

MULTIPLICITY IN PUBLIC POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Failures in service delivery or policy outcomes are in some instances ascribed to single and linear causes. Similarly, the successes of policy outcomes are seemingly due to one success factor. This article attempts to indicate the multiple factors influencing implementation outcomes. The emphasis of multiplicity provides a clearer understanding of real policy implementation. Investigation into multiple policy actors and the relation with structures and outcomes provide a meaningful perspective on policy implementation.

INTRODUCTION

In policy implementation there are multiple factors influencing implementation outcomes. There are also many different models in the literature that deal with implementation and variables influencing implementation. In the past the focus on policy implementation tended to converge on the rational or top-down models promoted by Van Meter and Van Horn (Jordan 1995: 5) and Sabatier and Mazmanian (Ryan 1996: 34). These models measured how set goals have been achieved in action and predominantly promote central control. These models were criticised as an insufficient foundation for studies of implementation and in turn led to the interest in the bottom-up models and, more recently, the models of bargaining and evolution in analysis of implementation (Jordan 1995: 6). According to these more contemporary models that advocate the evolving, mutually adapting and exploratory process of policy and programme implementation, it is affected to a large degree by the strategies and policies of the state and corporations and how the people accept or react to how they are implemented. In this sense, implementation is seen as a learning process, rather than simply a consequential step after a policy or strategy is formulated.

The variables that affect implementation outcomes, in particular multiplicity of participants and multiplicity of perspectives, need to be examined in view of the various models and approaches in programme implementation in order to formulate a coherent framework that would be capable of being applied by public sector managers (Ryan 1996: 34). It is important to understand policy implementation and how it changes its surroundings, how it changed itself in the process and how it can be influenced to achieve the goals it set out to achieve (Turton, Brynard, & Meissner 2002: 12).

THE CONCEPT OF POLICY AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Policy-making is defined by Hanekom as (Hanekom as quoted by Turton, Ashton, & Cloete 2003: 314):
“the activity preceding the publication of a goal, while a policy statement is the making known, the formal articulation, the declaration of intent or the publication of the goal to be pursued. Policy is thus indicative of a goal, a specific purpose, a programme of action that has been decided upon. Public policy is therefore a formally articulated goal that the legislator intends pursuing with society or with a societal group.”

Policy implementation can therefore be defined as those actions by public and private people or groups of people that result in the achievement of objectives that form part of a policy or policy decisions (Van Horn and Van Meter as quoted by Rampedi 2003: 26). Policy implementation ensures that the government and ancillary organisations can carry out the policies. To Pressman and Wildavsky (Pressman and Wildavsky

as quoted by Rampedi 2003: 24) implementation means that part of public programming that follows the initial policy-making, setting of goals and funding it. It is the carrying out of a policy, the forged links in the causal chain to obtain results. Changing actors and different perspectives of these actors can make implementation difficult and complex with a process fraught with conflict.

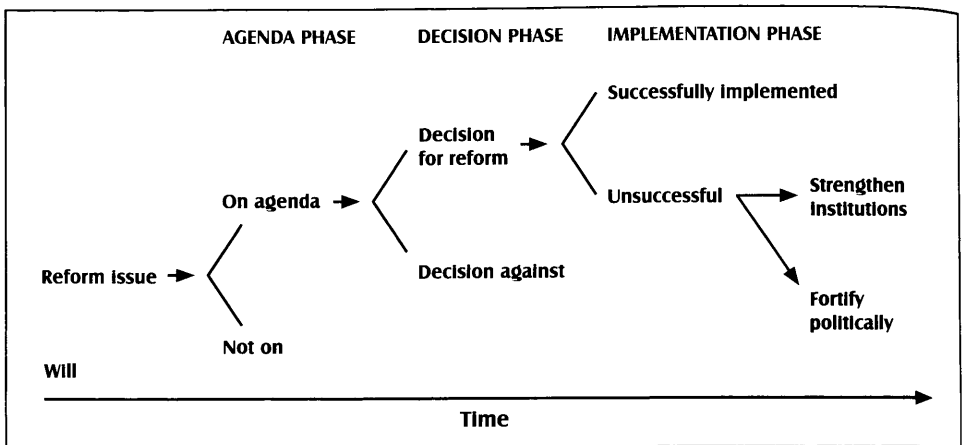
According to Lane (1993), the concept of implementation is characterised by a problematic structure. Webster's Dictionary states that 'implementation' means either the act of implementing or the state of having been implemented; it presents the following key words for 'implement': to carry out; accomplish, fulfill, to give practical effect to and ensure actual fulfillment by concrete measures, to provide instruments or means of practical expression (Lane 1993:90). The formal definition might be: where implementation refers to the bringing about, by means of outputs, of outcomes that are congruent with the original intention(s). Thus, implementation has a double meaning: to give practical effect to or execution on one hand, and fulfillment or accomplishment of its objectives, on the other. This shows a basic ambiguity in the notion of implementation: implementation is an end state or policy execution. The Oxford English Dictionary notes the same double meaning: to complete, perform; to fulfill. Since the concept of implementation implies that these two entities are objective and outcomes satisfy two different relationships: the causal function and the accomplishment function.

Two ideas are fundamental to the concept of implementation: that the policy programme is the output that brings about the outcomes in such a way that the latter accomplish the objectives of the policy. Implementation assessment focuses on the operation of a public policy and its consequences. It includes three logically separate activities: (a) clarification of the objectives involved (the goal function), (b) statement of the relationship between outputs and outcomes in terms of causal effectiveness (the causal function); and (c) clarification of the relation between objectives and outcomes in order to affirm the extent of goal achievement i.e. (the accomplishment function) (Lane 1993:92).

Each of the three tasks presents its own peculiar problems. Together, they imply that it may be difficult to judge the effectiveness of implementation. The ends and means, the intentions of the policies are formulated and enacted by various kinds of actors in the political process. What is an end or a means is an intentional object to some actor, which means that any definition of implementation must specify the actors involved in the process. These actors may be divided into two sets, the formulators and the implementers. To illustrate the multiplicity in policy implementation, the following section provides two models of implementation.

MODELS OF IMPLEMENTATION

According to Lane (1993) implementation models were suggested in response to the neglect of the various stages of policy execution at government level, sometimes called the missing link. To further highlight the complexity and multiplicity of factors that affect implementation Brynard in Cloete (2002:176) states that the process can be affected by the content of policy, its context, the commitment of implementers, the clients the policy is expected to serve and other coalitions of influence. This is commonly referred to as the 5-C protocol of policy implementation. This is contrary to what reductionism scholars say implementation is. They assume that if a policy is decided upon, implementation will be carried out automatically, because to implement a policy, in their view, is simple, straightforward and mechanical, once resources are made available. This state of affairs is described by Lane (1993) as mechanical translation of goals into routine procedures, while Grindle and Thomas (1991) regard it as a linear approach to implementation. The linear model is provided in Figure 1 to illustrate this point in a tree format. The two authors explain that most decision-makers and policy analysts in the past have created the impression that a proposed reform gets on the agenda for Government action. A decision is then made on the proposal or it is rejected. If accepted, the new policy is then implemented either successfully or unsuccessfully. In this model the decision is seen as the most critical, and crucial, choice and implementation is seen as a matter of carrying out that which has



Source: Grindle & Thomas (1991:123)

Figure 1: A linear model of policy reform

been decided upon. Successful implementation is viewed as a question of whether or not the implementing institution is strong enough for the task. If implementation is unsuccessful, the usual remedy is to call for greater efforts to strengthen institutional capacity or to blame failure on lack of political will that sometimes becomes a catch-all culprit.

However, the reality is sometimes inconsistent with this linear approach. Björkman (1994) argues that implementation is a complex, interactive and ongoing process of decision-making, which is the most crucial part of the policy process since the policy outcome depends on how successful implementation has been. Brinkerhoff et al (2000) agree with Björkman that the policy implementation process is at least as political as it is technical. It is complex and highly interactive and calls for consensus building. Thus, it can be pointed out that implementation does not always happen automatically and, as a result, it can sometimes be successful or unsuccessful, altered after a decision to pursue it has been made, and removed from the agenda because those responsible for implementing it are convinced that it cannot be carried through.

As an alternative to the linear model, the interactive model is proposed as a more realistic representation of the implementation process (Quade 1974; Dye 1985; and Grindle and Thomas 1991). Figure 2 illustrates this model. In this model, efforts to alter an existing situation through policy upsets an existing equilibrium and elicits some response or reaction from those affected by the changes or the stakeholders and sometimes the actors as well. This reaction from the stakeholders, the model explains, may occur at any point along the pro-cess. Unlike the linear model, the interactive model views policy implementation as a process of decision and implementation. This determines whether implementation may go on or return to the agenda or to any point on the model, depending on where conflict occurs. In most cases some items on the agenda are acted upon but many are not, often because of the preferences, perceptions and actions of policy elites and their appreciation of the economic and political environment. This state of affairs is visible in many African governments.

In the implementation process, political, financial, managerial and technical resources are needed. Therefore, throughout the implementation process it is important to guard against those opposing the policy change blocking access to these required resources. The process confirms the fact that sometimes the policy outcome is very different from what the planners conceived due to the process of change and conflict that occurs in the implementation stage.

THREE MAIN APPROACHES OF IMPLEMENTATION STUDIES

The top-down approach is also known as the rational or systems model. This approach is characterised by its hierarchical and control themes. The broad aim is to improve performance, thus to achieve the top’s goals. The policy is an independent variable, a starting point and a benchmark which can and should be controlled by sanctions (Jordan 1995: 6).

The bottom-up approach was a critique on the top-down approach. Implementers of this approach, also known as street level bureaucrats, (Brodkin 2000) sought to achieve greater allegiance between policy-making and policy delivery. The policy is dependent upon the interaction between actors at the local level and the aim is to explain what actually happens when policies are implemented.

The evolution and bargaining models see policy implementation as a bargaining, exchange and negotiation action. The aim of this approach is to explain how policy is the product of bargaining and negotiation between interests and policy is seen as dependent upon a process of bargaining. Implementation is seen as one part of an ongoing process of bargaining and compromise with inputs from the top and innovations from the bottom (Jordan 1995: 15).

In the implementation process policy-makers may use elements from all or some of the above approaches, whichever suit their purposes for the policy at hand.

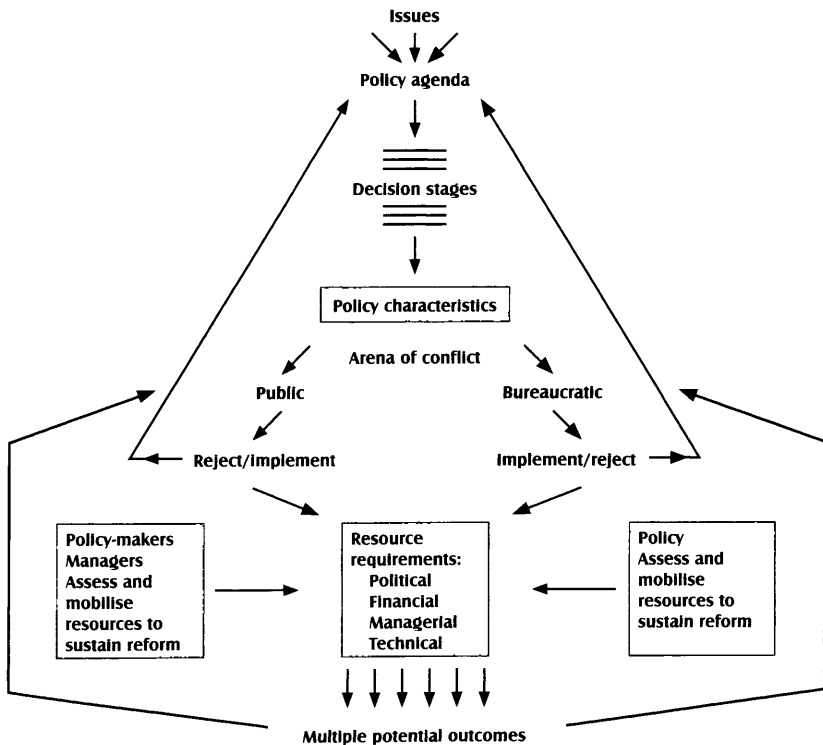


Figure 2: The process of policy implementation

Source: (Grindle & Thomas 1991:127)

PRESSMAN AND WILDAVSKY'S PREMISE ON MULTIPLICITY

The work of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) inquired into the discrepancies between the articulated policy goals set in Washington and the little relation of this goal to what was on the ground in Oakland (Colebatch 1998:56). Thus, the problem highlighted in implementation was that of outcomes being different to stated objectives and goals. Pressman and Wildavsky explained this phenomenon as relating to multiplicity of participants and perspectives.

They argued that between the enactment of policy and its implementation, there are numerous decision points, between public and private decision-making bodies (John 1998:27). These decision points in turn reduce the likelihood of the policy-maker's objective being carried out. According to John (1998:27), Pressman and Wildavsky's assumption amounts to a probabilistic theory, where the more the decision points are, the more likely the policy is to fail and vice versa.

Multiplicity is also viewed as a top-down approach to policy research (Lazin 1998:154), which sees policy implementation in an inter-organisational context with a hierarchical arrangement, where the central elite controls lower bureaucrats. That is to say, the top-down approach to policy implementation also sees the discretion and autonomy of local actors as adding to the likelihood of failure in policy implementation.

Looking at the case of multiplicity in decision points, the current milieu in local government in South Africa consists of municipalities with wide-ranging partnerships and many sectors. Citing a case of the Local Economic Development Policy (LED: 2002:38), the institution of co-operative government as enshrined in the South African Constitution (Constitution 1996: Chapter 3), entails that policy is negotiated between the three spheres of government as well as the private sector. Some core problems that have been noted are:

- The issue of varying strategic planning, goal-setting and implementation processes by provinces and municipalities with respect to the LED (LED: 2002:40), resulting in fragmented and differing development outcomes.
- The issue of non-clarification of roles between national government, provinces, municipalities, civil society and the private sector, resulting in different players having different understandings and interpretations of the LED policy (LED 2002: 40).

These examples of the complexities in the different decision points in implementing the LED show that, like that of Britain (John 1998:28), the South African government must navigate the numerous tangles of vertical government departments, regional organisations, the private sector and municipalities to implement policies.

Does this then mean that the route to 'perfect' policy implementation (the ideal outcome from the perspective of the policy-maker), as modelled by Hood (in John 1998:29) can be traced to the Pressman and Wildavsky probabilistic theory of multiplicity? That is, the fewer the decision points the greater the likelihood that the policy will succeed.

IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES BY MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS

Policies are developed, finalised and approved, but there is no time when the implementation plan is clearly added in writing. Again according to Glass (1999) policies are not self-executing; once they are finalised agencies or administrators are responsible for their implementation. Plans are always the responsibility of implementers. The Reconstruction and Development Programme attempted to come up with a coherent programme that intended to build the nation, but implementation of it demonstrated something else. The vision was there but because of a lack of consistency as well as stability in the state actions did not run the way they were planned. As indicated earlier on, the problem lies in the reactive approach to the development of most policies.

It is important to state that stakeholders are critical in policy formulation, but sometimes handling huge projects which involve a multiplicity of stakeholders can lead to the downfall of the policy. Looking into the South African situation, particularly during the development of the Reconstruction and Development Programme, nearly all stakeholders were involved. They came up with a brilliant document which is comprehensive and still complex to implement. All the programmes were basically reactive to the situation at the time. When the implementation stage came, for instance, in the case of housing, people were expecting proper houses only to find that they got houses that do not meet their expectations.

Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) state that the multiplicity of participants and perspectives combined to produce a formidable obstacle course for the programmes which were designed to reduce unemployment and build the cities. The legacy of the past just like it was in South Africa was so dynamic that addressing it at face value would always suggest a number of problems and stakeholders to be involved. It needed a good planning mechanism which was not really reactive but rather looking beyond the problem as experienced at that point in time. In many instances policy implementers are forced to change the intention of the goal for the simple reason that they have their own interpretation. Lindblom (1980) states that multiple conflicting criteria are universal phenomena in policy implementation, appearing also in areas far removed from ordinary policy implementation in democracies. As indicated above, this is a human error as people do not have the same understanding of the issues as presented. Again the policy implementers must try to be sympathetic to the goals of the policy, have adequate resources, as well as trained people to implement.

When implementing policy there are several tollgates to observe and analysis of progress to make to find out whether a particular programme could be reviewed or be started all over again. There is also a degree of bureaucracy involved where certain actions need to be approved before they can be implemented. Some stakeholders, even when the objective of the policy is clearly written, tend to join with their own agendas.

One other critical component of policy implementation is the decentralisation of power where, for instance, the provincial governments are given power to initiate programmes accordingly and develop policies of their own which would, however, not be antagonistic to the national policies. It has been found that in some provinces in South Africa problems are experienced when policies are implemented, particularly in areas where the ruling party has the minority support. Even when a policy can produce a positive impact, it is not accepted and consequently the community suffers.

Implementation is not simply an administrative or managerial problem, but a complex political process of who gets what, when, how, where and from whom (Turton, Brynard, & Meissner 2002: 11). Because there are many actors that operate on multiple levels it complicates the implementation process further. Consider the example of the Department of National Health's Anti-retroviral Treatment (ARVT) Programme, which has been conceived and rolled out at national sphere. The implementation of the ARVT Programme takes place in the provincial and municipal sphere with multiple actors such as nurses, doctors, pharmacists, dieticians, administrative public officials and laboratory technicians that all have to play a role at their own level. The medication is being procured through a national tender by national Government, the pharmacist who receives and dispenses it is at provincial level, the doctors and nurses who prescribe it can be at provincial or municipal sphere. The ARVT Programme has multiple aspects, such as treatment, prevention, nutrition, drug resistance and treatment compliance and it is being implemented by a multiplicity of actors, with a multiplicity of perspectives in different layers of government. By definition the implementation of such a programme will be faced with enormous difficulties and challenges.

CONCLUSION

Policy implementation can be studied from many different perspectives using different theoretical tools. Not one perspective can be singled out as better than the rest, as each attempt to explain policy and

programme implementation and the factors influencing it. The questions to ask of the policy implementation process are: Were the intentions of the policy translated into tangible outputs? Did the outcomes of the policy match its goals? What is being implemented? How is policy-making differentiated from policy implementation? In a South African sense it means identifying and examining the relationship between the actors and structures in the national, provincial and municipal spheres; the intergovernmental relationships between these spheres as well as the government's relationship with the public.

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