

Revisiting Public Policy Making Process and Strategies in Pakistan: A Governance Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The paper deliberates on the issue of public policy making process and strategies in the specific context of Pakistan in view of the universal call for good governance, efficient service delivery, accountability, participation and sound public policy making through empowering people and leveraging their potential in the process of governance. It emphasizes on the need for revisiting the public policy making process and strategies with a renewed interest at a time when strategy and policy instruments are being intensively debated in the wake of a plethora of economic, social, political and governance problems triggered by the tragic wave of terrorism, militancy and corruption in the country. The paper argues that existing process and strategies of policy making are quite generic, linear and mainstream which provide an overly simplistic and general understanding of the approach in which public policies are formulated. These define policy formulation merely a solution generating process which in turn solves some problems. This procedure consists of sequential steps which begins with identification of a problem, and completes with a set of actions to resolve the problem. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that real world of policy making is much more complex and intricate. Some notable competing approaches in this regard include the “advocacy framework” (Sabatiae and Jenkins-Smith, 1999), “multiple stream framework” (Kingdon, 1984; Zahariadis, 2003), “rational-choice analysis” (Sharpf, 1997), “policy network approach” (Borzel, 1998; Thatcher, 1998; Howlett, 2002), “policy transfer perspective” (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996), and “network governance” (Cross, Hesterly, and Borgatti, 1997). While all of the above competing frameworks offer competing explanations they are largely concentrated on pluralist cultures and the way policy choices are made. Therefore, it is challenging to elucidate by what means such frameworks explain policy making where the decision making is done in dictatorial settings i.e. in those countries which are politically independent but economically dependent on international financial institutions, who have elected governments but without people centric democracy, who gained independence from colonial rule but are still well-entrenched in colonial traditions, and whose intellectuals are highly educated and well-read but have captive mindset. To address the issue the paper suggests utilizing a network governance perspective with decentralized/bottom up approach for effective policy making in Pakistan and recommends ways towards effective public policy based on a realistic, context specific, collaborative and participative approach.

Keywords: Public Policy, Governance, Collaborative, Participative, Reforms

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Thomas Dye, 2012, Public Policy can be defined as “What governments choose to do or not to do’ and more importantly, why they do whatever they do?” (cited in Chand, 2010, p.8). Bhutto, 2006, in her keynote address on, ‘Democratic Institutions in Pakistan’, defined public policy as, ‘the process of prioritizing and allocating resources in an efficient manner to provide relief to the people, who need it most’ (Bhutto, 2006). Similarly, Peters, 1999 wrote, “Public policy is the sum of government activities contributing directly or indirectly to have an influence on life of citizens”, (cited in Chand, 2010, p. 8).

Public policy thus is a process of making decision for addressing a public issue. It could be in the form of legislative vote on a legislative bill or an executive order at various levels of governance, federal, provincial, institutional and organizational in various policy sectors such as education, health, national security, international relations, development, industry, agriculture etc. A new policy requires structural and attitudinal change. Hence, public policy making is a multidimensional procedure that includes the collaboration of concerned institutions and those who sway policy fabricators in certain direction. These actors

exercise their sways to progress their goals by backing their seats, trying to edify devotees and mustering supporters on certain issues (Dye, 2012).

Public policy experts have identified the following five steps as important in policy process.

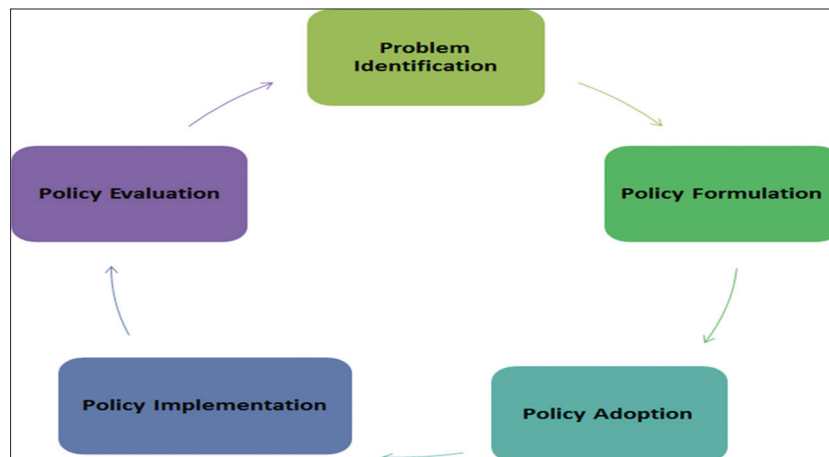


Figure 1: Source: Dye, 2012

1.1. Problem Identification

“In this first step of public policy, the problem is identified and nature of the problem is described along with its history. The process often involves who is affected, how far public is aware of the issue whether it is long term and short term policy. Whether altering public policy can bring the desired change or not? Answering to these questions may provide arrange for policy options. No policy response is likely to be effective without clear definition of issue” (Dye, 2012).

1.2. Policy Formulation

“After the problem is identified, the next step is formulation of policy to resolve the particular identified problem. This step of public policy is usually marked by discussions and debates among the government officials, interests groups or individual citizens, as to how best to address the related issue or problem. The general purpose of this step is to set clear goals and list out strategy to achieve them. The formulation step often includes discussion of alternatives, solutions, potential obstacles and how to measure the effects of policy changes. After having in depth discussion on alternative solutions and potential, the policy is formulated (Dye, 2012).

1.3. Policy Adoption

“Policy adoption is the process through which policy makers evaluate alternative policies that are intended to lesson or resolve the social and economic problems of the society. The policy adoption phase involves formulating and communicating useful advices. The main purpose of this activity is to help the decision makers to make better choice amongst the alternatives. In this process, it is essential to establish viable criteria for analysing the alternatives. In order to compare and measure alternatives, economic or social benefits and results of the policy must be considered” (Dye, 2012).

1.4. Policy Implementation

“In this step, the defining agencies and organizations are involved and responsibilities are assigned to each agency and department. This stage requires close communication and coordination among the involved agencies, sufficient funds and staff to carry out the tasks and overall compliance to achieving the desired objectives of the public policy. In Pakistan, the problem of implementation of public policy extends beyond any other stage of policy making” (Dye, 2012).

1.5. Policy Evaluation

“In this step the policy is evaluated to determine how it is working after being implemented, how far it has been able to resolve the problem of the society and whether the selected policy is implemented properly to achieve targeted policy objectives or

not. There are various types of evaluation methods that are employed for the assessment of policy such as cost benefit analysis, multi-critics analysis, economic impact and developing forecasting. This part of the process is generally implemented through a co-operative effort between policy managers and independent evaluation. Furthermore, the impact of policy is also evaluated to get to know the overall effect of that policy” (Dye, 2012).

The above discussion reflects that public policy process is generic, linear, mainstream and rational which provides an overly simplistic and general understanding of the approach in which public policies are formulated. These define policy formulation merely a solution generating process which in turn solves some problems. This procedure consists of sequential steps that begins with identification of a problem, and complete with a set of actions to resolve the problem. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that real world of policy making is much more complex and intricate. In case the policies get failed to attain the planned goals, responsibility is usually not placed on the policy, rather on administrative or management fiasco in executing it (Juma and Clark 1995). The blame of failure is also placed on a dearth of political motivation, meagre administration of resources etc.

The reality, on the other hand, shows that world of policy of making is much more complex and intricate. There is an ample amount of evidence to advocate that the liner framework is far away from practice. Several public policy theorists have utilized different theoretical frameworks to capture the complex reality and to elucidate in what ways administrative systems formulate public policies. The most notable competing approaches include: “advocacy framework” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999), “multiple stream framework” (Kingdon, 1984; Zahariadis, 2003), “rational-choice analysis” (Sharpf, 1997), “policy network approach” (Borzel, 1998; Thatcher, 1998; Howlett, 2002), “policy transfer perspective” (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996), and “network governance”(Cross, Hesterly, and Borgatti, 1997).

While all of the above competing frameworks offer plausible explanations they had largely concentrated on pluralist cultures and on the ways policy choices are made. Therefore, it is challenging to elucidate by what means such frameworks explain policy making where the decision making is done in dictatorial settings i.e. in those countries which are politically independent but economically dependent on international financial institutions, who have elected governments but without people centric democracy, who gained independence from colonial rule but are still well-entrenched in colonial traditions, and whose intellectuals are highly educated and well-read but have captive mindset. The paper therefore, makes an effort to elucidate the public policy making process in developing countries with specific reference to Pakistan keeping in view the cultural and historical context of the country to highlight the need for revisiting the process to look beyond the dominant paradigms of public policy for effective public service provisioning and improved governance.

2. PERSPECTIVES ON POLICY MAKING IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES INCLUDING PAKISTAN

Most recently, a number of researchers, particularly having research interest in developing countries have presented three perspectives to guide discussion on policy making in developing countries:

1. External perspective
2. Internal perspective
3. Contingency perspective

A brief discussion on each of these perspectives is presented below:

2.1. External Perspective

This perspective argues that developing states are impassive receivers of policies from developed countries either directly or indirectly through international development organizations and global financial bodies such as the “World Bank”, “International Monetary Fund”, “USAID”, “DFID” and “JAICA” etc. A number of researchers consider that it happens particularly in the sphere of economic policy while others argue that policy formulation is outwardly determined in all policy sectors. They view the developing countries as being choice less. The choicelessness is revealed in policy contents and mechanisms, policy mix and the scheduling, and phasing. There is either no or limited debate on different aspects of policy and institutional reform issues.

It is argued that major actors in the policy process are international donor community and international financial institutions who have set of policy proposals and prescriptions for all developing countries. It is exactly the case of solutions chasing the problems as identified in the ‘Garbage Cane Model, 1972’, whereas it is reverse in the countries whose policies are home-grown (March and Olsen, 1972).

2.2. Internal Perspective

This perspective highlights objections or conflicting views related to external perspective. It is claimed that developing countries are not simply “policy punching bags” that endure remains mash by outer powers. It is claimed that choices about public policies are determined by internal forces. The countries take policy decisions which are influenced by their own political, administrative and culture traditions as well as the governing style. Even if they are adopting international best practices either through emulation or policy band waging, or learning from best practices, policy decisions making is voluntary not coercive involving discussion and participation among stakeholders.

2.3. Institutional/Contingency Perspective

This perspective argues that both positions maintained by proponents of external and internal perspectives are extreme views, diametrically opposed to each other. None of the two perspectives explains the complex realities of policy making in developing countries. It is argued that both internal and external view represent a drastic oversimplification of the highly intricate process of public policy making. In really, it all depends on the institutional practices, norms, procedures and culture of the organizations which influence the independent decision making. Whether policy is externally driven or internally driven, its formulation, effective implementation and sincere evaluation depends on a number of factors such as:

- a. The nature of policy issues
- b. Focusing events
- c. Administrative and political traditions
- d. Political leadership
- e. Policy analysis capacity
- f. Style of governance
- g. Stage of development

It is argued that some policies are externally driven while others are internally driven and in some cases policy outcomes are the result of both external and internal forces. It all depends on the context, situation, ecosystem and the factors outlined above. Nevertheless, irrespective of the internal or external origin, the success of policy depends largely on how the policy is developed. Whether it is externally imposed either through overt coercion or covert incentives or internally decided without any debate, participation of stakeholders and consensus building, it is bound to fail at any phase of policy process if not done properly.

3. NETWORK GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE

More recently drawing upon the new public management philosophy of partnership, efficiency, responsiveness and participation in governance process, network governance approach is also offered as a competing framework to refer to collaborative policy processes and strategies for effective and efficient delivery of public services based on the theme of public, private and civil society partnership.

In the light of above discussion we can say that whatever approach or perspective is followed for public policy making it requires insight, creativity, and imagination as well as knowledge, training, discipline, sincerity and commitment.

4. KEY PLAYERS IN PUBLIC POLICY IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan came into being in August 1947 after gaining independence from the British India. The policy process in Pakistan over the period has witnessed that the political governments have always served their own interests instead of prioritizing the public service motives. The history of 7 decades of Pakistan presents a dismal state in case of policy formulation and execution. While the designated governments are accountable for devising feasible policies to solve the public problems the civil bureaucracy, military bureaucracy, political institutions, judicial institutions, international monetary organizations and foreign regimes are the key players in Public Policy Making Process in the country (Bashir, 2013). More recently, after the 18th Constitutional Amendment and fiscal decentralization through National Finance Commission (NFC) award, the responsibility of policy formulation has been delegated to the provincial governments that can be further delegated down to the local governments’ level. 2 below reflects the state of public policy making in Pakistan over time:

5. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC POLICY IN PAKISTAN

It reflects that 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 as presented below (Bashir, 2013).

In spite of being democratically elected government, there is absence of leader focused and people centric approach in policy making with citizen participation in both, federal and provincial governments in Pakistan. Furthermore, policy processes in Pakistan over the years have been largely top-down in nature as compared to bottom-up seeking public opinion on various

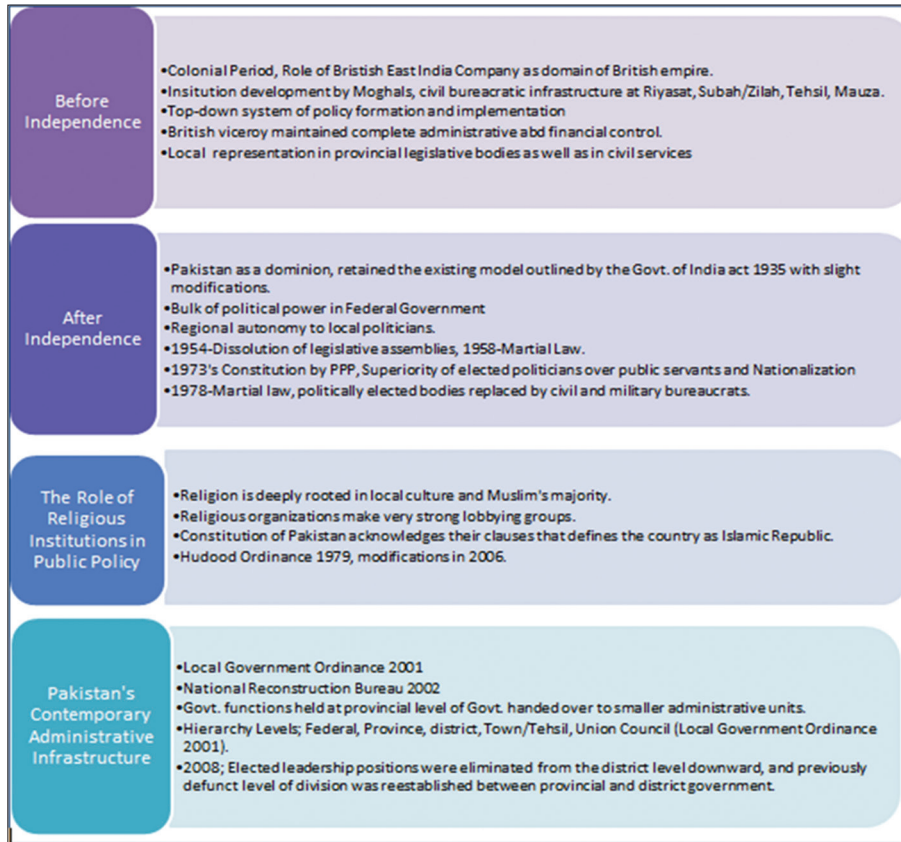


Figure 2: Source Bashir, 2013

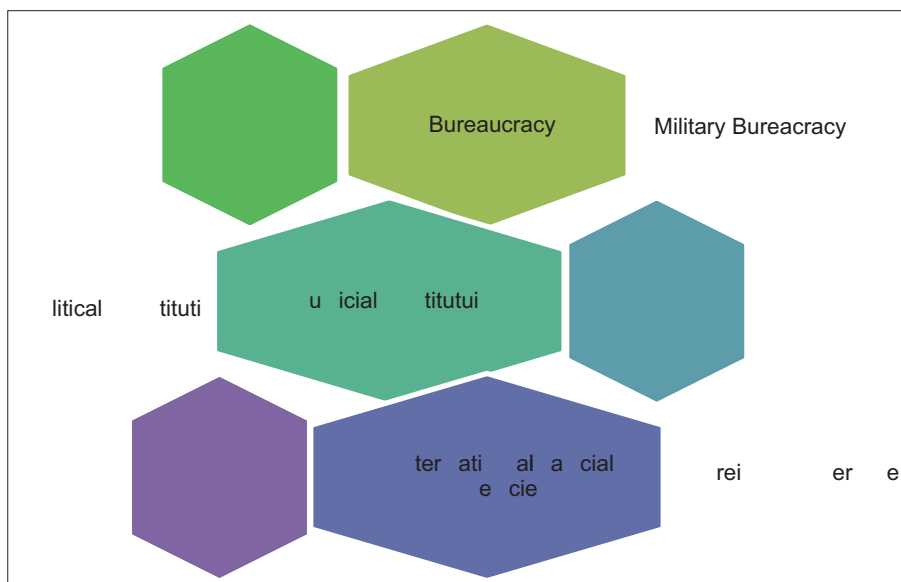


Figure 3: Source Bashir, 2013

social and public policy issues and debates to enhance public confidence in governance institutions. In a democratic systems world over, governmental leadership carry out a vital role in formulating and implementing any policy and the participative administrative procedures provides credibility and a sense of ownership with the process. But if the administrative chiefs are comparatively weak and the governing body lacks capacity the process may be taken over by the bureaucracy which is largely the case in Pakistan where both policy preparation and execution parts have been presumed by the bureaucracy which needs to be changed through a process of policy reform(Shafqat, 2014).

The paper argues that sound public policy processes and norms of effective governance go hand in hand, hence, a stable and sound process of policy making requires a renewed focus on various aspects of governance in a country. Building on the above discussed ideas, the paper suggests the need for an application of universally agreed world-wide governance indicators (WGI) including: participation, accountability, rule of law, transparency, control of corruption and efficiency/political stability to revamp the existing policy processes and strategies (WB, 2012).

To conclude, policy making process and strategies in Pakistan need to be redefined and revisited in line with universal trends as well as indigenes realities while using the Institutional approach, bottom-up view and network governance framework discussed above. The paper highlights the need for participative, citizen oriented and pro-people policy making through involvement of community in policy formulation and implementation for improved governance, policy making and effective public service provisioning. Policies also need to be known and understood by all going to be affected by them. Written policies are most effective when spelled out clearly in terms of what organization members should or should not do under a given situation. Key recommendations in this regard include the following:

1. Public policies making process as well as policies need to be stable and sustainable. If policies are to serve as guidelines to actions, they should not be changed frequently and needed to be formulated carefully.
2. Once formulated, policies need to be implemented consistently at all levels following the principle of rule of law even beyond the term of the elected government to avoid the element of adhocacy to policies and promote sustainability of the system.
3. Policies must be sincere as they are public pronouncement of the philosophy and beliefs of institutions, they need to be based on real intentions rather than merestatements of ideals written only on papers. A system of checks and balances need to be developed to safeguard public money for public interest.
4. Since the concept of governance encompass public, corporate and civil society organizations considering them all as partner in the process of governance, public policies need to be integrative and collaborative, built around shared goals and values on the principles of public, private and community organizations' partnership paving the way for effective network governance.
5. Policies also need to be proactive and goal oriented. Good policies anticipate problems requiring actions and contribute to the success of institutions rather than reacting to day to day occurrences.
6. Devolved governance structures after the award of NFC to provinces and local institutions are expected to further strengthen the collaborative arrangements for delivery of public services requiring efficient and effective consultative policy processes through effective inter-government relations. However, the system of decentralized governance needs to be implemented with sincerity and commitment.
7. Since public policy processes require insight, creativity, vision as well as knowledge, training, discipline and commitment, capacity building of policy makers through continuous professional development programs is extremely important to catch up with the dynamic arena of public policy processes and strategies.
8. Last but not least, to make Pakistan a truly participative democracy education system and quality need to be reformed from traditional to state of the art analytical, autonomous and learner cantered education, designed around the new path ways to ensure active citizen participation in governance process. Moreover, education of policy studies at university and college level is highly important for promoting public voice in policy process and preparing an enlightened and visionary future leadership in Pakistan.

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