

Book Review: Public Policymaking: An Introduction

Kurebwa Jeffrey, Department of Peace and Governance, Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe.

Mhaka Martin Chirume, Department of Peace and Governance, Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe.

Kuwanda Farai, Department of Peace and Governance, Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe.

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Author: Anderson, J.E.

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Preface

This book is concerned with the public policy formulation processes and has listed 5 guidelines. These guidelines will determine which problem seeks a policy first.

Guidelines:

- Problem identification and agenda setting - This involves identifying a problem in the society and agreeing on the way forward.
- Formulation - consideration of options for the problem.
- Adoption- Choosing and adopting a suitable option for the problem
- Implementation- After considering all options available the option chosen will be tried
- Evaluation- This is the stage where the option on trial is evaluated and considered for use in coming up with the policy for the problem. (Dye, T.R. 1992)

Review

The book is interested in categories of public policy formulation in America. There are number of policies at play and being used at once and this book put them in groups or sets for easy reference. Public policies are a bit complex (not easy to understand) to understand policies there is need for legislative mind to be at play. This book summarises the policies making them simple to understand. Their applicability becomes easier.

Insights of public policies formulated at national, state and local government are also considered. The policies formulated at different level of governance and their purpose or what they serve is highlighted. This helps in understanding further the policies. So the development of public policies according to this book is done at national, state and local level. The nature of the problem determines the policy and the policy makers.

In a two term congress in America at least 300-400 laws are enacted. Why these laws are enacted is also explained in this book. The assumption is that a new president will come with his /her own vision where improvements are needed according to the party ideology and this will normally necessitate the formulation of new laws or development, modification or amendments of the existing policy. These policies deal with public housing, higher education, internal revenue service reform, etc. Comparing this with Zimbabwean scenario it is quite interesting to note that policy formulation or amendments to address issues such as higher education where for example the former minister of higher education advocates for the education system to move towards science. He embraced science as the way to go, and the current minister is completely focussing on something else. On public housing the Zimbabwean authorities came up with a housing policy which is always modified and have a code name ready for a purpose whenever there is an opportunity. It used to be code named 'House for all' to 'operation hlalani kuhle' on revenue of late there are quite a number of policies being introduced such as the unpopular 2% on every electronic transaction.

CATEGORIES OF PUBLIC POLICY

Substantive and procedural policy

Substantive policies are concerned with what the government is going to do, to address a problem such as the construction of a high way, the payment of social benefits, etc. Again comparing these with Zimbabwe is interesting. In Zimbabwe there is a problem of cyclone Idai which destroys houses, schools, roads, etc. and before that the road network in Zimbabwe was equally bad. So substantive policies directly allocates benefits & costs, advantages & disadvantages to the people.

Procedural policies are interested with how a problem is going to be solved. They are also concerned with the way, the manner and the process in which the problem will be solved. Procedural policies include laws that provide for the creation of administrative agencies that determine matters which they have jurisdiction over. They specify the process and the

techniques that can be used in carrying out the desired or planned programmes and providing other recommended controls for the operations. Examples of procedural policies are: Administrative Procedural Act (APA) OF 1946, this is a response to the growth of administrative agency discretion in the 20th Century which prescribes procedures to be followed or observed by agencies in the notice and community or informal policy making.

Distributive, Regulatory, Self-regulatory, and Redistributive Policies

This differentiates policies according to their effects on society and the relationships of the people involved in the policy making process. Distributive Policies involves the allocation of benefits or service to particular units or segments of the people concerned, such as individuals, disadvantaged groups and disadvantaged communities. Distributive Policies involves the use of public money to help particular disadvantaged groups. (Lowe, T.J. 1964) (Examples of distributive policy in America are 'rivers and harbours improvement and flood control legislation (water projects). This is similar to Zimbabwe's water rights in which water in Zimbabwe is controlled by Zimbabwe Water Authority (ZINWA). ZINWA is in charge of water in Zimbabwe whether underground, in sea, rivers or borehole. It does not matter where the water is stored it belongs to ZINWA. The purpose is preserve and save the few drops that are in Zimbabwe.

Regulatory Policies normally imposes restrictions or limitations especially on the behaviour of individuals and or groups. The formation of restrictive policies is normally necessitated by two conflicting groups or coalition of groups this is done to maintain or find peace which is not sustainable but rather negative peace. It is negative because it is not long lasting.

Self-regulatory policies this involves restricting or controlling some matter or group. While redistributive policies are concerned with the government's efforts to shift the allocation of wealth, income, property, rights among classes or groups of people. The equivalent of this in Zimbabwe is the indigenisation Policy which is concerned in shifting wealth from a few minorities to the majority though it was done in an orderly manner. A given example is graduated income tax which is based on the ability to pay. In Zimbabwe you pay according to how you are paid (income tax) or you pay according to how you spend (Value Added Tax)

Material and Symbolic Policies

Material policies provide concrete resources or substantive power to their beneficiaries. The policy also allows employers to pay a prescribed minimum wage. (Edelmann, M. 1984) In

Zimbabwe minimum wages are also set for agriculture, mining, maids etc. The policies provide public house programme and they also provide income support payments to farmers as material in content. For example paying of AIDS levy in Zimbabwe is also similar to that kind of policy (material policy). Symbolic policies also allocate no tangible advantages and disadvantages, they appeal to people's cherished values such as patriotism, peace, and social justice. (Elder & Cobb 1970)

Public Policies

These policies involve collective goods and or private goods. The nature of collective goods is such that if they are provided for one person they must be provided for all. There are also some approaches to policy study which are as follows:

- Political systems theory-Public policy may be viewed as a political system's responds to demands arising from its environment.
- Group theory -This theory states that public policy is the product of group struggle, and it also argues that the contention that interaction and struggle among groups are the central facts of political life. (Lathan 1985)
- Elite theory -In this theory, public policy can be regarded as reflecting the values and preferences of governing elite.
- Institutionalism-This approach emphasise formal or structural aspects of institutions. It explains that an institution is in part a set of regularised patterns of human behaviour that persist over time and perform some significant social function or activity.
- Rational Choice Theory-It is sometimes called social choice, public choice or formal theory. It involves applying the principles of political analysis and explanation of political behaviour (or normative decision making). (Wade & Curry 1970)

This book provides methodological difficulties in studying public policy are solid, conclusive evidence, facts or data as one prefers, on the motives, values, and behaviour of policymakers, the nature and scope of public problems, the impact policies, and other facets of the policy process are often difficult to acquire or simply not available. Explicit theory, quantitative data, and careful, rigorous analysis have not been as frequently utilised in studying policy as would be possible or desirable.

It can be concluded that the purpose of this book in a nutshell is to develop a basic understanding of how policy making processes function or are conducted. It is also involved in

conflicting issues and struggles between and or among conflicting interests, desires and values on matters to do with policy. Public policymaking by Anderson J, is different from Policy paradox by Deborah in the sense that policy paradox is devoted to improving governance which become its target audience and its strength is mainly on the profound disgust for uncertainties and inconsistencies of politics. It is also interested in tensions between economic rational analysis of policy ideas and political process as it addresses policy issues just as the same with public policymaking by Anderson.

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