

POLICY FORMULATION PROCESS

Executive summary

Policy is a statement of intent which aims at mitigating the negative effects and enhances the positive impacts that has been noticed by the government. There are several steps that are taken to form a policy. Government is responsible for formulating national policies. The policy must have a goal, objectives, applicability and scope, effective date and responsibilities among others

Introduction

A policy is a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes. A policy is a statement of intent and is implemented as a procedure. Policies are generally adopted by the board of or senior governance body within an organization or government. Policies play important role in both subjective and objective decision making.

Policy may apply to government, private sector organizations and groups, as well as individuals. A policy is different from a law. The difference is that a law can compel or prohibit behaviors for example a law requiring the payment of taxes on income while a policy guides actions toward those that are most likely to achieve a desired outcome

Objectives

The main objective of a policy is to avoid some negative effect that has been noticed in the organization or country by the government and to seek some positive benefit.

Steps in developing a policy

1. **Problem identification or Agenda setting** – This is initial stage. It recognizes a certain subject as a problem demanding further government attention.
2. **Policy Formulation** – This stage involves exploring various options or alternative courses of action available for addressing the problem identified in the first stage. It also looks at appraisal, dialogue or public consultation, formulation and consolidation.
3. **Decision-making** - Government decides on an ultimate course of action, whether to perpetuate the policy status quo or alter it. The decision can be positive or negative or no-action.
4. **Implementation** – This is when ultimate decision made earlier is put into practice.
5. **Evaluation** – This is the final step. It assesses the effectiveness of a public policy in terms of its perceived intentions and results. Policy actors attempt to determine whether the course of action is a success or failure by examining its impact and outcomes. If there are gaps the policies can be reviewed to reflect the current situation.

Institution arrangement

In Malawi policy issues are vested in the hands of Government. The concerned Department or Government Ministry submits the draft policy after wider consultations of general public and data collection to Ministry of Justice and Constitution Affairs for vetting. Ministry of Justice and Constitution Affairs prepares a position paper which is then presented to Cabinet Committee and then Parliament for enactment.

Content in the policy

Policies are typically promulgated through official written documents. Policy documents often come with the endorsement or signature of the executive powers within the government to legitimize the policy and demonstrate that it is considered in force. Such documents often have standard formats that are particular to the department. While such formats differ in form, policy documents usually contain certain standard components including

- **Background**, indicating any reasons, history, and intent that led to the creation of the policy, which may be listed as motivating factors. This information is often quite valuable when policies must be evaluated or used in ambiguous situations, just as the intent of a law can be useful to a court when deciding a case that involves that law.
- **Definitions**, providing clear and unambiguous definitions for terms and concepts found in the policy document.
- A **purpose statement**, outlining why the government department is issuing the policy, and what its desired effect or outcome of the policy should be.

- An **applicability and scope** statement, describing who the policy affects and which actions are impacted by the policy. The applicability and scope may expressly exclude certain people, organizations, or actions from the policy requirements. Applicability and scope is used to focus the policy on only the desired targets, and avoid unintended consequences where possible.
- An **effective date** which indicates when the policy comes into force.
- A **responsibilities** section, indicating which stakeholders and government departments or ministries are responsible for carrying out individual policy statements. Many policies may require the establishment of some ongoing function or action. Responsibilities often include identification of any relevant oversight and governance structures.
- **Policy statements** indicating the specific regulations, requirements, or modifications to organizational behavior that the policy is creating.

Conclusion

Policy play important role when addressing special problems that have been identified by the government and that can only be addressed by policy intervention. Local communities need to participate in participate in policy cycle stages such as policy formulation process and implementation for the policy to be effective.

Reference

Linda C.K, (2011). *Policy Practice for Social Workers: New Strategies for a New Era*. Pearson. ISBN 9780205022441

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