

UNDERSTANDING POLICY EVALUATION

Structure: Part-A

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INTRODUCTION

Policy process is quite long and arduous. As noted in the previous units, the policy process comprises of various key stages. It begins with the identification of problems and issues for policies, chalking out various solutions and alternatives, analysing and comparing the possible alternatives, selecting the best possible, putting them into the concrete forms as policies', and implementing them effectively, and finally assessing their outcome and impact. In this process, policy evaluation plays a significant role. A modified emphasis on the policy process points to a renewed awareness and sensitivity to the importance of those value-choices, which shape public priorities and commitments to governmental action. During the mid and latter half of the twentieth century, we witnessed intense concern towards evaluative studies with the help of better methodologies, use of scientific methods, inter-disciplinary approaches, and use of electronic data processing systems. Many observers of the functioning of government tend to think that policies may be improved upon, and inefficiencies and administration can be corrected on the basis-of scientific policy evaluation. However, a viable evaluation of policies and action is a difficult exercise in itself. Sometimes it is fraught with political implications. In this Unit, we will discuss the significance, types, criteria, approaches, and methods of policy evaluation. In addition, we will explain the role of various agencies involved in policy evaluation, and problems in evaluation.

POLICY EVALUATION: NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The term evaluation embraces a wide range of activities. Evaluations are undertaken in all spheres of life, in informal or formal ways. A distinction is made between the activities of appraisal, monitoring and evaluation. 'Appraisal' is usually taken to mean a critical examination of a programme (or policy) normally before the latter is approved for implementation and funding. Both monitoring and evaluation are undertaken to find out how

a programme performs or has performed. Monitoring primarily covers issues of finance, and quality pertaining to inputs and outputs as well as actors, and time used in implementation. Usually, monitoring encompasses some current assessment of the progress of a project, including difficulties in obtaining the expected results; these may possibly be analysed more thoroughly in some subsequent evaluation. 'Evaluation' is a more systematic and scientific attempt with emphasis on impacts and efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, reliability and sustainability. Rossi and Freeman (1993) specify it as a systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualisation, design, implementation, and utility of social: intervention programmes. Policy evaluation can be briefly described as a procedure that appraises the worthwhileness of a policy, and considers the special context and political and economic variables of the situation. For example, evaluation research may pinpoint the extension which the goals of a policy are achieved besides identifying the constraints associated with it. Poor results obviously imply lack of effectiveness and efficiency. However, policy evaluation may suggest changes in policy to obtain desired results. Evaluation research also assumes that the programme can be scrapped, if it is not effective. For a policy maker, policy evaluation is a means of getting the relevant information and knowledge regarding policy problems, the effectiveness of past, and prevailing strategies for reducing or eliminating the problems so as to improve the effectiveness of specific policies. Thus, uncertainty and risk in policy-making are reduced because of such knowledge and information, administrative accountability is enhanced, and administrative control over policy is appropriately increased. Policy evaluation, thus, plays a significant role that starts right from the identification of various policy issues and selecting of the best course out of the various alternatives. Over the years, public policy evaluation has become more sophisticated. From simple analysis of the outcomes and cost-benefit analysis, it has developed its own methodology. Built on the basic principles of maximising income minus costs, new methodology is also focusing on non-monetary policy outcomes, measuring retarding factors, equity, effectiveness, organisational and human factors and so on. Policy evaluation has also become more proactive rather than reactive. Sometimes, it is too late to wait for the outcome of policies after their implementation. As a result, there is an increasing trend towards using pre adoption projections or deductive modelling rather than just post-adoption before and after analysis. Moreover, policy evaluation is becoming increasingly inter-disciplinary, drawing on a variety of disciplinary sources for ideas as to means or policies for achieving given goals. Policy evaluation is increasingly using the components of political science, economics, sociology, psychology, law, public administration, business administration,

statistics, and social work and so on. Thus, there has been an increasing use of behavioural sciences as well as technology.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

The simplest criterion, that is most often employed in policy literature and in implementation is, whether statutorily prescribed goals are met, and to what extent? The criteria of evaluation, therefore, focus either on the objectives themselves or on the means/ends relationships between strategies and objectives. Poister adds other performance variables, such as, effectiveness, adequacy and appropriateness. Edward Suchman proposes a five-dimensional scheme for evaluating success /failure, that is, effort, performance, adequacy, efficiency and process. Frohock's, four concepts, criteria for policy evaluation have received a great deal of attention by the scholars: they are equity, efficiency, Pareto optimality, and public interest. These concepts will be briefly examined in the subsequent section.

1. Equity:

Primarily, equity relates to fairness, uprightness and equality. Equity means giving to each man his due, impartiality, a system of supplementary law founded upon precedents and established principles. Equity is a branch of law that provides a remedy where the common law does not apply. Equity, thus, refers to the distribution of effects and effort among different groups in society. For example, the criterion or equity implies the question: are costs and benefits distributed equitably among the different groups? Policies designed to redistribute income; social benefits and employment opportunities in public services are often recommended and evaluated on the basis of the criterion or equity. In most of the democratic systems, right to equality has been provided to the citizens irrespective of caste, creed, sex, and income. The question before the policy evaluators is: how much the policies are able to serve the disadvantaged sections of society and how far the policies have resulted in reducing inequalities. However, to some scholars the concept of equity is not free from controversy. To them, the concepts of equity, fairness and justice are related to political power and involve subjectivity. The processes involving the distribution of power in society influence perceptions about them. Individuals and groups have different values, objectives, and perceptions, what satisfies one person or group may not satisfy another.

2. Efficiency:

Efficiency refers to keeping costs down in achieving benefits, as measured by benefits minus costs, or benefits divided by costs. In other words, it is the amount of outputs created and their quality in relation to the resources (capital and personnel) invested. It is then a measure of how productively the resources (as converted into inputs) have been used. Efficiency is

generally equated with economic rationality. When efficiency is expressed in monetary terms, it refers to the ratio of + monetary income from the output to the monetary costs of inputs. The main problem in evaluating efficiency depends on decisions on the amount of various, inputs, which the evaluator considers to be reasonable for producing the outputs. Moreover, making judgments about efficiency requires a proper perspective about public policy in terms of identifiable units, such as, programmes, projects or particular work processes. But in many cases, it is difficult to break government agencies and certain policies into smaller units for analysis. Again, there may be problems of subjectivity.

3. Effectiveness:

Effectiveness refers to the ben "its alternative public policies. It refers to the extent to which the planned outputs, c , (immediate objectives) and 'intended impacts are being or have been prescribed that in practice, it may be appropriate to focus on the effects, especially on the outcome side, for two related reasons: i) benefits for the intended beneficiaries are expressed at the point of effects, which make effects a much more significant measure of achievement than outputs; ii) being more directly derived from the inputs and activities of the respective development scheme than are the impacts, the effects will be less influenced by intervening external factors and can be assessed quickly are more reliably.

Measuring, effectiveness is not a simple exercise. It is often difficult to quantify or measure the impact. For example, it is not easy to measure the qualitative impact of educational policies, environment related policies or health policies. We may measure the rate of literacy, but not the level of enlightenment among citizens. We may quantify the doctor-population ratio or the number of hospital beds, but we cannot easily measure their real impact on level of health.

4. Pareto Optimality:

As noted earlier, efficiency is a condition in which goods are produced at the lowest possible cost and in accordance with the highest preference of consumers. As per the Pareto definition, a given economic arrangement was efficient if there could be no rearrangement that would leave someone better off without worsening the position of others. Under Pareto Optimality, thus, a policy that makes one or several persons better off without hurting anyone else is desirable. However, Pareto optimality is not without limitations. Some policies, such as, those related to welfare do not Fare well under Pareto optimality. Welfare is, in essence, social transfers: some are made better through the distribution of social resources and distribution requires making some poorer by taking their wealth to make others better off here may not be general acceptability to this objection. It is argued, for example, that giving relief

is designed primarily to serve the larger economic and political order by ensuring social stability and only secondarily to give relief to the recipients. Supporting this argument is the fact that welfare policies are typically installed during periods of social disorders. But the general validity of this argument aside, if we view welfare in terms of a conflict - management purpose, then Pareto optimality sanctions the distribution: the wealthy gain by preserving social stability, the poor gain by getting assistance. Each class also loses, of course. The wealthy lose money; the poor are fixed more firmly in the system of prevailing inequalities. But one could also maintain that each class receives a net gain, thus remaining true to Pareto optimality.

5. Adequacy:

Adequacy refers to whether a given level of effectiveness results in the satisfaction of needs or, values. According to Theodore, while the policy effectiveness criterion deals with the relationship between policy goals and what is achieved, the adequacy of a policy refers to the relationship between the policy and the problem to which it is addressed. A clear distinction exists between adequacy and effectiveness in the sense that a policy may be judged to be successful in achieving its listed objectives, but it has little impact upon the problem being addressed by the policy. For example, under the policy towards rural upliftment, a number of programmes introduced and implemented, grants are distributed, agriculture development measures are taken, and however, rural poverty and unemployment persist. It may be added that the dimension of adequacy may point to the complexity of relationships between costs and effectiveness. Moreover, a policy may meet the criterion, of cost effectiveness, but the resultant outcome in terms of satisfaction level of people turns out to be very poor. This means poor adequacy of the said policy. However, the concept of adequacy too is not free from objections. As in the case of effectiveness and efficiency, then ensuring of adequacy, is not a simple task; rather it involves more subjectivity and is value-laden. It is not possible to simply quantify the level of adequacy. Systematic studies based on rigorous methodology are required to identify the various dimensions of adequacy of certain policies.

6. Public Interest:

Public is interested in the end product or the real outcome of a policy. It has been rightly pointed out that the public is interested in law, not in the laws, in the methods of law, not in the substance; in the sanctity of a contract, not in a particular contract; an understanding based on custom, not in this custom or that. The public is interested in a workable rule, which will define and predict the behaviour of men so that they can make their adjustments (Lippman) Public may often show a keen interest in the process of policy enactment. The

public may also be sometimes interested in the issue or phenomenon due to one or the other reason and may not be interested in their self. Thus, it is difficult to express the concept of public interest in a well formulated definition. If we view the public interest on the basis of majority strength, even then it does not come out in a clear sense because it is often the minority in an overall situation that has the victorious stand. Let us ' suppose that views of people on three different issues, A, B and C are 45 per cent, 30 per cent, and 25 per cent respectively of the total population. It means 45 percent people have interest in issue 'A' and as it has more strength than for issues B and C. Therefore, A is to be accepted. Now if we analyse it from another angle, 55 per cent of the people are against issue A. That is why, it is contended that whatever emerges out of the political struggle is considered public interest. Redford (1958) has suggested three approaches for determining the nature of public interest. Firstly, it is possible that various interest groups bargain and coordinate with each other for reaching accord for presenting an agreed formula public interest in areas of conflict on public policies. Secondly, well-accepted and continuously shared interests can be highlighted as public interests. Thirdly, there is a need for evolving a procedure for the representation and balancing of interests for resolving issues, effecting compromise in policy enactment, and for executing policy properly.

7. Public Participation/Responsiveness:

Quite close to the concept public interest are the concepts of public participation and responsiveness. Public participation refers to decision-making by the target group, the general public, servant interest groups or other decision makers whose involvement reflects adherence to democratic procedures for achieving given goals. Consensus and consultation become the central concerns, as the determination of objectives becomes entangled with the search for suitable means and alternatives to achieve those objectives. Active participation leads to better acceptability and implementation becomes less conflict prone. Besides, the concept of responsiveness indicates the acceptance level as well as satisfaction level of a particular section of society. Certain welfare measures, education or health policies, may satisfy the needs of some sections of society, but may not invoke general positive response.

8. Sustainability

Sustainability is an important concept in the development context. It refers to the continuation of the practices or work done or measures taken under a policy after the termination of current interventions, under the same or an alternative policy. In more specific terms, sustainability would mean: maintenance of physical facilities produced (such as, roads, buildings, etc.); continued use of physical and intangible facilities (human resource,

knowledge, etc.); continued ability to plan. And manage similar work; continued production of the kinds of output created (such as, teachers, doctors, engineers etc.); maintenance of impacts created (such as, improved health and sanitation, better environment, better consumer awareness, competitiveness in industry, and so on); and in multiplication of effects and impacts. Sustainability is generally found to be neglect criterion in policy analysis and evaluation. It is always important to utilise the existing or created conditions so as to build upon them the proposed policies and measures. This helps in continuity, efficiency and effectiveness.

Still, the other criteria for policy evaluation are 'relevance' and 'appropriateness'. Relevance reflects the extent to which a policy has addressed the problems of high priority beneficiaries and any other people who might have been its beneficiaries. Thus instead of asking how productively allocated resources have been utilised to that end, one may ask whether the targeted people have received the benefits. In case of long-term policies or programmes, an appropriate issue for enquiry may be whether original priorities are still relevant. There is also the question of consistency of current policies with other policies in the related spheres. Close to the concept of relevance is the criterion of appropriateness. It refers to the worth of the objectives: Is the policy based upon appropriate values and operates within the zones of acceptance?

It should be noted that different analysts adopt different criteria for policy evaluation; some used different combinations of them. The most common criteria are efficiency, effectiveness, ad adequacy in terms of satisfaction. Most analysts focus on cost-benefit analysis, in combination with impact analysis, and responsiveness by different sections of society. The checklist depicted in the following table provides some idea in this regard.

Table: Criteria for Evaluation

Types of Criterion	Question	Illustrative Criteria
Effectiveness	Has valued outcome been achieved?	Units of Service
Efficiency	How much effort was required achieve to achieve an evaluated outcomes?	Fixed Costs Fixed Effectiveness
Equity	Are costs and benefits	Pareto Criterion

	distributed equitably among the different Groups?	Kaldor-Hicks Criterion Rawls Criterion
Responsiveness	Do policy outcomes satisfy the needs, preferences or values of any particular group?	Consistency with Citizen Surveys
Appropriateness	Are the desired outcomes (objective) actually worthy or valuable?	Public programmes should be equitable as well as efficient.

Source: Adapted from the U.S. General Accounting Office, Assessing Social Programme Impact Evaluation: Checklist Approach (Washington, D.C. **U . S .** General Accounting Office.