
UNIT 14 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS

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14.0 LEARNING OUTCOME

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the problems arising in the course of implementation of public policies;
- Explain the causes of implementation failure; and
- Discuss the conditions for effective policy implementation.

4 1 INTRODUCTION

‘Implementation’ is the heart of administration as it consists of carrying out of basic policy decisions. In the policy cycle, it is critical to the successful fulfilment of policy objectives. But implementation is not automatic. The implementation phase is faced with numerous problems. Effective implementation requires a chain of command, and the capacity to coordinate and control; often there are shortfalls in this exercise, more so in a developing country like India. In this Unit, the focus of discussion is on explanation of the implementation deficit.

14.2 PROBLEMS IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Problems in the implementation of policy are common in all countries, be they developed or developing. Even with relatively good administrative structures, public policy often does not have its intended impact due to conceptual and political problems. Implementation deficit may be due to insufficiency of the requisite resources — of time, material, money or manpower. We will discuss problems in policy implementation under following headings.

14.2.1 Conceptual Problems

Implementation of public policy has been hindered by conceptual problems in understanding the nature of contextual problems, and the kinds of policies and procedures necessary to address these problems. These conceptual problems may be related to policy design and policy analysis.

i) Policy Design

Hogwood and Gunn argue that the chances of a successful outcome will be increased if, at the stage of policy design, attention is given to potential problems of implementation. In order to avoid major shortfalls in implementation, they offer the following ten propositions that policy makers should ensure that:

- circumstances, external to the implementing agency, do not impose crippling constraints;
- adequate time and sufficient resources are made available to the programme;
- there are no constraints in terms of overall resources, and even at each stage in the implementation process;
- policy to be implemented is based upon a valid theory of cause and effect;
- relationship between cause and effect is direct and there are few, if any, intervening links;
- there is a single implementing agency that need not depend upon other agencies for success;
- there is complete understanding of, and agreement upon the objectives to be achieved, and that these conditions persist throughout the implementation process;
- in moving towards agreed objectives, the tasks to be performed by each participant should be specified in complete detail and perfect sequence;
- there is perfect communication among, and co-ordination of, the various elements involved in the programme; and
- those in authority can demand and obtain perfect obedience.

It is obvious that these preconditions are at the same time the reasons as to why, in practice, the implementation does not take place as expected. For example, India's population policy (2000) lacks an adequate policy design. According to Singh, the problems of policy design in this particular policy include ambiguous and ill-defined objectives, and inappropriate measures to achieve the stated goals. Lack of adequate political will, and sufficient social support are other reasons. These problems in policy design are partly a product of the nature of federalism and adherence to symbolic politics that emphasises policy as an instrument to appease certain interest groups rather than a policy design, geared to achieve intended outcomes.

Another conceptual problem in policy design relates to lack of key regulatory principles in most public policies in India. It has been observed, for example, that most industries in States have not come out strongly to comply with provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974. Industry management hesitates to comply with conditions imposed by the State Pollution Control Boards, such as, treating the effluents and discharging them in an appropriate manner. Further, even when an industry installs a treatment plant, management may evade its operation in order to save the extra expenses incurred in running the plant. Industry often uses various means to circumvent the provisions of law.

Similarly, the National Water Policy (NWP) adopted by the National Water Resource Council (NWRC) in 1987, was a desirable step in the direction of evolving a national consensus. But it has largely remained unimplemented because of poor design. The revised NWP (2002) has addressed emerging issues with a national perspective. However, this NWP (2002) lacks a blue print for action. Moreover, the subject of water is being dealt with at the Centre in too many ministries. It needs to be brought under one umbrella so that a holistic view can be taken of this precious resource.

ii) Policy Analysis

Implementation of public policies in India has also been hampered by conceptual weaknesses in policy analysis. For example, the National Health Policy (1983) was adopted without examining alternative policy options. The inability to set priorities and evolve appropriate strategies for reduction in health problems by the State departments of health has resulted partly from inadequate policy analysis. Most of the State Pollution Control Boards in India suffer from lack of adequate professional staff, sufficient time, and data. In addition, major policies have been adopted without due deliberation on various policy alternatives. Often, this was due to strong adherence to secrecy within the bureaucracy.

iii) Policy Statement

Often policy statements announced by the government contain ambiguous and contradictory terms, posing problems in implementation. The implementers at the field level often face a variety of problems because the policy statements lack clarity. Consequently, implementers use their own discretion while implementing them or they refer the statements back to the higher rungs of administration for clarification. In such instances, policy implementation is adversely affected. A contradictory policy statement is often subject to different interpretations by the Courts in India amounting to a new policy. Policy Statement for Abatement of Pollution (1992), for example, stresses that 'the emphasis will be on clean technologies' and not on clean-up technologies. The focus, therefore, must be on source reduction and substitution of chemicals with safe alternatives.

1422 Political Problems

Political problems in the implementation of public policies are grave and complex. These hamper effective implementation as discussed in the following areas of politics.

i) Centralised Policy Process

Friction between central and state government relations has affected the policy implementation processes adversely. In the area of environmental protection, for example, the policy process is heavily centralised. Policy decisions taken at the central level, including goal setting and procedure, ignore the local culture. Although the central government has been enthusiastic in adopting innovative population, health, education and environmental policies and programmes, the state governments have been dragging their feet when it came to effective implementation as the latter often lacked the requisite political will. As a consequence, health or environmental quality has hardly improved in terms of the availability of safe water, clean air, and provision of healthy living conditions. Policy-makers at the central level do realise that wide gaps in implementation exist in regard to several social policies. As a whole, the organisational structure for implementation of social policies is in better shape at the central level than at the state level, especially with regard to technical expertise, and the linkage between various ministries. Indeed, most state governments do not allocate sufficient funds for education, health, environment, and population since these are perceived as a non-productive investment.

ii) Unionisation of Bureaucracy

Another glaring implementation lacuna is due to the unionisation of civil services, at the lower levels in particular. This has destroyed not only the work culture and discipline, but it also demoralised considerably the supervisory levels into withdrawal and prompting them to take the line of least resistance. The higher and the middle levels of bureaucracy are too powerless and marginalised to give any relief to citizens in cases of corruption and unresponsiveness by lower level staff at the cutting edge of administration. Further, endemic political interference by the

political executive has compounded the marginalisation of the higher bureaucracy, thereby undermining its capacity to implement public policies effectively.

iii) **Interest Group Politics**

In many cases, it is observed that the policies are not implemented because of interest group politics. For example, several industries have little concern about the environmental consequences of siting decisions, retrofitting old technology buildings, or introducing new technology. Industrialists influence the environmental policy-implementation process either directly or through business lobbies and representatives of the business interests concerned. Pressure by industrial associations during consideration of Environmental Protection Act in Parliament resulted in a weakening of the penalties for non-compliance, and also forced the government to delay enforcement of the enacted legislation. Industrial firms, in both public and private sectors, had little incentive to comply with the environmental regulations due to the low cost of non-compliance. At the same time, it is important to note that the labour unions have not taken any major initiatives for the control of pollution problems inside or outside the factory or for the safe operation of hazardous facilities. Needless to mention that most industrialists in India wield lot of political clout. They have enduring links with the elites of the ruling parties. It is, therefore, common for the exertion of political influence in the environmental policy process, thereby permitting the free play of vested interests.

Honest policy implementers face many problems and challenges from the vested interests. To protect their profit margins the industrialists go to any extent. They enlist the support of the corrupt officials and put obstacles in the way of honest officials. Every effort is made to get the policies implemented in a way, which meets their specific interests. Consequently, the implementation process remains weak and tardy.

14.2.3 Administrative Problems

One way of analysing implementation problems is to begin by thinking about the limits of administration. Christopher Hood uses the term 'perfect administration' in comparison to economists' use of 'perfect competition'. He defines 'perfect administration' as a condition in which 'external' elements of resource availability and political acceptability combine with 'administration' to produce 'perfect policy implementation'.

Some of the administrative problems that occur in the policy implementation are discussed below.

i) **Lack of Adequate Institutional Capacity**

The institutional structure and administrative capabilities for implementation of environmental laws and policies, for example, are by no means adequate in the face of the complexities of environmental, political, social, and economic problems. Here, the institutional structure includes the whole system of rules and regulations by which administrative tasks and responsibilities are clearly defined and juxtaposed with the capabilities of the administrators concerned. For example, when thirty industrial units, including a few multinational companies in West Bengal failed to comply with environment laws, the Supreme Court had to play the role of the executive. At the end of the hearing on February 7, 1995, a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court expressed its displeasure by commenting that, "these multinational concerns have huge resources, yet they are not bothered about protecting the environment".

ii) **Lack of Personnel and Financial Resources**

Further, it is observed that most of the policies are not implemented because of deficient staff, and lack of financial resources. Social policies in many developing countries have not been implemented in full scale owing to lack of trained staff. Well planned policies fail to attain the proper goals

without competent personnel. Implementation implies allocating personnel resources to the appropriate tasks and activities, motivating them to do well and rewarding them for their action. Regardless of their status, specialised knowledge, experience and qualifications, the programme personnel need to work as a cohesive team for the purpose of achieving policy results. But often there is no proper allocation of tasks to the personnel.

For moving into the implementation phases of the policies, implementers need financial and infrastructural resources. Of course, the policy makers do make provision for money for carrying out the policies. However, provision of funds in the budget does not mean much when the sanctioned amount do not usually reach the implementing agencies on time. Furthermore, the amounts sanctioned are not generally adequate to meet the requirements. At the state level, serious financial problems exist due to deficit budgets. Part of the deficit is made up by central subvention. Despite this, financial problems persist in health, and education sectors.

iii) Pressure of **Time**

It is observed that the pressure of time often creates the implementation gap. Normally, while fixing the time frame, the policy formulators do not take into consideration the prevailing conditions. They tend to be idealistic while setting the targets, and forget the workload of the respective implementing agencies. Consequently, the Head Offices press the agencies for speedy implementation. The implementation agencies, under such conditions are unable to fulfill the targets allocated under the said policy, let alone carrying out the other works on hand.

iv) Lack of Administrative Will **and** Motivation

Without the conscious cooperation of implementers, nothing can be done. It is found that social policies have remained unimplemented largely for lack of administrative will and motivation. In the present environment, officials are not likely to feel enthusiastic about implementing policies, especially in enforcing environmental laws. Even in cases where public officials are inclined to implement the environmental laws, their authority is often undermined by the manoeuvres of industrial bigwigs. Many of them fall to the dominance of economic interests and monetary temptations and end up in formalistic enforcement of the regulations.

v) Lack of Coordination **and** Cooperation

Poor coordination and missing links among the administrative agencies have also stood in the way of adequate and appropriate policy actions. For example, at the administrative level, different departments are concerned with the implementation of policies relating to poverty alleviation programmes (for example, Ministry/Department of Urban Development, Ministry/Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry/Department of Rural Development, Ministry/Department of Tribal Affairs, etc.).

Similarly, gaps in policy implementation are found in population and family planning programmes. Lack of proper coordination and cooperation among the multitude of administrative agencies is an important lacunae in the whole institutional set-up.

14.2.4 Lack of Public Involvement

Public involvement in policy implementation programmes, such as, education, health, population control, pollution control, forest conservation, etc. puts tremendous pressure on administrative staff to produce results. By staging demonstrations and protests, and by launching mass movements, the public has tried to offset the power base of interest groups and lobbies that tend to influence policy implementation in their favour. The Chipko movement in Uttar Pradesh hills and the Appiko movement in Western Ghats of Karnataka were launched against tree felling for commercial purposes. These were sporadic movements by environmental groups against such acts. Local movements

against deforestation and construction of dams are somewhat random and episodic. This has to be understood in the context of a limited resource base of the administration and the ambitious goals set for them. The strength and endurance of the peoples' movements for implementing and enforcing regulations have not been a match to that of the vested interests, which are bent upon thwarting the implementation of public policies especially in the sphere of environment protection.

14.3 CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation is seen varying along a continuum, ranging from the most successful to aborted attempts. Successful implementation involves many operations and procedures as well as time and resources. However, successful implementation should not be equated with impact measures, as implementation is not the same thing as impact. For example, the National Health Policy (adopted in 1983) may be fully implemented and yet has little intended impact. W. Williams makes an attempt to identify ways in which policy failure can be prevented. He exhorts policy makers to pay more attention to implementation capacity and sets out a checklist of questions:

- i) How well articulated is the public policy to the implementers?
- ii) How capable are the policy-makers in developing meaningful guidelines for and assistance to implementers'?
- iii) How capable are the implementers to develop and carry out a new policy?
- iv) How much power do either have to change (i.e., the policy makers and implementers) the order.

Mazmanian and Sabateir formulate a set of six sufficient conditions of effective implementation. They are noted below:

- i) The enabling legislation mandates policy objectives that are clear and consistent or at least provides substantive criteria for resolving goal conflicts.
- ii) The enabling legislation incorporates a sound theory identifying the principal factors and causal linkages that affect policy objectives and gives implementing officials sufficient jurisdiction over target groups and other points of leverage to attain the desired goals.
- iii) The enabling legislation structures the implementation process to maximise the probability that implementing officials and target groups will perform as desired. It involves assignment to sympathetic agencies with adequate hierarchical integration, supportive decision rules, sufficient financial rules, and access to supporters.
- iv) The leaders of the implementing agency possess substantial managerial and political skills. They are committed to statutory goals.
- v) The programme is actively supported by organised constituency groups and key legislators, throughout the implementation process, with the courts being neutral and supportive.
- vi) The relative priority of statutory objectives is not undermined overtime by the emergence of conflicting public policies or by changes in relevant socio-economic conditions that weaken the statute's causal theory or political support.

Similarly, Christopher Hood sets out five conditions for perfect implementation, which are stated below.

- an ideal implementation is a product of a unitary 'army' like organisation, with clear lines of authority;

- norms would be enforced and objectives given;
- people do what they are asked to;
- there should be perfect communication in and between units of organisation; and
- there would be any kind of pressures of time.

The argument put forward by these authors is that problems can be avoided by anticipating constraints and difficulties in advance. But a policy, to be implemented, must be given concrete shape. In particular, the presumptions skate over the whole issue of consensus, either in a party-political or ideological sense or in terms of organisational interests affected by policy. In this context, Chase notes that it is difficult to obtain compliance where policy or a programme is to be implemented by agencies whose intentions do not necessarily coincide with those of the policy formulators. Solutions to this difficulty are therefore seen in terms of i) gaining credibility; ii) reference to higher authority; and iii) provision of adequate financial incentives.

However, Chase seems to ignore the relationship between interests, politics, and the balance of power among those making, implementing, and affected by policy. Any policy, in order to be properly implemented, needs translation, clarity, and concreteness. Thus, the extent of success of policy implementation depends to a large extent upon the fulfilment of the preconditions, the combination of political will, and administrative capability in particular.

14.4 CONCLUSION

In the preceding text, problems in policy implementation have been discussed. The implementation of a decision is just as important as the policy itself. No policy formulator can assume that decisions will automatically be implemented as envisioned. Policy implementation requires a wide variety of actions, including issuing policy directives that are clear and consistent; creating organisational units and assigning personnel with the information and authority necessary to administer the policies; coordinating personnel, resources, and expenditures to ensure benefits for target groups; and evaluating actions of the personnel regarding implementation. However, none of these steps is easy. Thus, serious efforts are required for policy implementation at the level of policy-making itself, because the process of implementation starts from the policy formulation stage.

14.5 KEY CONCEPTS

- Implementation failure** : It refers to the gap between what is observed? and what is expected? where the latter is defined in terms of the values of observer.
- Policy Process.** : The policy process is a flow of reactions to events and the reactions of other actors.

14.6 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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14.7 ACTIVITIES

- 1) What are the implications of implementation deficit for policy decision?
- 2) Explain, with illustrations, the conditions required for successful policy implementation.
- 3) . On the basis of your experience, outline the various problems encountered in policy implementation.