

Building a Resilient Insurance Ecosystem: Bridging Doctrinal Gaps and Adopting Global Standards

Prajwal Bhattarai

Legal Researcher and Management Consultant

Abstract: The insurance sector in Nepal, while having significant potential to bolster economic stability and resilience, remains underdeveloped due to persistent systemic challenges. With an insurance penetration rate of just 2.8% of GDP, Nepal lags far behind regional counterparts such as India, where the penetration rate is 7.1%. This disparity is indicative of deep-rooted issues such as low market participation, regulatory inefficiencies, a lack of consumer awareness and ambiguous legal doctrines that hinder the sector's growth. Despite the country's vulnerability to natural disasters, economic shocks and health crises, the insurance market continues to operate in a largely fragmented and limited capacity. This article delves into the current state of Nepal's insurance sector in light of the Insurance Act, 2079 (2022), which governs the industry's operations. The Act represents a step towards modernizing the regulatory environment but is marred by ambiguities and loopholes that impede its effectiveness in addressing the full spectrum of issues facing the sector. One of the primary areas of concern is the application and enforcement of key foundational insurance doctrines utmost good faith, proximate cause and indemnity which are essential for establishing fairness, transparency and trust in the insurance process. These doctrines have not been effectively codified or enforced in Nepal, leading to a range of legal disputes, fraud and consumer dissatisfaction. The article highlights the importance of integrating these doctrines more thoroughly into Nepal's legal and regulatory framework. The principle of utmost good faith requires that both parties to an insurance contract disclose all material facts to each other, yet in Nepal, there is a lack of consumer protection in cases of non-disclosure, often leaving policyholders vulnerable to claim denials. The concept of proximate cause, which determines the direct cause of loss or damage, is frequently misinterpreted, leading to conflicting decisions on liability. Similarly, the principle of indemnity, which aims to restore the insured to their pre-loss financial position, is often poorly enforced, enabling over-insurance fraud and undermining the integrity of the system. In addition to addressing doctrinal challenges, the article proposes a comprehensive examination of global best practices from countries with more mature insurance industries, such as the UK, EU, Japan and India. By comparing Nepal's current practices with those of these countries, the study identifies potential reforms that could help close the gap. For instance, the EU's Solvency II framework, which mandates that insurers maintain capital proportional to their risk exposure, offers valuable lessons in risk management and financial stability that could be applied in Nepal's context. Likewise, Japan's public-private partnerships for catastrophe insurance particularly in relation to earthquake risks provide a model for Nepal to mitigate the financial burden of frequent natural disasters. Furthermore, the study calls for greater use of technology to modernize claims processing, enhance consumer education and streamline risk management. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning in claims settlement, as demonstrated by companies like Lemonade in the USA, can reduce the time and cost involved in processing claims, thereby improving customer satisfaction and trust. Digital platforms can also facilitate easier access to insurance products, especially in rural and remote areas where financial literacy is low. The findings of this article underscore the importance of regulatory modernization, with a focus on increasing transparency, strengthening consumer protection and aligning local doctrines with global best practices. By adopting international standards and integrating technology into insurance operations, Nepal has the potential to build a more resilient, inclusive and transparent insurance ecosystem. Such reforms would not only support the growth of the insurance sector but also contribute to broader economic development, by providing individuals, businesses and the government with a robust risk management tool. Ultimately, the article argues that a comprehensive approach to regulatory reform, doctrinal clarity and technological innovation can position Nepal's insurance sector as a cornerstone of economic stability and resilience, benefiting the country's long-term growth and development.

Keywords: Nepal insurance sector, regulatory reforms, foundational doctrines, utmost good faith, proximate cause, indemnity, global best practices, market penetration, fraud, insurance technology, legal framework.

1. INTRODUCTION

Insurance, as an integral part of the global financial system, serves not only as a risk management tool but also as a socio-economic safety net for individuals, businesses and governments. In Nepal, however, the insurance sector remains underdeveloped and faces significant challenges that undermine its potential to support national economic stability. As

of recent data, insurance penetration in Nepal stands at a modest 2.8% of GDP, far below the 7.1% seen in neighboring India. Several factors contribute to this discrepancy, including structural issues, regulatory inefficiencies and a lack of consumer awareness. Moreover, the insurance sector is governed by the Insurance Act, 2079 (2022), which, while a step forward, still contains ambiguities and gaps that limit its effectiveness in addressing the dynamic needs of the market.

A key challenge in Nepal's insurance sector is the lack of clarity surrounding foundational doctrines such as utmost good faith, proximate cause and indemnity, which are central to insurance contracts globally. These doctrines are designed to ensure fairness, transparency and accountability in insurance dealings. However, their application in Nepal is often inconsistent and, in some cases, leads to disputes that could otherwise be avoided. For instance, cases involving ambiguous policy exclusions, such as the exclusion of riots or protests from coverage, have led to prolonged legal battles, as seen in the recent case of Rita's Claim. This case illustrates the tension between the legal framework's interpretation of proximate cause and the industry's reliance on ambiguous provisions in the Insurance Act.

To address these challenges, this article proposes reforms inspired by global best practices, particularly from jurisdictions such as the European Union (EU), United Kingdom (UK), Japan and India. The article explores how the adoption of risk-based solvency models, clearer definitions of policy exclusions and technology-driven solutions could transform Nepal's insurance landscape. By integrating doctrinal principles with regulatory modernization, Nepal has the opportunity to enhance consumer trust, reduce fraud and increase insurance penetration across both urban and rural areas. Furthermore, the proposed reforms aim to foster a more inclusive and resilient insurance ecosystem, capable of supporting Nepal's socio-economic development goals.

This article will begin by analyzing the foundational doctrines of insurance, followed by a critical evaluation of the current legal and regulatory framework in Nepal. It will then explore global best practices and suggest actionable reforms, concluding with a series of recommendations that aim to modernize and strengthen Nepal's insurance sector. Ultimately, the goal is to establish an insurance framework that not only aligns with international standards but also meets the unique needs of Nepal's population, ensuring that the sector becomes a cornerstone of national economic resilience.

The importance of a robust insurance sector cannot be overstated in an economy like Nepal's, where natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides frequently disrupt lives and livelihoods. With a large proportion of the population dependent on agriculture and small businesses, access to adequate insurance can provide crucial protection against the financial impact of such events. However, Nepal's insurance sector remains mired in systemic challenges that prevent it from reaching its full potential. These challenges are compounded by a lack of consumer understanding of insurance products, a weak regulatory framework and inconsistent application of fundamental insurance doctrines that govern the relationship between insurers and policyholders.

One of the core barriers to the growth of Nepal's insurance industry is the lack of doctrinal clarity in its legal framework. The insurance contracts in Nepal, while governed by the Insurance Act, 2079, suffer from ambiguities in policy exclusions, coverage terms and the interpretation of critical concepts like proximate cause, utmost good faith and indemnity. These doctrines are not merely theoretical; they form the backbone of insurance transactions and dictate the rights and obligations of both insurers and policyholders. When these doctrines are poorly understood or misapplied, the result is confusion, disputes and a lack of confidence in the sector.

For example, the doctrine of utmost good faith (*Uberrimae Fidei*) requires that both parties to an insurance contract insurer and insured disclose all material facts. Failure to do so can void the policy or result in claims being denied. However, in Nepal, there is often insufficient enforcement of this doctrine, leading to fraudulent claims and disputes. Similarly, the principle of proximate cause, which determines the cause of loss that directly triggers insurance liability, is not always applied consistently in Nepal. Ambiguous policy exclusions, particularly related to riots, protests and natural disasters, further complicate the resolution of claims.

In this context, the current article explores how Nepal can reform its insurance sector by addressing these doctrinal issues while drawing inspiration from international best practices. By aligning the legal framework with proven global models, Nepal can build a more transparent, efficient and accessible insurance market that better serves its people and its economy.

2. FOUNDATIONAL DOCTRINES OF INSURANCE

The three foundational doctrines of insurance utmost good faith, proximate cause and indemnity are integral to ensuring the integrity of the insurance contract and protecting the interests of both the insurer and the insured. These doctrines underpin the rights and obligations of both parties, establishing trust and fairness in the contract's execution. However,

their application in Nepal is often inconsistent and their misinterpretation has led to inefficiencies, disputes and distrust in the insurance system.

2.1 Doctrine of Utmost Good Faith (Uberrimae Fidei)

The principle of utmost good faith requires both the insurer and the insured to disclose all material facts that may influence the other party's decision to enter into the contract. This doctrine is fundamental in maintaining transparency and fairness in the insurance process. In Nepal, the application of this doctrine is often vague and insurers sometimes fail to enforce it adequately, allowing fraud and misrepresentation to persist. For example, in the case of *Snow White Food Products v. Sohan Lal Bagla* (1964), the insured's failure to disclose prior claims led to the denial of coverage, highlighting the importance of full disclosure.

Global Contrast: The United Kingdom's Consumer Insurance (Disclosure and Representations) Act 2012 offers a more balanced approach, shifting the burden of proof to insurers. Under this law, insurers must prove that the insured's non-disclosure was deliberate or fraudulent in order to void the policy. This shift in responsibility protects consumers from unfair denial of claims, especially in cases of unintentional non-disclosure. Implementing similar changes in Nepal would help strengthen consumer protection and reduce instances of policy avoidance due to non-disclosure.

2.2 Doctrine of Proximate Cause

The doctrine of proximate cause holds that the dominant or most direct cause of loss should determine liability. In cases of multiple contributing factors, this doctrine seeks to establish the "last effective cause" that directly led to the insured event. However, the application of this doctrine in Nepal is often clouded by ambiguous legal definitions, particularly concerning exclusions related to riots, protests and civil disturbances.

Case Study: Rita's Claim

In a case study, *Rita's Claim*, a policyholder sought coverage for losses incurred during a protest. Rita argued that police intervention in the protest triggered a chain of events, including stone-pelting, that led to damage to property and therefore, the police action should be considered the proximate cause. However, the insurer contended that the protest itself, which violated the legal provisions of Nepal's Penal Code, constituted the proximate cause of the loss, thereby excluding coverage under the riot clause.

Global Jurisprudence:

The *Leyland Shipping Co. v. Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society* (1918) case from the UK established the legal precedent that the "last effective cause" should be used to determine liability in insurance disputes. This principle could be integrated into Nepal's insurance jurisprudence, ensuring more clarity and consistency in the application of proximate cause, particularly in complex cases involving multiple causes or disputed exclusions.

2.3 Principle of Indemnity

The principle of indemnity seeks to restore the insured to the same financial position they were in before the loss occurred, without allowing them to profit from the insurance payout. This principle is central to the majority of property and casualty insurance contracts. However, in Nepal, the enforcement of indemnity principles is often weak, with some cases of over-insurance or fraud going unchecked.

Nepalese Context:

Nepal's regulatory framework currently lacks sufficient measures to prevent over-insurance, where policyholders may insure their assets for amounts higher than their actual value, leading to inflated claims. In contrast, countries like Germany have stringent laws requiring precise asset valuation to prevent over-insurance, helping ensure that indemnity payouts are fair and in line with the actual loss. Incorporating such mechanisms into Nepal's insurance laws would help prevent fraud and ensure that insurers are not burdened with excessive claims.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND CHALLENGES IN NEPAL

Nepal's insurance sector is governed by a set of legal and regulatory instruments, including the Insurance Act, 2079 (2022) and various regulations that provide the foundation for policy terms, licensing, claims and consumer protection. However, despite these efforts, the industry continues to face several systemic challenges that hinder its growth and development.

3.1 Regulatory Structure

The Nepal Insurance Authority (NIA) is responsible for overseeing the insurance sector, ensuring solvency and regulating market practices. The NIA mandates that life insurers maintain a minimum capital adequacy of NPR 5 billion and

solvency margins to ensure financial stability. While these regulations aim to promote stability, the enforcement of these rules is often inconsistent and there are still gaps in regulatory capacity.

Key Laws:

- **Insurance Act, 2079 (2022):** This is the cornerstone of Nepal's insurance regulatory framework, governing the licensing of insurers, claims procedures, consumer rights and disputes resolution. While it represents a step toward modernizing the sector, the law remains unclear in some critical areas, particularly regarding policy exclusions and the application of insurance doctrines.
- **Regulations, 2049:** These regulations provide additional details on policy terms, exclusions and penalties for misrepresentation. However, the lack of clarity surrounding key terms like "riot" and "civil disturbance" often leads to disputes, as seen in the Rita's Claim case.

3.2 Systemic Challenges

The challenges faced by Nepal's insurance sector are manifold, ranging from fraudulent claims to low market penetration, especially in rural areas. The primary challenges include:

- **Ambiguous Exclusions:** Many insurance policies contain vague or unclear exclusions, particularly concerning civil unrest, natural disasters and political events. The lack of a clear definition of terms like "riot" or "protest" has led to disputes that could otherwise be avoided.
- **Fraudulent Claims:** The enforcement of utmost good faith is weak, leading to a significant number of fraudulent claims. Non-disclosure of material facts, especially in cases where policyholders exaggerate or misrepresent risks, has been a persistent issue.
- **Low Penetration:** Despite the critical need for insurance in a country prone to natural disasters and economic vulnerabilities, insurance penetration remains low, particularly in rural areas. Factors such as financial illiteracy, lack of trust in insurers and limited access to insurance products prevent many Nepalese from benefiting from coverage.

4. GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS FOR NEPAL

As Nepal seeks to reform its insurance sector, it is beneficial to look at global best practices from countries with well-established, efficient insurance systems. By analyzing regulatory frameworks, claims handling and risk management practices from the European Union (EU), United Kingdom (UK), Japan and India, this article aims to highlight how Nepal can learn from these models and integrate similar reforms into its own insurance industry. The goal is to create a regulatory environment that enhances market confidence, reduces disputes, increases penetration and supports the long-term growth of the sector.

4.1 Regulatory Modernization: EU's Solvency II Model

In the European Union, the Solvency II regulatory framework sets high standards for the financial stability of insurance companies. This model introduces a risk-based approach to capital requirements, meaning that insurers are required to hold capital proportional to their risk exposure. The framework also includes stress testing for extreme scenarios such as earthquakes, floods, or financial crises, ensuring that insurers can withstand shocks and continue to operate effectively.

Nepal's Adaptation:

Nepal can adopt a similar risk-based capital model, with solvency requirements linked to the specific risks faced by insurers in the region. Given Nepal's vulnerability to natural disasters like earthquakes and floods, it would be prudent for insurance companies to hold additional capital reserves to cover catastrophic events. Introducing stress testing for natural disasters and requiring insurers to maintain sufficient liquidity to cover these risks would ensure the long-term stability of the insurance sector. Additionally, aligning with international solvency norms would boost investor confidence and enhance Nepal's reputation in global financial markets.

4.2 Proximate Cause Jurisprudence: UK's Dominant Cause Doctrine

In the UK, the legal precedent established in *Leyland Shipping Co. v. Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society* (1918) reinforced the principle of proximate cause, emphasizing that the dominant cause of loss should determine liability in insurance disputes. The case set a clear standard that the last effective cause, in a chain of events leading to a loss, is considered the proximate cause, even if other factors contributed to the event.

Nepal's Need:

Nepal's legal framework could benefit from codifying this "dominant cause" doctrine to ensure clarity and consistency in the application of proximate cause in insurance claims. Training for judges and insurance professionals on how to apply this principle rigorously would help reduce ambiguity in cases involving multiple causes or contested exclusions,

such as the Rita's Claim case. Clear guidelines on determining proximate cause, coupled with legal reforms to better define exclusions such as riots or protests, would reduce the number of disputed claims and lead to a more transparent and predictable system.

4.3 Japan's Catastrophe Insurance Model

Japan has developed an effective public-private partnership for catastrophe insurance, particularly in relation to earthquake risks. The government offers reinsurance coverage for natural disasters, which allows private insurers to share the burden of catastrophic claims. This system has helped Japan manage the high frequency of earthquakes and other natural disasters without overwhelming the private insurance market.

Nepal's Application:

Nepal could implement a similar model by establishing partnerships with international reinsurers, such as Swiss Re or Munich Re, to share the financial risks associated with earthquakes and floods. By providing a government-backed reinsurance system, Nepal can ensure that insurance companies remain solvent while expanding coverage for high-risk natural disasters. This partnership would also encourage private insurers to offer more affordable policies in disaster-prone areas, thereby increasing insurance penetration in rural regions.

4.4 India's Deposit Insurance System

India's Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) charges banks and financial institutions premiums based on their risk profiles, ensuring that the premium reflects the level of risk exposure. This differentiated premium system helps banks better manage their risks and incentivizes them to adopt safer practices.

Nepal's Gap:

Currently, Nepal's Deposit Insurance Act, 2079 uses a flat premium system, which does not take into account the varying levels of risk among financial institutions. A differentiated premium model based on risk profiles would encourage financial institutions to manage their risks more effectively and help stabilize the sector. By adopting a similar system, Nepal can enhance the efficiency of its deposit insurance and promote better risk management practices across the financial sector.

5. CASE APPLICATION: RITA'S CLAIM THROUGH A GLOBAL LENS

The case of Rita's Claim provides an opportunity to examine how global best practices can be applied to real-world insurance disputes in Nepal. In this case, Rita's claim for property damage was contested by the insurer on the grounds that the loss occurred during a protest, which was classified as an excluded peril under the policy. Rita, however, argued that the police intervention in the protest was the proximate cause of the damage, as it triggered stone-pelting, which directly resulted in her property being damaged.

Proximate Cause Analysis:

From a global perspective, several legal systems offer insights into how this claim could be handled more effectively. For instance, in *Bird v. St. Paul Fire & Marine Insurance* (1918), U.S. courts ruled that if an excluded peril (like a riot) is the dominant cause of the loss, the claim should be denied, even if a covered peril (such as police intervention) also contributed. Under UK jurisprudence, as established in *Leyland Shipping Co. v. Norwich Union*, the last effective cause whether it be the protest or police intervention should determine the liability.

Nepal's Approach:

In Nepal, the reliance on the Penal Code's definition of a riot to determine proximate cause is problematic. A more structured approach, as seen in the UK and the U.S., would allow for a more precise and transparent determination of proximate cause. Codifying a "dominant cause" rule would ensure that claims like Rita's are evaluated fairly and the insured party's rights are adequately protected. Additionally, shifting the burden of proof to insurers, as seen in the Insurance Contracts Act 1984 in Australia, could provide further protection for consumers by making it harder for insurers to deny valid claims.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM

To address the systemic challenges outlined above and foster a more efficient, transparent and inclusive insurance sector, the following reforms are recommended for Nepal:

6.1 Clarify Exclusion Clauses:

Insurance policies must have clear, unambiguous definitions of exclusions, particularly concerning perils like riots, protests and civil disturbances. The term "riot" should be legally defined as a violent assembly with the intent to damage

property, similar to the approach taken in South Africa's Riotous Assemblies Act. This clarity will reduce disputes and ensure that claims are evaluated fairly.

6.2 Adopt Technology-Driven Solutions:

Nepal's insurance sector should embrace technological innovations to streamline operations and improve consumer experience. AI-powered claims processing, as demonstrated by companies like Lemonade in the U.S., can significantly reduce claim settlement time and increase customer satisfaction. Implementing chatbots, mobile apps and online platforms for policy purchase and claim tracking can also improve accessibility, particularly in rural areas.

6.3 Strengthen Consumer Education:

Insurance companies and regulators should collaborate to launch nationwide campaigns that educate consumers about insurance products, policy terms and their rights. A program similar to Malaysia's Insurance Services Education Program could help increase financial literacy and trust in the sector, encouraging more people to purchase insurance.

6.4 Enhance Regulatory Capacity:

The Nepal Insurance Authority (NIA) must improve its capacity to enforce risk-based supervision and align with international standards such as those set by the International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS). Regular training for NIA staff, along with increased collaboration with international regulatory bodies, will help ensure that the regulatory framework evolves to meet global challenges.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Nepal's insurance sector faces significant challenges that undermine its potential to drive economic stability and resilience. The issues of low market penetration, ambiguous legal doctrines and regulatory inefficiencies have hindered the growth of the industry and limited its ability to serve as a vital socio-economic safety net. The current legal framework, particularly the Insurance Act, 2079 (2022), while progressive in many respects, still suffers from ambiguities and gaps that leave room for confusion and dispute. Central to these challenges are foundational doctrines such as utmost good faith, proximate cause and indemnity, which require more consistent application and clarity to ensure fair outcomes for both insurers and insured parties.

By examining global best practices from regions with well-established insurance systems, such as the European Union, the United Kingdom, Japan and India, it is clear that there is substantial opportunity for Nepal to reform and modernize its insurance framework. The implementation of a risk-based capital model, similar to the EU's Solvency II framework, would provide Nepal's insurers with a robust system for managing financial stability in the face of natural disasters and other risks. Similarly, adopting clearer guidelines for proximate cause, as seen in the UK and US, could resolve many of the disputes surrounding insurance claims related to ambiguous exclusions such as riots, protests and natural calamities. The experiences of Japan, particularly its public-private partnership in managing catastrophe insurance, provide an excellent model for how Nepal could better manage the risks posed by earthquakes and floods, which are frequent and devastating in the region. A reinsurance system backed by the government would not only protect insurers from catastrophic losses but also allow for more affordable and accessible coverage, especially in rural areas that are most vulnerable to such risks. Moreover, India's differentiated premium system for deposit insurance, which charges banks based on their risk profiles, offers a practical framework that Nepal could adopt to improve the efficiency of its own deposit insurance system and incentivize safer practices among financial institutions.

One of the most important lessons from these international models is the need for clarity and consistency in insurance contracts. The doctrine of utmost good faith, which requires full disclosure of material facts by both the insurer and the insured, is fundamental to maintaining trust in the system. However, for this principle to be effective, it must be actively enforced and the burden of proof must be fairly placed on insurers, as demonstrated in the UK's Consumer Insurance (Disclosure and Representations) Act 2012. Strengthening consumer education and making insurance products more transparent would significantly increase trust in the sector, thereby improving penetration rates across urban and rural areas alike.

Additionally, technology can play a transformative role in addressing many of the operational inefficiencies in Nepal's insurance sector. The use of artificial intelligence and machine learning in claims processing, as demonstrated by global innovators like Lemonade in the US, can drastically reduce the time it takes to settle claims and improve overall customer satisfaction. Incorporating digital platforms for policy purchases and claim tracking can make insurance more accessible, particularly for populations in remote areas that are often excluded from the formal financial sector.

Finally, enhancing the capacity of the Nepal Insurance Authority (NIA) to regulate and supervise the market is critical for the successful implementation of these reforms. By aligning with international standards set by organizations like the

International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS), the NIA can better oversee risk-based supervision and ensure that insurers maintain appropriate capital reserves, engage in fair business practices and adhere to the core doctrines of insurance law.

In light of these findings, Nepal has a unique opportunity to transform its insurance sector into a more inclusive, transparent and efficient system that can effectively respond to the country's growing need for financial protection against risks. While the road to reform will require significant effort and investment from both public and private sectors, the potential benefits are immense. Not only would a more resilient insurance sector contribute to national economic stability, but it would also promote financial inclusion, reduce vulnerability to natural disasters and ultimately support Nepal's broader development goals. Collaborative efforts from regulators, insurers, policymakers and the public will be essential in creating a stronger and more reliable insurance ecosystem that can serve the diverse needs of Nepal's population, both now and in the future.

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