

# Contribution of Janata Awash Grant for Poverty Reduction in Makwanpur, Nepal

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DOI: 10.3126/hj.v15i2.70675

## Abstract

*This research paper deals with the Janata Awash Grant, a program resembling Universal Basic Income (UBI), implemented in Raksirang Rural Municipality of Makawanpur District in Nepal, which specifically focuses on poverty reduction, social justice, and inclusion for impoverished families. The main aim of this paper is to examine the effectiveness of the Janata Awash Grant (JAG) in reducing poverty and promoting social justice among the designated families. The research uses a mixed-method approach, employing an explanatory sequential research design, and utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. Forty households out of 200 grant recipients were randomly chosen for primary data collection. Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with selected representatives and informed beneficiaries to gather qualitative insights. The results indicate significant improvements in the economic status of recipient families, leading to a decrease in poverty rates and an overall enhancement in quality of life. Qualitative analysis highlights the broader societal and ethical impacts of receiving a guaranteed income, emphasizing the transformative potential of UBI beyond its monetary benefits.*

**Keywords:** Poverty reduction, Social justice, Employment, Income inequality, Janata Awash

## Introduction

The concept of Janata Awas (People Housing Programme) is considered an instrumental effort to fulfill the basic minimum requirements for all people, focusing on the poor and marginalized segments of the country as a prime responsibility of the state to be delivered to its citizens. Fundamentally, the concept of the Janata Awas Grant (JAG) was initiated in 2008/09 in a few selected districts of the country, and it has gradually spread nearly all over the country as part of universally accepted human needs for the backward and marginalized people. The National Shelter Policy of 2012 recognizes housing as a basic

need for all, and the new Constitution of Nepal (2015) guarantees the right to housing for all citizens as a fundamental right. The state is responsible for ensuring social and economic security, including providing land for socially and economically disadvantaged groups, where housing is universally accepted as a basic requirement for all people, as part of social protection to be granted by the state authority (MoUD, 2016).

In this connection, the concept of Universal Basic Income (UBI) proposes providing a regular and unconditional cash allowance to all citizens or residents of a country, irrespective of their income or job status, aiming to cover essential living expenses and ensure a minimum level of economic security for everyone (Chohan, 2017). UBI is often viewed as a response to increasing income inequality and the potential job displacement caused by automation and technological advancements (Dristi IAS, 2020). In Nepal, where poverty and inequality persist, UBI could serve as a vital safety net for vulnerable populations, including those at risk of job displacement due to automation. Ranzaho et al. (2019) pointed out that unconditional resource transfers, as a sensitive social protection strategy, can effectively address issues of basic requirements like child nutrition and similar needs. It could also alleviate financial strain on low-income families, particularly during the global COVID-19 pandemic and the economic challenges it brings, including recession. Even if the JAG program does not reflect the actual features of UBI, the provision of Janata Awas is intended to be a practical application of the Right to Housing Act 2018, ensuring housing facilities—either temporary housing or financial assistance—for needy people who are homeless or truly displaced by natural disasters like earthquakes (Shrestha and Poudel, 2020).

The revised National Shelter Policy of 2012 specifies the need to tackle emerging issues such as slums, rental housing, and housing needs for internally displaced people and economically disadvantaged groups, along with the projection of 1.3 million housing units needed in urban areas. To meet this demand, it is crucial to prioritize housing for deprived groups, marginalized communities, landless families, single women, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and orphans. The Government of Nepal has approved, ratified, and implemented various international declarations and agreements related to the right to housing, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Habitat Agenda, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Sustainable Development Goals (MoUD, 2016).

Implementing UBI could enable individuals not only to meet basic needs but also to invest in themselves, potentially enhancing the overall economy. Additionally, UBI could stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation by providing a guaranteed income, leading to the creation of new jobs and economic growth. However, concerns about the feasibility and sustainability of such a program in Nepal remain, given limited financial resources and institutional capacity. Therefore, the key issue surrounding UBI in Nepal is how to design and implement a program that effectively addresses socio-economic challenges while ensuring financial viability and long-term sustainability. This paper aims to explore the strengths and prospects of the Janata Awas Grant Program within the framework of Universal Basic Income in a selected study area.

Lansley and Reed (2019) presented a thorough examination of UBI, going beyond its desirability to assess its feasibility. While acknowledging the appeal of UBI in providing a financial safety net, they delve into practical implementation concerns, including cost and fiscal implications. Their work offers a comprehensive view of balancing the desire for economic security with the practicalities of making UBI a sustainable policy. Wijngaarde et al. (2021) have also pointed out that, according to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every citizen, regardless of their personal characteristics and constraints, must have their basic human requirements fulfilled at any cost. The aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals also favor the provision of a basic level of income or assets, which is undoubtedly a precondition that should prioritize poor and marginalized households displaced by various types of disasters.

Gentilini and Grosh (2020) view UBI as the beginning of a social protection system that covers everyone in need. Gentilini et al. (2019) offer a clear and balanced perspective on UBI, covering its concepts, real-world evidence, and practical applications. Their work provides insights into poverty alleviation and economic security while addressing implementation challenges, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of UBI's potential impact. Yang (2018) presents UBI as a strategy for mitigating job loss and poverty through regular cash payments to all citizens, providing a financial cushion in the face of automation's impact on the job market. Yang advocates for UBI as a progressive solution to economic instability and inequality. Bregman (2017) makes a compelling case for UBI as a practical means of poverty reduction, advocating for regular cash payments to all individuals, simplifying the welfare system, and empowering recipients to escape poverty. Lowrey (2019) presents UBI as a progressive solution to poverty, offering regular cash payments to all individuals to meet basic needs. She discusses how UBI can alleviate poverty, improve economic stability, and simplify social support systems, fostering a more equitable society. Similarly, Calnitsky (2016) asserts that UBI pilots in Canada highlight their potential to reduce poverty and improve economic well-being. The Manitoba "Mincome" experiment and Ontario Basic Income Pilot provide empirical evidence of UBI's positive impact on health, education, and economic outcomes. In the case of Nepal, the government allocates a significant portion of its budget to social protection, supported by a strong legal framework. Nonetheless, the policy and institutional framework is disjointed, resulting in coverage and adequacy gaps (Pandey, 2021).

Structurally, Nepal has experienced a pilot program called the Unconditional Cash Transfer Program for the first time in the Dailekh district, with a targeted initiative to alleviate poverty for marginalized people. While not a true UBI, the program provides insights into the potential benefits of direct cash transfers for poverty reduction and economic empowerment (Pandey, 2019). The Janata Awas Grant Program primarily focuses on housing construction for marginalized communities, especially the primary victims of the devastating earthquake of 2015. Beneficiaries perceive the program remarkably positively and are highly optimistic about sustaining their own lives. Once they secure shelter, they are expected to have better working opportunities, making their livelihoods more comfortable (Parajuli, 2022). Similarly, JAG is a type of social protection strategy through which a

targeted segment of the Nepalese population benefits from their respective provincial or local governments in association with various donor agencies, as there are more than 80 social protection programs implemented by the Government of Nepal (Maharjan et al., 2021). Pandey and Fusaro (2020) mention that the 2030 agenda of the SDGs largely depends on policy interventions to address the poverty and food insecurity of marginalized segments, such as Dalits and scheduled communities. In this regard, JAG would be a basic initiative through which poor families can manage everyday household challenges. However, there have been significant changes in the everyday lives of Nepalese people, alongside a persistent level of socio-political change, even though a significant proportion of people in developing communities remain poor (Huchzermeyer, 2001; Pokhrel, 2015; Khatri & Timsina, 2023).

Even though there are no exact policies and programs representing UBI in Nepal, the recent Janata Awas Grant program can be seen as a promising practice that includes examining the potential costs and benefits of implementing a UBI system, the potential impact on work incentives and labor market outcomes, the effects on social and economic inequality, and the potential for UBI to address a range of social and economic issues. Overall, this paper intends to explore whether or not it is a viable policy option for addressing some of the most pressing economic and social challenges, such as poverty and inequality, facing societies today. More specifically, this paper intends to focus on the connection between JAG and poverty reduction, social justice, and inclusion for impoverished families.

### Methodology

This paper is based on an explanatory descriptive research design that relies on both primary and secondary sources of data. Since the research is based on a mixed-method approach, both qualitative and quantitative data are utilized to produce the research findings. Primary data are obtained from household surveys for quantitative data, and observations and key informant surveys for qualitative data. The study area consists of settlements of predominantly marginalized ethnic communities such as Bankariya, Chepang, Bote, and Majhi, who have received the Janata Awas Grant from the government of Nepal. Out of the total of 200 households that formally received the grant in the current study area, 40 households are randomly selected as a sample, representing 20 percent of the total population for the inquiry involving these marginalized communities. Since the population is pre-specified as marginalized and appears homogenous in nature, the researcher applied personal judgment to select the sample units to ensure that the required information could be collected from the field survey. Similarly, eight key informant interviews have been conducted with local representatives, I/NGO personnel, and some well-known individuals to collect qualitative information, ensuring that the data are reliable and valid. Likewise, secondary data are collected through a rigorous study of municipal official publications, publications from the Ministry of Urban Development, the National Statistics Office, books, journals, and other published as well as digital sources, such as official weVSites, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and so on, as necessary. The data are presented and analyzed using computer software like MS Office, along with basic manual calculations. Both

qualitative and quantitative data are sequentially analyzed and explained to accomplish the objectives of the paper.

**Results and Discussion**

The study area selected by the author is significantly backward and underprivileged in terms of basic survival services such as road linkage, drinking water and sanitation, and access to schools and health services. The population is largely dominated by underprivileged ethnic communities, which contributes to the perceived usefulness and importance of the Janata Awas Program. The details of community distribution and the responses of the people are presented under this heading.

**Caste based distribution of the population**

The following Table 1 represents the major caste composition of the selected study area. It clearly shows the significant domination of marginalized castes as listed in national records.

**Table 1** Major Castes-wise population in the selected Study area

S.N	Major Castes	Percentage
1	Tamang	46.25
2	Chepang	43.96
3	Chhetri	2.75
4	Dalit	2.38
5	Magar	1.50
6	Newar	0.56
7	Brahmin	0.06

**Source:** Raksirang Rural Municipality, 2075VS

The data provided reflect the caste distribution within Raksirang Rural Municipality. Among the various ethnic groups, Tamang constitutes the largest percentage at 46.25 percent, followed by the Chepang community, which accounts for 43.96 percent of the population. In contrast, the Brahmin community has an insignificant presence of 0.06 percent compared to others. This breakdown offers insights into the diverse demographic composition of Raksirang Rural Municipality, showcasing the rich tapestry of ethnicities that contribute to its population makeup.

**Income Status of Respondents**

The survey examined the income status of the participants. It assessed their financial situation, including whether they were below the poverty line, had a middle income, or fell into the upper-income category.

**Table 2** Income Status of Respondents

Employment Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage
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Below Poverty line	37	92.5
Middle Income	3	7.5
Upper Income	0	0
Not Specified	0	0
Total	40	100

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 shows that more than 90 percent of the participants fell below the poverty line, while 7.5 percent were in the middle-income bracket. No participants were categorized in any other income groups.

### Use of Janata Awash Grant

A survey was conducted to understand how recipients utilize the grant they have received. This aims to determine whether the grant serves as an effective tool in reducing poverty or if it simply represents a squandering of national wealth.

**Table 3** Uses of Janata Awas Grant

S.N	Description	Number of Households	Percentage
1	Basic needs like Food, housing, and healthcare	29	72.5
2	For recreation activity	6	15
3	Purchasing luxuries like; electronics, mobiles	1	2.5
4	Other purposes	4	10
	Total	40	100

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

The field survey data provides insights into the spending preferences of the surveyed population, highlighting diverse priorities among residents. The majority of respondents, constituting 29 (73.75 percent), prioritize basic needs such as food, housing, and healthcare, underscoring the significance of addressing fundamental requirements for sustenance and well-being within the community. In contrast, 6 respondents (15 percent) allocate resources for recreational activities like feasts and celebrations, reflecting the cultural and social importance placed on communal events. Furthermore, 8.75 percent allocate funds for other purposes, indicating additional spending priorities that vary among respondents. This nuanced breakdown of spending preferences offers valuable insights for local planning and development initiatives, emphasizing the multifaceted needs and preferences of the residents in Raksirang Rural Municipality.

### Role of Janata Awash Grant for Reducing Poverty

The role of the Janata Awash Grant in reducing poverty is to provide financial assistance and support to individuals or communities facing economic hardships. This grant aims to alleviate poverty by offering resources for education, vocational training, small business initiatives, or essential needs. By empowering recipients with financial aid, opportunities for skill development, and the means to start income-generating activities, the

Janata Awash Grant endeavors to uplift individuals and communities, thereby contributing to the reduction of poverty levels.

**Table 4** Effectiveness of Janata Awash Grant in Reduction of Poverty

Level of Effectiveness	Total Agreement No. of Respondents	Percentage
Highly Effective	7	17.5
Effective	28	70
Less Effective	1	2.5
No effective at all	4	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 represents the responses of the participants regarding the effectiveness of the Janata Awash Program for poverty reduction. A majority of respondents, totaling 70 percent, find the initiative to be effective, with 18.75 percent rating it as highly effective. This positive sentiment suggests a generally favorable perception among the majority of participants regarding the impact and efficiency of the program in question. However, there are respondents, constituting 2.5 percent, who view the initiative as less effective, and 8.75 percent who believe it to be not effective at all. These divergent opinions indicate a range of perspectives within the community regarding the success of the program, emphasizing the importance of understanding varying viewpoints to inform adjustments or improvements. The data underscores the significance of ongoing assessments and feedback mechanisms to gauge the effectiveness of initiatives in Raksirang Rural Municipality, ensuring that community needs and expectations are met in the most impactful way possible.

**Role of Janata Awash Grant to pursue new opportunities**

The Janata Awash Grant enables recipients to pursue new opportunities, such as starting a small business or pursuing education or training. Since the grant is primarily focused on housing facilities, individuals benefit additionally by utilizing their income and assets for productive outcomes that would have otherwise been allocated for housing provision had the grant not been provided. The responses of the participants are represented in the table below:

**Table 5** Janata Awash Grant to Pursue New Opportunities

Perception about opportunity	Total number of household	Percentage
Yes	36	90
No	4	10
Total	40	100

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

Table 5 indicates that a considerable percentage of households in the area, specifically 90 percent, have availed themselves of the Janata Awash Grant to pursue new opportunities. This suggests widespread engagement with the program and a positive response from the community in leveraging financial support for various initiatives. On the other hand, 10 percent of households have chosen not to utilize the

grant for new options, possibly indicating individual circumstances, preferences, or alternative means of pursuing opportunities. The data highlights the impact and reach of the Janata Awash Grant in providing financial assistance to households, fostering economic activities, and creating new avenues for growth within the rural municipality. Understanding these trends is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of such programs and tailoring future initiatives to meet the evolving needs and aspirations of the local population in Raksirang.

**Impact of Janata Awash Grant for overall well- being**

The Janata Awash Grant impacts overall well-being. It reduces stress and anxiety related to financial insecurity, allowing people to gradually improve their quality of life and maintain their everyday needs. The responses regarding the contribution of the Grant to overall well-being are shown in the table below:

**Table 6** Impact of Janata Awash Grant for Overall Wellbeing

Well-being contribution of JAG	Total number of household	Percentage
Yes	34	85
No	4	8.75
Neutral	2	6.25
Total	40	100

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

The field survey data sheds light on the reception of the Janata Awash Grant for pursuing new opportunities among the surveyed households, enabling them to improve their overall well-being. A significant proportion, constituting 85 percent, has availed themselves of the grant, indicating widespread uptake and positive engagement with the program to explore new avenues. This data underscores the mixed perceptions within the community and highlights the importance of ongoing communication and support mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness of such programs. Understanding the nuances in household responses is crucial for refining and tailoring initiatives like the Janata Awash Grant to better meet the diverse needs and expectations of residents in Raksirang Rural Municipality.

**Sustainability of Janata Awash Program**

The sustainability of any specific program is one of the basic conditions that must be maintained for positive outcomes. In this connection, the JAG program seems weak in assuring a secure future, causing people to feel insecure even if they are receiving immediate benefits. However, the majority of participants responded positively regarding its sustainability. The actual perceptions are provided in the table below:

**Table 7** Sustainability of Janata Awash Program

Sustainability of the Grant	Total number of household	Percentage
Yes	30	75
No	10	25



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Total	40	100
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**Source:** Field Survey, 2023

The field survey data provides insights into the adoption of the Janata Awash Grant for pursuing new opportunities among the surveyed households. A significant majority, comprising 75 percent, have embraced the grant as a means to explore and engage in new avenues, suggesting a positive reception within the community. On the contrary, 25 percent of households have opted not to utilize the grant, reflecting a diversity of perspectives, individual choices, or possibly alternative resources for pursuing opportunities. The data underscores the importance of acknowledging the varied responses within the community, emphasizing the need for tailored approaches to support residents in leveraging such financial initiatives effectively. Understanding the factors influencing the decision to accept or decline the Janata Awash Grant is crucial for refining strategies, enhancing outreach, and ensuring that the program aligns more closely with the unique needs and aspirations of the residents in the study area.

**Potential drawbacks of Janata Awash Program**

The field survey data from Raksirang Rural Municipality and the interviews with key informants indicate a unanimous perception regarding the potential drawbacks within the community. All respondents, totaling 100 percent, identify "High Corruption, No Accountability" as a significant concern. This uniform response underscores a shared awareness and consensus among the residents regarding the challenges related to corruption and accountability issues within the municipality. The absence of any respondents indicating "No Drawback" suggests a collective recognition of existing challenges. The data highlights the critical need to address issues related to corruption and accountability to foster a transparent and accountable governance system. Recognizing these concerns is a crucial step toward implementing targeted strategies and reforms that aim to mitigate corruption and enhance accountability, ultimately contributing to the overall development and well-being of Raksirang Rural Municipality.

The selected study area is characterized by a severe lack of basic survival services, including inadequate road access, insufficient drinking water and sanitation, and limited educational and health facilities. The population is predominantly composed of underprivileged ethnic communities, underscoring the critical need for programs like Janata Awas. In the study area, the Tamang community constitutes 46.25% of the population, while Brahmins occupy only 0.06%. This diverse demographic highlights the ethnic variety within Raksirang Rural Municipality. The income status of respondents indicates severe economic challenges. Table 2 shows that 93.75% of the participants live below the poverty line, with only 6.25% falling into the middle-income bracket. No respondents were classified as upper-income, reflecting the widespread poverty in the area. As noted by Pandey and Fusaro (2020), support programs should focus on marginalized segments like Dalits and scheduled communities to fulfill their basic requirements; this finding reflects similar segments among the people under study.

The survey on grant utilization reveals that most recipients use the Janata Awas Grant for essential needs. As depicted in Table 3, 73.75% of households spend the grant on food, housing, and healthcare. Smaller percentages allocate funds for recreation (15%), luxury items (2.5%), and other purposes (8.75%). This indicates that the grant predominantly addresses basic survival needs while also supporting some level of discretionary spending. Regarding the effectiveness of the Janata Awas Grant in poverty reduction, Table 4 shows that 70% of respondents consider it effective, and 18.75% rate it as highly effective. Only a small fraction views it as less effective (2.5%) or not effective at all (8.75%). These responses suggest a generally positive perception of the grant's impact on poverty alleviation. In this context, Huchzermeyer (2001) also concludes that such provisions must be made for needy individuals with the lowest income, even if they are largely ignored in most cases.

The grant also facilitates the pursuit of new opportunities. Table 5 indicates that 90% of households used the grant to explore new ventures, such as starting small businesses or furthering their education. However, 10% did not leverage the grant in this way, highlighting differing individual circumstances or choices. Table 6 illustrates the grant's broader impact on well-being, with 85% of households acknowledging its positive effect on reducing financial stress and improving daily life. As mentioned in the Right to Housing Act 2018, which clearly states that the three tiers of government must hold coordinated responsibility to provide housing facilities to marginalized and homeless individuals regardless of the causes of homelessness, the Janata Awas Grant may be one of the effective initiatives to address this issue, even if it might not be sufficient (Shrestha and Poudel, 2020).

The sustainability of the Janata Awas Program is a critical concern. Table 7 shows that 75% of respondents believe the program is sustainable, while 25% disagree. This division suggests that while many see the program as a viable long-term solution, a significant minority has reservations about its durability. The most significant criticism of the Janata Awas Program, as identified by all respondents, is the high risk of corruption and lack of accountability. This unanimous concern highlights the critical need for better governance and transparency to ensure the program's success and trustworthiness. Huchzermeyer (2001) posits that permanent supportive housing and income assistance programs have proven successful in reducing homelessness and promoting housing stability. Future studies should explore the long-term impacts of these interventions on physical and mental health, substance use, and overall quality of life.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the transformative potential of Universal Basic Income (UBI) through the Janata Awas Grant in reducing poverty and economic disparities in Nepal. It highlights how these grants, potentially similar to UBI, provide crucial support for basic needs to the needy segments of the population. The Janata Awas Program has proven to be an essential tool for improving living conditions and alleviating poverty in Raksirang Rural Municipality, particularly for marginalized ethnic communities.

The majority of beneficiaries use the grant for basic needs, underscoring its crucial role in addressing immediate survival concerns such as food, housing, and healthcare. Additionally, many have leveraged the grant to pursue new opportunities, contributing to personal and economic growth. However, concerns regarding corruption and program sustainability emphasize the need for stronger governance and transparency. Moving forward, refining implementation and ensuring long-term viability will be key to maximizing the program's impact and fostering lasting community development.

### **Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The dataset used in the study is available upon request.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### **Funding Statement**

No funding has been received for this study.

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