

Process of Policy Formulation in Pakistan

In every society there are numerous problems and issues faced by the general masses. Public policy is a tool; an action, or a regulation, formulated by the governments to address those societal problems which may appear in the areas of education, politics, transportation or any other vital sector of the state.

A policy is a combination of six elements that includes Intentions (these are the purposes for which a policy is made), Goals (The desired outcomes of a policy), Plans (they describe the ways of achieving these goals), Programs (which act as medium for achieving the desired outcome), Decisions (Actions taken by authorities to set goals, develop plans, implement and evaluate the programs), Effects (the consequences), positive or negative, which a policy would have on the society.

While creating policy authorities there are certain factors to be kept in mind such as, prevailing political values, mood of citizens at time of introducing a policy, Structure of the government and, foremost, national and local cultural norms of a country. In an ideal world, policymaking follows a policy cycle. It has five major stages: Policy Agenda Setting, Policy Formulation, Policy Adoption, Policy Implementation and Policy Evaluation. In the first step of policy making the problem is identified in accordance with the policy being made. The process often involves the short and long term effects.

In the Policy Formulation step, discussions and debates take place among the government, researchers and relevant stakeholders regarding the best course of action that must be taken to address the identified issue. Potential obstacles to address the problem and alternative solutions are also addressed in this step. In Policy Adoption step, any alternative or existing policies on the issue is evaluated. Useful advises are communicated to address social and economic issues of the society. This step helps decision makers to make better choices among the alternatives available. In Policy implementation, the responsibilities are assigned to the relevant stakeholders to carry out the different tasks. In policy Evaluation, the post implementation of the policy is evaluated to comprehend how the policy is working and whether the desired objectives have been achieved through the policy.

In Pakistan, policy making rests solely in the hands of the elected government which coordinates with various departments to formulate a policy. Along with the government, the civil bureaucracy, military bureaucracy, political institutions, judicial institutions, global monetary organizations and external governments are the key players in Public Policy Making Process in Pakistan.

However, Pakistan has never been able to follow the step-by-step procedure of the policy cycle defined above. Policy making in the country as always used the Top-to-Bottom approach rather than the Bottom-to-Top approach. This is because, most of the times policies have been introduced without the consent of public and no real efforts have been made to collect practical information about the issue on which policy is being made. Relevant stakeholders like professors who have specialized in policy making are never taken on board by the government in the process. Due to the lack of reliable information, policy makers find it difficult to initially define the problem, then formulate policy goals and policy alternatives, implement these plans and evaluate mechanisms which ultimately result in failure of the policy.

In developed countries, political leadership focuses on development and implementation of such policies which are in the best interests of the citizens. However, unfortunately in Pakistan the leadership of the country has always been incompetent and they try to make policies which are in *their* best interests rather than the interests of the citizens. Moreover, 90 percent of the policy makers are not educated well enough to have a vision and solution of the problems. There is a lack of commitment in political leadership. After every five years the new government discontinues most of the development programs started by previous government or it does not get support from the system to implement them. Due to political instability in the country, politicians are always busy in strengthening their position for the next tenure; therefore, they end up employing wrong people with no prior knowledge of the issue in critical departments of various institutions. Due to this, it becomes difficult for policy makers to address the goals of development programs.

The governance structure in Pakistan is the most important problem of the country which results in making and implementation of a public policy. The lack of accountability, misuse of powers and corruption in various departments leads to a weak governance system in the country. Due to this reason, there is a lack of co-operation between various stakeholders in the government which in turn results in failure of policy. Moreover, in Pakistan there is a centralized decision system. Decisions regarding policy formation usually are taken by the top officials of the government with

no or limited input from the relevant stakeholders. It is also due to this reason that the concerns of the people at a grass root a level are not addressed and ultimately, the policy made fails to yield the desired fruit.

The financial, technical and human resources of any country play a crucial role in formulation and implementation of the public policy. For proper implementation, it is necessary that these resources are available in abundance during every step of public policy process. In Pakistan, there has always been an acute shortage of these resources. Not only this but the policy makers have also always mismanaged and underutilized the already scarce resources due to corruption. This results in the failure of development and implementation of various programs.

In a nutshell, there is a strong need of revisiting the policy process of Pakistan. Efforts need to be made in order to ensure that a Bottom-to-Top approach for the policy making is implemented. Other than this, the citizens of the country should be able to participate in the decision making process. In addition to this, polices should be sustained and implemented at every level regardless of the government and a transparent system of accountability should be introduced. Improvements in the public policy making would yield all kinds of benefits for the country and Pakistan will be able to make progress to keep up with developed nations of the world.