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WHAT CONNOTES "PUBLIC POLICY"?

Public Policy helps in removing deficiencies and improving conditions in a particular area of interest to the public. It helps the policy making agencies to assess public dealing methods and leads to an advancement of public administration. It further helps to examine what the government is doing, the procedure adopted by it for the same and its administration. Public policy may take the form of programmes, projects, budget allocations etc.

Policy science was first developed by Daniel Lerner and Harold D. Lasswell in the year 1951 and is concerned with social consequences and policy implications. It is a multi-method problem and future oriented approach aimed at general promotion of social welfare. Policies concern themselves with a wide array of issues such as civil rights, poverty, environmental issues, unemployment and international trade etc. The dependence on economics for formulation of policies was at a later stage diluted to consider other disciplines which helped in a better understanding of societal needs.

Policy making requires continuous input of resources, and motivation. It is dynamic in nature and undergoes change from time to time. Policies which are formulated are vague and elastic in nature pertaining to the uncertainty which allows the makers to alter the policies as per the situations and needs that may arise in the future. It is influenced by factors such as public opinion, rational analysis and the political and

economic situation of the country. It is not an independent or isolated process as it is influenced greatly by the actions of politicians, legacy of the past governments, the nature of government organizations and economic considerations.

DEFINITIONS IN PUBLIC POLICY

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a policy may be defined as a set of ideas or a plan of what to do in particular situations that has been agreed to officially, by a group of people, a business organization, a government, or a political party. The citizens of a country have various demands, needs and requirement and in order to meet these demands, the government comes up with policies which are known as public policies.

Few of the eminent personalities and theorists of political science defined public policy as:

"Public policy is the relationship of government unit to its environment."- Robert EyeStone

"Public policy is whatever government chooses to do or not to do"- Thomas R. Dye

"Public policy is not a decision; it is a course of action of a person, group or government within a given environment providing opportunities and obstacles which the policy was proposed to utilize and overcome in an effort to reach a goal or realize an objective or purpose."- Carl J. Friedrich

The meaning of public policy can thus be understood as governmental decisions taken in pursuance of certain goals or objectives for the benefit of the masses. It should however, not be confused with mere decision making as it includes complex processes

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involving actual resource allocation necessary for projects and programmes designed to respond to perceived public problems.

TYPES OF PUBLIC POLICY

On the basis of purpose, aims and objectives, policies can be of following types :

Substantive

Policies concerning general welfare and development of the society may be termed as substantive policies. These ensure the development of a society as a whole due to their vast area of operation. Policies relating to law and order, education, employment etc. are of the substantive kind.

Regulatory

Policies concerning regulation of trade, business, safety measures, public utilities, etc. can be understood as regulatory policies. Independent organizations such as Life Insurance Corporation, Reserve Bank of India, Hindustan Steel, State Electricity Boards etc. carry out such regulatory work on behalf of the government.

Distributive

Policies meant for specific segments of the society are distributive policies. Public welfare services, and programmes come under the purview of distributive policies.. Adult education programmes, food security and social insurance schemes are some examples of distributive policies.

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Redistributive

Policies with the aim of bringing about social and economic changes are termed as redistributive policies. These ensure redistribution of goods and welfare services that were divided amongst certain segments of the society. Low income housing and progressive taxation are examples of redistributive policies by which the tax is collected and utilised for the benefit of the underprivileged.

Capitalization

Capitalization policies entail providing financial subsidies to the State and Local Governments by the Union Government. These subsidies are also granted to the central and state business undertakings or some other important bodies if necessary. These include infrastructural and development policies for government business organisations to ensure their proper functioning.

THEORIES OF PUBLIC POLICY

The different theories or models of public policy help in a better understanding of the same. These are few of the theories:

Elite Theory

Under this theory certain entities are perceived as the elites who are given the task of policy formulation. The elites are mostly people with wealth, intelligence, political power, military might and influence, etc. They formulate policies which reflect upon their values and notions which the people are to follow due to their lack of understanding of the same. The theory is based on the idea that the majority of people do not possess the required knowledge or information to equip them with the responsibility of policy making. It does not take into account the demands and wants of the people; rather it confines itself to the preferences and opinions of the elite.

Group Theory

The group theory was propounded by A.F. Bentley in his book *"The Process of Government"*. According to this theory, various entities such as political parties, racial or religious groups and pressure groups play a significant role in influencing policies to achieve their respective group's demands. It views public policy as the result of constant bargains, compromises and negotiations amongst various influential groups.

The theory assumes and implies that groups will always join hands to press for certain issues and therefore all interests will be given an opportunity to be represented.

Rational Choice Theory

Herbert Simon propounded the rational choice theory. He defines rationality as, *"a style of behavior that is appropriate to the achievement of given goals."* It can be understood as a three step process which involves identification of the issue that requires formulation of policy, gathering of all possible alternatives to resolve such issues and lastly analysis of the alternatives to select the most cost-effective solution which must also be the most beneficial to the society. One of the basic principles of this theory is to not adopt a policy if the cost exceeds the benefit.

The rational choice assumes that the preferences and values of the society can be known and calculated.

Systems Theory

Systems theory is closely knit with the existence of a democracy, which functions with the support of the society, attained through elections. Such support is validated when the outcome of the elections are accepted and complied with by the individuals. Systems refer to a set of institutions and activities in a society that function to transform demands into authoritative decisions requiring general support of the society. The demands may be conflicting in nature in which case settlements must be reached and implemented for the conflicting parties.

The systems theory implies the interrelatedness of the systems and their ability to respond to forces in their environment, and that they will do so to preserve themselves.

Public Choice Theory

Public choice theory views public policy as the process by which self-interest individuals make collective decisions for their own benefits. Unlike the elite theory, it assumes that individuals have sufficient information and knowledge about their best interests. These theorists view individuals as rational beings acting in self interest and aim to give greater choice to individuals. It implies the application of principal-agent relation to public administration.

Game Theory

Game theory is viewed as an abstract or deductive theory of public policy . Its application arises in competitive situations where the outcome depends on the decisions or choices of two or more participants. It mainly focuses on maximizing gains and minimizing profits.

The Game theory can be understood by the Prisoner's dilemma which was developed by Merrill Flood and Melvin Dresher. It involves the rational selection of choices which ensure less profit by avoiding disastrous consequences. It emphasizes on the need for thoughtful examination of alternatives and options prior to making a decision.

PUBLIC POLICY AND STAKEHOLDERS

In every society, depending upon the nature of the agenda for the formulation of policies, various entities may express their interest. These entities might be individuals, institutions, non-governmental organizations etc. Every entity which expresses and has an interest in the set agenda can be said to be a stakeholder in that process of policy making. For instance, in the domain of public health research, the stakeholders can be the researchers, funding agencies, organizations hosting research activities, policymakers, health managers, professionals in the healthcare system, patients and the community as well as the healthcare industry. It is not possible to determine or define a particular set of stakeholders with regards to public policy.

However, stakeholders can be understood in a generic sense by classifying them under the following categories:

Individual Stakeholders – The People

Individuals can be both members within and outside the government. An individual who has the power to make a difference or can affect or be affected by the achievement of the objectives of the policy can be said to be a stakeholder. Examples of individual stakeholders in the public sector include politicians, government bureaucrats from various sectors and public sector staff responsible for implementing the programmes. Similarly, in the non-governmental sector, the stakeholder may include researchers,

media personalities, representatives from civil society organizations, support groups, women's health advocacy groups, faith-based organizations etc.

<u>Institutional Stakeholders – Places</u>

Individual stakeholders would be ineffective without institutional stakeholders facilitating enforcement of the policies. The institutions have varied functions and responsibilities such as approval of submitted proposals, drafting of policies, enforcing the policy or the laws etc.

Various parts of the government such as the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judiciary branch clearly play key roles in formal policy making. The strength of institutions involved in policy making determines the success of the policies and programs.

Institutions outside the government such as civil society groups, Non-Governmental Organisations, Not-for-Profit Organisations, advocacy groups, amongst others, also play a key role in policy making. India has over three million active Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and social movements which foster socio-economic, political and cultural development. They also play an important role in the process of promotion and protection of human rights. They work to ensure government accountability for the decisions and actions made and further act as the torch bearer for policies advancing human rights. Civil society organizations have a major role in shaping social legislations and pushing for reforms which have changed India's legislative landscape. The Right to Information Act, the National Rural Employment

Guarantee Act, the Forest Rights Act, the Right to Education Act, the Right to Food Act, and the Land Acquisition Act are examples of such laws.

Another major highlight of such an instance was the uproar in the country after the **Nirbhaya Rape Case of 2012** whereafter the civil society pressured the government to reform the laws related to sexual violence, in our country.

Another example of the civil society at the helm of legislative reform could be **The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan instance**, known for the advent of the **Right to Information Act** which arose out of the recurrent issue between the farmers and the local authorities in relation to payment of fair wages. Similarly. the **Anna Hazare movement** was a major step which led to the enactment of the **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act**, to help alleviate departmental corruption in the Indian Polity.

In a democratic country like India, the representation of public opinion in public policy is of obvious importance and implementation of such policies is essential for all democracies to ensure the development, general welfare and enforcement of fundamental & legal rights of the people.

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