

Public Policy

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The scope of public policy is determined by the kind of role that the state adopts for itself in a society. In the nineteenth century, the state was assigned a limited role and it was expected that it would merely act as a regulator of social and economic activity and not its promoter. However, since the middle of the twentieth century, the state has come to be perceived as an active agent in promoting and shaping societies in its various dimensions. As a consequence, public policies expanded their scope from merely one of regulation to that of promoter development and enterprise.

'Public Policy', as an academic pursuit emerged in the early 1950s and since then it has been acquiring new dimensions, and is now attempting to acquire the status of a discipline. This concept of policy science was first formulated by Harold Lasswell in 1951. As a study of products of government, policy forms a significant component in several social science disciplines like political science, public administration, economics, and management. Public policy is frequently used term in our daily life and in academic literature, where we often make references to national health policy, education policy, wage policy, agricultural policy, foreign policy and so on.

It is an area, which had to do with those spheres that are labelled as public. The concept of public policy presupposes that there is a domain of life that is not private or purely individual, but common. In the past, studies on public policy were dominated by researchers and students of political science. They broadly concentrated on the institutional structure and philosophical justifications of the government. The focus was rarely on the policies themselves.

Political science hence was to some extent preoccupied with the activities of the various political institutions and groups in relation to their success in the pursuit of political power. It hardly recognised the role, which such organisations played towards the formation of policy as one of its main concerns. Yet, policy is an important element of the political process.

The starting point is that 'public policy' has to do with those spheres, which are so labelled as 'public' as opposed to spheres involving the 'private'. The public dimension is generally

referred to 'public ownership' or control for 'public purpose.' The public sector comprises that domain of human activity, which is regarded as requiring governmental intervention or common action.

Like the idea of 'public', the concept of 'policy' is not a precise term. Policy denotes, among other elements, guidance for action. It may take the form of:

- a declaration of goals;
- a declaration of course of action;
- a declaration of general purpose; and or
- an authoritative decision.

Policy analysis is nothing more than finding out the impact of policy. It is a technique to measure organisational effectiveness through an examination and evaluation of the effect of a programme. Thomas Dye labels "policy analysis" as the "thinking man's response" to demands.

A policy may be general or specific, broad or narrow, simple or complex, public or private, written or unwritten, explicit or implicit, discretionary or detailed and qualitative or quantitative. Here the emphasis is on public policy, that is, what a government chooses as guidance for action. A public policy may cover a major portion of its activities, which are consistent with the development policy of the country. Socio-economic development, equality, or liberty or self-reliance or similar broad principles of guidance for action may be adopted as a developmental policy or basic framework of goals.

The scope and sheer size of the public sector has grown enormously, especially in developing countries in response to the growing public needs and demands; and the increasing impact of other trends, such as, the complexity of technology, social organisation, industrialisation and urbanisation. At present, functions of all, governments in the developing countries have significantly increased. They are now concerned with the more complex functions of nation-building and socio-economic progress.

In many developing countries, there is also great pressure on governments to accelerate national development, make use of up-to-date and relevant technological innovations, adopt

and facilitate necessary institutional changes, increase national production, make full use of human and other resources, and improve the standards of living.

In India, the activist role of the state meant the assumption of responsibility for the formulation of long-term development plans and policies to set the direction, which the country would follow. So, the first major goal of public policies in our country has been in the area of socio-economic development. Wide-ranging policies were formulated in the area of industrial and agricultural development, regulation and control of the private sector.

With the onset of liberalisation, policies of deregulation were introduced. In India, the government undertook a major responsibility in the social sphere too. A number of policies aimed at national integration, protection to disadvantaged groups have come into force. Empowerment of women, and decentralisation and devolution of authority to local bodies have been adopted as major constitutional policies. On the basis of this it can be stated that the field of public policy has assumed considerable importance. It is not only concerned with the description and explanation of the causes and consequences of government activity, but also with the development of scientific knowledge about the forces shaping public policy.

There are various types of public policies.

Distributive Policy Issues

Policy issues concerned with the distribution of new resources are distributive policies. Distributive policies are meant for specific segments of society. It can be in the area of grant of subsidies, loans provision of education, welfare or health services or other public assistance schemes. Some more examples of distributive policies are adult education programme, food security, social insurance, scholarships to students from disadvantaged social backgrounds, assistance to aged, physically challenged persons, etc.

Redistributive Policy Issues

Redistributive policy issues are concerned with changing the distribution of existing resources. Redistributive policies are concerned with the rearrangement of policies, which are concerned with bringing about basic socio-economic changes. Certain public goods and welfare services are disproportionately divided among certain segments of the society, these goods and services are streamlined through redistributive policies.

Regulatory Policy Issues

Regulatory policy issues are concerned with regulation and control of activities. They deal with regulation of trade, business, safety measures, public utilities, etc. This type of regulation is done by independent organisations that work on behalf of the government. In India, the Reserve Bank of India, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), etc. are engaged in regulatory activities.

In conclusion one can say that a policy is purposive and deliberately formulated. Policy must have a purpose or a goal. It does not emerge at random or by chance. Once a goal is decided the policy is devised in such a way that it determines the course of action needed to achieve that goal. Hence;

- ii) A policy is well thought-out and is not a series of discrete decisions.
- iii) A policy is what is actually done and not what is intended or desired; a statement of goals does not constitute a policy.
- iv) Policy also delineates a time frame in which its goals have to be achieved.
- v) Policy follows a defined course of action in a sequential order viz., formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.