



## Social Policy: Need, Determinants and Stakeholders

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### Abstract

This paper entitled *Social Policy: Need, Determinants, and Stakeholders* provides a thorough exploration of social policy as a critical tool for fostering social welfare and equity. It begins with an introduction to the foundational principles of social policy, examining its essential role in addressing societal issues such as poverty, healthcare access, education, and employment. Expanding on its scope, the article highlights the importance of social policy in promoting justice and support systems, especially for marginalized groups, and offers a broad historical overview to frame these developments. The article then narrows to the Indian context, where social policy has been instrumental in addressing unique social challenges, including caste-based inequality, economic disparities, and rural development. This article addresses the contemporary need for social policy to bridge socioeconomic gaps and drive inclusive growth. The role of civil society is also examined, emphasizing how NGOs, advocacy groups, and local communities contribute to policy development, implementation, and accountability. Key stakeholders—including government agencies, civil society, and private-sector participants—are discussed in terms of their influence on policy formulation and outcomes, underlining the importance of stakeholder engagement as essential for ensuring policies meet diverse needs and remain responsive to social changes. The article also traces early policy efforts in post-independence India, analyzing the welfare state initiatives that laid the groundwork for the country's modern social policies. Through a review of relevant studies, the article places social policy within academic and practical frameworks, offering a detailed analysis of its evolution and determinants. This review provides a nuanced understanding of how social policy is shaped and implemented, ultimately positioning it as a cornerstone for addressing complex social issues and promoting equitable development in the Indian context and beyond.

**Keywords:** *Social Policy, Welfare State, Child*

*Development, India, Political Ideologies, Social Justice, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Social Inequality, Rural Development, Inclusive Development.*

### I. SOCIAL POLICY- INTRODUCTION

Social policy refers to government initiatives addressing topics such as healthcare, education, employment, and housing to promote social justice and lessen inequality while serving human needs and improving society's welfare (LSE, n.d.; McClelland, 2016). According to Strathclyde University (n.d.), social policy is seen as an academic discipline that examines the distribution of resources for social needs and as actual government activities to fulfil such needs. Following India's independence, the Public Distribution System and other welfare state initiatives aimed at reducing poverty were influenced by Nehru's Fabian socialism (Modali, 2021). However, more significant problems like urban poverty and hunger were ignored by early measures (Betz, 2019).

India implemented rights-based reforms in the early 2000s, including the MGNREGA, the Right to Information, and the Right to Education, which increased public power and improved responsibility for government (Bhattacharyya, 2013). For example, MGNREGA allowed the impoverished to take on financial risks they otherwise could not (Drèze & Khera, 2017). Notwithstanding these developments, implementation issues still exist, and welfare programs are sometimes accused of being political manoeuvres rather than sincere attempts at upliftment (Chaudhuri & Gupta, 2020). According to critics, recent governments have not implemented many systemic reforms since political ambitions have trumped the need for fundamental adjustments (Jha & Kumar, 2021).

### THE SCOPE OF SOCIAL POLICY

Within this scope, social policy deals with significant issues, such as poverty alleviation, social security, education, health, and housing. Its concern is



not only with the well-being of individuals but also with how well-being is distributed among different groups of people in society (LSE, n.d.). However, this distribution often mirrors the underlying social inequalities based on socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and age (Taylor Gooby, 2019). Therefore, social policy works to find and solve these inequalities towards social justice and equity. In its practical use, social policy has observed how societies approach resource mobilisation and utilise it to meet individual and collective needs. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed by it in order to assess the effectiveness of different programs and policies (McClelland, 2019). For example, the evaluation of public health initiatives such as new public health policies may include the examination of the outcome of health across different demographic groups to check if the health disparities had fallen on the particular demographic group.

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Early welfare efforts to address poverty and inequality have become the roots of social policy. Historical events like colonialism, independence, and economic liberalisation have formed India's social policy and shaped its course (Modali, 2021). After independence, India adopted the model of a 'welfare state' under Nehru's influence of socialism, with the distribution of resources through a wide range of public welfare programs (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2010). However, bureaucratic constraints and confusion between the Centre and states on their respective roles hampered this approach. The 1990s was when social policy was liberalised in the Indian economy. It turned from state-led welfare initiatives to market-led approaches that stressed economic growth (Drèze & Khera, 2017). As a result, there has been a shift in which inequalities are enhanced, and calls are made for revising social policies with inclusion growth as their priority (Andaleeb & Rahman, 2021).

### **THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Social policy in India has been marked by a complex set of actors: government agencies, NGOs, civil society organisations, and private sector actors. The Indian government has implemented programs to address social problems, such as reducing poverty through schemes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) (Drèze & Khera, 2017). However, these programs face corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and insufficient funding. NGOs have an important role in complementing government efforts by offering services to communities directly.

This is why organisations like Akshaya Patra have been supporting the combat of hunger in the form of midday meal schemes in schools by the government (Akshaya Patra Foundation, 2021). Not only do these initiatives help ensure better nutritional outcomes for children, but they also ensure that the same children can attend school. Also, advocacy that aims to affect policy decisions by civil society organisations is undertaken. For instance, the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) (2022) is fighting for social justice and rights to land and livelihood, among others. This advocacy ensures that the marginalised are not excluded from the policymaking process.

Post has made significant efforts to relieve social problems via several policies and programmes, but challenges remain widespread. There are many problems, but one is a lack of coordination among various levels of government. Because the responsibilities of central and state authorities often overlap, social policies are thus fragmented (Modali, 2021). At the same time, bureaucratic inefficiencies can slow down access to services for whom they are most needed. Additionally, social policy outcomes are more influenced by socio-cultural factors. Traditional values about caste and gender may influence access to resources and services. For example, Kumar and Singh (2020) emphasise that women from deprived communities may face extra hurdles in educating or using health care on the never-ending basis of in-vogue gender norms.

### **NEED FOR SOCIAL POLICY**

India's social policy has developed dramatically since independence, responding to various socioeconomic and political contexts. Initially shaped by Nehru's Fabian socialism, which focused on resource redistribution through subsidies and welfare, the policy has since shifted towards rights-based approaches, with legislation such as the Right to Information, Right to Food, and MGNREGA aimed at improving inclusion for marginalised communities (Kumar, 2018; Planning Commission, 2014). These programs, notably MGNREGA, have enabled rural communities to manage risks they would not have been able to otherwise (Dutta & Sharma, 2019). Even in the face of expanded social protection coverage, effective implementation is hampered by governance issues, such as inadequate accountability and unbalanced resource allocation (Drèze & Khera, 2017). As seen in selective assistance programs and employment reservations, political patronage frequently influences policy, giving electoral support precedence over more general community demands (Chaudhuri & Gupta,



2020). Concerns about a lack of significant change have also been highlighted by recent social policy changes under the present administration (Jha & Kumar, 2021). Thus, India's social policy continues to be a complicated jumble of initiatives to meet various demands influenced by political, economic, and historical considerations (McClelland, 2019).

### **1- Addressing Inequality and Poverty**

Existence of poverty and inequality are some of the reasons why we need social policy. Despite India's recent economic growth, many of the population are impoverished and marginalised. About 90 per cent of the labour force remains in informal employment and is denied social protections — in its health insurance and pensions (Drèze & Khera, 2017). Social policies are safety net policies meant to protect vulnerable populations from economic shock or living at a minimum standard of living. For example, Programs like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which supports the guarantee of 100 days wage employment in a financial year to all rural households, is an effort to address rural poverty and improve livelihoods (Andaleeb & Rahman, 2024).

### **2- Promoting Human Development**

Social policy also helps ensure access to essential services like education and healthcare, which in turn contribute to human capital development. The Right to Education Act (2009) is a well-known legislation that endeavours to offer free and compulsory instruction to children between the ages of 6 to 14 years, consequently patting out such educational inequalities (Government of India, 2009). Similarly, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) tries to increase the nutrition and health outcomes of children under six years old (Mehrotra et al., 2014). Break the cycle of poverty and empower people with the skills and resources they need to achieve better economic opportunities: these policies could not be more critical.

### **3- Fostering Social Inclusion**

Social policy is a tool for promoting inclusion in a country where social diversity is defined by caste, religion and gender. Systemic barriers meant to reduce or prevent access for historically marginalised groups exist. Affirmative action policy, of course, covers reservations in education and employment for the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) to correct historical injustices and improve qualified participation in society (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2010). However, such policies have also set off

debates about how well they work and what changes they might bring about in social composition.

### **4- Responding to Changing Economic Conditions**

Economic change needs to be matched by social policy. As India's economy urbanises and urban poverty looms large on the government's agenda, policies addressing urban poverty and supporting informal workers are in high demand. As rural populations grow or contract and land is developed increasingly rapidly, traditional rural-focused programs may become less relevant. For example, the cash transfer schemes such as PradhanMantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) to provide direct financial assistance to farmers may have to be complemented by urban livelihood programs to tackle more significant urban labour issues with burgeoning migration of people to cities in search of work (Andaleeb & Rahman, 2024).

### **THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

Civil society organisations, therefore, act as essential platforms for promoting social policy reform by the government. Often serving as intermediaries between marginalised communities and the policymakers in whose service their work is primarily concentrated, they help ensure that the voices of those whose lives and livelihoods are most directly impacted by social policies are heard and acted on. Compared to earlier campaigns, social movements in India which have been successful in attaining rights-based approaches (Chopra, 2014) have partly been responsible for the expansion of social welfare programs in India in the early 21st century. These governments have been pressured more to address these social issues and become more aware of the problems themselves (What are the determinants: role of ideology and values?). Ideologies and values within any given society significantly affect the determinants of social policy. These ideologies then condition the kind of framework on which social policies are conceived and implemented and are then evaluated, determining resource allocations and priorities of social issues. The ideological terrain in India has changed with time, evolving from a complex mix of historical, cultural and political factors (Modali, 2021).

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND EARLY IDEOLOGIES**

Nehru's Fabian socialist ideology of post-independence India heavily influenced its initial agenda, priding itself on sidelining redistribution of resources and delivering welfare through state



intervention (Bhattacharyya, 2013). Applying this principle resulted in diverse social welfare programs for the less privileged, such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) and agricultural price controls. The PDS strives to provide low-income families with food security at a meagre cost. However, this ideology was criticised for being too bureaucratic, frequently risking missing the critical roots of the cause of poverty and inequality (Betz, 2019). However, critics say that while well-intentioned, these programmes also sustained dependency on government support rather than promoting self-sufficiency among the beneficiaries.

### **SHIFT TOWARDS NEOLIBERALISM**

There has been a significant change in the ideological perceptions about social policy as India's more market-oriented economy took shape in the 90s. An economic liberalisation reform began in 1991 and separated from the state-led development to institutionalise a neoliberal framework stressing economic growth and efficiency rather than welfare provisions (Drèze & Khera, 2017). The new structure shifted the state's role in social services, and the market-based mechanism gained importance. This approach resulted in economic growth and triggered increasing inequalities that call for reviewing social policies emphasising inclusive growth (Andaleeb & Rahman, 2021). These policies' ideological underpinnings involve balancing market-driven approaches with social justice requirements. Economic growth has diminished poverty for millions but also delivered more likely forms of inequality that need targeted response. Social policies must attempt to steer through this complex competition between economic imperatives and social needs.

### **PATRONAGE POLITICS**

Social policy formulation in India cannot be studied without considering the role of patronage politics. Political parties frequently employ social services as tactics of electoral gain rather than as instruments of truly uplifting their people (Modali, 2021). Such a patronage system results in a circularity of policies to the level that some groups benefit at the cost of broader social equity objectives. Also, reservations of jobs for certain caste groups can be used instead of taking on systemic inequality as a political appeasement (Bardhan, 2011). The policy of social equity becomes complicated by this dynamic. Evidence-based policymaking outweighs political motivation and exposes us to poorly designed programs or laggard ones based more on funds rather than the actual implementation of goals and targets.

Thus, marginalised communities can maintain barriers to access to essential services.

### **TRADITIONAL VALUES VS MODERN DEMOCRATIC IDEALS**

The situation of social policy in India has become even more complex because of the tension between traditional values and modern democratic ideals. These values are historically rooted in caste and religious identities and tend to define social programs' who and how (Deshpande et al., 2017). Reservations for welfare programs, for instance, are often marked by caste in a way that continues existing hierarchies instead of tearing them down. Moreover, social policy outcomes have also been shaped by societal values about gender roles. Deeply ingrained patriarchal norms are a big challenge to policies focused on women's empowerment (Kumar & Singh, 2020). The difficulty is reconciling these traditional values to the spirit of our time of equality and justice.

### **STAKEHOLDERS IN SOCIAL POLICIES**

Social policy stakeholders are individuals, groups or organisations interested in or affected by social policies and programs to address a social problem. Social policies rely on their involvement in the formulation, implementation and evaluation. India's stakeholders include government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society groups, and private sector industries and communities (McClelland, 2019). It is essential to understand these stakeholders to create social policies that fulfil the needs of various populations.

#### **Government Agencies**

The social policy landscape is primarily a stakeholder space. They create, implement, and regulate policies aimed at social needs. Different ministries function at the central and state levels in India in conjunction with this. This leads us to examples such as that of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, which crafts policies to improve the welfare of marginalised people (Government of India, 2020). They supply these funding agencies with funding, frames, and guidelines for social programs. However, fragmentation of policy implementation is often the result of overlapping authorities between central and state governments (Modali, 2021). However, this complexity can undermine good governance and weaken the operational effect of social policies. In addition, local government bodies are crucial for implementing social policies at a grassroots level. They often execute programs related to health care, education and sanitation (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2010). Unfortunately, they are often hampered by limited resources and bureaucratic inefficiencies. In



this sense, local bodies may fail to provide essential services because of inadequate funding or a lack of trained stakeholders (Tillin et al., 2015).

#### - **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

NGOs play an important role in acting as intermediaries between the government and communities. They work for marginalised people, give them services, and discuss policy. There is an example: The Akshaya Patra Foundation seeks to address the problem of hunger through its mid-day meal schemes for schools and, in doing so, influence educational and nutritional policies (Akshaya Patra Foundation, 2021). In terms of implementing social initiatives, NGOs often close the gap in government programs implemented and can also mobilise community resources to do so effectively (Betz, 2019). Due to their grassroots connections, they can employ tailor-made interventions for a particular place. Besides service delivery, NGOs have an elaborate role in monitoring government performance and ensuring that authorities meet their commitments toward social welfare (Kumar & Singh, 2020). They usually engage in research and advocacy campaigns regarding poverty alleviation and gender equality. However, this advocacy work can result in engagement in the broader public discourses and campaigns to build public pressure on policymakers on pressing social issues.

#### - **Civil Society Groups**

Civil society groups include many organisations, such as women's rights groups, labour unions, and environmental activists. They work as an organ to advocate and mobilise for social policy. For example, the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) seeks social justice through its work on land rights, livelihood and housing (NAPM, 2022). Watchdogs of the government and civil society organisations often hold the government accountable for its commitments to social welfare. Having multiple identities means that civil society has a significant role in a country like India. So, these groups can reach marginalised voices that might otherwise be unheard in mainstream political discourse (Chaudhuri & Gupta, 2020). Civil society organisations play a substantial role in creating public opinion and moving the legislative agenda forward by engaging in policy advocacy and community mobilisation.

#### - **Private Sector**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) also plays a role through the private sector as a stakeholder in

social policy. Companies' investments in community development projects (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2014) are beginning to get noticed as companies become increasingly aware of their responsibility for societal well-being. One example is that business operates educational or health programmes in line with their CSR objective. However, this can contribute to a tendency to concentrate on short-term gains at the expense of sustainable development results (Tyagi & Kumar, 2020). Increasing engagement between the social programs and the private sector would provide these resources and lead to questions about accountability and transparency. CSR initiatives may not always be due to the correct motivations, what the community requires, or what is in the development more extended term. For this reason, private sector actors must meaningfully engage with local communities so that their contributions help solve critical social issues.

#### - **Community Members**

As the most relevant stakeholders in social policy, community members face the impact of such policies directly. Policy responses can be effective only if they meet their needs and feedback. This highlights the need for grassroots participation if policies respond to community needs rather than top-down directives that may not resonate with real community context (OCD, 2023). It not only helps to answer to the communities but also to foster ownership. Nevertheless, awareness or access to decision-making instruments are barriers to community participation. Often, there are extra challenges confronting marginalised groups because systemic inequalities block their ability to engage fully with policymakers (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2010). As a result, policymakers must develop inclusive platforms to enable manifold community voices to participate in the decision-making process.

### **IMPORTANCE OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

This increases legitimacy and effectiveness, as mentioned before. When stakeholders come together to discuss social policy, the community needs are better understood, and many sectors can work together (CTB, n.d.). For instance, in the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been imperative to involve stakeholders in developing appropriate public health responses by situating them in the context of the needs of vulnerable populations (Africa Sustainability Matters, 2023). Additionally, an effective engagement of stakeholders will lead to a sense of ownership from the community in some policies that affect their lives (Taylor-Gooby et al.,



2019). The ownership of such a sense is important to guarantee compliance with policies and to involve the community in initiatives dedicated to better social welfare.

### **CHALLENGES IN STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

Although stakeholders are important, issues such as engaging stakeholders will arise. Power imbalances often exist between stakeholders, particularly the voiceless, marginalised communities and more influential actors such as corporations or government officials (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2010). Moreover, bureaucratic hurdles can hamper the effective participation of grassroots bodies. Given the complexity of stakeholder relationships, careful navigation is required to incorporate all voices throughout the policy lifecycle, from problem identification to measuring the impact (Tyagi & Kumar, 2020). In addition, building trust with stakeholders is a slow process that requires much effort from all parties. Indian government's approach to social policy has evolved over the decades. The Indian government's attitude to social policy has changed considerably over the decades and has been influenced by historical, political, and socio-economic factors. This evolution, from its early post-independence focus on welfare through state intervention to more recent emphasis on rights-based frameworks and inclusive growth, was in response to changing priorities and challenges of the nation.

### **EARLY YEARS: POST-INDEPENDENCE WELFARE STATE**

After its independence in 1947, India followed a welfare state model influenced by socialist values. Focusing on welfare programs, the government wanted to redistribute resources and provide social security. The initial areas of focus for Modali (2021) were poverty alleviation, food security, and employment generation. For example, the experience of food availability to urban populations during World War II was extended to rural areas (Andaleeb & Rahman, 2024). However, the early efforts were often uncoordinated and fragmented by the central and state governments (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2010).

One of India's major social policy milestones occurred with the economic liberalisation of the 1990s. The government was driven by fiscal prudence and globalisation in reducing its role in welfare provision and shifting towards market-oriented policies (Dreze & Khera, 2017). It brought about a reappraisal of existing welfare programmes and a rejig of who those programmes should target—

discriminating between the poorest people and everyone else. This shift was apparent in the 1997 introduction of the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), which differentiated households below the poverty line (BPL) versus those above the poverty line (APL) for rationing (Andaleeb & Rahman, 2024). However, during the liberalisation period, inequalities soared, and the institutions of marginalised communities were not sufficiently addressed. However, critics argue that economic growth has increased, but the steps for social protection lag far behind (Tyagi & Kumar, 2020). Impartial attention was paid to health and education, even as essential social investments.

### **EMERGENCE OF THE RIGHT-BASED FRAMEWORKS**

A significant policy change occurred in India during the early 2000s when social welfare became seen as a basic entitlement. Important legislation that emphasised a right to work rather than only financial assistance, including the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005, guaranteed rural households at least 100 days of employment annually (Tillin & Pereira, 2017). At the same time, the Right to Food and Right to Education Acts were influenced by the rights-based approach, which changed the focus of social policy discussions from charitable giving to legal rights (Dreze & Khera, 2017). A robust civil society promotes transparency and accountability in government (Betz, 2019). Recent policy changes place a strong focus on technological integration and inclusive growth. Farmers receive direct financial assistance through programs like PM-KISAN, and technological improvements allow for more effective direct benefit transfers (DBT). Nevertheless, despite rising social spending, implementation obstacles continue, with problems such as bureaucratic inefficiencies and low beneficiary knowledge limiting the impact (Dreze & Khera, 2017; Tyagi & Kumar, 2020).

## **II. REVIEW STUDIES ON SOCIAL POLICIES**

This literature overview highlights the political, economic, social, institutional, and global factors that shape the formulation of social policies. Policy decisions are greatly influenced by interest group lobbying and the political philosophies of the ruling parties, such as conservative inclinations for market-based solutions (SocialWorkin, 2023). According to the logic of the industrialism paradigm, more industrialised countries often have extensive welfare systems because socioeconomic and



technical improvements lead to new social problems that require government involvement (Cowgill, 1980). According to research on social welfare education in the United States, a liberal viewpoint predominates, which may restrict students' ideological awareness by omitting conservative or socialist alternatives (Lyons, 1983). Globalisation also encourages social policy convergence since international institutions significantly impact national plans for inequality and income maintenance (Deacon, 1999). The *Global Social Policy Journal* emphasises the interaction between local and global environments by highlighting how transnational ideas and money flows influence national policy (Yeates & Holden, 2022).

As governments respond to rising demand for social services, economic considerations play a crucial role in social policy adaption, particularly during times of crisis (SocialWorkin, 2023; Wilensky & Lebeaux, 1965). According to Kerr et al. (1964), cultural values also influence how the general public views and accepts welfare programs, indicating that policies that align with cultural norms may be more successful. Current endeavours in India and elsewhere can benefit significantly from historical insights into the history of social policy (Skocpol, 1979). For inclusive policymaking to address societal demands, effective stakeholder engagement—including that of the government, non-profits, and community organisations—is essential (O'Connor, 1973). Lastly, through institutions like the World Bank and IMF, globalisation spreads particular ideas that may lead to a convergence of national policies (Murphy). Evaluation methods are still crucial for determining whether social programs effectively achieve their objectives (Wilensky & Lebeaux, 1965).

### III. CONCLUSION

Social policy is pivotal in tending to India's complicated financial difficulties. Regardless of progress through different government assistance programs focused on comprehensive development, issues connected with the administration, political elements, and execution keep on frustrating significant headways. India's social arrangement has advanced from early communist systems to later neoliberal impacts, mirroring the nation's changing political scene. To encourage a practical turn of events and work on expectations for everyday comforts, a decent methodology is required to coordinate financial open doors with civil rights while tending to the necessities of underestimated networks.

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