

Impact of Social Protection Mechanism for Child Protection

Debaki Acharya^{1*}, Tilottam Poudel², Sumikshya Khadka³, Shristi Tamrakar⁴ & Shreya Tamrakar⁵

¹ National Child Rights Council, Nepal

² Social Protection Civil Society Network

³ CFLG Forum

⁴ Social Activist

⁵ Independent Researcher

*Corresponding email: debakiach@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 14 Oct. 2021

Accepted 11 Dec. 2021

Keywords:

Budget allocation

Children

Local level

Provinces

Scheme

Social protection

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 have-nots, 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 Gurukuls¹, Monasteries, Madrasas², Ashrams³ and other alternative Schools.

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 War⁴, People's Movement⁵ 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

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 children⁶. 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

⁶ 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.

References

- Global Child Nutrition Foundation. (2019). *Global survey of school meal programs: country report: Nepal*. From https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CR_Nepal_07_2020.pdf
- ILO. (2021). *Social protection responses to COVID-19 in Nepal*. International Labour Organization Office. From https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-kathmandu/documents/publication/wcms_809272.pdf
- IPC-IG. (2020). *Child-sensitive social protection in South Asia-assessing programmes design features and coverage of children*. The International Policy Center for Inclusive Growth, Brazil. From https://ipcig.org/pub/eng/OP442_Child_sensitive_social_protection_in_South_Asia.pdf
- Kafle, B. D., Wagle, S. K., Shrestha, D., & Khatri, H. B. (2018). *A study on the effectiveness of the scholarship provided at the school level and identification of measures for its improvement*. From <http://www.doe.gov.np/assets/uploads/files/0abf8e73c50b2c-ca90dc2b43e2eeb848.pdf>
- NPC. (2016). *Nepal and the millennium development goals, final status report, 2000-2015*. Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission. From https://www.npc.gov.np/images/category/MDG-Status-Report-2016_.pdf
- NPC. (2018). *Multidimensional poverty index*. Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission. From https://www.npc.gov.np/images/category/Nepal_MPI.pdf
- Pun, B. R., & Shrestha, G. K. (2020). Assessment of child sensitive social protection programmes in Nepal. *Journal of Social Protection*, 1: 51-69.

- Roelen, K., & Chettri, H. K. (2016). *Improving social protection's response to child poverty and vulnerability in Nepal*. Save the Children, Finland. From <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/scnepalidspaper-2016final.pdf>
- UNESCO. (2015). *Education for all, National review report, 2001-2015*. UNESCO. From <https://un.info.np/Net/NeoDocs/View/5112>
- UNICEF (2020b). *Social protection budget brief*. From <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/media/13261/file/Social%20Protection%20-%20Budget%20Brief.pdf>
- UNICEF. (2016). *Benefits of Nepal's child grant for current and future generations*. United Nations Children's Fund, Nepal. From <https://un.info.np/Net/NeoDocs/View/7347>
- UNICEF. (2018). *Nepal's cash allowances for children with disabilities*. United Nations Children's Fund, Nepal. From <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12414.pdf>
- UNICEF. (2019). *Paying it forward: expanding universal child grants in Nepal*. United Nations Children's Fund, Nepal. From <https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/paying-forward-expanding-universal-child-grants-nepal/>
- UNICEF. (2020a). *The legal framework for child protection in South Asia*. From https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/5916/file/Executive_Summary_-_The_legal_framework_for_child_protection_in_south_asia.pdf
- WHO. (2020). *Nepal introduces rotavirus vaccine against diarrhoea in children: national immunization programme achieves a new milestone*. The World Health Organization. From South-East Asia: Nepal: <https://www.who.int/nepal/news/detail/02-07-2020-nepal-introduces-rotavirus-vaccine-against-diarrhoea-in-children-national-immunization-programme-achieves-new-milestone>.
- World Bank Group. (2021). *Social protection: review of public expenditure and assessment of social assistance programs*. Washington DC: The World Bank Group, USA. From <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36329>