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Definitions and Characteristics and Types of Public Policy  
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## PUBLIC POLICY

Public policy is a 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. Public policy is therefore the broad term refers to the policy (plan of what to do) that is formulated and implemented for the benefit of the public. If read in the light of the narrow view of Public policy then it relates to plan of action to be pursued by the Government, because Public is also used as a synonym for Government in many places.

Public policy is a goal-directed course of action, taken by government, to deal with a public problem. Governments use public policy to solve a social problem (housing, welfare), to counter a threat (crime, illegal drugs), or to pursue an objective (revenue generation). Public policy, then, is a choice made by official government bodies and agencies that affect the public interest. Public policymaking involves a series of activities that leads ultimately to a policy decision and the application of that decision.

Public policies are as old as governments. Whatever be the form, oligarchy, monarchy, aristocracy, tyranny, democracy etc., - whenever and wherever governments have existed, public policies have been formulated and implemented. To cope with the varied problems and demands of the people the government has to make many policies, these policies are called public policies.

## MEANING AND DEFINITION OF PUBLIC POLICY

There are various studies about public policy and many scholars have attempted to define public policy from different angles. Before explaining the meaning of public policy, let us first go through some of its definitions.

**Robert Eye Stone** terms public policy as "the relationship of government unit to its environment. **Thomas R. Dye** says that "public policy is whatever government chooses to do or not to do" **Richard Rose** says that "public policy is not a decision, it is a course or pattern of activity. In **Carl J. Friedrich's** opinion public policy is a proposed course of action of a person, group or government within a given environment providing opportunities and obstacles which the policy was proposed to utilise and overcome in an effort to reach a goal of realise an objective or purpose.

From these definitions, it is clear that public policies are governmental decisions, and are actually the result of activities which the government undertakes in pursuance of certain goals and objectives. It can also be said that public policy formulation and implementation involves a well-planned pattern or course of activity. It requires a thoroughly close knit relation and interaction between the important governmental agencies viz., the political executive, legislature, bureaucracy and judiciary.

### **NATURE OF PUBLIC POLICY.**

1) **Public Policies are goal oriented.** Public policies are formulated and implemented in order to attain the objectives which the government has in view for the ultimate benefit of the masses in general. These policies clearly spell out the programmes of government.

2) **Public policy is the outcome of the government's collective actions.** It means that it is a pattern or course of activity of the governmental officials and actors in a collective sense than being termed as their discrete and segregated decisions. [SEP]

3) **Public policy is what the government actually decides or chooses to do.** It is the relationship of the government units to the specific field of political environment in a given administrative system. It can take a variety of forms like law, ordinances, court decisions, executive orders, decisions etc. [SEP]

4) **Public policy is positive in the sense that it depicts the concern of the government and involves its action to a particular problem on which the policy is made.** It has the sanction of law and authority behind it. Negatively, it involves a decision by the governmental officials regarding not taking any action on a particular issue. [SEP]

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC POLICY MAKING**

The major characteristics of public policy making are:

- i. **Public Policy Making is a Very Complex Process:** Policy making involves many components. which are interconnected by communication and feedback loops and which interact in different ways. Some parts of the process are explicit (clearly expressed) and directly observable, but many others proceed through hidden channels that the officials themselves are often only partly aware of. These hidden procedures are very difficult, and often impossible to observe. Thus, guidelines are often formed by a series of single decisions that result in a 'policy' without any one of the decision makers being aware of that process.
- ii. **It is a Dynamic Process:** Policy making is a process, that is a continuing activity taking place within a structure; for sustenance, it requires a continuing input of resources and motivation. It is a dynamic process, which changes with time, the sequences of its sub-processes and phases vary internally and with respect to each other.

- iii. **Policy Making Comprises Various Components:** The complexity of public policy making as we know, is an important characteristic of policy making. Public policy formulation often involves a great variety of substructures. The identity of these substructures and the degree of their involvement in policy making, vary because of different issues, circumstances and societal values.
- iv. **Policy Structure makes Different Contributions:** This characteristic suggests that every substructure makes different, and sometimes unique, contribution to public policy. What sort of contribution substructures make, depends in part on their formal and informal characteristics which vary from society to society.
- v. **Decision-Making:** Policy making is a species of decision-making because it lets us use decision-making models for dealing with policy making.
- vi. **Lays down Major Guidelines:** Public policy, in most cases, lays down general directives, rather than detailed instructions, on the main lines of action to be followed. After main lines of action have been decided on, detailed sub-policies that translate the general theory into more concrete terms are usually needed to execute it.
- vii. **Results in Action:** Decision-making can result in action, it changes in the decision-making itself, or both or neither. The policies of most socially significant decision-making, such as most public policy making are intended to result in action. Also policies directed at the policy making apparatus itself such as efficiency drives in government are action oriented.
- viii. **Directed at the Future:** Policy making is directed at the future. This is one of its most important characteristics since it introduces the ever-present elements of uncertainty and doubtful prediction that establish the basic tone of nearly all policy making. Actual policy making tends to formulate policies in vague and elastic terms; because the future is so uncertain. It permits policy makers to adjust their policy according to emerging facts and enables them to guard against unforeseen circumstances.
- ix. **Mainly Formulated by Governmental Organs :** Public policy is also directed. in part, at private persons and non-governmental structures, as 'when it calls for a law

prohibiting a certain type of behaviour or appeals to citizens to engage in private saving. But public policy, in most cases, is primarily directed at governmental organs, and only intermediately and secondarily at other factors.

- x. **Aims at Achieving what is in the Public Interest:** However difficult it might be to find out what the "public interest" may refer to, the term never the less conveys the idea of a "general" orientation and seems therefore to be important and significant. Furthermore, there is good evidence that the image of "public interest" influences the public policy making process and is therefore at least, as conceived by the various public policy making units, a "real" phenomenon, and an important operational tool for the study of policy making.
  
- xi. **Use of Best Possible Means:** In abstract terminology, public policy making aims at achieving the maximum net benefit. Benefits and costs take in part the form of realised values and impaired values, respectively, and cannot in most cases be expressed in commensurable units. Often, quantitative techniques can therefore not be used in this area of public policy making but neither the qualitative significance of maximum net benefits as an aim nor the necessity to think broadly about alternative public policies in terms of benefits and costs is therefore reduced.
  
- xii. **Involvement of Various Bodies/Agencies:** Industrial workers, voters, intellectuals; legislators, bureaucrats, political parties, political executives, judiciary- etc. are the various organs that participate in public policy making and can influence the policy process to a great extent.

### **TYPES OF PUBLIC POLICY:**

Having explained the features of public policy making, we will now explain: the dissimilar types of public policy. There are several types of public policy like substantive, regulatory, distributive, redistributive etc.

#### **Substantive**

These policies are concerned with the general welfare and development of the society, the programmes like provision of education and employment opportunities, economic stabilization, law and order enforcement, antipollution legislation etc. are the result of substantive policy formulation. These

policies have vast areas of operation affecting the general welfare and development of the society as a whole. These do not relate to any scrupulous or privileged segments of the society. Such policies have to be formulated keeping in view the prime character of the constitution socio-economic troubles and the stage of moral claims of the society.

### **Regulatory**

Regulatory policies are concerned with regulation of trade, business, safety events, public utilities, etc. This type of regulation is done through independent organizations that work on behalf of the government. In India, we have Life Insurance Corporation, Reserve Bank of India, Hindustan Steel, State Electricity Boards, State Transport Corporations, State Financial Corporations, etc., which are occupied in regulatory activities. The policies made through the government, pertaining to these services and organizations rendering these services are recognized as regulatory policies.

### **Distributive**

Distributive policies are meant for specific segments of society. It can be in the area of grant of goods, public welfare or health services, etc. These mainly contain all public assistance and welfare programmes. Some more examples of distributive policies are adult education programme, food relief, social insurance, vaccination camps etc.

### **Redistributive**

Redistributive policies are concerned with the rearrangement of policies which are concerned with bringing in relation to the basic social and economic changes. Certain public goods and welfare services are disproportionately divided in the middle of certain segments of the society, these goods and services are streamlined through redistributive policies.

### **Capitalization**

Under the capitalization policies financial subsidies are given through the Union government to the state and local governments, such subsidies are also granted to the central and state business undertakings or some other significant sphere if necessary. Capitalization policies are dissimilar in nature than the substantive, regulatory, distributive, and redistributive policies as no provision for public welfare services is made through these.

## **STAGES IN PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS:**

A brief highlight on the several stages of public policy will clarify the actual process of public policy in India. Policy formulation is the first stage in public policy process. Through this process the demands of the system are converted into policies. But before this it has to be clearly recognized as to which demands require to be converted into policies. At the policy interpretation stage, the formulated public policy is further clarified and interpreted in order to create it fully understandable. The after that stage in

public policy process is policy education. The government through several channels of mass-media attempts to create the masses aware of the formulated policies. After this comes the stage of policy implementation, when the policies are systematically executed through the dissimilar administrative agencies at the central, state and local stages. To ascertain the impact of policies, it is very essential to keep an eye on the implementation process, to see that expenditure does not exceed the possessions accessible and to see that policies are positively affecting those for whom they are being made. For this proper monitoring of policy implementation has to be done, and policy evaluation stage is the final stage in policy process. Proper and appropriate administrative and adjudicative functions are needed for keeping a complete control in excess of the public policies.

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