

Diversity and Social Policy

1. Policy Praxis and Gender Equality: Epistemic Shifts or Barriers to Change?

Convenor	Gurneet Tej, IIT Delhi & GoK
Co-Convenor(s)	Navdeep Mathur, IIM Ahmedabad Manashvi Kumar, Government of India
Keywords	Gender, State-ism, Public Patriarchy

Call for Abstracts

Policy sciences are only recently warming up to the idea of deploying a gendered lens particularly in case of climate studies, economic inclusion and social restructuring (from McPhail 2008 to Kanenberg 2019). Welfarism has targeted marginalized groups as subjects of patronage, including women, but continues to turn a blind eye to the androcentric and intersectional bias that is not only cultural but 'deterministic' as well, to borrow from Sapolsky (and Bensimon and Marshall 2003). Women-centric policy is also a reflection of this acculturation often justified through biological, social and sometimes religious positionalities.

The use of cultural symbols and the language of policy is often designed for greater acceptability in the garb of value-neutrality; its concomitant reinforcement to existing norms is a relatively unexplored area of study. In India, for example, many surveys reveal the stubborn persistence of gendered norms and that remarkable strides in education and economic status fail to buck this trend (NFHS-V, 2019-21; IHDS 2, 2011-12). In this mélange of intersecting private and public spaces, where does contemporary policy analysis and practice position itself?

An interesting case in point is efforts towards greater participation of women in the workforce through statutory and guided provisions both in the formal and informal workspaces, acting as supporting pillars for smoothening the transitions women face as economic agents, when their biological and social clocks enforce inevitable milestones of marital shifts and parenthood. The role of policy as an enabler of purported disruptions raises interesting precepts of the role of State itself, that feeds the larger social ordering. Considering the multitude of contexts cultures create, even addressing inclusion of women through policy and in policy is fraught with dissonance and disagreement.

Against this backdrop, this panel calls upon scholars of policy to think beyond disciplinary bounds and offer accounts of how policy studies- its language, its construction and its implementation allows/can allow for more equal negotiating space for addressing issues of gender inclusion in particular, and diversity in general. Voices from the field that may be demonstrative of such efforts as well as work debating theoretical constructs is expected to add to this relevant but under-recognized discourse.

2. New Ethnographies of Social Policy and Governance in Rural India

Convenor	Anindita Adhikari, Post Doctoral Fellow, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
Co-Convenor(s)	Vanita Leah Falcao, India Institute, King's College London

Keywords	Rural, Social Policy, Technology
<p>Call for Abstracts</p> <p>Sweeping changes in the social policy landscape in rural India such as the rights-based social policies of the early 2000s that directed significant funds and functionaries downwards, new platforms for citizen oversight and grievance redress, expanding financial inclusion infrastructure and large-scale digitalisation have increased the institutional presence of the local state and state-citizen interactions in myriad new ways. Complex interplays of routine and exception emerge amidst the expanding terrain of formal entitlements alongside persistent inequalities and thriving informal structures of mediation. Arguably, understandings of social policy that are constructed on macro analyses and metrics like levels of poverty and income inequality, budgets, and laws, do not adequately capture the processes of transformation and reversals in the implementation process. Instead, ethnography's emphasis on observations and in-depth interviews is better suited to gain insights into the processual and dynamic interactions between citizens and state institutions occurring when policies enter "complex social entanglements" (Bear and Mathur 2015). Grounded in this perspective, this panel invites new ethnographic research that explores the policy process as inherently political and focuses on the quotidian socialities, effects, and contestations engendered by and in the name of social policy in rural India. We welcome papers that study encounters between the state and citizens through the lens of a specific social policy or set of policies or a cross-cutting institutional reform, that seek to answer questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of welfare-based claims are being made on the state, by whom and when? How has digital technology shaped these claims and practices of claim-making? • What does bureaucratic responsiveness to these claims look like? • What kinds of information and capacity gaps do frontline functionaries confront in responding to citizen's claims and how can these be addressed? • What kinds of conflicts and collaborations arise as marginalized caste, class and gender groups more frequently encounter the law, institutions, and new digital technologies? How are these conflicts being negotiated? • What are the various kinds of intermediation that are observed in accessing public services? What are its effects? 	

3. Social Welfare Policy in the Global South with Special Reference to India

Convenor	Radhika Kumar, Professor, Department of Political Science, Motilal Nehru College, University of Delhi
Keywords	Social Welfare Policy, Global South, New Welfarism
<p>Call for Abstracts</p> <p>Following economic liberalization in the 1990s, there has been a perception of the roll back of the welfare state in India. Contrary to this expectation, there has been an expansion of welfare provisions, albeit in a new avatar namely that of 'social protection policies and programs.' In the 2000s, welfare came to be placed within the framework of entitlements as it was undergirded by various citizens' rights. More recently social welfare policy has been underscored by the idea of creating 'beneficiaries.' Hence expenditure on subsidies as a component of the government's social expenditure has gone down while that on other schemes that provide tangible benefits such as a gas cylinder or housing has increased. Concomitant to this has been stagnation</p>	

of expenditure on public goods such as health and education which are increasingly being taken over by the private sector.

Further, state governments’ have traditionally been known to innovate in welfare policies. These have often been used as prototypes at the national level such as the mid-day meal scheme initiated by Tamil Nadu. Presently the expansion in the central government’s footprint in social welfare policy has dwarfed the subnational social policy space. Combined with state level fiscal challenges and reduced central fund devolution to states, centralization of social policy processes may be detrimental to the federal compact. This may be aggravated by the fact that social welfare policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation is now centralized on account of the use of technology and facilitated by banks and post offices. Finally, ‘new welfarism’ promises programmatic policies in place of clientelism. In doing so it aims to bring within its ambit broad coalitions of recipients. However in doing so, the policy focus is on provision of ‘tangible’ or ‘visible benefits.’ Such a social policy is not invested in longer term gains such as human capabilities.

This panel invites papers that address themes such as,

- Welfare and the multiple lineages of the concept within social policy
- Democracy, social policy and welfare
- Social policy, ideology, and welfare
- Social welfare policy and electoral politics
- Federal social welfare policy
- Sub-national welfare regimes

4. Social Accountability for Commons: Exploring Theory, Practice, and Policy

Convenor	Pooja Chandran, Foundation for Ecological Security
Co-Convenor(s)	Rakshita Swamy, Social Accountability Forum for Action and Research Ishan Agarwal, Living Landscapes Sony Pellissery, National Law School of India University
Keywords	Social Policy, Environmental Policy, Urban Policy, Digital Societies

Call for Abstracts

In this panel, we aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice to inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of social accountability interventions that strengthen the ownership and governance of commons. We ask “what works” in the realm of accountability for commons, recognising that while practice in the field is advancing rapidly, empirical research and theory often struggle to keep pace. We are interested in the papers that seek answers to the questions of: A) What are the public policies that consider accountability as a measure to protect the commons? What is the difference or agreement in the conceptual understanding of public good between grassroots movements and policy epistemic communities? B) Are stakeholders and communities of commons able to influence policy processes to enforce accountability? How far have communities been successful in making use of existing instruments of accountability? C) What are the contestations both within and with the public institutions when accountability is demanded?

Capturing answers to these questions, we welcome papers in the following modalities:

- Theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks of accountability that enable commoning or re-commoning.
- Case studies and empirical analyses of successful and failed accountability mechanisms in diverse settings.
- The role of local communities in designing and implementing accountability mechanisms, as well as the role of state and non-state actors in fostering accountability.
- Methods to strengthen capacities and the potential of digital tools, platforms, technology, and innovations in promoting transparency, participation, and more.
- Negotiation spaces for commons and their navigation by different vulnerable groups like tribals, women, Dalits and livelihood groups like forest produce collectors, small scale fishers.
- Intersectionality of gender, caste, and other axes of identity in building and strengthening accountability mechanisms.
- Novel and innovative approaches and methodologies for evaluating accountability processes and outcomes.

5. Behavioural Science in Public Policy: Insights from the Global South

Convenor	Anirudh Tagat, Research Author, Department of Economics, Monk Prayogshala, Mumbai, and Affiliate, School of Mathematics, Monash University, Melbourne
Co-Convenor(s)	Hansika Kapoor Department of Psychology, Monk Prayogshala
Keywords	Behavioural Economics, Psychology, Nudge

Call for Abstracts

We invite papers that explore the application of behavioural science (intersections of economics, psychology, sociology, gender, anthropology) in public policy within India, as well as other countries in South Asia. Submissions may include theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and case analyses addressing various thematic areas, such as social welfare, healthcare, education, pro-environmental behaviours, and governance. We welcome papers adopting diverse methodological approaches, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research. We especially welcome work from early-career researchers (ECRs), PhD students, private sector professionals, policy-adjacent professionals. Potential topics of interest include but are not limited to:

- Theoretical frameworks integrating behavioural insights into policy design
- Empirical studies examining the effectiveness of behavioural interventions in diverse socio-cultural contexts
- Case analyses of successful or unsuccessful policy implementations informed by behavioural science
- Ethical considerations and implications of utilizing behavioural science techniques in policymaking
- Comparative studies highlighting differences and similarities in behavioural responses to policy interventions across regions within the Global South.

This panel encourages submissions from researchers, policymakers, and practitioners interested in advancing our understanding of how behavioural science can contribute to more effective, actionable, and equitable public policies in the Global South.