WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY? DEFINITION, SCOPE, FEATURES, TYPES & MORE

What is Public Policy?

Public policy is the framework of laws, regulations, and actions governments implement to achieve social and economic goals. It's a statement of the government's intent and commitment to address a particular issue or problem. Public policy shapes the decisions of government officials and agencies, and it affects society, the economy, and politics.

It covers various issues, including economic, social welfare, education, healthcare, and environmental policies. Political ideologies, societal values, and economic conditions influence public policy, vital in shaping a country's future. Public policy plays a crucial role in shaping societies and addressing societal challenges. In political science, it is essential to comprehend public policy's meaning, public policy definition evolution, and significance.

This article aims to understand public policy and its various aspects comprehensively.

The History & Evolution of Public Policy

The genesis of public policy dates back to ancient civilizations like Greece and Rome, where rulers made decrees and laws to regulate society. However, the contemporary study of public policy began in the late 19th century when American scholars like Woodrow Wilson and John Burgess explored the relationship between government and society. After World War II, public policy became an established field of study, focusing on solving social, economic, and political problems.

Over time, various models of public policy emerged, such as the rational model, the incremental model, and the advocacy coalition framework, which help explain how policymakers arrive at decisions. The field of public policy has evolved, shaped by historical, social, and political factors. Initially, public policy was primarily concerned with economic matters and the regulation of trade and commerce. However, as societies became more complex and interconnected, the scope of public policy expanded to include various social, environmental, and technological issues.

Features & Nature of Public Policy

Public policy is a deliberate and systematic attempt to address various social, economic, and political issues that affect society. It is a multifaceted field encompassing a wide range of policies and decision-making processes to achieve specific goals and outcomes. Understanding the nature and features of public policy is essential to appreciate its significance and impact on society.

Here are some of the key features of public policy:

- **Purposeful:** Public policy is designed to solve specific problems or address particular societal needs. It is not random or haphazard but a deliberate effort to address identified issues. Policies may aim to improve the economy, enhance public health, reduce crime, or mitigate the effects of climate change, among others.
- **Systematic:** Public policy is not a one-off decision but a set of coordinated actions that work together to achieve a desired outcome. Policies are typically developed and implemented systematically, involving various stakeholders and decision-making processes.
- **Strategic**: Public policy aims to achieve long-term goals, not just immediate needs. Policymakers consider the potential consequences of their decisions and try to create policies that will have a lasting impact. This means that policies may take time to implement and require significant resource investments.

Types of Public Policy

Public policy can be categorized into several types based on focus, scope, and duration. **Distributive policies** allocate resources among societal groups, ensuring fair distribution. **Redistributive policies** aim to reduce income inequality by redistributing wealth. **Regulatory policies** control or manage behaviors to protect the public interest. **Constitutional policies** establish fundamental rules and principles governing society. **Foreign policies** promote national interests, maintain peace and stability, and foster international cooperation.

Each type of policy plays a crucial role in addressing various social, economic, and political challenges.

Process of Public Policy Formation

The process of public policy formation involves several stages, including problem identification, agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation.

- **Problem Identification:** Identify a problem or issue that requires government intervention. Conduct research and gather data to understand the scope and severity of the problem. Define the problem and its impact on society.
- **Agenda Setting:** Determine the importance of the problem and its priority on the policy agenda. Consider the political and social context in which the problem exists. Decide whether the problem should be addressed through legislation, regulation, or other means.
- **Policy Formulation:** Generate alternative solutions to address the problem. Evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of each solution. Consider the short-term and long-term impacts of each solution. Choose the best solution and develop a plan for its implementation.
- **Decision-Making:** Present the proposed policy solution to the appropriate decision-makers. Seek input and feedback from stakeholders and interested parties. Debate and discuss the merits of the proposal. Make a final decision on the policy and its implementation.
- **Implementation and Evaluation:** Put the policy into practice through legislation, regulation, or other means. Monitor the implementation of the policy and make any necessary adjustments. Assess the effectiveness and efficacy of the policy. Gather feedback from stakeholders and interested parties. Use the feedback to refine and improve the policy over time.

Scope of Public Policy in India

The scope of public policy in India is vast and covers various critical areas. It includes economic development, promoting social justice, ensuring environmental sustainability,

maintaining national security, and engaging in international relations. Public policy in India aims to drive economic growth, alleviate poverty, address inequality, promote renewable energy and conservation, enhance national security, and actively participate in global affairs.

By addressing these areas, public policy in India seeks to foster development, prosperity, and well-being for all citizens while positioning the country as a responsible global power.

Importance of Public Policy

 Studying public policy provides numerous benefits, equipping individuals to address complex societal issues and make positive changes on a large scale. It provides a deep understanding of policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation, allowing for effective advocacy and influencing decision-making processes. Additionally, it enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills valued in various professions while offering networking opportunities with experts in the field.

Major Subjects in Public Policy

Public policy covers diverse subjects like policy analysis, economics, governance, research methods, social justice, and public administration. These subjects develop a comprehensive understanding of contemporary policy issues and equip students with effective skills in formulation, evaluation, and management. Students gain insights into policy development's social, economic, and political contexts.

Significance of Public Policy

Public policy plays a critical role in shaping societies and affecting the lives of individuals. It influences everything from healthcare and education to the environment and social welfare. Effective public policy ensures the equitable allocation of resources, promotes social justice, and addresses societal challenges. By studying public policy, you become empowered to contribute to developing and implementing policies that positively impact people's lives. With the ability to identify and analyze policy problems, you can propose innovative solutions, advocate for change, and drive sustainable development. The importance of public

policy cannot be understated, as it is the catalyst for creating more inclusive and prosperous societies.

Conclusion

Studying public policy offers many benefits, including the opportunity to create meaningful change, develop essential skills, and expand career opportunities. By mastering subjects such as policy analysis, economics, and governance, you gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of policy development and implementation. Public policy is essential in addressing societal challenges and improving the overall well-being of individuals and communities. By studying public policy, you become an agent of change, equipped with the knowledge and skills to shape a more equitable future. So, if you are passionate about making a difference and driving positive social impact, studying public policy is the pathway to transform your aspirations into reality.

Public Policy –

As you know Public policies are as old as governments. So, 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 different problems and demands of the people, the government has to make many policies; these policies are called public policies. Generally speaking public policy is what the government chooses to do, or not to do. It is a decision made by government to either act, or not act in order to resolve a problem. Public policy is a course of action that guides a range of related actions in a given field. They rarely tackle one problem, but rather deal with clusters of entangled i.e deeply involved and long-term problems. Public policy provides guidance to governments and accountability links to citizens. Public policy is the process by which groups act collectively--everything from declaring war to installing stoplights. We study public policy in the hopes that we can do better. It is an audacious task. What activities are best handled by the market? How can we act in the face of scientific uncertainty? How can we make sense of the opinions of hundreds of millions of people? How can we evaluate trade-offs--economic growth versus environmental protection, for example? How can we even measure our success? There are various studies about public policy and many scholars

have attempted to define public policy from different angles. Let's look at how four scholars have defined 1. Firstly Robert Eyestone terms public policy as "the relationship of government unit to its environment." 2. Thomas R. Dye says that "public policy is whatever government chooses to do or not to do" 3. Richard Rose says that "public policy is not a decision; it is a course or pattern of activity". 4. According to 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 realise an objective or purpose. 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 wellplanned 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. With the following four points student will be more clearer with the meaning of public policy. They are: First, Public Policies are goal oriented, meaning that 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. Second, Public policy is the outcome of the government's collective actions. It means that it is a pattern or course of activity or' the governmental officials and actors in a collective sense than being termed as their discrete and segregated decisions. Third, 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. Fourth, 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 official regarding not taking any action on a particular issue. What are the characteristic of Public Policy? Here let's point out Sambo (1999) and Anderson (1975) how they differentiate public policy from private policies. Also the other forms of policies. 1. Public policy is a purposive course of action or goal-oriented action rather than a random or chance behaviour. 2. Public policy consists of courses or patterns of action by government officials. 3. Public policy is what governments actually do, not what they intend to do or say they are going to do. However, this is still a subject of debate since future plans of

governments over certain matters of concern can be seen as a commitment to resolving such issues within the set time. 4. Public policy involves some forms of overt government action to affect a particular problem; it involves a decision by government officials not to take action, to do nothing on some matter on which governmental involvement is sought. 5. Public policy is based on law and is authoritative. In other words, public policy has an authoritative, potentially legally-coercive quality that the policies of private organisations do not have. 6. Public policy is sometimes an outcome of bargaining and compromise among political/policy actors and various interest groups in the policy process.

Relevance of Public Policy

1. It is a mirror that guides government in its actions. This is because a government without a definite plan of actions is like a traveller without a destination. He may cover many kilometres and yet not be able to say where he is going or how far he has gone. Public policy thus helps government to reconcile the numerous public demands and scarce resources based on priority.

2. It arouses in citizens public consciousness and critical minds to take up the challenge of assessing government-planned activities and performance over time.

3. It provides the platforms to question the why of government, i.e. why do governments do what they do? It seeks an understanding of the causes or determinants of political/policy actions.

4. It provides the opportunity for various interest groups and the general public to know government's responses and reactions to their demands. Such reactions show the pattern of action government adopts or intends to adopt.

5. It promotes professionalism in the art and science of policy-making. Applying the knowledge of social science to solve practical societal problems makes it compelling that expertise contributions of political scientists or public/development administrators, economists, sociologists, lawyers, industrial relations experts, among others, are sought in analysing the viability and feasibility of proposed policies that have direct consequences on the general populace, the economy and government itself.

Types of Public Policy

Public Policy has different types. It is important to know them because they are important to critically understand the contents and the purposes for which they are formulated.

1. **Foreign policy and Domestic Policy**

     Foreign policies are those that shape the orientation and mode of interaction that takes place between a particular country and other countries of the world. It is a potent tool for achieving the national interests and/or objectives of a country.

2. **Distributive Policy**

    This type of policy is formulated by government to allocate resources to the general public. It promotes equal access to resources because benefits are distributed not at the expense of some other people. It is a win-win approach since every individual, irrespective of status, is a beneficiary. The policy aims at achieving egalitarianism (i.e. equality in status) among members of a political community. Examples of distributive policies in India NHM, MGNRUGS, etc.

3. **Re-Distributive Policy:**

    This policy is usually referred to as "social inter-transfer of material resources". The policy involves the allocation of resources by transferring such resources from one section of the society to another. The policy aims at achieving equilibrium, that is, a balance share of state resources or access to them.

4. **Regulatory Policy**

    This type of policy is formulated as a control measures in the conduct of human and societal affairs. It involves setting of standards and rules to limit or restrict certain behaviour or activities with undesirable consequences in the society. It entails the making of rules based on accepted terms, enforcement and adjudication in cases of any breach. Regulatory policies could be competitive or protective.

5. **Constituent Policy**

    This type of policy has a national orientation as it goes beyond serving individuals, organisations or sections of the society. The policy serves the nation as a whole by protecting and promoting certain activities that are vital to national security and survival.

For further and detailed reading, students can refer to the suggested reading and they can access the following links too:-

1. eGyanKosh: Unit-3 Models of Public Policy
2. eGyanKosh: MPA-015 Public Policy and Analysis
3. http://egyankosh.ac.in//handle/123456789/25796