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Governance and Welfare Measures in India: Policies, Challenges and the Way Forward Three-day CPIGD- ISEC IIPA-KRB National Seminar

17th-19th December 2025

Venue : Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC)
Bengaluru, Karnataka - 560072

Summary of the National Seminar on Governance and Welfare Measures in India: Policies Challenges and Way Forward

Introduction

The three-day National Seminar on “Governance and Welfare Measures in India: Policies, Challenges and the Way Forward” brought together academics, policymakers, and practitioners to critically examine India’s evolving welfare regime. Organized jointly by the Centre for Political Institutions, Governance and Development (CPIGD), Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), and the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), Karnataka Regional Branch, the seminar examined welfare not merely as public expenditure but as a political, institutional, and social process. Against the backdrop of rising socio-economic inequalities, competitive populism, digital governance, and changing labour regimes, the seminar explored how welfare policies shape citizenship, dignity, and democratic accountability.



Day One: Conceptual Foundations and Political Economy of Welfare



The first day laid the conceptual and analytical foundation of the seminar. The inaugural session reaffirmed India’s constitutional commitment to the welfare state while raising concerns regarding fiscal sustainability and the long-term productive outcomes of welfare schemes. Speakers emphasized that welfare policies must strengthen social and economic infrastructure rather than remain limited to short-term redistribution.

The keynote address traced the evolution of welfare discourses in India from paternalistic and clientelist approaches to rightsbased and responsive welfare. Contemporary welfare was presented as a hybrid form shaped by democratic competition, civil society mobilisation, and decentralisation, alongside enduring elements of patronage. The panel discussion on the political economy of welfare critically examined the role of the state under neoliberal conditions. It highlighted how welfare increasingly functions as a mechanism to manage social tensions, often taking populist forms driven by electoral competition. At the same time, constitutional ideals and democratic pressures were acknowledged as forces compelling welfare expansion. Discussions also highlighted the limitations of identity-based politics in delivering substantive welfare outcomes without institutional reform.

The technical session on basic services examined welfare delivery in water, health insurance, and social protection. While infrastructural expansion was acknowledged, participants highlighted governance challenges, uneven regional outcomes, and the importance of community participation and accountability mechanisms.



Day Two: Gender, Decentralisation, and State-Level Welfare Dynamics

The second day deepened empirical and theoretical engagement with welfare governance. Impact assessments of welfare schemes across states revealed improvements in basic indicators such as health, education, and food security, alongside persistent challenges of bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, and uneven coverage.

Sessions on democratic decentralisation illustrated how local governments can function as active welfare institutions, particularly in Kerala. However, discussions questioned the replicability of such models and highlighted issues of elite capture and uneven local capacities.

Gender-focused sessions examined welfare through feminist and intersectional lenses. While women-centred welfare schemes and cash transfers enhanced dignity and short-term security, they often failed to address structural constraints such as unpaid care work, patriarchal norms, and limited economic autonomy. Digital welfare systems were also critiqued for producing new forms of exclusion, particularly for women and marginalized groups.

State-level analyses highlighted the rise of competitive welfare populism and its implications for fiscal sustainability and long-term development. Emerging labour regimes, particularly the gig economy, were identified as areas requiring urgent welfare and regulatory interventions.

Day Three: Sectoral, Regional, and Urban Perspectives on Welfare

The third day focused on sector-specific and regional welfare interventions. Sessions on Karnataka examined agricultural productivity, state guarantee schemes, housing, and irrigation. While welfare schemes demonstrated measurable outcomes, discussions emphasized challenges related to sustainability, attribution, and implementation gaps.

Parallel sessions on livelihoods, migration, and tribal welfare provided grounded insights into the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Studies highlighted the central role of women in livelihoods, the invisibility of migrant workers, and the importance of welfare portability and inter-state coordination.

Urban-focused sessions examined welfare exclusion among informal workers, street vendors, and urban poor populations. Welfare exclusion in urban contexts was shown to be structural, necessitating decentralized, occupation-specific welfare frameworks and integrated urban planning approaches.

Conclusion

The national seminar demonstrated that welfare governance in India is a deeply political and institutional process rather than a collection of schemes. Key cross-cutting themes included governance capacity, institutional coordination, digital inclusion, and the tension between rights-based welfare and competitive populism. The seminar emphasized the need for mixed-method approaches, decentralised planning, and outcome-based evaluation. Overall, the deliberations reaffirmed welfare as central to citizenship, social justice, and democratic legitimacy in India.