

**Local Government and Welfare State: Study on Welfare Policy Practices of Kirtipur Municipality**  
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**Abstract**

The paper delves into the political framework of Nepal's social welfare system of Local Level Government and its policy. The study explores the importance of social values, cultural roots and government's decisions and their evolution in the political systems of Nepal. Similarly, it explores the significance of welfare system in local level government, their policy endeavour and ongoing impact on the subjects. The local level government structure and agencies are the important carriers of the change and welfare. The study is based on constructive interpretative nature of qualitative method, the non-probability purposive sampling with interview questions is used to explore the data of the study. The collective endeavour of Nepali cultural identity and structure has played a vital role in its polity in ancient, medieval, and early modern periods of its history. The local government system plays a greater role in bringing equal opportunity, recognition, participation and inclusion. The study explores the local government of Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal engages in basic needs-interest-based polity welfare system and need to holistic governing welfare mechanism among the three tiers of government. Additionally, this paper touches upon the challenges and opportunities involved in constructing Nepal as a welfare state.

**Keywords:** Welfare state, local level government, welfare policy, political system

**Background of the Study**

The evolution of social welfare in Nepal has deep political and cultural roots that span from ancient ideals to modern democratic reforms. Historically, Nepali society envisioned ideal governance systems through mythological figures and philosophical teachings. The concept of *Rama Rajya* or the utopian state, reflected a kingdom where justice, equality, and public welfare prevailed. Similarly, *Bidura's Ideal State* found in the *Mahabharata*, emphasized moral leadership and ethical governance. *Kautilya's Arthashastra* further grounded the notion of state responsibility articulating that the king's happiness is tied to the people's

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well-being '*Prajasukhe Sukham Rajna: Prajanam Cha Hite Hitama.*' These early ideations were pivotal in shaping the foundational thinking about state accountability and the prioritization of the public benefits.

Parallel to political ideals, Nepal's **cultural and spiritual philosophies** deeply influenced the values of social welfare. Ancient Vedic prayers like '*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina:*' express a universal wish for happiness, health, and well-being for all, laying a moral foundation for inclusive social policies. Principles such as '*Paropakara Punyaya*' (helping others is virtuous) and '*Sewa Dharma*' (service as a duty) fostered collective responsibility and compassion. These values have long rooted in Nepali culture and exploring leadership and governance with service-mindedness and empathy toward the most vulnerable people and the group of the society.

Nepal's **historical governance practices** further institutionalized social welfare. Early examples include the ***Shakya-Koliya* principality** state which introduced democratic dialogue in governance, and the ***Lichchavi Period*** also known for significant administrative and economic development. ***Jaya Sthiti Malla's* social reforms** in the medieval period addressed caste duties and legal codes. King ***Rama Shah*** has introduced standard measurement systems for justice and commerce similarly, ***Prithvi Narayan Shah's*** emphasis on the ***Jagir*** system reflected a proto-welfare ideology that recognized land and service as state responsibilities in his famous *Divyopadesh*. The ***Muluki Ain of 1910 BS***, introduced by ***Jung Bahadur Rana***, was a landmark legal code aiming to regulate social behavior, though deeply hierarchical. Alongside it, institutions like ***Durbar High School***, ***Bir Hospital***, and ***Tri-Chandra College*** began sowing the seeds of modern public welfare.

With the **advent of democracy**, Nepal witnessed landmark shifts in its welfare landscape. ***B.P. Koirala***, through the *Nepali Congress* manifesto, introduced the idea of **social democracy**, advocating for equality and inclusion. Post-1950 reforms gave path to crucial legislative and policy transformations. The **Land Reform Act**, **amendments to the *Muluki Ain* (2021 BS)**, and **abolition of untouchability** marked significant steps toward social justice. Education became a key focus, with the ***Naya Shiksha* (2031 BS)** evolve as education as welfare business of the state. The **Senior Citizen Allowance (2052 BS)** and abolition of bonded labor systems such as ***Kamaiya and Haliya* (2054 BS)** underscored the state's growing commitment to marginalized groups. The **inclusion policy (2059 BS)** ensured representation of various social groups, further deepened by the **popular movement of 2062/63**, which reaffirmed citizens' demand for equitable governance.

In the **contemporary context**, social welfare is enshrined in Nepal's legal and political frameworks. The **preamble of the Constitution of Nepal 2015** declares socialism as a national aspiration, linking governance directly to equity, justice, and welfare. Major political parties, including **Nepali Congress**, **CPN-UML** and **CPN-Maoist** uphold socialist ideals in their manifestos. Judicial interventions such as the **Supreme Court's verdict** for the security of single women have reinforced legal protection for vulnerable groups. Nepal's social welfare journey reflects a continuum from ancient ideals and cultural values to

modern legislative reforms and constitutional guarantees. This ongoing evolution underlines a persistent and deep-rooted national commitment to uplift the well-being of all citizens.

Kirtipur Municipality is one of the local level governments of Nepal located at the south of the Kathmandu valley; educational centre of the state, a historical Newari settlement, desire internal migration place of Nepali. Now days, it has multicultural settlements with 10 political administrative Ward and elective representative to handle pre womb to post tomb activities of the subjects.

Local government is one of the tiers of the federal governing structure of Nepal. Constitution of Nepal 2015 has adopted the three tiers of government system: federal; province and local level government. Since, its beginning, the local level government has granted certain constitutional duties and responsibilities towards the respect and honor of its preamble “commitment to create the bases of socialism.” (2015, p. 1). Local level government has guaranteed on twenty-two (22) list of powers and jurisdiction stated in constitution’s schedule 8. As a political science student, the researcher has been keenly interested in welfare mechanism and practices of local level government.

In general, welfare state is related with the benevolent behaviour and practices towards people or citizens by states in institutional, relational and embodied structure. Duties and responsibilities of local government encountered numerous impediments during practices in Nepali local government practiced. Democracy and its practices are important for welfare mechanism in local level government. The study of Raavad (2013) claims the social security examines the effective of the welfare mechanism in Nepal and its importance to the beneficiaries of the program Similarly, Bhusal (2012) criticizes the positive neo-liberal welfare policy of Nepal and emphasizes on universal welfare mechanism. The above studies are based on local government welfare practices though it could not carry the main theme of this study. The purpose of the study is to explore the welfare mechanism as enshrined in Constitution of Nepal 2015 of Kirtipur Municipality of Nepal. Similarly, it studies the cooperation and coordination between and among the three tiers of government in welfare policy of the state too. To response such gap the researcher has set following research objectives: to explore the welfare policy practices and its challenges faced by local level government.

### **Historical Roots of Modern Welfare State**

The modern welfare state can be traced back to the 1880s in Germany under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, who introduced pioneering social insurance programs. These early programs were designed to protect industrial workers against unemployment, workplace accidents, illness, and poverty in old age. This was a pivotal move by the state to address the social insecurities brought about by rapid industrialization. Bismarck’s motivations were both political and pragmatic. While he sought to reduce the appeal of socialism among the working classes, aimed to promote national unity and economic productivity. These schemes were contribution-based finance through both employer and employee payments and they became the model for later welfare systems around the world. This marked the beginning of

the idea that the state has a responsibility to ensure basic social protection, especially in times of need or vulnerability, thereby laying the foundation of the modern welfare state.

In response to the Great Depression of the 1930s, the United States launched the New Deal under President Franklin D. Roosevelt between 1933 and 1938. The New Deal aimed to revive the failing economy and support millions of unemployed Americans. It was structured around the famous “Three R’s”: Relief, Recovery, and Reform. Relief involved providing immediate assistance to the unemployed and impoverished, such as food programs and public works employment. Recovery focused on restoring economic health through measures like infrastructure development and financial support for businesses and farmers. Reform introduced long-term changes, such as regulating the banking sector and establishing Social Security to prevent future economic disasters. Although the New Deal did not create a comprehensive welfare state like in Europe, it significantly altered the role of the U.S. government, establishing the principle that the state should play a proactive role in ensuring economic stability and protecting citizens during crises. It marked a turning point from laissez-faire economics to state-managed welfare intervention.

Further, a giant step toward universal welfare in Europe came with the Beveridge Report in the United Kingdom, published in 1942 during World War II. The report proposed a comprehensive social insurance system to tackle what he identified as the ‘five giant evils’: Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness. The report emphasized the importance of expanding National Insurance to cover all citizens and laid the foundation for the National Health Service (NHS) and other public welfare institutions. Beveridge advocated that welfare was not merely financial support but a moral and social obligation of the state, rooted in social values and integrity. His vision promoted universal access to health, education, and income security from cradle to grave. These ideas were revolutionary at the time, placing emphasis on citizenship rights and state responsibility. Importantly, the Beveridge model contributed to the transformation of social policy into a central part of national political agendas, reinforcing the notion that well-being and equality are cornerstones of a just society.

### **Functional Perspectives of the Welfare State**

The theoretical frameworks and variations of welfare systems across countries can be analyzed through the lens of political economy, particularly the work of Gøsta Esping-Andersen. In his typology of welfare capitalism, Esping-Andersen identified three main welfare regimes: Liberal, Conservative (Corporatist), and Social Democratic. The Liberal model, found in countries like the United States, is characterized by means-tested benefits and a reliance on the market to deliver services, resulting in modest support and more inequality. The Conservative model, typical of countries like Germany and the Netherlands, ties benefits to employment status and promotes traditional family roles, leading to segmented welfare systems. The Social Democratic model, practiced in Nordic countries like Sweden and Norway, emphasizes universalism, generous benefits, and decommodification:

meaning individuals are not entirely dependent on the market for survival. The development and implementation of these regimes are influenced by the economic philosophies of Keynes (1926) who advocated for government intervention, Alfred Marshall (1964) who emphasized education and social investment, Karl Polanyi (1944) who warned against market dominance over social life and Gunnar Myrdal (1958), who supported democratic planning for equality). These ideologies inform both political decisions and policy outcomes. Finally, translating these welfare policies into real-life support systems falls within the social welfare.

### **Welfare State**

Almond and Powell defines welfare state as the concept of government in which in state or a well-established network of social institutions plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of citizens. It is based on the ideas of political system theory which believe in wholistic development of citizens needs. Similarly, Peter Bondarenko explains it as the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life.

Further Garland (2014) explains welfare state as a distinctive form of governmentality with a specific mode of constituting the economy, which assures the social security, and guarantees social provision. Further garland explains welfare state with three broad categories with distinct boundaries and functions. The first and narrowest is 'welfare for the poor' which includes means-tested support like food stamps and public assistance. This category is often highlighted by critics of welfare, particularly in American political discourse, is associated with programs that directly support the economically disadvantaged. Though essential, this version of the welfare state tends to be stigmatized and viewed as the most controversial. The second conception involves 'insurance, income maintenance, and health and social services.' This broader view is the primary focus of social policy experts and includes systems like Social Security and Medicare in the U.S. or the NHS in the U.K. It covers universal entitlement programs that aim to protect citizens against common life risks such as illness, unemployment and old age. The third and broadest conception considers government's role in managing the economy and population, including fiscal, monetary, employment, and bio-political policies. While often overlooked in mainstream debates, this systemic approach emphasized the state's deep role in shaping market conditions and social life and this idea rooted in Foucault's concept of governmentality. Garland argues that these three are not competing views but rather interlinked layers of a comprehensive welfare system.

For some theorist welfare state is differ in their nature and practices as proposed by Espring-Andersen. Explain welfare for capitalist state as, state should be understood as the state's involvement in the distribution and redistribution of welfare in a given country, taking, however, democracy and the relatively high standard of living as a basis for the welfare state. (Aidukaite, 2009). Whereas Skocpol and Amenta (1986) have used the term 'social policies'

in the broader sense to mean state activities affecting the social status and the life opportunities for families, individuals or various social groups. And define social policy such as mass education, social insurance, pension programmes and a health-care system etc. are parts of welfare state.

In broader sense, social welfare state means as a government obligation to ensure a decent standard of living for its citizens given as a social right through such channels as social security, social services, the labour market, housing policy, education and health care. It should be agreed that the notion of the welfare state coexists with a relatively high standard of living. For above things regime couldn't affect the ideas (Aidukaite, 2009).

### **Methods**

The study was based on constructive ideas of ontology and interpretative nature of epistemology with qualitative explanatory research design. For this, the researcher applied conducting research, reading raw data, generating themes, and interpreting data into findings. Non-probability purposive sampling and open-ended interview questions were used as tools to explore the data. The researcher explores the local government welfare practices in Kirtipur Municipality through its research interview (official authorities, social activist, politician, teacher and ordinary citizens of the Municipality.) in an inductive manner. The researcher further transcribed data and also generated themes using an interpretivist paradigm. The limitation of the study was welfare policy and practices of local government of Kirtipur Municipality, the research was completed in 3 months August to October, 2024. The study was limited in geographic location inside the Kathmandu district, Kirtipur Municipality, making it as a representative of other local government body of Nepal. Furthermore, the research was captured welfare policy and practices of local government of Kirtipur Municipality as a representation of Nepal.

### **Discussion: Analyzing Kirtipur Local Government through the Lens of Welfare State Theory**

The modern welfare state, as defined is not merely an apparatus of social assistance but a fundamental aspect of governance that integrates economic management with social security, equity, and redistribution. While some scholars Garland (2014) focuses on the welfare state as a cornerstone of modern government. Similarly, Esping-Andersen (1990) classifies welfare states into liberal, conservative, and social-democratic models based on de commodification, stratification, and public service provision. In analyzing Kirtipur Local Government's welfare initiatives, it becomes essential to evaluate its policies not just by their presence, but by their depth, inclusivity, and sustainability in shaping a local welfare system reflective of national ideals.

Kirtipur Municipality presents itself as a federal state's one of the local government's welfare policies attempting to address socio-economic inequalities and development gaps

through localized strategies. While there are notable successes in areas such as health care, education, and empowerment programs, the municipality's efforts are constrained by systemic and structural limitations that impact policy effectiveness. One of the most important ideas from the study of Kirtipur's governance is the persistent issue of policy implementation gaps. While various policies have been framed with a vision toward long-term social transformation, such as senior citizen medical support or child-friendly municipality goals, the follow-through has often been weak. One of the Interviewee said, 'we could not do anything without the support of bureaucracy and elected representative knowledge about the welfare state, its principle, process, taxation system and justice towards the society.' This observation aligns with Garland's notion that welfare initiatives must be supported by institutional robustness and governance capacity. The lack of sustainable outcomes, largely due to insufficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, undermines the policies' transformative potential. Without effective bureaucratic structures and political will the policy could not bring positive outcomes as it desired.

The low level of public awareness regarding existing welfare provisions is the problematic to achieve the goal of the subject matter. Many people remain unaware and unknown of their entitlements and disconnect with local government facilities and rights. policy Esping-Andersen's emphasis on social rights as foundational to welfare states requires that individuals be aware of and able to claim these rights. Kirtipur's lack of an effective communication strategy reduces the actual decommodification effect of its welfare policies. One of the Ward Chairperson claims, 'Many citizens of the ward don't know about their rights and facilities provided by municipality and those programmes has outdated without knowing by targeted person.'

Despite these issues, the municipality has made commendable progress in tax policy, which underpins any functioning welfare system. Steps to improve tax collection and broaden the tax base are indicative of a shift toward a more self-sustaining model of local governance. According to Vice Mayor, the process of redistributing revenue across wards, the municipality is taking an equity-focused approach to resource allocation. This is one of the important tasks of welfare state mechanism in building what Garland calls the infrastructure of redistribution where social justice redirected to vulnerable sections of the society. While Kirtipur's tax system is still in its developmental stages, these initial steps reflect a strong intent to lay the groundwork for local fiscal autonomy, which is vital for welfare sustenance.

The municipality's financial incentives and welfare programs form the core of its social support architecture. Social security and health subsidies for senior citizens and patients with chronic diseases illustrate a commitment to supporting life's critical junctures. These initiatives bear the hallmark of Esping-Andersen's conservative model, where familial status and community structures often determine access. However, by offering universal schemes such as health subsidies for older adults and birth rewards for every newborn, Kirtipur also demonstrates characteristics of the social-democratic welfare state—particularly in its attempt to universalize support regardless of socio-economic standing. While the financial

scale of these programs may be modest, their symbolic value in fostering social solidarity cannot be overlooked. Though one of the citizens of the municipality believe during election, the federal social security allowances and health insurance are highly politicized as Bhusal (2012) stated.

Though the purpose of local level government is providing efficient, effective, accountable and transparent governance to its citizen but due to the bureaucratic delays, complex regulatory frameworks and insufficient manpower creates the less effectiveness of government and welfare activities. The welfare policy emphasized on the importance of institutional modernization in delivery. A system built on outdated or overly complex administrative rules often becomes exclusionary, inadvertently reinforcing social inequality rather than reducing it. The situation in Kirtipur shows that while public feedback is generally supportive, the absence of strong accountability mechanisms of the local government risks eroding trust over time.

Kirtipur's healthcare services, particularly the recruitment of doctors in *Bishnudevi* and quarterly health camps, represent an important shift toward primary health care provisioning at the local level. This is one of the values of decentralized welfare governance, where local governments play a critical role in ensuring universal access. The municipality's disease-specific medical aid plan also reflects an effort to direct resources toward high-burden health areas. What Garland (2014) states, 'governing through care' model, where health becomes a lever for both social protection and productivity enhancement.

Similarly, to empower and facilitate the civic engagement and training in collaboration with national and international organization lead to the local government as patron and protector of the citizen stated by Vice-Mayor. The recent rise in citizen participation, coupled with training programs supported by organizations like UNDP and World Vision, illustrates the merging of public welfare with global development networks. By promoting local capacity-building and skill development, the municipality promotes the capability of the citizens and it help to reduce the poverty and exclusion. Welfare system reminds us that without active citizenship policies, welfare states risk becoming passive fail institution. Kirtipur's training initiatives point toward a more enabling, rather than dependency-inducing, welfare orientation local government.

Education, long viewed as a cornerstone of welfare regimes, presents a mixed picture. The federal government policy of free school education upto secondary level applied as a universal welfare policy in this municipality as well. The municipality has applied the mixed education policy; public, private and community. The highly ambitious programme of Kirtipur Municipality '*Ek Ghar Ek Snatak*' (One House One Graduate) has launched in 2079. One of the members of Municipality Council states, "It is the foundation for Kirtipur Education". Similarly, one of the interviewees stated that it is too early to analyze and comment on this programme. It has mixed retrospect and prospect. The success of the *Khulla Bidhyalaya* program is commendable, with 15 out of 23 students passing their SEE



exams, indicating that non-traditional education formats can successfully reintegrate dropouts into the mainstream. The imbalance between access and quality is a common issue in developing welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

In terms of technological progress, Kirtipur's move toward digitizing services such as online map approvals and the Education Management Information System (EMIS) marks a initial step toward modernizing public administration. Digital platforms can reduce corruption, enhance transparency, and improve service delivery. However, digital divides must be considered. It could not address the marginalized communities lack the digital literacy or infrastructure to access these services. Garland (2014) warns against technocratic solutions that overlook socio-cultural realities; hence, Kirtipur's digital reforms must be accompanied by digital inclusion policies to ensure true accessibility.

Furthermore, Kirtipur Municipality works on youth and women empowerment programmes. Electricity training for colleges, job creation through community forests, and auto-rickshaw driving training for women all indicate a strategic approach to inclusive growth. These initiatives are particularly significant in the context of Nepal's immigration and brain drain, offering local alternatives to youth who might otherwise leave in search of employment. What Esping-Andersen's social-democratic model emphasizes labor market inclusion as a tool of welfare expansion, and Kirtipur seems to be taking steps in this direction by actively creating employment pathways within the local economy. Initiatives to promote tourism and employment, including youth management of tourist areas and the promotion of home-stay, community businesses are aligned with the principles of sustainable local development. These efforts not only generate income but also preserve cultural identity and foster community resilience. This type of embedded development reflects the welfare state and its moral and cultural community accountability with economic well-being.

Among the notable achievements, the child-friendly municipality goal stands out as a symbolic pragmatic initiative. Declaring Ward No. 7 child-friendly, with more wards scheduled to follow, illustrates a targeted strategy to improve child welfare, safety, and education. This aligns with the idea of the welfare state as a protector of vulnerable groups, creating spaces where children's rights and needs are prioritized. Symbolic gestures like these, when paired with tangible policy support, contribute to building a culture of care that is essential for any welfare system.

Finally, Kirtipur's commitment to cultural and social empowerment especially among marginalized groups like women and Dalits reinforces the inclusive dimension of its welfare agenda. By promoting traditional musical instruments (arts) such as *Naumati Baja* and integrating financial support into cultural initiatives, the municipality strengthens community identity and social participation. These activities do more than entertain; they validate historically marginalized voices and contribute to a pluralistic public sphere, which is central to the legitimacy of a welfare state.

**Major Findings**

Kirtipur Municipality, through its arrangement of welfare programs and developmental strategies, showcases a strong local attempt to institutionalize welfare within a developing context. Drawing from the research data analysis, the researcher explores the following ideas as the major findings of the topic:

- **Mixed Welfare Typology:** Kirtipur's model incorporates mixed welfare system where universal birth and health subsidies reflect social-democratic ideals; death benefits and senior aid align with conservative models rooted in familial care; and its labor-focused training and job-creation strategies echo liberal traits of enabling market participation.
- **Policy-Implementation Gap:** in municipal action, there is gap between policy design and execution, largely due to lack of good research and inadequate follow-up mechanisms. This undermines long-term impact on federalism and local government system of Nepal.
- **Growing Fiscal Capacity:** The efforts in tax collection and equitable revenue allocation highlight an emerging fiscal base for welfare expansion. However, these systems need to be scaled and diversified to reduce reliance on Federal and Province level government funding.
- **Inclusive but Fragile Support Programs:** Welfare schemes are largely inclusive in design, but their sustainability and reach remain vulnerable to administrative delays, lack of awareness, and insufficient infrastructure.
- **Social and Economic Empowerment:** in respect of others fields, Kirtipur Municipality noteworthy progress in youth and women empowerment, cultural inclusion, and child welfare shows a commitment to broad-based development. These programs foster both material and symbolic inclusion and lead to just and equal society as preferred by ideal welfare state.
- **Modernization Efforts:** Digitization of services and integration of technology are positive steps but must be paired with digital literacy and equitable access to prevent exclusion.
- **Community-Based Welfare:** The municipality's emphasis on community participation, resource mobilization, and traditional knowledge shows a hybrid welfare approach that blends modern principles with local context.

In conclusion, Kirtipur Municipality shows the potential of local governments in building welfare states from the ground up. While still in its developmental phase, its strategic focus on inclusion, empowerment, and sustainability lays a promising foundation. Continued attention to implementation quality, institutional strength, and inclusive awareness-building will be essential for transforming Kirtipur's welfare vision as welfare state not as a rhetoric as a pragmatic one.

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