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The Politics of Social Protection in Nepal

State Infrastructural Power and Implementation of the Scholarship Programme

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1. Introduction

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

By drawing attention to the varied capacities, discourses, and interests at different layers of state bureaucracy, this chapter explores the complex dynamics shaping the implementation of education assistance in Nepal, popularly known as the 'Scholarship Programme'. This programme provides cash stipends to primary and secondary students of marginalized communities. The Scholarship Programme exemplifies the 'protective' dimension of social protection, designed as it is to provide recipients with relief from deprivation (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux 2009). Furthermore, by promoting education among historically oppressed groups, the Scholarship Programme emphasizes the 'transformative' dimension of social protection (Sijapati 2017). Its multi-faceted dimensions make

the Scholarship Programme a crucial component of social protection in Nepal, and it demands to be studied more extensively than at present. This particularly relates to implementation, since effective implementation at all the stages of the programme is crucial for the realization of the intended objectives and, ultimately, to assess the claims of such programmes as instruments of social inclusion.

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

This chapter makes two distinct arguments. First, it highlights the importance of infrastructural power to the implementation of social transfers. In particular, the main implementation failings of the Scholarship Programme can be attributed to the relations between state agencies and the limited capacity of higher levels of the state to monitor effectively the actions of lower levels. One notable source of divergence between these state agencies is the different ways in which the Scholarship Programme is framed by different state actors, suggesting that different narratives, as well as material interests, of state actors can limit the infrastructural power of the state. Second, the research concludes that programme design can compensate for some of the limitations of state infrastructural power. In particular, the framing of the Scholarship Programme in terms of advancing social justice has resulted in the use of categorical targeting to distribute scholarships to *all* girls and historically marginalized castes. This categorical targeting considerably limits the logistical demands placed on the state in comparison with poverty targeting and, as such, is more in line with the limitations of state infrastructural power in Nepal.

The chapter proceeds by outlining the methodology pursued in the research and the rationale for selection of case studies of implementation. Next, the chapter presents an overview of the political factors shaping the design and origins of the Scholarship Programme, highlighting the use of the scholarships as a means of overcoming social injustice by focusing on marginalized social groups. The main analytical sections examine the process of implementing the Scholarship Programme across the disaggregated levels of the state, focusing on two main issues: first, how the distribution of scholarships and the application of targeting

and conditionality criteria are shaped by distinct narratives used to justify the programme; and, second, how the limited infrastructural power of the state contributes to major problems with the disbursement of the scholarships.

2. Research design and methodology

This chapter draws on fieldwork in four districts[1]: (1) Ilam; (2) Saptari; (3) Lalitpur; and (4) Jumla (see Fig. 8.1). The four districts are located in four distinct regions of Nepal, each uniquely situated within the historic process of Nepalese state formation. Lalitpur district abuts the national capital of Kathmandu. Its proximity to Kathmandu, the centre of the high-caste Khas Hindu Nepalese state for over 200 years, has contributed to a relatively high level of state infrastructural power, including a greater presence of state institutions in the district. Likewise, a high level of state infrastructural power in Ilam district, located in Nepal's far east, resulted from a process of increasing state control over the communal lands of the indigenous Limbu community. Distinct from both these processes, state formation in the southern district of Saptari exemplifies neglect by the state and limited infrastructural power, as illustrated by high student–teacher ratios, and appalling levels of poverty and illiteracy. State infrastructural power in the midwestern district of Jumla is impacted by the region's geographic remoteness from Kathmandu. Despite having been the centre of the sprawling twelfth-century 'Khas kingdom', the district rapidly declined in importance once the centre of political gravity shifted to Kathmandu in the eighteenth century. These variations in the infrastructural power of the state find resonance in contemporary socio-economic indices, as demonstrated in Table 8.1.

Case selection also reflected considerable variation in ethnic diversity and the balance of social power in districts across Nepal (see Table 8.2). Members of the historically oppressed Tamang community in Lalitpur, for example, remained largely apathetic to the political churning around them during the ethnic movements of the 1990s (Carter Center 2013). Likewise, members of the Kami, Sarki, Damai, and other oppressed Dalit communities in Jumla remained largely aloof from the Maoist movement whose strongholds lay in the vicinity. By contrast, members of historically oppressed communities, such as the Limbu in Ilam, and the Yadavs and Tharus in Saptari, actively participated in and often led ethnic, linguistic, and caste movements directed against political domination by the 'high caste' Khas leadership of the Nepali state.

In selecting these districts, we expected to find variation in the implementation of the Scholarship Programme between districts, with better implementation in districts with higher levels of infrastructural power, such as Ilam and Lalitpur, and greater politicization of subaltern groups, who would be in a position to hold local officials to account, such as in Ilam and Saptari. However, the analysis that follows
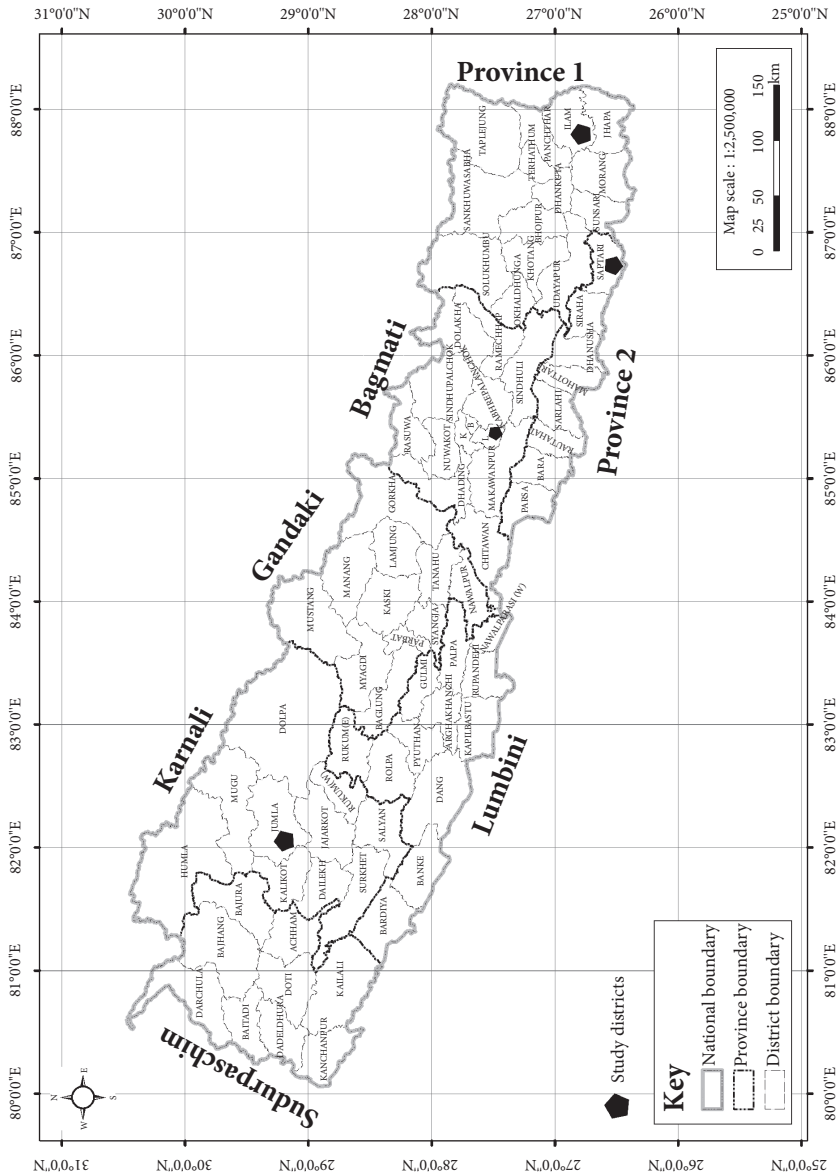
Fig. 8.1 Map of the Nepalese research sites
Source: NAXA for Social Science Baha.

did not suggest significant differences in implementation. Rather, all four districts faced similar challenges in the disbursement of the scholarships.

In all four districts, significant educational budgets were allocated to the school Scholarship Programme. Table 8.3 shows the total budget allocated to the

Table 8.1 Socio-economic indices of research districts

	Ilam	Saptari	Lalitpur	Jumla	National total
Total population	290,254	639,284	468,123	108,921	26,494,504
Total schools	432	449	184	156	29,035
Total students	60,123	129,475	44,157	38,999	6,062,806
Development assistance (USD million)	4.487	8.483	15.787	5.991	–
Child malnutrition (%)	46	34	16	54	41
Poverty rate (%)	7	40	8	49	24
Total teachers	2,352	2,575	1,813	811	152,480
Student–school ratio	139	288	240	250	209
Student–teacher ratio	26	50	24	48	40
Life expectancy (years)	68	71	70	63	
Adult literacy (%)	73	45	80	44	66
Mean years of schooling	5	3	6	3	
Per capita income (NPR)	1,260	801	1,894	1,007	1,160
Human Development Index	0.518	0.437	0.601	0.409	0.574

Source: Adapted from DoE 2018b, MoF 2018, and Sharma et al. 2014.

Table 8.2 Social composition of research districts

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

Source: CBS (2014).

municipalities and rural municipalities for scholarships in the four research districts for the fiscal year 2018/19. The highest amount of budget was allocated to scholarships for girl students. This was followed by scholarships for Dalit students. Comparison of Tables 8.2 and 8.3 suggests that the budgets allocated to the different districts are commensurate to their population.

Table 8.3 Budget allocated by type of scholarship and district (hundreds of Nepalese rupees)

	Ilam	Saptari	Lalitpur	Jumla
Scholarship for girl students (1–8)	8,397	13,674	7,031	4,992
Scholarship for Dalits (1–8)	1,502	14,929	1,762	2,943
Scholarship for Dalits (9–10)	131	729	177	165
Scholarship for student with disability (1–12) non-residential	1,770	3928	169	1,192
Scholarship for student with disability (1–12) residential	2,400	3,480	0	2,600
Feeder hostel	800	0	0	800
Himali residential	0	0	0	2,800

Source: CEHRD (2019).

Table 8.4 Respondent coverage across research districts

Research method	Ilam	Saptari	Lalitpur	Jumla	Total
Key informant interview (KII)	25	24	14	26	89
School stakeholder interview (SSI) (head teachers, teachers, Scholarship Management Committee members)	5	14	3	4	26
Parent survey	100	128	55	84	367

As part of our fieldwork, we gathered existing district-level official statistics on the coverage of the scholarship schemes. This was followed by a survey that entailed in-depth interviews with 367 parents/guardians. The study also interviewed 89 key informants, including bureaucrats, activists, academics, and politicians. In addition, we interviewed 26 school stakeholders, such as head teachers, teachers, and members of School Management Committees (see Table 8.4 for district-wise details).

3. The politics of Nepal's School Scholarship Programme

The Scholarship Programme is a nationwide educational assistance programme that disburses cash stipends to primary and secondary students of marginalized communities in state schools. The Scholarship Programme entails an annual cash stipend of: (1) between NPR 400 and 600 per annum[2] for Dalit and girl scholarships; (2) NPR 1,700 per annum for 'poor and talented' students at secondary level; and (3) NPR 1,000–1,500 per annum for girl students in Karnali zone, including Jumla district. The scholarships also cover students from marginalized communities, students with disabilities, and students from families affected by conflict. The scholarships operate under the School Sector Development Programme. The Ministry of Education disburses the funds to district education offices,[3] from where they are allocated to all state schools in the district. In the schools, the stipends are disbursed to eligible children, preferably in the presence of their parent or legal guardian. This stipend is expected to cover children's education-related costs, over and above the free primary education to which they are entitled. It is estimated that the scholarships reach at least 3 million children, out of a total of 7.4 million children enrolled in grades 1–12[4] (DoE 2017b; DoE 2018b). The School Sector Development Plan (2016/17–2020/1) has budgeted a total of NPR 40,516 million (USD 386 million) for scholarship and incentive programmes. This amounts to 6 per cent of the total education budget for the period (SSDP 2016, p. 110). These scholarship programmes are considered one of the largest social protection programmes in the education sector (GoN 2014).

The Scholarship Programme targets support to multiple groups and categories, reflecting the programme's multiple objectives and framings. Indeed, the dominant framing of the programme has evolved over time, from a limited focus on productive investment in the education and protection of the poorest, to the pursuit of social justice as a means of addressing historical marginalization. The Scholarship Programme was originally introduced under the reign of King Mahendra (1955–72) with the intention of projecting the image of the king as pro-development (*vikas premi*, which literally translates into 'development lover'). The programme aimed to increase literacy, school enrolment, and educational attainment, and was framed as a productive intervention, embedded within narratives of modernization and development. In 1961, King Mahendra formed the Nepal All Round National Education Committee, which eventually led to the Education Act and education regulations of 1971. Nepal's Five-Year Development Plans after 1960 prioritized education, with an emphasis on the Scholarship Programme. For example, the Second Five-Year Development Plan provided for scholarships in higher studies, especially in engineering, agriculture, and medicine (NPC 1962). The Third Five-Year Development Plan emphasized girls' education, teacher training programmes, and hostel facilities for students from remote areas (NPC 1965). In the words of a former National Planning Commission chairperson,
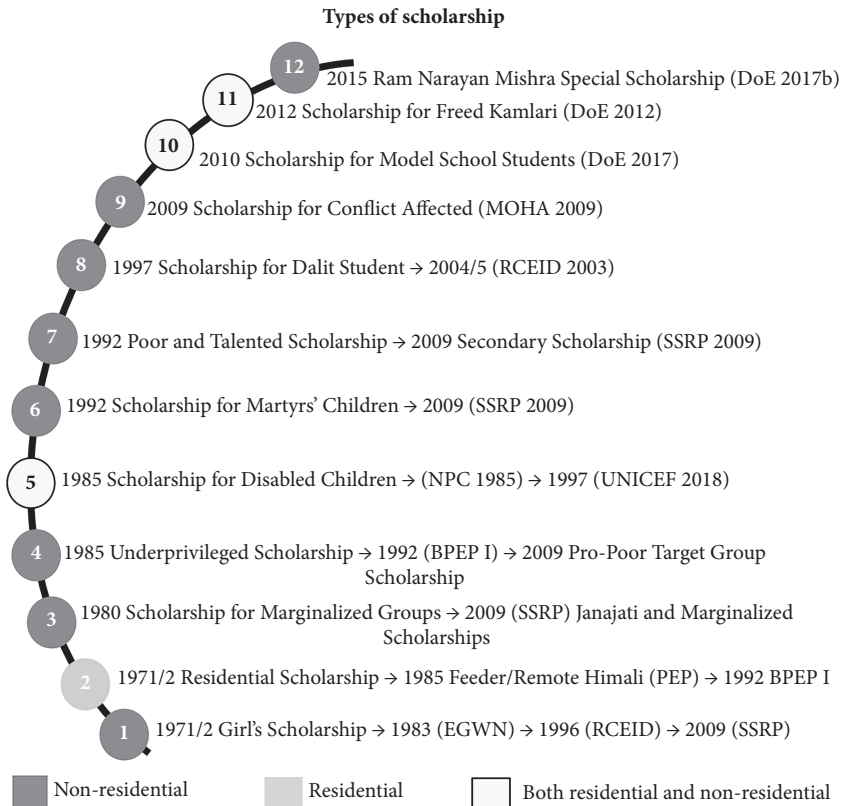
> Education emerged as one of the most important agendas under King Mahendra. He wanted the country to modernize. You could only modernize by eradicating illiteracy. He knew a breakthrough could only be achieved by educating people.[5]

When the western-educated King Birendra ascended the throne in 1972, he continued with his father's liberal education policies (Shakya 1977; Acharya and Bennett 1981; Whelpton 2005). Scholarships were extended as part of the liberalization reforms and introduction of free primary education in the Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (1975/6–1979/80) (Shakya 1977; Acharya and Bennett 1981; Whelpton 2005). Scholarships at this time retained their productive emphasis and were extended to poor but talented students to cover their educational expenses, as well as being extended to some girl students, as part of a residential programme that promoted and trained women as teachers, in part based on the influence of Queen Aishwarya (Dahal 1975). Policies such as girls' scholarship schemes were incorporated within the Equal Access of Women to Education Project (EAWEP). The National Education System Plan (1971–6) included two types of scholarship: (1) to cover educational expenses for poor and talented students; and (2) to cover hostel charges.

The following decade witnessed the gradual shift from the productivist orientation of the scholarship programmes to a greater focus on social justice. Responding to increased opposition movements, as well as democratization of the political system, King Birendra introduced scholarships targeted towards members of marginalized communities. For example, the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (1980/1–1984/5) included the provision of scholarships to 430 children of marginalized communities, such as Koche, Meche, Chepang, Chhantel, Jirel, and Gaine, among others (NPC 1980). The Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985–90) included the provision of free education to children with disabilities, scholarship provision for female students, and 110 scholarships for students from remote areas (NPC 1985).

The emphasis on social justice deepened considerably in the 1990s (Koehler 2011; Sijapati 2017; Drucza 2019). This shift reflected the democratic transition, the Maoist People's War between 1996 and 2006, and the subsequent reconciliation efforts. The transition resulted in a democratic constitution of 2007 that ensured basic fundamental rights and included a special provision to protect the interests of women, children, people with disabilities, and economically, socially, and educationally backward communities. For example, scholarships were extended to: girl students of 65 districts on a quota basis and to all enrolled girl students of 10 remote districts in 2009; 100 per cent of the girls enrolled in community schools in 2011 (ERDCN 2011); children of families affected by the Maoist insurgency; and, in 2012, to students who had hitherto been bonded labourers (traditionally known as Kamlari and Kamaiya). Fig. 8.2 shows the gradual emergence and expansion of the School Scholarship Programme.

Types of scholarship

12 2015 Ram Narayan Mishra Special Scholarship (DoE 2017b)

11 2012 Scholarship for Freed Kamlari (DoE 2012)

10 2010 Scholarship for Model School Students (DoE 2017)

9 2009 Scholarship for Conflict Affected (MOHA 2009)

8 1997 Scholarship for Dalit Student → 2004/5 (RCEID 2003)

7 1992 Poor and Talented Scholarship → 2009 Secondary Scholarship (SSRP 2009)

6 1992 Scholarship for Martyrs' Children → 2009 (SSRP 2009)

5 1985 Scholarship for Disabled Children → (NPC 1985) → 1997 (UNICEF 2018)

4 1985 Underprivileged Scholarship → 1992 (BPEP I) → 2009 Pro-Poor Target Group Scholarship

3 1980 Scholarship for Marginalized Groups → 2009 (SSRP) Janajati and Marginalized Scholarships

2 1971/2 Residential Scholarship → 1985 Feeder/Remote Himali (PEP) → 1992 BPEP I

1 1971/2 Girl's Scholarship → 1983 (EGWN) → 1996 (RCEID) → 2009 (SSRP)

▮ Non-residential   ▮ Residential   ▢ Both residential and non-residential

Fig. 8.2 Emergence of different types of scholarship in Nepal
Source: Authors' compilation from Shakya (1977); MoE (1983); NPC (1985); MoE (1984); MoF (1992); MoE (1999); RCEID (2003); MOHA (2009); DoE (2012, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2018a); EMIS, 2017.

The eventual promulgation of the 2015 Constitution mainstreamed the political discussion on issues of inequitable resource distribution, ethnic/caste discrimination, and demands for greater social inclusion (Thapa and Sijapati 2003; Bennett et al. 2006; Thapa 2017). As one former education minister and CPN (Maoist) party leader said,

> The concept of inclusive scholarship by the state emerged after the Maoist People's War for the *utpidit* (oppressed) groups. After the People's War, the government established constitutional provisions for scholarships.[6]

These movements influenced not only the government's plans and programmes but also those of the donors (Thapa and Sijapati 2003; Murshed and Gates 2005; Bennett et al. 2006; Riaz and Basu 2007; Thapa 2017). The commitment of the central state to the Scholarship Programme was consolidated by the support of donors

such as the World Bank, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, the United Nations Development Programme, the Danish International Development Agency and the Asian Development Bank. As such, key informants suggested that the domestic priorities in favour of scholarship programmes were aligned with the social sector focus of donors.[7]

The Scholarship Programme performs both symbolic and instrumental roles. Symbolically, it illustrates the commitment to social inclusion by the central state in Nepal, which, at least rhetorically, distinguishes the central state of republican Nepal from the monarchy. Instrumentally, the programme addresses the political demands made by marginalized groups. Nonetheless, the rapid expansion of the Scholarship Programme, and its shift in emphasis over time from a productive to a social justice framing, raises questions regarding how these changes have affected the process of implementation. The existing literature sheds light on several aspects of the programme's implementation and differential performance on different aspects of the programme. Official reports (DoE 2011, 2017a) aver that the programme enables the state to respond to inequalities in educational opportunities. Indeed, most observers concur that the Scholarship Programme positively impacted educational opportunities, especially for girls and Dalits (Jnawali 2010; DoE 2011, 2017a;), although some suggest that more could be done (DoE 2017a). However, several reports criticize the programme's low and shallow coverage (Drucza 2017), polarized views of its very desirability (Bhusal 2012), and the categorical targeting of social groups (Carter Centre 2013). Reports also highlight the problems of coordination between different state organizations that adversely impact the delivery of the programme. These problems range from limited internal coordination within the educational bureaucracy (DoE 2010) to a mismatch between funds available and number of students eligible for scholarships (DoE 2011). Such commentaries indicate the mixed ability of the state in Nepal to implement and manage the Scholarship Programme.

4. Distributing scholarships: changing frames from productivism to social justice

This section examines the processes by which scholarship recipients are selected for inclusion in the programme in the four case study sites, encompassing both targeting and the application of conditions related to school attendance. A key factor shaping this process is the limit to state infrastructural power and, in particular, the limited ability of higher levels of the state to ensure effective implementation at the district level. One of the key sources of divergence between levels of the disaggregated state concerns the narratives and framings that officials use to justify the Scholarship Programme, and the influence this has on their decision making in the

implementation process. As discussed in the previous section, at the national level, the Scholarship Programme is justified in relation to distinct rationales—namely, as a productive intervention and as a means of addressing social marginalization, with the dominant framing of the programme shifting over time from productivism to social justice. With the shift to a social justice framing, the programme design increasingly utilizes categorical targeting to identify the majority of scholarship recipients. As such, all the girl students, Dalit students, and students from Karnali zone received the scholarship, while individual targeting is limited to the 'poor and talented' scholarship, mainly targeting secondary-level students.

Teachers are responsible for identifying eligible students in their schools and, following approval by the Scholarship Management Committee, the school submits the list of recipients to the education officer at the district level. The district then compiles the total number of eligible students in the district and submits this list to the central state for the release of the budget. One important by-product of the shift towards a social justice framing is the lower logistical demands presented by the targeting process. Unlike poverty targeting, which requires the state to generate detailed information regarding the income, consumption, or assets of individuals, categorical targeting of the majority of recipients means that eligible students are easily identifiable by teachers, without any need to submit documentation or generate additional information. Our research in the four districts shows that no specific criteria were followed for the selection of girls and Dalit scholarship. According to the School Scholarship Management Directive 2017, proof of government-recognized Dalit identity and poor economic conditions is required along with an application for Dalit scholarship. However, our study shows that the majority of students submitted no such documents.[8] Teachers and members of School Management Committees informed us that they never asked for documents, since the students lived in the same community as them and they could verify the students' family background and status. Moreover, students' surnames were often taken as a proof of their caste identity. The relative ease of identifying students based on categorical targeting, where the boundaries of the group are relatively clear, made it possible for schools to take such decisions with little controversy or contention. While the focus of the Scholarship Programme and the coverage of particular groups was motivated by the claims of historically marginalized social groups, as discussed above, the design is also well attuned to the limited infrastructural power of the state in Nepal.

While at the national level the social justice framing has attained prominence, as reflected in the programme design, this change in priorities is not uniformly reflected across the levels of the state. Indeed, despite the dominant emphasis of the Scholarship Programme on social justice, the previous emphasis on the use of scholarships as a productive intervention remains, most visibly in the Scholarship Directive 2017, which mandates a minimum attendance criterion. As discussed above, scholarships were first introduced in the education sector with an overall

objective to increase education enrolment and attendance. On paper, this emphasis on school attendance still continues as a condition for scholarship transfers.

Despite the central state's commitment to social inclusion, and its continued assurance of the Scholarship Programme, the central state was unable to enforce its framing of the programme as a commitment to social inclusion upon the local state. In particular, district- and local-level actors continued to emphasize the productive potential of the scholarships as a means of enhancing literacy rates, attainment of schooling, and developing a productive labour force. As such, a district education officer[9] in Saptari district claimed that the scholarship boosted the enrolment rate among Dalits and girls, as per the government policy and goals. A bureaucrat[10] in Ilam, emphasizing the need to expand the Scholarship Programme, mentioned, 'Our leaders are educated and know that our country will not develop without education. So they give special importance to education.' At the local level, therefore, scholarships continue to be seen as an important intervention to encourage all children to complete school education, so that they may become productive citizens. Such a productive focus frames students from marginalized groups as a 'problem' to be addressed and social programmes as a way to transform them 'into better, more productive members of society' (Hickey 2008, p. 353). Therefore, in all four districts, resource persons[11] are deployed by the district education officer to ensure that schools follow the scholarship guidelines on attendance.[12]

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

> [the] government tells us to give it to those with 75 per cent attendance but it is not possible for us. No student would ever meet the criteria. We are compelled to give it to those (students) who come for 15–20 days but also to those who do not come at all.[13]

The decision to ignore the condition of school attendance—and with it the productive framing favoured by district officials—was, in part, based on a competing

framing of the programme at the level of the everyday state. Here, schools prioritized the care and support of programme recipients, in order to be as inclusive as possible when it came to disbursing scholarships, ignoring requirements to distribute the scholarships based on attendance. However, the failure to enforce the attendance criterion was also the result of the weak infrastructural power of the everyday state. When some schools in Saptari district did attempt to enforce official criteria regarding attendance, the parents and guardians of students protested, forcing the schools to discontinue the requirement.[14] Thus, the school was unable to enforce the rule in the face of societal opposition. Many of our key informants reported that keeping attendance as a criterion led to disagreements between school authorities and guardians as well as cases of students fighting with each other.[15] As one head teacher told the research team: 'When we do not give scholarship to students with irregular attendance, their guardians quarrel with us.'[16]

While the scholarships are increasingly framed as a means of pursuing social justice and overcoming past marginalization, the size of the transfers raises questions about the ability of the Scholarship Programme to make a meaningful contribution to these objectives. As discussed above, the Scholarship Programme amounts to between NPR 400 and NPR 1,700 per annum for different categories of student. Moreover, the central state's programme criteria mandate that the local state and the school limit each student to one type of scholarship, with no overlap. Our study found that all schools stringently followed this instruction and avoided duplication in the distribution of cash. For example, a Dalit girl student can claim a scholarship under either the Dalit or the girl child criterion, not both.

State bureaucrats and school authorities across the research sites complained that the money provided by the scholarships was too little.[17] For example, a Scholarship Management Committee head in Saptari argued,

> I do not think the money is adequate. Before, clothes could be bought with 200–300 but now it takes about 1,000 and the sewing cost alone is 200–300, so I think it would be adequate if it was 1,000.

Similarly, some school authorities said that the scholarship of NPR 400 was not adequate to buy uniforms or stationery for the year. A head teacher in Ilam and a guardian in South Lalitpur went to the extent of suggesting that students could earn around NPR 800–1,000 a day working as a labourer in construction or in the field, in some cases more than the annual amount they would receive under the scholarship. Since the scholarship amount is small, many view it as a merely symbolic act.

Nevertheless, although the amount is little, it has provided help for very poor families to buy uniforms and stationery. School authorities, state bureaucrats, and elected representatives in all four research sites agreed that the scholarship provided great support to children. In Jumla, the research team found overwhelmingly

positive responses towards the programme, as the scholarship amount was higher (due to the region's remoteness) and was sufficient to cover school materials. In Saptari, Ilam, and South Lalitpur districts, parents and school authorities often shared that the poor felt the state was at least giving them something. For example, a teacher in Saptari noted that

> When the students receive money, students are also happy, parents are also happy. They say we could buy copy, pen, and bag with this. The government at least did this much.[18]

A poor Dalit mother in Ilam, whose daughter received the scholarship, explained,

> It is okay. Even if it is not that much, it is enough. It gives relief to poor. It is enough to buy copies for two to four months. It brings smile in difficult times.[19]

In summary, then, the reframing of the Scholarship Programme has resulted in the dominance of categorical targeting which reduces the logistical burdens on a state with limited infrastructural power. Nonetheless, this shift in programme objectives is incomplete, with officials at different levels of the state emphasizing different programme framings in their decision making. Moreover, despite attempts to frame the Scholarship Programme as a means of overcoming historical injustice, the reality of the low level of transfers threatens to undermine the transformative potential of the programme, even if the minuscule payments are appreciated by members of marginalized communities.

5.   Distributing scholarships: logistical challenges

The scholarship programme faced a number of additional implementation challenges across the sites. These implementation failings are a reflection of the weak infrastructural power of the state and, in particular, the inability of higher levels of the state to monitor effectively the behaviour of lower levels. This failing was identified as a typical challenge by an education sector expert in Kathmandu:

> Central government creates popular campaigns and declares commitments. By the time the policy reaches the ground level, it hardly remains the same.[20]

Fig. 8.3 shows the range of individuals involved in the administration of the Scholarship Programme. These individuals include not only bureaucrats, such as the district education officer, but also head teachers, resource persons, and members of the school-level Scholarship Management Committees. Information flows from the district education officer to the resource person but scholarships are disbursed
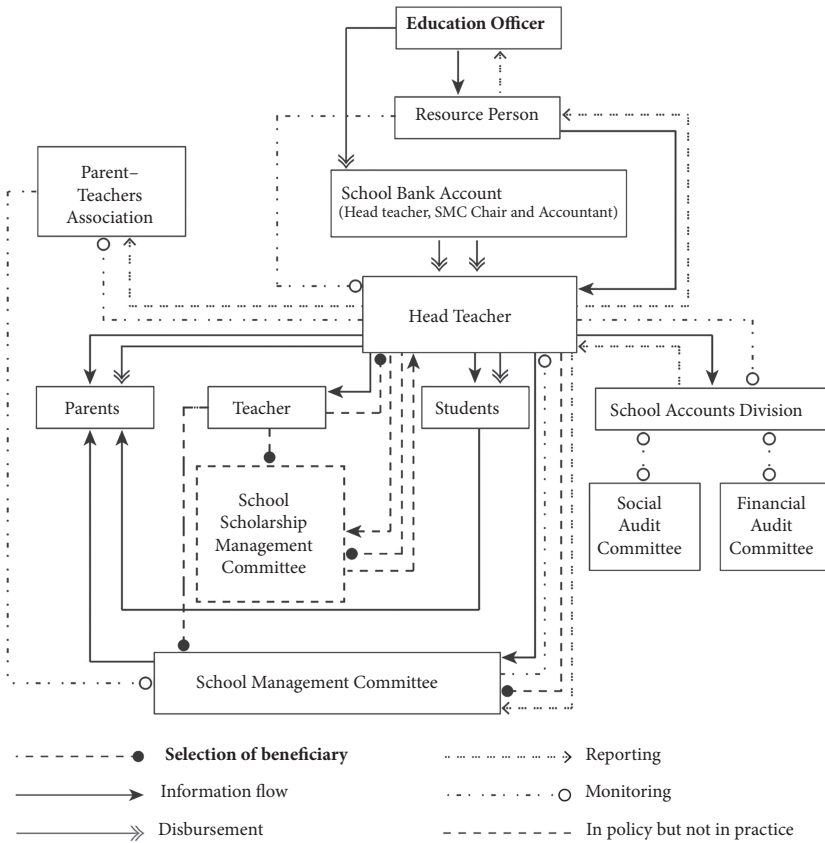
Fig. 8.3 Scholarship distribution process

directly from the district education officer to the school, which then disburses the scholarship to students or parents. The disbursement is monitored by the resource persons, Parent–Teacher Associations, and the school-level Scholarship Management Committees. The school sends reports on scholarship disbursement, via the head teacher, to the district education officer. Crucially, although the district education officer receives reports about the disbursement of the scholarship, s/he does not have any active monitoring role vis-à-vis the schools.

This governance structure to oversee the disbursement of the Scholarship Programme illustrates the weakness of state infrastructural power in Nepal. The district education officer and their team of resource persons were simply not equipped to deal with the volume of monitoring and reports from the schools. On average, it appeared from our interviews that each district education officer was responsible for the supervision of at least 20 resource persons. Each resource person in turn was responsible for a cluster of 20 schools. It was estimated that each

district education officer was thus responsible for monitoring and reporting 400 schools, and thousands of students (see Table 8.2 for the total number of scholarships in each district). However, as mentioned above, with the restructuring of the state, this situation is likely to change, with more power being devolved to elected municipalities.

Furthermore, according to the School Scholarship Management Directive 2017, the District Scholarship Management Committee is responsible for monitoring the distribution of scholarships and overseeing the school-level Scholarship Management Committee. However, the school-level committees were not formed (or, if they had been formed, they were not active) in any of the schools studied in the four districts. Similarly, at the district level, the resource persons and school superintendents who were responsible for monitoring the scholarships were not clear about their role. Indeed, head teachers of the study schools in our research sites told us that they rarely saw the school superintendents. When the resource persons did visit schools, they were only interested in collecting school-level data rather than monitoring the distribution of scholarships. The Scholarship Directive mandates that school-level Social Audit Committees submit a report on scholarship distribution to the district education officer. However, our study found that the reporting mechanism is neither clear nor effective at the research sites.

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

The implementation of the Scholarship Programme was further impeded by the inability of the state—at both central and local levels—to maintain a database of students. The challenges faced by the district education officers to provide up-to-date information on the number of students in a timely manner hinders the central state's ability to release the full budget to the district in time. This inability reflected the weak logistical capacity of the state. The district education officers were responsible for maintaining the Integrated Educational Management Information System (IEMIS), the electronic software for recording school data.[21] The district education officers struggle to maintain the IEMIS, for various reasons. First, not all schools in their jurisdiction have access to computers, electricity, or staff with adequate computer skills. Second, and as a consequence, schools sometimes submitted their data in print rather than using the software. For example, one primary school head teacher in Ilam told us that he had to walk 40 minutes to the nearby secondary

school, which was their closest access to a computer. A similar story was shared by the head teacher of a primary school in Jumla:

> It is challenging to fill IEMIS data for the primary school like ours. We do not have the facility of electricity/solar and computer. Also, there is no person in school who could do such technical work. I go to the cyber in headquarter along with all required document/information to fill IEMIS data every year and pay for it.[22]

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

In addition, there is often a mismatch between the number of eligible students and the actual budget that is released to a school. The scholarship amount released to the school account is often up to 50 per cent less than the actual number of students in the schools.[23] Under such circumstances, the head teacher and the school-level Scholarship Management Committee consult with the guardians to distribute a reduced scholarship equally to all eligible students, a practice called *damasahi* in Nepali.[24] Head teachers in Jumla[25] district and Lalitpur[26] district and the school-level Scholarship Management Committee chair in Saptari[27] district confirmed this while distributing the scholarship. Another illustration of this mismatch was provided in Jumla district, where the scholarship amount is sometimes released in two instalments (75 per cent and 25 per cent) over two different academic years.[28] For ease of distribution, the schools distribute the scholarship in one lump sum after they received the second tranche. Such funding inconsistencies often lead to confusion and a lack of trust amongst the recipients. These limitations in the logistical capacity of the state lead to delays and confusions that threaten the social significance of the Scholarship Programme in terms of either inclusion or productivity.

6. Conclusion

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

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

Nevertheless, limited infrastructural power continues to undermine implementation and particular scholarship disbursement, with relatively uniform problems evident across research sites. The lack of physical infrastructure as well as limited bureaucratic capacity and oversight meant that districts struggled to maintain up-to-date data on eligible recipients in their districts. As such, limited state infrastructural power led to delayed and reduced payments that are likely to undermine the positive contributions of the programme either to address social injustice or to make productive investments.

Notes

1. In should be noted that, during fieldwork, Nepal underwent a major transition in governance, establishing a federal state that transferred responsibility for the Scholarship

Programme from the districts to elected municipalities. The reinstatement of elected local governments, disbanded since 1999, meant that our fieldwork was undertaken at a time of flux, and the situation is likely to have changed by the time this chapter is published.

2. There were approximately 150 Nepalese rupees (NPR) to the British pound at the time of fieldwork in 2018.

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

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

5. KII 111, Kathmandu, 13 August 2018.

6. KII 103, Kathmandu, 20 August 2018.

7. KII 107, Kathmandu, 28 August 2018.

8. The scholarship for students with disabilities constitutes an exception, with students required to provide a disability card authorized by the government.

9. KII 32, Saptari, 26 November 2018.

10. KII 17, Ilam, 23 November 2018.

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

12. KII 87, Lalitpur, 7 December 2018; KII 87, Lalitpur, 7 December 2018; KII 73, Lalitpur, 3 October 2018.

13. SSI 32, Saptari, 26 November 2018.

14. SSI 32, Saptari, 26 November 2018; SSI 39, Saptari, 2 December 2018; KII 64, Saptari, 24 November 2018; KII 65, Saptari, 24 November 2018; informal conversation 27, Saptari, 2 December 2018.

15. SSI 32, Saptari, 26 November 2018; SSI 39, Saptari, 2 December 2018; KII 64, Saptari, 24 November 2018; KII 65, Saptari, 24 November 2018; informal conversation 27, Saptari, 2 December 2018; KII 60, Saptari, 21 November 2018.

16. SSI 32, Saptari, 26 November 2018.

17. KII 60, Saptari, 21 November 2018. Likewise, KII 51, Saptari, 18 November 2018; SSI 30, Saptari, 23 November 2018; KII 63, Saptari, 23 November 2018; KII 66, Saptari, 24 November 2018; SSI 31, Saptari, 25 November 2018; SSI 10, Jumla, 17 November 2018; KII 1, Ilam, 14 November 2018; KII 9, Ilam, 16 November 2018; informal conversation 4, Ilam, 17 November 2018; KII 8, Ilam, 17 November 2018; KII 15, Ilam, 20 November 2018; KII 16, Ilam, 23 November 2018; informal conversation 25, Ilam, 24 November 2018, KII 23, Ilam, 28 November 2018; informal conversation 12, Ilam, 28 November 2018; KII 19, Ilam, 24 November 2018; SSI 35, South Lalitpur, 8 December 2018; KII 91, South Lalitpur, 9 December 2018; KII 97, South Lalitpur, 10 December 2018; KII 88, South Lalitpur, 9 December 2018; KII 93, South Lalitpur, 9 December 2018.

18. KII 63, Saptari, 23 November 2018. Also KII 52, Saptari, 19 November 2018; KII 64, Saptari, 24 November 2018.

19. Informal conversation 10, Ilam, 21 November 2018.

20. KII 112, Kathmandu, 5 July 2018.

21. School data include students' name, ethnicity/caste, date of birth, parents' name, grade, scholarship type received by the student, examination marks, teacher's information, etc.
22. Informal conversation 15, Jumla, 30 November 2018.
23. KII 55, Saptari, 20 November 2018; KII 54, Saptari, 20 November 2018; KII 60, Saptari, 21 November 2018; KII 64, Saptari, 24 November 2018.
24. KII 63, Saptari, 23 November 2018; KII 65, Saptari, 24 November 2018.
25. KII 26, Jumla, 14 November 2018.
26. KII 87, Lalitpur, 7 December 2018; KII 87, Lalitpur, 7 December 2018; KII 73, Lalitpur, 3 October 2018.
27. KII 59, Saptari, 21 November 2018; KII 60, Saptari, 24 November 2018; KII 65, Saptari, 24 November 2018; KII 66, Saptari, 24 November 2018.
28. KII 48, Jumla, 28 November 2018; KII 35, Jumla, 19 November 2018.

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