all 14 districts in Province 1. Likewise, scholarships will be provided to hardworking students from backward castes and communities.
- The provincial government will continue to operate the Emergency Child Protection Fund Programme with the children who are the future leaders of the country.

### **Province 2**

- Scholarships will be provided for Adivasi, Janajati, Dalit, Muslim, female students and families of

martyrs and those injured during the Madhesh movement, studying higher education while employment-oriented trainings will be provided to the families of martyrs.

- Feasibility study will be done for the construction of provincial level library in Janakpurdham. Following that, construction and upgradation of community libraries will be continued. Also, the provincial historical libraries will also be upgraded.
- In order to increase the literacy level of female students, the student education scholarship programme will be continued by encouraging the extremely poor Dalit and Muslim students from grade 1 to 8 through scholarships.
- Safe daughter campaign, child violence, preventive and remedial programmes against domestic violence will be conducted in collaboration with police, local level and schools.
- The insurance programme for daughters has become popular after its implementation in the province under the daughter term insurance scheme “Beti Bacchau, Beti Padhau” which is a campaign launched for social transformation in the state. Under the current system, the girls will receive a minimum of NPR 300,000 rupees in cash after reaching the age of 20. This campaign of social transformation will be carried out in a more sophisticated and powerful manner. Under this campaign, education scholarship for daughters, daughter public service preparation class, ideal marriage, bicycle and laptops

distribution will be held. Structural arrangements will be made for 50 per cent participation of daughters in the provincial structure.

### **Bagmati Province**

- Arrangements are made for free treatment in the provincial hospitals for the victims of the conflict, those injured during the people's movement (Maoist insurgency from 1996-2006 and joint people's movement against monarchy in 2006), victims of natural disaster, and those who have lost their parents due to COVID-19. Out of the total conditional grant, NPR 69 crores have been allocated to education and health. Giving priority to the most marginalised and endangered communities like Rautes, necessary budget has been allocated for the consolidation of birthing centers at the local level for adolescent targeted reproductive and sexual health programmes in all rural schools.
- Scholarships have so far been provided to 900 students under the scholarship programmes for daughters and daughter-in-laws studying in community campuses. This programme will be continued by giving priority to the economically and socially backward Dalits and minorities of Bagmati province.
- Children who have lost both their parents due to COVID-19 will be given a monthly stipend of NPR 3000 as an arrangement to provide educational and social allowance. In addition, the allocated budget is to be provided as a social security allowance at the rate of NPR 2,000 per month to the children who have lost both their parents due to other

reasons.

- A zero-tolerance policy will be adopted against gender-based violence. An integrated social security services will be provided related to rescue, relief, psychosocial, psychological, rehabilitation to adolescent girls, children with disabilities, sexual and gender minorities, therefore the survivors of Gender Based Violence, human trafficking and other sexual related violence.

### **Gandaki Province**

- In order to improve the nutritional status of children, adolescents and women, the multi-sectoral nutrition improvement programme will run in partnership with the Government of Nepal as well as expanded to all local levels. In partnership with the Government of Nepal and the local level, a budget of NPR1 Crore and 50 lakhs has been allocated to improve the multi-sectoral nutrition status of infant kids, children and pregnant mothers.
- A model residential school management and scholarship programme in remote and mountainous areas in collaboration with the local level will be continued. The policy will continue to streamline education provided by such institutions in the formal education system by facilitating the infrastructure development of Gurukuls<sup>1</sup>, Monasteries, Madrasas<sup>2</sup>, Ashrams<sup>3</sup> and other alternative Schools.

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1 Ancient education system where the pupils live near their teacher "Guru", to learn from him/her.

2 Religious school attended by Muslims.

3 Name given to the spiritual hermitage or a Hindu Monastery.

- Cash relief will be provided to the children who have lost their father or mother due to COVID-19. An arrangement of NPR 5,000 per month has been provided as a relief for social security to the children who have lost their parents due to the pandemic. In addition, financial assistance of NPR 50,000 will be provided to the families of the deceased.

### **Lumbini Province**

- Special assistance will be provided for the treatment of cancer patients under 16 years of age. An arrangement to add NPR 1 lakh per person on behalf of the provincial government for the cancer victims under the age of 16 will be provided.
- Budget allocation to run targeted programmes in order to provide social security for the protection of vulnerable groups, women, children, single women, persons with disabilities will be conducted by the government.
- A total of NPR 21.4 million has been allocated to make Lumbini, a child-friendly province which will be free from child marriage, child labor, and street children. Further, protection and promotion of children at risk, their immediate rescue, rehabilitation, provision of rescue and child fund, operation of child helpline will be included from the budget line.
- A continuation on providing rescue and service/rehabilitation centers related to gender and domestic violence, human trafficking eradication, as well as providing capacity building and

training opportunities for self-employment, protection of the helpless, women, children, single women with disabilities, senior citizens, sexual and programmes will be implemented for the social security and protection of the gender minorities and the extremely poor. Coordination and cooperation with federal, state and local level governments for the construction of state level rehabilitation center for women victims of gender-based violence will be done.

### **Karnali Province**

- A programme to increase women's access to education and scholarship to daughter-in-laws will be continued. Necessary arrangements have been made for scholarships for poor and needy and Dalit children in collaboration and coordination with the Government of Nepal and the local government
- A budget arrangement to provide free education till bachelor's level for the children of martyrs of the People's War<sup>4</sup>, People's Movement <sup>5</sup>and the movement for the acquisition of provinces and the descendants of the seriously injured soldiers will be made.
- Budget has been allocated for the continuation of scholarships for daughters, daughters-in-laws, Dalit persons with disabilities, marginalised and children of

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4 Nepal's civil war was the armed conflict between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and the Government of Nepal that accounted for the loss of lives of many civilians and armed force, lasting from 1996-2006.

5 People's movement of 2006, against the then King Gyanendra Shah after he dissolved the cabinet and took over the executive power. The power was completely transferred to people after this movement.

endangered communities like Rautes.

- One school one nurse programme will be implemented to improve health and nutrition of school children. In order to uplift, empower and holistically develop women and end gender discrimination against children, prevent child marriage as a social stereotype and ensure education to girls at least till undergraduate level, a bank account will be opened under the scheme, “Daughter security lifelong programme” where bank can invest the deposited amount in big infrastructure projects as a return.
- The transformation into a gender safe and egalitarian province needs ending discrimination in child rearing, education, etc. A bank account entitled “Daughter security lifelong programme” will be continued in coordination with the local government development partners, banks and financial institutions. This programme will be integrated with other schemes including educational assistance and insurance.

### **Sudurpaschim Province**

- Special programmes will be implemented and will aim for effectiveness for the improvement of maternal and child health.
- The helpless, helpless citizens and children on the streets will be rescued, protected and managed in partnership with various agencies of the provincial government.
- The Bank Account Programme will be continued for the bright future of the newborn girls. To

end discrimination on the basis of gender and to ensure the dignified life and rights of the girl child, a budget allocation of NPR 15 million has been made by the provincial government.

In the policies, programmes and budget statements, emphasis has been given to the issues of education and health of children<sup>6</sup>. In addition, social security allowances have also gained high priority. Despite this, there is lack of adequate budget allocation for the overall issue of children. On top of that, policies and programmes and budget statements do not show complete compliance. The federal government lacks policies and programmes to work accordingly, while the policies and programmes of the provincial governments are satisfactory. There is still no mention of Child Friendly Local Governance declaration programmes in any budget allocation.

### **3.4 Budget allocation at the local level**

Under the federal structure, all local governments have been provided with equal constitutional authority. Seven steps of the annual planning process have been directed

<sup>6</sup> The programme and budget statement covering free health care, free treatment for serious illnesses, continuation of the Presidential Maternity Rescue Programme, immunisation of all children, nutrition, 33 per cent increase in social security, nutrition for the disadvantaged and marginalised children, arrangement of day lunch, priority for construction of disability friendly physical infrastructure, 100 per cent enrollment rate, provision of books in Braille for visually impaired children, construction of residential school for secondary class in remote and mountainous district, one school one nurse programme, provision for disability friendly resources, construction of child academy for the all-round development of children, construction of juvenile correctional facilities, provision of budget for zero hunger, provision of free legal services in 49 districts for vulnerable children suffering from various forms of violence, abuse, awareness programmes, programmes including provision of sanitary pads for adolescent girls has properly covered the agenda of health and education for children.



for these local governments to receive the fund and complete the process of budget formulation and allocation. The Local Level Plan and Budget Formulation Guideline, 2017 directs local governments to prepare a thematic list for budget allocation. Whereas, many local governments have failed to clearly allocate funds by thematic area. Most local governments prioritise infrastructure development over other thematic sectors, and the practice of former unitary structure has continued to influence how local governments allocate funds in the federal structure. Moreover, 10 per cent allocation of the budget for children was made mandatory at all the local levels in the previous context. This increased to 15 per cent in the Child Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) declared areas. Whereas, this trend has disappeared now, with which the investment on children at the local government have greatly reduced. The policies and programmes of most of the local governments at least cover some areas of children including provisions as well as incentives for pregnant and lactating mothers, but the adequate budget allocation is still a major issue.

### **3.5 Types of social protection schemes related to children and their impact**

There are numerous non-contributory schemes, among which most of them encompass the Social Security Allowance (SSA). This programme is administered by MoHA and contributes to the largest proportion of social assistance programmes expenditure (International Labor Organization, 2021). As of 2021, there are five SSA namely Child Protection Grant, Disability Allowances, Endangered Ethnicity Allowance, Single Women Allowance and Senior Citizens Allowance. Out of the five programmes, child protection grants and disability allowance target children of vulnerable conditions.

Other key social assistance programmes targeting children include scholarships and midday meals under MOEST.

#### **3.5.1 Child protection grant**

The child protection grant is one of the major non-contributory schemes which was introduced in 2009 to support vulnerable children under the age of five. Initially, the scheme had targeted Dalit children and children younger than the age of five in five remote districts of Karnali province. However, this programme has now been expanded to a total of 25 districts to cover some of the basic needs of children. Under this scheme, mothers of eligible children receive an allowance of NPR400 every month (UNICEF, 2019). As of 2018-19, there were 679,715 beneficiaries, which constituted about 25 per cent of the total number of children aged 0-5 (ILO, 2021).

There has been evidence that the grant has allowed the beneficiary households to purchase more nutritious and desirable foods thus bringing improvements in dietary diversity in the households (World Bank Group, 2021). Moreover, the report also discloses that the allowance has enabled children to consume a greater number of meals and eat bigger portions. This grant has also brought a sense of inclusion, equality and respect as reported by 85 per cent of the respondents of a survey of 2,040 households in the five districts (UNICEF, 2016). Aside from the nutritional impact, it is mandatory to register their child therefore, the birth registration rate has increased tremendously to 90 per cent (UNICEF, 2016).

#### **3.5.2 Disability allowance**

Commenced in 1996, Nepal's disability allowance is one of the government-run non-contributory schemes which provides allowances to people with disabilities. To receive the disability allowance, and other subsidized services, people with disabilities need to have a disability identity card which is

categorised based on severity. Any individual with a disability regardless of any age can apply to receive an identity card. However, only ‘profound’ and ‘severe’ disability cardholders (red or blue cards respectively) are eligible for the disability allowance. Red cardholders receive an allowance of NPR 2000 per month whereas blue cardholders receive NPR 600 per month (UNICEF, 2018).

Regarding the impact of disability allowances, very little information is available. This is mainly due to the high exclusion errors from the disability identity card (UNICEF, 2018). It is also estimated that among the disability cardholders, 30 per cent to almost 60 per cent of the beneficiaries who are eligible do not have access to the allowance. However, previous research has proven that the allowance has shown a mildly positive impact on health and poverty (Roelen & Chettri, 2016). It was reported that the parents of the beneficiaries either save the allowance for the child’s future while some spend it for the access of basic needs such as clothing, health and school expenses (UNICEF, 2018).

### **3.5.3 Scholarship programmes**

Numerous scholarship programmes have been commenced by the government to improve educational outcomes for vulnerable groups and to include those children who do not fall under the child protection schemes. Under the ministry, 15 types of scholarships have been mentioned, including five residential scholarships. Some of the non-residential scholarship programmes are targeted to girls, Dalit, disabled, conflict-affected, martyr’s children, endangered and marginalized groups and freed Kamalari (World Bank Group, 2021). Although Dalits and girl children constitute over 80 per cent of all scholarship beneficiaries in basic education but received less than 40 per cent of the total benefits in FY 2019 (World Bank Group, 2021).

The impact of scholarships varies based on the type of scholarships. MOEST and UNESCO had conducted a joint review of Education for All in 2015, which revealed that NPR 400 per student per annum was “helpful but hardly adequate to cover school expenses, let alone to compensate for the opportunity costs”. Although other scholarships had lower coverage, the benefits were much higher than other scholarship schemes. Scholarships to children with disabilities, freed Kamalari, martyr’s children, conflict-affected were seen as relatively effective, in terms of needs and the scholarship amount (Kafle et al., 2018).

Following the introduction of the scheme, scholarship had increased girl’s enrolment by 6 per cent between 2003 and 2005 (World Bank Group, 2021). However, scholarships had minimal impact on the student’s attendance and retention. Scholarships are meant to increase the enrolment rate along with their attendance and retention, however, very little can be attributed to these scholarships which may be due to the small size of the benefit (World Bank Group, 2021).

### **3.5.4 Midday meals**

To improve the student’s enrolment rate along with their nutritional status and health, School Meal Programme has been implemented. There are two models for implementing the programme: i) government-run cash-based programme, and ii) World Food Program (WFP) run food-based programme. For both the models, NPR15 has been allocated per child per day for 180 school days a year. A home-grown school feeding approach has been adopted where locally grown foods are sourced, hoping to improve the meal quality and local ownership.

Midday meals have contributed positively to increasing school enrollment and attendance. There may have been cases where students would go back to their homes

to eat their meals and would not return for rest of the day. Providing meals for children, particularly those who are food insecure and have low educational performance, has been successful in achieving gender parity in primary education and reducing socio-cultural discrimination (Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2019). In the fiscal year 2019, NPR 5.8 billion was spent for scholarships and midday meal programmes with 3.2 million beneficiaries for the scholarships and over 1.3 million children for the midday meal programme.

### ***3.5.5 National immunization programme***

Launched as the Expanded Programme on Immunization in 1977/78, the National Immunization Programme has been a number one priority programme of the Government of Nepal. As of 2020, 12 antigens have been listed in the programmes and are provided to eligible infants, children and mothers (WHO, 2020). The vaccinations under this programme are available to all children under the age of five. The efforts of the government in immunising the children have been quite successful as Nepal has reached to more than 90 per cent of the targeted population through vaccination (WHO, 2020). Through this programme, Nepal had set an example in the world by achieving all the targets of Millenium Development Goals (MDG) 4 which was ‘to reduce under-five mortality by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015’ (National Planning Commission, 2016). In 2000, the infant mortality rate was 64 per 1,000 live births which reduced to 33 per 1,000 in 2014 (ibid). Similarly, the under-five mortality which stood around 91 per 1,000 was reduced to 38 per 1,000 live births in 2014 (NPC, 2016).

### ***3.5.6 Safe motherhood programme***

The National Safe Motherhood Programme was initiated with the goal of reducing maternal and neonatal mortality and improving the maternal and neonatal health

through preventive and promotive activities as well as by addressing avoidable factors that cause death during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum period (Ministry of Health and Population, Nepal, 2021). Under the programme, initially a cash payment of NPR 1,500 in the mountain, NPR 1,000 in hills, and NPR 500 in Terai districts was made to women immediately following the delivery. As per the new budget decision in 2019, women in the mountainous, hilly and Tarai regions will get NPR 3,000, NPR 2,000, and NPR 1,000 respectively following the delivery. Additionally, cash bonus of NPR 800 should be provided to mothers who complete all four antenatal checkups. In some local level institutions, the pregnant women attending regular health check-ups are provided with nutritious food items as well.

## **4. Conclusion**

As one of the first countries to introduce social pensions and many state-funded social protection systems, Nepal is considered in the forefront of social protection mechanism compared to other low-income countries. Despite the long history of social protection in Nepal, there needs to be clarity about its functionality, accessibility and resources. This, coupled with the limited priority of children’s issues, can undermine efforts to make social protection child-friendly. Building knowledge and awareness on the importance of child-friendly social protection between policy makers and practitioners is essential to strengthen the potential benefits of social protection for children. This applies to both those who formulate policies at the national level and those who implement policies at the province and local levels. Therefore, in Nepal, efforts to expand social protection are critical in lowering life span risk and vulnerability. Despite the determination to boost investment and coverage, there are growing concerns about its long-term funding, effectiveness, impact, and inclusion.

These should be addressed through adequate reflection in the policies, programme and budget by focusing on the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, support from various other provisions and their efficient implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Some recommendations to shape the child rights campaign through social protection can be given as follows.

- The social protection programme is heavily skewed towards elderly allowance. There is a need to balance the resources among other sectors, especially to child protection.
- Due to the success of the child protection grant, it has been expanded to only around 25 districts where Dalit children and children under the age of five can access this allowance. The government should recognise these efforts and the capability of these programmes to bring positive changes and thus should implement its coverage in all 77 districts.
- Separate provisions should be ensured for the most marginalised children including sexual and gender minorities.
- The budget statement of both the federal and provincial government should be supported by the policies and programme provisions and vice versa. In some cases, the outlined policies do not necessarily have a budget allocation which causes difficulty in implementation, mainly due to lack of funds. Effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the provisions should also be emphasised.
- The local government should make the budget allocation for children

mandatory, and ensure that the annual policy, programme and budget supports the immediate as well as long term needs of the children.

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# The Landscape of Social Protection Programmes in Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

*Stimulating social protection programmes have a greater impact on the lives of people. More than 80 social protection programmes are being implemented by the Government of Nepal. The development partners, bilateral and multilateral agencies have been assisting the government for a long time however, the gap is realised in the programme integration and lack of inter-ministerial cooperation to set the results. 12 federal ministries are regulating social protection programmes through provincial and local governments. Some programmes have similar nature and might have certain duplication in beneficiaries, thus leaving the eligible ones excluded from the support. Based on the information gathered from year-wise reports of federal ministries, government line ministries, and various development partners, set the priority areas to enhance sufficient programme strategies for better social protection coverage. This article highlights the federal social protection schemes and programmes that are scattered, the status of beneficiaries, social accountability, and identifies the challenges faced by beneficiaries and the justification of the requirement on an integrated social protection framework..*

## 1. Introduction

In Nepal, a large proportion of social protection programmes subsist in the form of cash, in-kind, and food transfers like insurance, subsidies, and public works that are being regulated primarily by the federal government and partially by the provincial governments. however, the local governments operate the social protection programmes. As autonomous bodies, local governments

also formulate social protection programmes and implement them accordingly<sup>1</sup>. These programmes are largely fragmented and are disassociated. However, social protection as a comprehensive approach directed at reducing poverty, vulnerability, and risk has emerged after the 2006 political change. Government-led social protection initiatives have been less effective than expected. Despite the universal approach of some of the schemes, coverage

<sup>1</sup> <https://gorkhapatraonline.com/open/2021-02-20-32337>



rates for the key social protection groups vary widely from an estimated 30 per cent for the elderly to under 10 per cent for people with disabilities or those entitled to health insurance. From the formal sectors, less than 7 per cent of the population are enrolled in the provident fund and Citizens Investment Fund. Likewise, about 10 per cent of the total population are receiving social protection allowances and 17 per cent are getting benefits from any form of the social protection programme. Social protection programmes cover 2.5 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 15 per cent of the national budget (Handbook of Social Protection, 2019.) Social protection programmes are designed to target populations and are also categorised into three aspects: i) Social Protection ii) Social Assistance iii) Social Security.

## 2. Methods and Materials

This paper is based on the analysis of the yearly programmes of the 12 federal ministries of Nepal. It thoroughly assesses the programmes and budget on social protection schemes of each ministry. The paper also draws on secondary data comprising of review of literature and reports, both published and unpublished. Similarly, the yearly fiscal budgets from the Ministry of Finance, year-wise publication of the Office of the Attorney General, National Health Insurance Board, and data from the Department of National ID and Civil Registration were collected and analysed. Most of the analyses are made by comparing inter-ministerial financial and programmematic performance.

The data segmentation is made with necessary arrangements by reviewing Nepal's policies which are right-based, need-based, and dedicated programmes. Regarding the data analysis and comparison, the right-based programmes are arranged by comparing constitutional rights, need-based

programmes, for instance, flood events, and dedicated programmes that are being operated through federal ministries. Similarly, we observed how these programmes are being implemented through provinces and local units.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 A Short history of social protection programmes in Nepal

The non-contributory social protection programme does not require any contribution from the beneficiaries and has been implemented as constitutional mandates by the Government of Nepal. The coverage has gradually been expanded and the progress in reducing poverty, promoting equity and social inclusion for marginalised groups.

There is a short history of implementing social protection programmes through the fiscal budget. Initially, it was established as the soldier welfare fund in 1941, and a year after the pension fund was introduced for the government staff in 1942 as social welfare programmes in 1989 AD, and senior citizen allowances in 1995. Now, there are more than 80 types of social protection schemes are under the oversight of the federal ministries (Office of Attorney General, 2020).

The Government established the Soldiers' Welfare Fund in 1934. Focusing on the welfare of soldiers from World War II, was a milestone to initiate social protection programmes. During the Rana regime, there were a couple of programmes introduced such as a pension plan and provident fund for government staff. After the democratic reform, the Nepali Congress Party established the Government Provident Fund in 1962. After a long interval, in 1989, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist – CPN-UML) started distributing Nepalese Rupees (NPR) 100 as social protection allowances for senior citizens. The Constitution of

Nepal, 2015 has introduced social protection as a fundamental right for vulnerable and poor groups. To achieve the constitutional mandate, the Contributory Social Protection Act 2017, Labor Act 2017, and the Non-Contributory Social Protection Act 2018 were endorsed by the Federal Parliament of Nepal. Then after the National Planning Commission started designing plans of action concerning those priorities

### **3.2 Social protection programmes and three tiers of government**

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the Asian region, it is also the most unequal with a GINI coefficient of 47. Globally, it is ranked at the mid-level, but measurement of group inequality places it as one of the most unequal countries in the world, surpassed only by Zimbabwe, according to Foreign Policy Magazine (Kohler, 2007). In Nepal, the cash flow programme was initiated in July 2012 through the Ministry of Home Affairs and is providing conditional cash transfer of NRP 100, the sample has been distributed from 20 districts across the country. Since the fiscal year 1995/96, this programme has been addressed as social protection under the Ministry of Local Development and has been providing regular assistance to senior citizens including widows, and persons with disabilities. Also, the allowance rates are being transferred according to the time and target group. The distribution of allowances through online technology and banking systems is moving ahead to make the distribution process simple and transparent from the fiscal year 2014/15. Till now, 750 local units will have access to the banking disbursement system by the fiscal year 2021/22 and the Department of National ID and Civil Registration (DoNIDCR) is planning to make all 753 units accessible to the banking system. The social protection allowance distribution procedure, 2019

requires all local levels to enter the details of all the beneficiaries in MIS online, name registration, logging, and renewal as per law, and all local levels have access to the bank and must distribute it through them. The Ministry of Home Affairs had released the gazette notification that informs the compulsory enrollment of the beneficiaries into the banking system (MoIC, 2021). According to the Department of National ID and Civil Registration, more than 2.8 million beneficiaries are officially registered in the banking system. (Source: DoNIDCR, 2021).

Over the 12 consecutive fiscal years since 2009/10, there has been a significant increase in the national budget allocation and expenditure on social protection. According to the data provided by the Office of the Controller and Auditor General, the highest amount of budget allocated was NRP 15 billion 49 million 3 hundred 40 thousand with 14.48 per cent of the total budget in the year 2019/20. There was a remarkable increment in the budget in the year 2013/14 than that of the fiscal year 2012/13 which covers only 2.35 per cent. It was increased from 2.35 per cent to 11.02 per cent which seems to be a high allocation during the period. It kept on escalating moderately till 2019/20 up to 14.48 per cent. However, in the fiscal year 2020/21, it was slightly reduced to 12.8 per cent. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the budget for the year has been slightly decreased. Likewise, the proportion of the budget allocated for 2009/10 to 2012/13 has just increased from 0.78 per cent to 2.35 per cent which seems to be less budget allocation in social protection.

Table 1 illustrates 35 categories of work responsibilities that fall under Social Protection Programmes at three different tiers viz. federal, province, and

Table 1: Mapping of social protection programmes by three tiers of government

Social Protection Programmes	Existing Programmes				Federal				Province				Local			
Social Security Allowance																
Relief and rescue																
Relief and rehabilitation programmes																
All types of scholarships, including residential																
School lunch programme																
Mother safety programme																
Prenatal service																
Maternal and Child Nutrition Supplement Programme (Integrated Child Health and Nutrition)																
AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases																
Leprosy control programme																
Free treatment of communicable diseases																
Poor health treatment programme																
Free check-up and treatment																
Senior Citizen Health Treatment																
Social welfare programme																
Presidential Women's Upliftment Programme / Air Rescue Service																
Child welfare assistance																
Special agricultural production programme																
Crop and livestock insurance																
Sugarcane grower farmer subsidy																
Interest subsidy (in finance)																
Herbal Cultivation Technology and Enterprise Development Grants																
Food transportation subsidy																
Throat control																
Safe Citizen Housing Programme																
Free Halya Grant																
Discount on land ownership																
Free legal aid																
Retirement allowance treatment expenses insurance																
Civil Provident Fund																
Social Security Fund programmes																
Health insurance programme																
Financial assistance for foreign employment																
Prime Minister's Employment Programme																
Youth Self-Employment Fund																

Source: Different Ministries.

local governments in Nepal. It suggests all the programmes are in existence except for discounts on land ownership since the Land-Related Problem Solution Commission is dissolved now<sup>2</sup>. Among them, relief and rehabilitation programmes, relief and rescue, and poor health treatment programmes are the programmes implemented at all levels of government. With 20 different programmes at the local level, it is launching maximum social protection programmes as compared to federal and province levels. Amongst them, 13 programmes have not been carried out by the federal and provincial governments. Those programmes are all types of scholarships, including residential, school lunch programme, mother safety programme, prenatal service, free check-up and treatment, social welfare programme, presidential women's upliftment programme/air rescue service, child welfare assistance, crop, and livestock insurance, sugarcane grower farmer subsidy, Interest subsidy (in finance) and prime minister's employment

programme. AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, leprosy control programmes, and discounts on land ownership are only three specific programmes run by the provincial government. Likewise, the six programmes run at the federal level are social protection allowance, free treatment of communicable diseases, special agricultural production programme, food transportation subsidy, throat control, and safe citizen housing programme. The common programmes are relief and rescue, relief and rehabilitation programmes, and poor health treatment programmes that have been run by the government at the federal, provincial, and local levels.

### 3.3 Types of social protection programmes by ministries

The budget for the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology stands for NPR 1 billion 26 million 82 hundred thousand for various scholarships programmes. Likewise, the Sanitary Pad distribution and the School Lunch programme are implemented under a budget of NPR 18 billion 2 million

<sup>2</sup> <https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2021/08/06/ruling-opposition-parties-on-collision-course-after-land-commission-scrapped>

and NPR 33 hundred million 27 hundred thousand respectively. There are right-based programmes namely, free secondary education and free higher education among 12 other different schemes (Table 5).

The Ministry of Health and Population incorporates 16 schemes as needs and rights. These schemes are Mother Safety programme, Prenatal Service, Maternity Leaves, Maternal and Child Nutrition Supplement programme (Integrated Child Health and Nutrition), AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, Leprosy Control programme, Free treatment of communicable diseases, Senior Citizen Health Treatment, Cervical cancer screening, Vaccination against rabies, Treatment of snake bites, Treatment of *Aang khasne* disease, Free immunization service, and Free basic health care. The budget distributed for the mother safety programme is NPR 10 million 12 hundred thousand which is half of the Maternal and Child Nutrition Supplement programme. The maximum budget allocated by the Ministry of Health is NPR 2 billion 20 million rupees for poor health treatment programmes. The least budget is NPR 2 million 8 hundred thousand rupees allocated for the leprosy control programme which is provided to beneficiaries through the treatment centre.

Similarly, there are six programmes run by the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens. It had a budget of NPR 22 million for an aerial rescue programme for pregnant and lactating women at risk in remote areas whereas NPR 14 hundred thousand was apportioned for the institutional support to rehabilitate persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development had seven programmes with a total budget of NPR 16 billion 47 million 50 hundred thousand. They are operated under agricultural production programme, crop and livestock insurance, Bird Flu compensation distribution, agriculture sector Disaster

Management programme, Sugarcane grower farmer subsidy, Interest Grant (Ministry of Finance), and Herbal Cultivation Technology and Enterprise Development Grants. The Ministry had invested the highest amount of budget in the Special agricultural production programme which amounted NPR 10 billion. Equal amount i.e 50 million of the budget was dispensed for Agriculture Sector Disaster Management programme and Herbal Cultivation Technology and Enterprise Development Grants. NPR 1 billion 5 million is the highest amount that was rationed in Bird Flu Compensation Distribution by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development. The Ministry of Commerce and Supplies oversaw two programmes namely, Food transportation subsidy and Throat control with NPR 75 million 2 hundred thousand. Likewise, the Ministry of Urban Development and the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives, and Poverty Alleviation had 2 programmes. However, the Safe Citizen Housing Programme and Free *Haliya* Grant were executed with a budget around NPR 130 million respectively.

The Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs couldn't distribute the budget despite having a programme of free legal aid. Ministries and individual institutions are working to provide social protection under social insurance. The Ministry of Finance/Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, Employees Provident Fund, Social Security Fund, and Health Insurance Board are stakeholders guiding social protection in various forms.

The Ministry of Finance/Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration governs retirement and gratuity, retirement, gratuity, treatment costs, and contribution-based pension funds. Among these retirement, gratuity, and treatment costs were executed at a budget of NPR 53 billion as a monthly programme, as per the requirement. On the

other hand, the Employees Provident Fund includes maternity and infant care, crematory ceremonies (*Kaajkriya*), and fatal disease treatment costs. However, none of these were executed in the fiscal year 2019/20.

The Ministry of Home Affairs basically covers social protection allowance, relief, and rehabilitation under social protection programmes. Similarly, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology regulates the scholarship and education and day meal programmes. The Ministry of Health and Population covers prenatal services, mother safety programmes, HIV/AIDS and STD control programmes, immunisation, economically poor treatment programmes, and cervical cancers among others. The Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens operate senior citizens support, social welfare, Prime Minister upliftment programmes, and child welfare support programmes among others. Respectively, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development looks after insurance, incentive and seed money distribution, compensation, interest and subsidies, and disaster risk reduction, among others. The Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Supplies provides transportation, throat control, and safe housing programmes which has only three programmes on social protection. The Ministry of Land Management Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation is looking for a free *Haliya* grant and discount on land ownership

programmes. The Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs provides free legal assistance as social protection programmes. Similarly, the Ministry of Finance is launching treatment expenses for poor, pregnant, and lactating mothers, ritual rites costs, health treatment, gratuity, and pension grants. Moreover, the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security provides grant support to the deceased family members abroad, economic support for the injured employees, financial assistance to the families of those who died in the course of foreign employment, financial assistance to workers who are disabled or seriously ill during foreign employment, in addition to providing financial assistance to the families of those who have gone for foreign employment, Foreign Employment Scholarship (given to the children of those who died/were maimed in the course of foreign employment), Prime Minister's Employment programme. As for the youths, the self-employment fund has been operated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

There are 12 ministries that are providing more than 80 social protection programmes in Nepal (Table 2). So far, these programmes are divided into 6 broad headings i.e. social protection programme, social insurance, contributory social protection programme, Labor Market and Employment, legal assistance and, others. The Ministry of Home Affairs has provided support in two categories of Social Protection

**Table: 2 Mapping of Social Protection Programmes of fiscal year 2019/20**

S.N.	Name of the programme	Brief description of the programme
<b>Ministry of Home Affairs</b>		
1. Social Protection Allowance		
1.1	Senior Citizen Allowance	Monthly allowance to be provided to the citizens of existing Karnali Zone and Dalit community above 60 years of age and in case of others above 70 years of age

1.2	Single Women Allowance	Monthly allowance to be provided to single women above 60 years of age in case of divorce or unmarried of any age after death of husband
1.3	Disability allowance	Monthly allowance to be provided to persons with complete disability and persons with severe disability among the citizens with disabilities
1.4	Endangered Tribal Allowance	Monthly allowance provided by the Government of Nepal to citizens of 10 different castes listed as endangered
1.5	Child nutrition allowance	The monthly allowance will be gradually extended to the underprivileged districts of Karnali Zone and Dalit community under the age of five starting from the underprivileged in the districts which are lagging behind in the Human Poverty Index
2. Relief assistance		
2.1	Relief and rescue for those who die in disaster	On the basis of necessity and justification, conflict victims, armed conflict injured disabled, people’s movement injured, people’s movement injured martyr’s family, people’s movement injured children scholarship
2.2	Immediate relief	
2.3	Completely damaged house due to the disaster	
2.4	Cold wave affected	
3	Relief and Rehabilitation Programme	
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology		
4. All types of scholarships (including accommodation)		
4.1	Dalit Student Scholarship	Children of Dalit community Funds provided to children (non-resident) of Dalit families studying in classes one to eight to increase opportunities in education
4.2	Girl Scholarship	Scholarships provided to assist girls studying in the basic level (grades 1-8)
4.3	Disability Scholarship	Cash assistance provided to children with disabilities studying from class 1 to 12
4.4	Poor scholarship	Scholarships awarded to students from poor families studying in classes 9 to 12
4.5	Marginalised and Endangered Scholarships	Cash provided for (residential) students studying in schools run for marginalised communities
4.6	Street children and child labor scholarships	Cash provided for (residential) educational arrangements for street children and child laborers
4.7	Scholarships for the sons and daughters of martyrs	Scholarships provided to help the children of martyrs in their studies (from elementary education to higher education)
4.8	Free Kamalari Scholarship	
4.9	Himalayan Residential Scholarship	
4.10	Other scholarships	To be provided to the students studying residential in the approved quota in the schools run in public-private partnership
4.11	Sanitary Pad	Distribution of free sanitary pads to community secondary school girls
5	School lunch programme	Lunch for children from pre-primary to class 5 in 48 districts and other target groups (endangered and very marginalised and Musahar) including existing Karnali Zone to increase school enrollment rate and reduce dropout rate



6	Free secondary education	Scholarship to provide free secondary education as provided by the Government of Nepal in accordance with the Constitution of Nepal
7	Free higher education	Scholarships to provide free higher education to students from financially deprived, disabled and Dalit families
<b>Ministry of Health and Population</b>		
8	Mother safety programme	Cash provided to encourage safe delivery in health facilities
9	Prenatal service	Cash to be provided at 4, 6, 8 and 9 months of pregnancy if checked in health facility
10	Maternity leave	98 days maternity leave for all according to the paid maternity and reproductive health rights
11	Maternal and Child Nutrition Supplement programme (Integrated Child Health and Nutrition)	Assistance provided to improve maternal and child health and nutrition
12	AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases	Services related to AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases will be provided free of cost
13	Leprosy control programme	Transportation costs to bring the patient to the treatment center
14	Free treatment of communicable diseases	Free treatment for malaria, kala-azar, leprosy, elephantiasis and tuberculosis
15	Poor health treatment programme	Assistance for the treatment of 8 different diseases to the needy citizens who have received the identity card of poverty and have been recommended by the local level
16	Free check-up and treatment	
16.1	Senior Citizen Health Treatment	Concession in health treatment to poor and senior citizens
16.2	Cervical cancer screening	Free cervical cancer treatment for women through Visual Inspection Acetic Acid (VIA) method and free neonatal health treatment.
16.3	Vaccination against rabies	Free vaccination and treatment against rabies will be provided
16.4	Treatment of snake bites	Treatment against snake bites will be provided free of cost
16.5	Treatment of <i>Aang khasne</i> disease	Free Diagnosis and Treatment of Eyes Disease in Women (Including Surgery)
16.6	Free immunisation service	Free immunisation services for children against 12 different diseases
16.7	Free basic health care	Health services will be provided free of cost as per sub-section 4 of section 3 of the Public Health Services Act
<b>Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens</b>		
17	Senior Citizen Health Treatment	Assistance to assist the needy senior citizens in health treatment
18	Senior Citizen Transport Convenience	
19	Social welfare programme	Institutional support for rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

20	Presidential Women's Upliftment Programme / Air Rescue Service	Aerial rescue programme for pregnant and lactating women at risk in remote areas
21	Child welfare assistance	Assistance to children in need of special protection and at risk
22	Day Baby Care Center	Operation of Child Care Center at Singha Durbar for child care of civil servants
Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development		
23	Special agricultural production programme	Subsidy to be given to the farmers if the price of the prescribed manure increases in the international market
24	Crop and livestock insurance	
25	Bird Flu Compensation Distribution	Amount to be provided as relief to the farmers of the bird flu affected areas
26	Agriculture Sector Disaster Management programmew	Relief amount to be provided to the affected farmers in case of loss in the agricultural sector due to the disaster
27	Sugarcane grower farmer subsidy	Subsidy given to sugarcane growers on the basis of production quantity
28	Interest Grant (Ministry of Finance)	Agriculture, animal husbandry and other income generating programmes
29	Herbal Cultivation Technology and Enterprise Development Grants	
Ministry of Commerce and Supplies		
30	Food transportation subsidy	Grants for food transportation in designated remote districts
31	Throat control	Grants for transportation of iodized salt to designated remote districts
Ministry of Urban Development		
32	Safe Citizen Housing programme	Grants to build safe, affordable and environment friendly housing for the extremely poor, endangered and marginalised families
33	Public housing programme	To build houses for the families of the specified communities and make them available at concessional prices
Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation		
34	Free Haliya Grant	Land purchase, house construction and maintenance grant to Mukta Haliya
35	Discount on land ownership	Full deduction of fees and charges on instruments obtained in the name of the dependent of the martyr 25 per cent in real estate registration fee for ownership in the name of blind, disabled, Dalit and backward castes and Provision of 25 per cent discount in the registration fee for ownership in the name of women in the municipality and 30 per cent in the village
Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs		
36	Free legal aid	
Ministry of Finance / Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration		
37	Retirement and gratuity	

37.1	Retirement	Amount to be paid monthly to civil servants, police, armed police, Nepal Army and teachers on compulsory retirement from service after completion of fixed service period.
37.2	Gratuity	A lump sum of cash to be paid to civil servants, police, armed police, Nepal Army and teachers if they retire before retirement
37.3	Treatment costs	Expenses for treatment provided to civil servants, police, armed police, Nepal Army and teachers during service period or after retirement
37.4	Contribution based pension fund	To be available to civil servants, police, armed police, Nepal Army employees appointed after 2018
<b>Employees Provident Fund</b>		
38.1	Maternity and infant care	Up to twice (per delivery maternity and infant care expenses) NPR 7500.00
38.2	Funeral (Kaajkriya)	Grant of NPR 40,000.00 to the family of a member who died in service
38.3	Fatal disease treatment costs	Reimbursement of treatment expenses for the nine deadly diseases specified by the Government of Nepal (as per the rules of MP)
<b>Social Security Fund</b>		
39.1	Old age protection	According to the Contribution Based Social Security Act 2075, pension will be provided to persons who have completed 60 years of age by working in the formal sector and contributing for 15 years
39.2	Drug treatment and health protection plan	Medicine treatment expenses to be provided to the contributing contributors as per the Contribution Based Social Security Act 2075
39.3	Maternity protection plan	According to the Contribution Based Social Security Act 2075, if the contributor or his / her spouse is pregnant, the amount of health check-up during pregnancy, treatment, safe delivery, treatment of newborn child and leave pay
39.4	Accident and disability protection	According to the Contribution Based Social Security Act 2075, treatment expenses incurred in case of employment or other accident or occupational disease
39.5	Dependent family protection	According to the Contribution Based Social Security Act 2075, in case of death of the contributor, monthly pension will be provided to the dependent family. Educational scholarship and funeral expenses.
<b>Health Insurance Board</b>		
40.1	Health Insurance Board programme	Health care services up to NPR 150,000/- per annum will be provided to families of up to 5 persons with an annual premium of NPR 3500.00. Patients with insurance contribution (premium) 100 per cent and women's health volunteers 50 per cent
40.2	Free health insurance	Provision of free health insurance for families below the poverty line and senior citizens who have reached 70 years of age
<b>Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security</b>		
<b>Foreign Employment Financial Assistance</b>		
41.1	Financial assistance to the families of those who died in the course of foreign employment	Assistance to the family in case of disability or death in the course of foreign employment by rescuing oneself or bringing one's dead body back home.
41.2	Financial assistance to workers who are disabled or seriously ill during foreign employment	

41.3	Financial assistance to the families of those who have gone for foreign employment	
41.4	Foreign Employment Scholarship (given to the children of those who died / were maimed in the course of foreign employment)	
42	Prime Minister's Employment programme	
<b>Ministry of Youth and Sports</b>		
43	Youth Self-Employment Fund	Interest subsidy to young entrepreneurs who take self-employment loans

Source: Thematic Ministry, Economic Survey, Annual Development Programme, Budget Statement, Expenditure Estimates.

Allowance and Relief Assistance. The Ministry of Home Affairs has provided a rights-based social protection allowance with an annual budget of NPR 10 billion in the fiscal year 2019/20. There are five types of allowances existing as social support, senior citizens, single women, people with disabilities, endangered tribal people, and children are receiving allowances once every four months. Starting from the fiscal year 2021-22, the allowance is distributed on a quarterly basis. Among those allowances, 1 million 200 thousand 76 hundred 77 senior citizens were benefited under the category of Senior Citizens Allowance through the means of either cash or bank deposits. The amount of the allowances varied from NPR 300 to NPR 3000 per month. The number of single women beneficiaries is 7 hundred 67 thousand 6 hundred. Likewise, the number of disability allowance beneficiaries is 1 hundred 77 thousand 95. Until now there are 24 thousand 2 hundred 4 who have benefited from endangered tribal allowance whereas 6 hundred 79 thousand 1 hundred 15 children were benefited with child nutrition allowance.

Relief assistance is considered as a need-based social support. In terms of relief assistance, people affected during a disaster

event are provided with benefits of NPR 5 thousand to 2 hundred thousand, depending on the nature of the disaster. The family of a deceased or injured person in disasters, receive NPR 40 thousand. NPR five thousand is given as an immediate relief for the victims of natural disasters. Likewise, the government pays up to NPR two hundred thousand including NPR 15 thousand per household for the victims of a completely damaged house in disaster events, to reconstruct the house. Relief assistance also includes assistance for the victims of the cold wave and rehabilitation programmes.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology allocate a budget of NPR 1 billion 26 million 82 hundred thousand for various scholarships programmes. Likewise, need-based schemes such as; sanitary pad distribution and smchool lunch prograem are implemented under a budget of NPR 18 billion 2 million and NPR 33 hundred million 27 hundred thousand, respectively. There are rights-based programmes specifically, Free secondary education and Free higher education among 12 other different schemes run by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

The budget distributed for the mother safety programme accounts to NPR 10 million 12 hundred thousand which is half of budget allocated for the Maternal and Child Nutrition Supplement programme. The maximum budget allocated by the Ministry of Health is NPR 2 billion 20 million for poor health treatment programmes. The least budget accounts to NPR 2 million 8 hundred thousand allocated for the leprosy control programme which is provided to beneficiaries through the treatment center.

Similarly, there are six programmes run by the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens. It had a budget of NPR 22 million for an aerial rescue programme for pregnant and lactating women at risk in remote areas whereas NPR 14 hundred thousand was apportioned for the institutional support to rehabilitate persons with disabilities.

The Ministry of Commerce and Supplies bore two programmes namely, Food transportation subsidy and Throat control with 75 hundred million and 2 hundred thousand. Likewise, the Ministry of Urban Development and the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives, and Poverty Alleviation had two programmes. However, the Safe Citizen Housing Programme and Free *Haliya* Grant were executed with a budget of NPR 13 hundred million and 10 million respectively.

The Social Security Fund consists of old-age protection, drug treatment and health protection plan, maternity protection plan, accident and disability protection, and dependent family protection. Likewise, the Health Insurance Board subsumes two schemes: Health Insurance Board programme and Free health insurance. The former schemes ordained funds of NPR 5 billion 85 hundred million and NPR 96 million. The Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports encompassed the labor market and employment programmes. (MoLESS, 2020.)

### 3.4 Challenges for the implementation of social protection programmes

Social protection programmes are backed up without or limited research to identify vulnerable groups and are designed on an ad hoc basis that may not represent the exact need of the ultra-poor population. Identification of poor people by DoNIDCR has not been conducted yet so there might be many people left out from the current social protection programmes. The programmes are arbitrarily designed and are regulated accordingly. It also suggests that 80 per cent of informal workers are left behind, possibly more due to the global pandemic and various other reasons. (ILO, 2021.)

Likewise, most of the programmes requires the proper identification of the poor and vulnerable groups before distributing the national identity card to the population. However, it is the most challenging factor to determine who is 'rich' or 'poor'. The Constitution of Nepal and the Social Protection Act, 2018 mention social protection for poor and vulnerable populations however, the universal approach on disbursing huge amounts of budget on cash transfers may not be equally important for those populations. Now, the country liability reaches 89.6% as non-contributory elderly pensions which ultimately means the political commitments and support. (ILO, 2021). Regarding gaps in the programme integration, revision, management and proper tracking of The National Planning Commission have been exercising the Integrated National Social Protection Framework from 2009 however, the draft is yet to be finalized. The proper legislation and policy reforms may significantly contribute to developing favourable grounds to reduce poverty, however, 5 out 10 policies still need a breakthrough to achieve the clarity for proper functionality. (IPC-IG, 2020.)

- Child nutrition allowance is a good example for reducing child poverty however, the low amount may not

relax children to supply child nutrition. (NEPAN, 2014.) This allowance is age-specific (Below 5 years), and limited to 25 districts (SPCSN, 2021) whereas many children in the country are excluded so far.

- Lack of an integrated data system, some reports claim for duplication and inclusion errors on several occasions. The Integrated National Social Protection Framework may open the door to represent this error however, this framework has not been endorsed by the Government of Nepal after decade long debate.
- People often perceive schemes as a charity, hindering a right-based approach.
- Most of the population are receiving social protection schemes that have greater impacts in reducing poverty however, the eligible populations are still lacking to enrol in this programme due to a lack of government documents and other preconditions. Some of the most vulnerable-for examples, children of a young mother without having identification documents which are necessary for the birth registration of a child. (UNICEF, 2016)
- The scholarship programmes are designed according to the caste or are gender-specific rather than poor or poverty-specific.
- At the end of the Nepali fiscal year, the budget of the Prime Minister Employment Programme is being disbursed through local units. Many of the beneficiaries could not complete the 100 day works hence, the employees receive money on a pro-rata basis so that the

effectiveness of the programme is questioned.

- The ministerial decisions are made during or after disaster-related events occur and the cash plus programmes for the disaster-affected population are disbursed accordingly which should be pre-plan and a stronger response mechanism.
- Inter-ministerial level coordination is required however, the same nature of programmes is being implemented but the duplication of the beneficiaries may have occurred.
- It is realised that there might be people who are receiving pensions as universal programmes from the government or other institutions i.e. the Ex-British army, government pensioners, duplications, exclusion errors, and several other conditions that may not require government funds for survival. The huge budget goes to such populations and some more people are still lagging out of this programme. The government should minimise the inclusion error rather than enter into the debate on excluding certain groups of people.
- Beyond the cash transfer programmes, the safe motherhood programmes are such examples that provide safe child upbringing, but the dedicated budget is insufficient to run this programme effectively. Also, the cash plus programme (for example cash plus parenting) contributes to tackling the nutrition as well as parenting issues even though the benefit size is small. This contributes to reducing the intergenerational transfer of poverty. (World Bank, 2021.)



- There is an Act on non-contributory social protection that mentions poverty and vulnerability to be addressed but the regulation misses out to include that essence and only includes the points to continue the existing social security allowance. Yes, there has been a big question on the sustainability of regular financing as for political benefits or designed on an ad-hoc basis.
- Matters related to the implementation, transparency, and budget accountability of the programmes are questionable. During the research, it was hard for a team to gather information and seek small-scale programmes being implemented by the federal ministries. (Adhikari & Karn, 2020.)

## 4. Conclusion

This paper briefly explains the landscape of social protection programmes of Nepal. It shows that the social protection programmes are widely fragmented and distributed from horizontal to vertical approaches. Furthermore, duplication of the programme has also been observed. The political will is always a strong factor necessary in considering the increase of budget and continuation of such programmes to address poverty and vulnerability. The sustainability of the cash transfer and the government's liability is increasing. For this, the government should concentrate on contributory social protection programmes to attract informal sector workers. The remarkable aspect of these programmes is their continuation since 2011 however, they may require revisions and research to see the impacts. The manuscript also highlights that the federal and local governments have more control on social protection rather than the provincial governments; as they have little to do. At present, 4 types of contributory

programmes should be increased giving full attention to reducing the liabilities. Specific reasons to concentrate on scalable programmes are important to justify and address the needs. Coordination is needed for systematic implementation of the scattered programmes from 12 federal-level ministries. These programmes concentrate on the implementation rather than pushing the coverage and its effectiveness.

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# Coverage of Children's Issues in the Nepali Print and Online Media: Impact of Public Pressure on Media Gatekeeping

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## ABSTRACT

*The media do not cover all the events and incidents of the day. There is a visible trend across the world that the process of gatekeeping in the mass media outlets could be liberal with the presence of pressure groups. Though the usual trend of low media coverage on children in Nepal has been low, the spikes have been visible time and again with frequent and relentless persuasion of the cause in the form of pressure, advocacy and campaigns. Analysis of the media coverage of child-related issues from five national dailies and three prominent online news portals based on the cultivated data with qualitative and quantitative approaches demonstrate the direct relationship between the pressure and coverage. It reveals that influence over the gatekeeping process would become the potential to cause wider coverage and prominence placement.*

## 1. Introduction

Children related issues are not being given significant coverage in Nepali newspapers and online news portals as well as in the mainstream media in the country. For instance, Nepal's child population of age 14 and below constitutes 34.9 per cent of the total population. (CBS, 2014). Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2014) estimates Nepal's population, at 26.5 million as of 2011, and is projected to grow to 30.4 million by 2021 and 33.6 million by 2031. But the children's issues are not in priority in the process of

gatekeeping in the Nepali newspapers and news portals.

Nepal's ratification of the United Nations Child Rights Convention and the establishment of the plural media system coincided with the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990. Albeit the Nepali media in general appears to be aware of the principles enshrined in national and international professional standards such as the guidelines of UNICEF, the International Federation of Journalists and Press Council Nepal on child-friendly reporting. A child

friendly media directive has been declared by the Press Council Nepal (PCN) on February 2017 (PCN, *Baal maitri*, 2017).

According to ADB (2003), social protection consists of five major elements including child protection, to ensure healthy and productive development of the future workforce (p.1). Wider and substantial mass media coverage on children can play instrumental role for promoting strategies towards social protection. However, As the International Labour Organisation (ILO) states, low knowledge levels on social protection and citizen rights among journalists have placed social protection at the back page of most media houses despite the media's immense potential for enhancing knowledge amongst the general public on the issue (ILO, Consultancy services: Capacity). Voltmer and Koch-Baumarten (2010), in this regard, argue that the media have little, if any, opportunity to influence policy decisions because of the low velocity of coverage. They further view that the news rarely focuses on an issue over a sustained period of time, and thus generates only spotlights of attention that hardly leave any traces in the memory of the audience (p.2). Consequently, there would be infrequent and low public awareness and debate on the matter of social issues including those concerning the children. Hence, media needs to be socialised, capacitated and sensitised for the substantial and effective coverage concerning child rights and to escalate public debates on the concerns of social protection.

Lippmann (1998), argues that the reporters in the world working all day could not witness the happenings in the world. He further states that *'the media and the journalists watch, or rather in the majority of cases belong to, associations which employ men who watch a comparatively small number of places where it is made known when the life of anyone...departs from*

*ordinary paths, or when events worth telling about occur'* (p.338). His idea is that not every incident appears as news in the media. Different factors influence the media to decide to cover or reject certain issues or events. As held by Lippmann (1998) *'in principle news are covered as per one of the five news values such as sensationalism, proximity, relevance, unambiguity and facticity'*. He also states that *'the news is an account of the overt phases that are interesting, and the pressure on the newspaper to adhere to this routine comes from many sides'* (p.350). Lippmann (1998), in the context of news values, argue that every newspaper when it reaches the reader is the result of a whole series of selections as to what items shall be printed, in what position they shall be printed, how much space each shall occupy, and what emphasis each shall have (p.354). Later, as Watson (2004) notes, Galtung and Ruge identify more news factors that influence the process of gatekeeping. Watson (2004), stating that Lippmann produced his analysis of news values in 1922, explains the news value analysis presented by Galtung and Ruge in 1965 with their model of selective gatekeeping (pp.134-135).

Watson (2004) mentions the following 12 news factors or values as identified by Galtung and Ruge (p.135): frequency, amplitude, unambiguity, familiarity, predictability, surprise, correspondence, composition, eliteness of people, eliteness of nations, personification, and negativity (p.135). Watson (2004) uses the term threshold value as he argues that the bigger, the better, the more dramatic, the more likely the event is to be poised to pass through the gate (p.136). Hence, in case of raising an issue with frequent amplitude, there would be a great chance to get covered in the media.

An underlying common argument that can be derived from Lippmann to Galtung's idea is that exposure to the media or media person can make difference in

terms of coverage. Hence, Lippmann (1998) argues that before a series of events become news, they have usually made themselves noticeable in some more or less overt act (p.339). According to him the events which are not scored are reported either as personal or conventional opinion, or they are not news. Lippmann (1998) further argues that they do not take shape until somebody protests, or somebody investigates or somebody publicly in the etymological meaning of the word, makes an issue of them (pp. 343-344).

Shoemaker et al. (2001) state that in its simplest conceptualisation within mass communication, gatekeeping is the process by which the vast array of potential news messages is winnowed, shaped, and prodded into those few that are transmitted by the media (p.233). In other words, pressure groups and their continuous and rigorous campaigns are to be potential to influence journalists and media outlets.

With reference to news, gatekeeping is the process of selection, treatment and placement or even rejection of any newsworthy items by the particular media outlet. Gatekeeping occurs at different levels of the production of media content within a structure of a media outlet. It begins from the field level when a reporter decide which sources are to be selected to include in a news story. Then, the editors decide which stories are to be covered. But, the very existence of the influencing factors for the media or individual journalists cannot be denied. Hence, this write up argues that media gates could be widened with the help of a campaign by enhancing the frequency, and continuity of the pressure concerning a particular issue or event. Rosengren (1970) argues that journalists will be more likely to cover an event that they perceive as unexpected than an easily predictable event (p.148). An event or an issue is likely to be covered as news if it could attract the media.

Against the backdrop, this paper aims to examine the state of media coverage on children's issues. It has also another objective to demonstrate that the presence of pressure groups as a prominent news factor concerning the coverage of children in the Nepali media in general. Thus, it attempts to explore the role of the frequency and intensity of the activities exerted by the pressure group in assuming good media coverage.

## **2. Methods and Materials**

This paper attempts to explain the media coverage of children through the theoretical lens of media gatekeeping. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) define media gatekeeping as the process by which countless occurrences and ideas are reduced to few messages, that the audience are offered in the news media (p.75). The concept of gatekeeping originates from social psychologist Kurt Lewin's study of the selection and distribution of food items in a social system in the 1940s in the United States (Erzikoval, 2018, p.1) (Figure 1). Shoemaker et al. (2002) state Lewin's theory concerning the selection or rejection of items suggest that they pass through channels could be applied to the flow of news (pp.233-34). Shoemaker & Vos (2009, as elaborated by Erzikoval, 2018) mentions that Lewin describes the selection process in terms of metaphors: channels (the grocery store, garden), gates (the entrance to a channel), gatekeepers (shoppers, cooks), and positive (attractiveness of a food item) and negative (a high price) forces that influence the selection and processing of items. Lewin believes that the concept of gatekeeping could be applied in other areas of human activities, including mass media communications (p.1). It is a universal practice in the field of journalism, that reporters and editors follow such selection process.



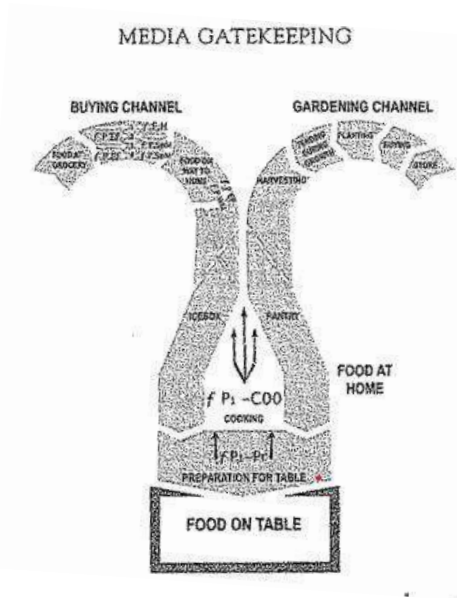


Figure 1: Kurt Lewin's model of how food passes through channels on its way to the table.

Source: Shoemaker & Vos (2009).

As Erzikoval (2018) explains, in terms of gatekeeping in a journalism context, news organisations are channels. She states that the decision points whether a news item would be published/broadcasted and how it would be shaped and presented are the gates. Likewise, professional norms are forces. Finally, the decision-makers or policies are gatekeepers (p.1). Erzikoval (2018) further argues that gatekeeping theory, lobbies and interest groups have been recognised as powerful actors or forces able to control the gates (p. 4).

The gatekeepers determine which information will be passed out to people. However, a gatekeeper is always having its influences like social, cultural, ethical and political. The theory of gatekeeping describes the process through which events are covered by the mass media. It explains how and why certain information is either passed through or is restricted. The selection and organisation

process of the information as per the level of importance and interest depends on a team or a person.

The gatekeepers determine how much of the information gets published or is aired. According to Shoemaker (1991) gatekeeping is the process by which billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day (p. 1). Watson (2004) states that gatekeeping is about opening or closing the channels of communication. It is about accessing or refusing access (p.123). Shoemaker and Reese (2014) argue that news is a thing, a social artifact that can be read, viewed, or interacted with. Deciding what's newsworthy, on the other hand, is a cognitive exercise, a judgment that any person can make (p.172). Hence, the pressure groups or experts in the area of child rights can make the media to think about providing wider space or substantial coverage on children.

Watson (2004) argues that in studying the news, one needs to explore three linked features viz. production-gatekeeping, agenda-setting and news values. He states that the operation of the first two depends upon the demands of the third which in turn regulates the conventions of news presentation (p.123). The data reveals that impact of the campaign on coverage of children-related issues and events has been visible in the media coverage. The process of gatekeeping in the context of all kinds of news, including the coverage on children depend upon the level of socialisation of the reporters and the desks.

The major technique of collection of relevant data is the content analysis from the selective samples of newspapers and online news portals. To date, as many as 7874 newspapers are registered in Nepal. However, out of those only 919 (19%) were published in 2020 (PCN, 2021). The total number of online news portals as per the record of NPC has reached 2965.

Contents that are related to children's issues from newspapers and online news portals were selected as the sample for the texts to be analysed. The newspapers and online news portals were selected as per the record of PCN. All five national dailies and three online news portals are noted media outlets as per the record of the Council. These media outlets generally represent the trends of the coverage of entire Nepali media landscape. Both hard, the event or incident reporting, and soft, situation or process reporting appeared during 60 days period were examined. The sampling is considered appropriate to such small study with reference to the practice of media research. Data were collected by going through the newspapers and online and entered in the form developed in the google doc. Later, the data were processed by using statistical tools and the description as well.

Different indicators such as news related to protection, i.e. violence or participation, i.e. school attendance, were fixed, searched and counted out of the sample newspapers and online news portals. The study is the outcome of the news concerning the children. The unit of analysis in the study is hard or soft news. All the news items about children published during the same period were documented and analysed. The news stories were identified with their respective codes. Examining, counting, entering in to the data base, processing and obtaining statistics were the different steps in the process of content analysis. The qualitative and quantitative data were cultivated through different processes involving collection, management, and analysis of the data for this paper.

A total of 60 days-content on the coverage of children from eight Nepali media published or appeared between August and September of 2020 were reviewed. Children

related coverage from the five national daily newspapers namely *Gorakhapatra*, *Kantipur*, *NayaPatrika*, *Nagarik* and *Annapurna Post* were analysed in terms of their presentation style and usefulness. Likewise, the contents concerning the children from three digital news portals namely Online Khabar.com, Setopati.com and Ratopati.com published during the same period were analysed. The content analysis has been compared in terms of quantity with the total number of news and views published. The contents concerning children's issues in terms of news from the front, inside and the back page were also examined. The news stories on children regarding context, source and news peg were also examined.

Wimmer and Dominick (2005, p.141) state that quantification is important in fulfilling the objective of the content analysis because it aids researchers in the quest for precision. He argues that quantification gives researchers additional statistical tools that can aid in interpretation and analysis. For the purpose of this paper, news-contents from selected newspapers and online or digital news portals running from Kathmandu were counted and measured with the fixed indicators.

Besides content analysis, key informant interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were conducted with journalists, activists, editors of the national dailies and online news portals, and Child Rights Activists respectively.

A total of five KIIs and one FGD were carried out. During the FGD, participants were asked to present their views on three questions regarding the state of media coverage on children's issues or the quality of the coverage. The answers were recorded and compiled.

### 3. Results and Discussions

#### 3.1. Number of child related news

Analysis shows that among the total 9832 news stories published in selected five newspapers for two months, around 5 per cent are related to children (Figure 2). Likewise, out of the total news stories on children published during the period of study, as many as 21 per cent were published in the front pages of the newspapers. The majority 78 per cent of the news stories are published on inside pages and one per cent on the back.

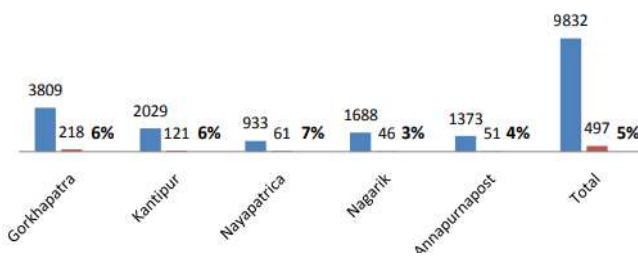


Figure 2: The ratio between the news stories and the news on children.

Source: Aryal and Dhital, 2020.

The news stories related to children occupy 5 per cent (as many as 497) of the total stories published in the newspapers. Out of them, the highest number of news stories was published in *Gorkhapatra* where it covered 44 per cent of total child-related news. Most of the stories on children were not fully focused on children's issues. Some of them were included just because of a single word or sentence on children.

The news stories entirely, or partly, focusing on children accounted to 36 per cent and 24 per cent respectively; whereas 40 per cent of news stories on children were included in data as they have touched the issue. In the total number of child-related news stories, as much as 33 per cent were on child development. News regarding the survival, protection and child participation, was as much as 31 per cent, 28 per cent, and 1 per cent respectively. About 8 per cent news-

stories were not directly related to any of the four themes.

During the KII, the editors admitted that generally, while respecting news values, they give less priority to the news related to the soft tissues. However, the editors state that in case of external pressure and public interest, they cover issues related to children. For instance, during the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, the coverage on women was at its highest. The editors hold that they use to be suspicious about the sponsored news, directly related to the I/NGOs (International/National Non-Governmental Organisations) activities and campaigns. However, they give priority to the news linked to the general public. They admit that there are not any standing instructions in regards whether or not to give priority to the news on children as such. Nevertheless, they state that the priority of a news story mainly depends on the news values. The editors view that the greater the potentiality to create an impact on a larger number of people, the greater the chance to get importance and prominence.

During the FGD<sup>1</sup>, the child rights experts state that the news outlets, broadly, do not abide by the obligations to provide space for the children and are not committed to being inclusive. News stories related to

1 A Focus Group Discussion was organised online among the participants comprising from senior to young Child Rights activists along with the experts in the field. The participants were from the government agency, UN Agency, INGOs, NGOs, and the networks working for child rights in different parts of country. Brij Mohan Kuswaha, Bara; Madhu Dawadi; Milan Dharel; Nupur Bhattacharya; Prakash Khatiwada, Hetauda; Rajan Burlakoti; Sanjog Thakuri Sumnima Tuladhar, Shiv Paudel; and Tilottam Poudel were the participants of the discussion held in September, 2020.

children from outside the Kathmandu valley get less space and importance, in comparison to the news from within the valley.

While analysing the cause of low level of substantial coverage of children's issues, the child rights activists, researchers and the experts during the FGD admit that they need to raise the frequency and intensity of analysing the state of children. Thus, they stress the need of socialising the journalists on issues concerning children. According to them, the child rights groups can provide journalists with exposure to the appropriate socialisation. Likewise, they could help journalists to get rid of stereotypes. Any materials on the abuse or exploitation of children need to be able to hold the responsible person more accountable. The materials need to be capable to sensitise the concerning authorities on obligations of the state. Even the media logics allow the news outlets to cover children related issues with the help of campaigns or similar kinds of pressure towards gatekeepers of media.

The experts and child-rights activists argue that the coverage would be enhanced with the institutions working for child rights collaborating closely with media persons. The collaboration would be primarily with reporters and also with an editor or the desk editors to socialise them and enhance their capacity to cover the children's issues properly. Efforts such as training, exposure trip and production of reference materials and media-kit would be instrumental to uplift child-sensitive journalism. Appropriate socialisation would be effective to develop a common understanding of child-friendly reporting and the importance of wider coverage of children including conceptual clarity on child rights among the communicators. The training comprised of practical exercise on evaluation and presentation of news and other materials that would encourage them to abide

by ethical standards. Media organisations and journalists need to undergo socialisation process with to develop a better understating that covering children issues require more sensitivity, knowledge and skills. Furthermore, it might be helpful in identifying and dealing with some of the hurdles/barriers in reporting child related issues.

### 3.2 Placement of child related news on newspaper

Out of the total news stories on children published during the period of study, as many as 21 per cent were published in the front pages. The majority 78 per cent of news stories are published on inside pages and 1 per cent on back (Figure 3). Most of the news stories on children are not above the satisfactory level.

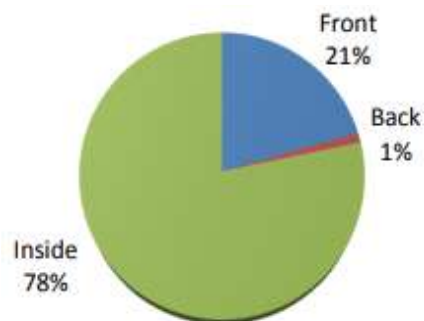


Figure 3: Placement of children related news on the newspaper

Source: Aryal and Dhital, 2020.

Analysis of the contents published in five national dailies during the two months period and three prominent online news portals shows that the media in many instances have not played a role in surveillance in the cases related to children, though at many instances, the issues used to be escalated because of the mounting public pressure.

### Case Study

A case study, in this regard, substantiates the findings. A news story of the rape of a minor and subsequently killing was published with low priority, on the fifth page. The general public continued the protest and after three days, the news appeared on the front page. The first news was silent about the offender, while the third explicitly exposed the rapist accused.

On September 25, 2020, *Nagarik* daily published a short news on the fifth page with the Bajhang dateline. The news story was about an incident where a minor girl was found dead inside a temple. The 12-year-old girl was killed following a rape. Though the news story has mentioned about the accused, the tone is soft as it quotes police stating that the case is being investigated. The news reported that the accused boy is a 16-year-old. After two days of follow-up, news on the incident was published. The crux of the news was that the body of the slain girl was not cremated as the locals had been demanding proper investigation of the case. The news reported that the police had arrested the accused boy. But it was also published on the fifth page. As the protest spread over to other places of the country, the follow-up news stories received space in media.

After four days, on September 28, follow up news on the incident got coverage on the front page with a dateline from Dhangadhi bureau and Bajhang. The news story has a highlight that reads: Police states that shreds of evidence concerning the facts on the incident of killing after the rape of 12-year-old girl has been collected. The news story has also revealed that a local youth, who is under police custody was being investigated, was also involved in the rape case in the past. It has been mentioned that he was 18 years old. The news appeared across three columns with prime importance.

A couple of news stories that appeared in the newspapers indicates an attempt to highlight the issue regarding children such as child marriage. On September 15, the main news published in *the Annapurna Post* was on child marriage. It was published with a catchy photograph of young mothers carrying infants. The news is based on extensive reporting. Most of the news stories, around 80 per cent, concerning children appear around the inside pages. As the afore-mentioned case, in most of the instances, the news stories on children get front-page coverage due to the activism of the pressure group.

### 3.3 Issues covered on the news

Among the child-related news stories, 29 per cent were directly related to education, 18 per cent to the pandemic, 14 per cent to disaster/accident, 12 per cent to abuse and exploitation, 9 per cent to health and 17 per cent on others. Out of the total news stories on abuse and exploitation cases, 72 per cent were about sex abuse, 8 per cent on child marriage and 20 per cent on others. The comparatively higher percentage of news related to sex abuse shows the relationship between the role of the pressure group and the media coverage. The pressure groups use to be relatively more concerned about the cases of abuse. As much as 9 per cent of the news stories on children are well explained, whereas 8 per cent are poorly explained and 83 per cent are satisfactory.

Likewise, out of the total news stories presented through online news portals, as much as 44 per cent were found to be on child protection. As many as 23, 19 and 3 per cent of news stories were found to be concerned with the themes of survival, development and participation respectively (Figure 4). Most of the news, about 21 per cent, were found to be about sex abuse. Likewise, about 6 per cent of news stories highlighted child marriage. As much as 57 per cent of news stories found online were on event/ incident reporting. Likewise, 29 per cent of news stories were on situation reporting. About 14 per cent were found to be based on press releases or reports. Out of the total news stories presented through online news portals, as much as 21 per cent are found to be written on the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, as much as 17, 14, 13 and 11 per cent of news stories are found to be concerned with the current contexts such as education, disaster/accident, abuse as well as exploitation and health.



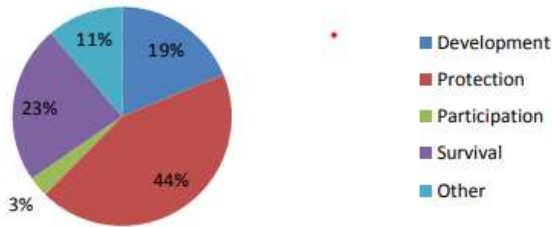


Figure 4: News-stories on four thematic areas of child rights.

Source: Aryal and Dhital, 2020.

Out of the total news stories presented through the selected three online news portals as much as 59 per cent are found to be useful for general awareness. Likewise, as much as 15 and 5 per cent of news stories are found to be useful for the exposition of wrongdoing and for making the offices accountable respectively.

#### 4. Conclusion

Findings reveal that influences on gatekeeping processes would have the potential to achieve wider coverage and prominence placement. Although children's issues are not in priority in the process of gatekeeping in the Nepali newspapers and online news portals, it would be encouraging to have involvement of the pressure groups. Hence, newspapers or the Nepali media in general have not been playing a proactive role in surveillance in cases related to children. At times, the issues would be escalated because of the mounting public pressure.

There is a dominant perception that children related news are usually considered as soft news and thus most of the news stories appear on the inside pages. Hardly 20 per cent of news, mostly about the agitation and child abuses, gets covered on the front page. Most of the news stories are found to be based on a formal source. It indicates that the news stories on children are not in-depth in nature. The process of gatekeeping in the Nepali media shows that it is the way to fix

the information in a hierarchy. The contents of the Nepali mass media, especially the print and digital news, signals the nature of gatekeeping, their process of determining newsworthiness.

Most of the news stories on children are not fully focused on children's issues. Some of them are included just because of the mention of a single word or sentence on children. The situation of low coverage and the coverage without substance would change with the greater efforts from child rights activists, as well as academia to provide well-articulated opinions as well.

Comparatively low coverage of the child-related issue is not only the consequence of traditional values of news hierarchy or newsworthiness but also the result of trained human resources. Newspapers lack especial beat for child reporting and trained human resources for child-sensitive and child-friendly reporting. Because, the contents demonstrate that 53 were not prepared as per the standard, treated and presented properly in absence of skilled human resources for covering the news on children or the issues of child rights.

Since advocacy and campaign activities are major forces that influence media gatekeeping, the relationship between intensity, frequency and effectiveness of action works and the selection process of the contents in media are visible. Analysis of the contents of prominent dailies and online news portals of Nepal demonstrates that the coverage on children would be the consequence of the editorial process of selection which used to be shaped by the news factors.

The conclusion drawn from the examination of coverage from select print and online news media generally applies to the entire Nepali media outlets. It is visible that the media coverage increases as the



pressure concerning any issue or event in different forms escalates. Infrequent and low substantial media coverage has resulted in low public awareness and debate on the matter of social issues including those concerning children. Hence, media personals need to be socialised, capacitated and sensitised so as to ensure substantial and effective coverage concerning child rights as well as promote public debates on the concerns of social protection.

## Acknowledgement

The author would like to acknowledge that the essay has taken reference of the report entitled state of child-friendliness in Nepali media (An assessment of coverage on children in Nepali media) 2020 which was conducted in support of Save the Children, Nepal Office. The author, who was the researcher of that study, is obliged to co-researcher Tarak Dhital, Senior Child Rights Activist.

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