Policy Making Process-a Perspective

Introduction

Public policy is a set of objectives set by the government relating to the general health and welfare of the **public** and actions taken to accomplish it. The **public policy process** is the manner in which **public policy** is formed, implemented and evaluated.

Public policy also refers to the actions taken by government — its decisions that are intended to solve problems and improve the quality of life of citizens. The key elements include:

- Identifying problem/s where policy makers require to pay serious attention
- Finding and providing context-specific and resource sensitive solutions
- Enabling evidence-based decision-making.

The importance of public policy can be studied from the Pareto Optimality perspective, also known as Pareto efficiency. Typically, it means that resources should be allocated in an economically efficient manner, but ideally this does not reflect objectivity or equality. In fact, it is an economic state where resources cannot be reallocated to make one individual better off without making at least one individual worse off. In the space of policy making an economy is said to be in a Pareto optimum state when "*no economic changes can make one individual better off without making at least one other individual worse off*".

Challenges

The success of any policy depends on a well-designed process. However, despite several good initiatives some of the policies never seem to have even taken off. Some of the reasons could be:

- Non-inclusion of the common man/community
- Gaps in implementation of policies
- Poor participation from community since it is not aware of what is to be done
- Poor incentives for policy implementation from the supply-side, hence the programme receives poor response.

Overcoming Challenges

Implementing a policy can be made robust and useful if some mechanism is set up at the beginning of a programme. Some of the key factors include:

- Inclusion of several stakeholders, especially the community as primary end-users
- Identifying and addressing gaps in implementation
- Introducing measureable indicators to include:

    I. Alignment of policy and its usage. This is important since it answers the question-will changing a policy improve situations?
    II. Actively engaging with stakeholders at all levels-community, peer groups, government, funding agencies to name a few. An ideal partnership like

this not only ensures ownership but in most cases ensures success in implementing policies

III. Managing change in an effective manner-Any change often does not have a smooth flow. Internal and external factors are always taken into account, sensitising and handling changes becomes an important activity and the right approach needs to be taken. A system of ongoing evaluation needs to be put in to ensure that new policies are achieving desired outcomes.

IV. Ensuring transparency throughout the process. This includes following best practices including making available policy documents to the public, rendering them useful and understandable to all (using simple and uncomplicated words). Customising and distributing specific information to the right audience at the right time.

Objectives Measured by Indicators:

- Was the programme/policy managed well?
- Were best practices (identified) used and were there any learnings?
- Was transparency created to draw attention of stakeholders?

Standard Framework

To capture the success or failure of a policy the following elements need to be kept in mind:

- Inclusivity-ensure a systematic approach by creating spaces for proactiveness to help in institutionalising policies and ensure ownership and increase transparency
- Openness-to include accessibility and also to successfully address the expectations of the community
- Reliability-ensure consistency and reduce the apprehension in the economic, social and political environment of the community
- Fairness in implementing policies without bias.

Input/Process → Process → Output → Final Outcome

Checklist
✓ Remove mental blocks
✓ Identify the problem
✓ What impact action?
✓ What must be the outcome?
✓ What is the output?

Case Study 1

Fact: The Government of India launched a scheme titled Mukhyamantri Yuva Swabhiman Yojana which primarily helps students who have passed their 10th grade to get monetary assistance to enrol for higher education

Problem: Due to no proper guidance parents and students started accessing information from an incorrect website. The government had failed to include people from the community in launching this scheme and hence were not completely aware of the ground reality in some states and also did not use the right mechanism to implement this.

Case Study 2

Fact: The Government of Karnataka introduced the Thayi Bhagya Yojana (TBY) scheme in some districts of Karnataka. The state contracted with private-sector providers to provide free obstetric care services for poor mothers. In addition, in March 2010, the state also announced the TBY Plus across all the districts in Karnataka, which provided a cash incentive of INR 1000 for women from India's scheduled caste and scheduled tribes and those who were from poor households and were above 19 years of age. This programme covered women for their first two live deliveries in private hospitals.

Problem: The programme did not have any significant effect on overall rates of institutional deliveries, or on maternal and child health outcomes. Intensive programme implementation led to small reductions in expenditures (INR200) and a 3.5 percentage point increase in delivery at private facilities. The private sector did not have a clear understanding of the programme and how best to leverage it for the community.

Conclusion

It may be useful if the policies planned in ministries and implemented in states, districts and village levels are looked at in a new manner. Schemes must be customised to suit local conditions. A better coordination between all the stakeholders needs to be encouraged and the flow of communication should be two-way.

Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander
Executive Director
Public Affairs Foundation