



PUBLIC POLICIES, PUBLIC AND THE DISCIPLINE OF ECONOMICS

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Abstract

The purpose of the present article is to address three important issues: One, what makes public policies in true sense 'public'; two, what should be the role of public in the framing and implementation of these policies, and three, the place and role of an economist in the public policy framework. Here it is being emphasized that the place and role of an economist in the overall policy framework as an analyst who takes care about *who gets, what, when and how* can be very important for the development of society and economy in terms of overall social and economic development.

INTRODUCTION

We live in different states and throughout our life span we are affected by different kinds of public policies framed by these states. State in itself is a socially constructed institution. State cannot exist without society, i.e. people inhabiting within a particular piece of territory. It means the two, i.e. state and society are inseparable. One of the principal components of a state is government. It is through the institution of government that governance of society members takes place. As with the passage of time, requirements of society changes, changes in the nature of policies framed for the public are noticed. Such policies can be of national, regional or local in nature. Sometimes, public policies can also be specific to religion, tribe, caste, class, gender or area. Such specific policies are especially framed and implemented for those who remain at the margins for a much longer period of time. Related necessary steps are taken for bringing these people into the mainstream of society and economy. It is the duty of the government to frame good policies for the public and to implement these in a rational manner. The implementation of public policies is the process of governance. If the policies are implemented in a proper way and the benefits of different socio-economic policies reach the common man, without any discrimination, it is known as 'good governance'. It is here pertinent to mention that providing social justice to each citizen has remained one of the objectives behind the 'welfare state'.

There has been a lot of discussion on public policies and their implementation from time to time. A lot of discussions are going on across the world on the public policies and their relevance. One of the possible reasons behind these are that the results of (some of the) public



policies are not reaching to the needy or at the ground level. That is the reason scholars across the world keep on thinking and doing researches about rising socio-economic inequalities and the need of inclusive growth. This is one way of questioning the nature of public policies and the need for their re-evaluation with time.

1. What is ‘Public’ in ‘Public Policies’?

The word ‘public policy’ gained wider audience through the work of an American political scientist, Harold Lasswell. Despite having some differences on what makes ‘public policy’ really ‘public’, political scientists and economists are of the view that all such policies which are “made by a government in response to public’s problem and demand, it may be implemented by public or private sectors or both” (Sapru, 2017:3) are called ‘public policies’. In simple terms, as these policies deal with the public concern and made by the government of a state, these are called ‘public policies’. It is important to mention here that all judicial decisions also do matter both in the formation and implementation of public policies. It means that in general, public policies refer to the decisions and actions taken by governments to address various socio-economic issues. They can encompass a wide range of issues such as education, healthcare, environment protection, economic development and much more. Public policies aim to achieve specific goals, solve problems or promote the overall well-being of the public. It is through the mechanism of governance that various decisions are made and actions are implemented in the society or organization. It involves the coordination and management of resources, rules and institutions to ensure effective policy implementation. The other thing related with public policies is that these policies are for common public interests and not private, i.e. for individual interests. Take the cases of *Ration Card*, *Aadhaar Card*, *PAN (Permanent Account Number)*, *Voter Identification No.*, *Driving License*, *Vehicle Registration No.* or any kind of housing, education, agriculture, transport policy. Such policies are framed and implemented keeping in view the larger interests of society.

It all means that in the formation and implementation of public policy, government intervention is there. Otherwise also, we require and observe government’s role at every stage of our life, i.e. from getting the birth certificate to the death certificate. The real role of the government is to observe and understand problems faced by the people and to frame and implement related policies. Time to time evaluation of such policies is also must to check the proper use of public money.

In the context of public policies and governance, it is essential to have transparent, accountable, and inclusive decision-making process to ensure that policies are developed, executed and evaluated in the best interests of the public. Good governance practices are vital for the success and legitimacy of public policies.



Framing, implementing and evaluation of public policies are necessary from the side of the government so that every section of society is benefitted. This task is comparatively easier in homogeneous societies than a federal, multi-ethnic democratic country like India. The problem is that with having a number of political parties on the scene, each political party contest not only to maintain its electoral base but also to make dent in other's base. With this nature of politics, if a political party at the helm of affairs at a particular period of time makes efforts to stop a wrong practice, other parties on the other hand, tries to attract the same voters on one pretext or the other. Similarly when one political party is voted to power then it tries to intervene in the existing policies or prepare its own policies in the name of public policies to attract and maintain its own vote bank. This is one of the reasons that the type and nature of public policies keep on changing from one political party regime to the other and even their number kept on increasing which create confusion among public about which policy exists for what, for whom and when. With more private capital investments on the scene, the relations between the government, public and the market are to seen afresh in terms of how to distribute the resources. In fact, the central core element of government should always be what Abraham Lincoln once said

Government of the people, by the people, for the people...

2. Role of the Public in Public Policies:

It is through the mechanism of various socio-economic public policies that the government reach the public. No state (through the government) can progress unless and until the government frame and implement public policies in right perspective, however, the public/citizens equally share the responsibility of abiding by the government/court rulings. No government in the world can place a watchman for an individual citizen to see whether he/she is following the issued guidelines/rulings or not. Just take a few cases:

(i) Smoking at public places:

Considering the harmful effect of smoking, the Supreme Court of India prohibited it at public places. Not only public places were defined but it also directed the government to make the general public aware of this order. But see what is having at public places around us.

(ii) Use of Single-use Plastic bags:

Despite official ban of specific plastic bags, markets are full of such bags and citizens as consumers are also not serious about it.

(iii) Encroachments on public land:

Despite specific policies on the built up area, encroachments both in rural and urban areas is rampant and has become a continuous process. Illegal colonies in urban come up and with time the people living in these areas pressurize different political parties to regularise these colonies. Similarly cases of encroachment on public property resources in rural areas (i.e *Shamlat land*) are also regularly coming up.

(iv) Pollution:



One of the main reasons behind the internationally debated issue of climate change is increase in the green house gases, especially the carbon dioxide through vehicles, blasting of crackers during specific festivals. There are specific policies and guidelines in this direction also. It needs to be observed how serious we are about the pollution of all kinds.

Despite lapses (deliberate or otherwise) on the part of the public in the proper implementation of public policies, the public can and should play a very crucial role in the implementation of public policies. Their involvement and participation are essential for several reasons:

(i) Legitimacy

Public policies gain legitimacy when these are developed with the input and support of the people they affect. Involving the public in the implementation process helps build trust and ensures that policies are responsive to the needs and preferences of the citizens;

(ii) Accountability

Public participation holds policymakers and government officials accountable for their decisions. When the public is engaged in policy implementation, they can monitor progress, provide feedback and hold the responsible authorities accountable for any shortcoming or mismanagement.

(iii) Feedback and Evaluation

The public involvement allows for a continuous feedback loop. Citizens can provide insights into the effectiveness and impact policies on the ground, which helps policy-makers to make necessary adjustments and improvements as and when needed.

(iv) Innovative Solutions

Public participation often brings diverse perspectives and ideas to the table. Engaging with citizens, communities, and stake holders can lead to innovative solutions that might not have been considered otherwise.



(v) Improved Implementation

When the public is involved in policy implementation there is higher chances of successful execution. Citizens can contribute their knowledge, resources and efforts, making the implementation process smoother and more efficient.

(vi) Social Acceptance

Inclusive policy implementation ensures that policies are more socially accepted. When people feel they have had a say in decision-making they are more likely to support and cooperate with the policies, leading to better compliance and outcomes.

(vii) Reduced Resistance

If the public is excluded from the implementation process, there is a higher risk of resistance, protests, or even non-compliance. Engaging the public can help identify potential barriers or objections and find ways to address these proactively.

(viii) Capacity Building

Public participation can lead to capacity building within communities and organizations. It empowers citizens to understand policies, participation in decision-making and take ownership of their implementation, fostering a sense of responsibility and active citizenship.

Involvement of public in the implementation of public policies leads to more effective, legitimate and sustainable outcomes. It strengthens democratic governance and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among citizens, making them active partners in shaping their own society's and economy's future.

From the citizen side, what is apt is what John F. Kennedy spoke his famous words in his inaugural address as the President of USA:

Ask not what your country can do for you

Ask what you can do for your country

3. Place and Role of an Economist in Policy Framework

In the overall public policy framework, their implementation and time to time evaluation, the role of economists seem paradoxical. "Most economists hope that their work will have an impact on public policy. Yet, few economists devote much time or effort to studying the



mechanisms by which economic writings and research are translated into public policy results. Many economists also know little about the role of economists in government, including their role as economic analysts in their own right and as conduits for academic and other outside research into policy-making circles” (Nelson,1987:49). This, however, does not mean that there are no efforts in linking economics with public policies. There are some good works on the evaluation of public policies (Rudolph and Rudolph,1987; Dreze and Sen, 1995), and how to improve the role of an economist in the public policy framework (Ward, 1972; Pechman, 1975; Just, Hueth and Schmitz, 1982; Kuttner, 1985; Colander and Klamer, 1987).

To understand and evaluate any public policy is part and partial of welfare economics which basically deals with questions related to who get? what?, when? and How? From this perspective, it is the academic duty of the students of economics to not only study various kinds of socio-economic policies framed, implemented by the government(s) but also to evaluate these in different areas and in different time periods. Through such process, one can identify gaps in the policy framework either in its framing or in implementation part. This is a wonderful way to produce brilliant critical economists who can serve the interests of society at large. This will certainly transform them as professional economists. For this transformation, there is an urgent need to have a fresh look at the existing curriculum of economics (graduation and post-graduation) in terms of course-content on understanding and evaluation of different public policies.

CONCLUSION

In concluding remarks it is submitted that unless and until there is a proper inclusion of public in the formation of public policies, i.e. what people in reality want for them, evaluation of such policies from time to time so that unnecessary opposition/objections can be studied; obedience from citizens (with certain level of freedom for opposition, if logical), we cannot have good governance or governance through technology, i.e. e-governance. In this overall process, an economist with his/her ample knowledge of society and economy can play a very crucial role for the framing, implementation and evaluation of various kinds of social and economic policies.



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