

How Relevant are the Dominant Models of Public Policy and Participation for Analyzing the Policy Processes in the South? (Special Focused on Sri Lanka)

Aruna Jayathilaka¹, P. L. T. Purasinghe²

¹Senior Lecturer, Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, Sri Lanka

²Senior Lecturer and the Head, Department of Political Science, University of Jayawardanapura, Sri Lanka

***Corresponding Author:**

Aruna Jayathilaka

Email: arunaa2010@yahoo.com

Abstract: Many of the models and concepts used in discussing public policy have been developed in Northern countries. Earlier policy makers were in a view that dominant models of public policy in the North can be applicable for the developing countries too. Latter, some of critiques emerged by questioning the validity of such concepts for analyzing Sothern contexts. By critically examining the key components of the dominant policy models, this study shows the fact that western concept on public policy can be highly variable in the southern contexts. Study also emphasizes the need of an applied theory for analyzing ground realities of public policy making in developing countries, rather than restrict into an idealistic model.

Keywords: public policy, political system model, dominant models, political north, political south, Sri Lanka, applied theory.

INTRODUCTION

Classical models on policy making were originated from the studies of developed countries. Weberian principles of bureaucracy were the foundation for most of classical policy making models [1]. Earlier policy makers were in a view that dominant models of public policy in the North can be applicable for the developing countries too. However, recently an impressive quantity of literature has been developed by questioning the validity of the dominant models of public policy for analyzing the policy processes in political South [2-4]. Classical theories on public policy seem to be largely underpinned by the notions of democracy. Number of scholars nevertheless identified the fact that most of developing nations suffer from a 'democracy deficit' [5]. Since the state failed to develop fruitful links between citizens and government institutions, citizens find it default to push the government for achieving the good governance. Therefore using classical policy making models for the contexts of developing countries is highly questionable.

Political Pluralism and Power Decentralization

As we observed some of policy making theories as, 'network theory' demands the political pluralism. Eck [6] identifies four basic elements in the concept of pluralism. Firstly, pluralism refers to the energetic engagement with diversity. Secondly it seeks the understanding across lines of difference. Third, it is

a mechanism of holding deepest differences of the individuals. Fourth, it is based on dialogues. When analyzing these elements, it is clear that they are closely related to key requirements of network approach of policy making. Therefore network approach can be applicable for countries like USA because pluralism is well rooted in its socio political structure. The constitution of USA was carefully designed to balance the internal conflict between competing factions and interests [7]. However unlike the developed countries pluralism is really lacking in developing countries [2].

Most of developed counters practice power decentralization. As an example decentralization of political power has been a core value of American political system. In USA sovereignty power has well divided among the center and the periphery [8]. Unlikely developed countries, decision making in developing countries is highly centralized [2]. Further political system of USA based on the principles of 'checks and balances'. However such a system of checks and balances is not practicing in the most of political contexts of the developing nations. In these countries the executive power is always center around a one leadership.

Public Participation for the Policy Making Process and Role of the Civil Society Organization

Number of scholars has identified the importance of the public participation in the policy making process [9]. Participatory approaches in the public policy making might be applicable for the developed nations. Because, most of developed countries owns strong civil society and therefore civil society actors play a vital role in the public policy making process. Socio political structures of the developing countries nevertheless differ from the ideal situation. As we observed participation principles developed in the west cannot be applied for the

developing countries due to number of factors. Firstly in most cases civil societies in the developing countries are fragmented by various social fault lines such as ethnicity and cast. Hence above fault line block the communication within the civil society (horizontal communication). Secondly proper communication channels have not been well developed among the government and the civil society. Therefore vertical communication is also lacking here. These horizontal gaps and vertical gaps limit the capacity of adapting an approach of participatory public policy making (Figure 01).

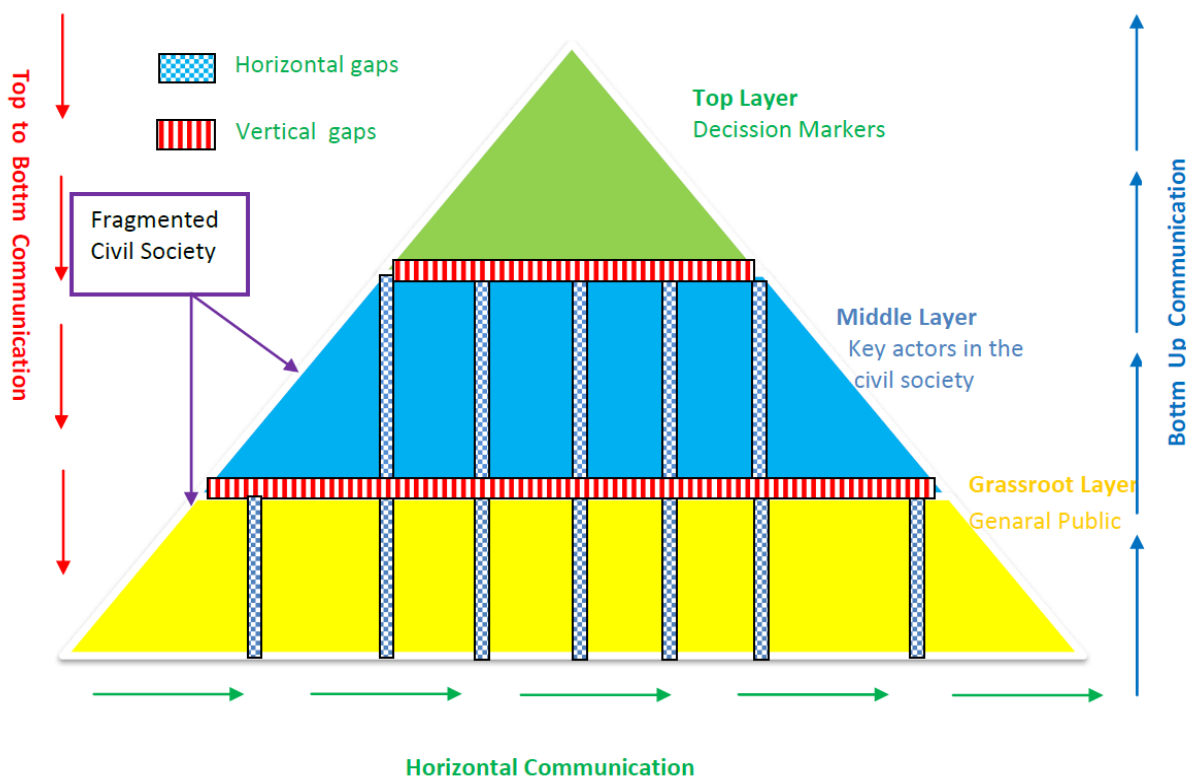


Fig 1: Public Policy Making in Developing Countries (Source: Author)

Further, civil society organizations should aim to enhance mutual respect and cooperation between the government and community [10]. In other words they have a crucial role for bridging the gap between the state and society. However a significant role from the civil society organizations for making the state - civil society synergy can't be expected in the developing countries. In authoritarian regimes, the role of the civil society organizations has being suppressed. Further as being showed in the figure 01, there are lots of fragmentations among the civil society actors.

As we observed there are more specific factors for the citizens in the political South for avoiding from

the public policy making, which are rarely experienced by the political North. Firstly, some of developing countries have been ruled for decades by the authoritarian regimes. These regimes have ruled the countries by violating citizens' rights. Such regimes have succeeded in terrifying their citizens so that they cannot demand for their rights. Therefore people have got used to remain in silent. Secondly most of developing countries have used an 'assimilative approach' rather than an 'integrative approach' in their nation building approaches. Political power has always centered in the hands of the majority ethnic group by marginalizing other ethnic groups from the main political stream. Even there are cases that minorities try

do developed 'shadow state building' projects by challenging the state sovereignty dominated by the ethnic majority. Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is a good case in point. Western notion of public participation in policy making will not be sufficient to explain this kind of localized factors.

Do we need an applied theory?

When analyzing the western theoretical explanations on public policy and public participation, it is clear fact that they have more focused the 'ideal' situations. Therefore they are not sufficient to analysis the ground realities in the developing countries. Moravcsik emphasizes the importance of identifying the difference between ideal and applied theory. According to him, "Citizens delegate to assemble more efficient decision-making in areas where expertise is required" [11]. In other words there can be a gap between 'popular vote' and the national importance of some policies. Some important policies such as environmental policy, medical drug authorization and criminal law can't be made by direct popular vote.

When examining the political context developing countries, it is evident that most of important policy decisions didn't get the popular vote. For instance all important environmental policies in Sri Lanka were not being made by the by direct popular vote. Further there are number of evidence to say some of important policy decisions have been unpopular among the general public. 'Banda –Chelva fact' was a very important policy decision taken by the government for ensuring the ethnic harmony of the country. But this decision was not only unpopular but also there was huge resistance from the civil society against the fact [12].

Further western concept on public policy can be highly variable in the southern contexts. As being discussed above civil society organizations play a significant role for enhancing the state – society synergy in the policy making process. However there are cases that civil society organization contribute to deteriorate the state – society synergy in the developing countries. The issue with the participatory irrigation management (PIM) in Sri Lanka is a good case in point. This was a good initiative for getting active involvement of farmers in the management of irrigation systems. However, when implementing the PIM approach, the government had several conflicts with the farmers due to the role of some civil society actors. As an example, in 1984 government introduce fee collection to pay for the operation and maintenance of irrigation project. Even though this was a promising initiative for the sustainability it did not last more than 4 years. Because, this was seen by farmers as an attempt to privatized the irrigation system and it became a contentious political issue [13].

Therefore we identify the need of an applied theory for analyzing the policy making processes in developing countries. Theories such as rational model that seem based on idealism will not be able to analysis practical challenges faced by developing countries. As we observed, theoretical facets as interactive model will be more suitable to the contexts of developing countries. Because it identifies real world as 'nonlinear relations' attached with feedback loop [14]. Further it says policy making process should be interactive not linear. This is a more suitable approach to touch the ground realities in the political South.

CONCLUSION

The study shows dominant models of public policy and participation in the North, are not sufficient for a broad analysis of the policy making process in the South. Socio political contexts in the developed countries differ from developing countries due to various factors. Northern policy analysis will suit for the contexts that have well-functioning democracies, political pluralism, decentralization, strong civil society and strong economy. Since these characteristics are really lacking in the political south, dominant models are unable to do a comprehensive analysis of the policy making processes in the developing countries. Therefore there is a need of an applied theory for analyzing ground realities in the developing countries.

REFERENCES

1. Hartman S; Management Theory New York Institute of Technology, 2007.
2. Osman F; Public policy making: theories and their implications in developing countries", Asian Affairs, vol. 24, no. 3, Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh, 2002.
3. Kabeer, Cook; Re-visioning Social Policy in the South: Challenges and Concepts", IDS Bulletin, 2000; 31: 4
4. James V; Public Policy and the African Environment: An Examination of the Theory and Practice of the Planning Process on the Continent, Chapter 2 in Kelechi A. Kalu, ed., Agenda Setting and Public Policy in Africa, Ashgate Publishing, UK, 2004.
5. Gaventa J; Triumph, Deficit or Contestation? Deepening the 'Deepening Democracy' Debate. Institute for Development Studies, 2005.
6. Eck D; What is Pluralism? The Pluralism Project, University of Harvard, USA, 2011.
7. Norman R; The Idea of Pluralism in the United States. Springfield Technical Community College, 2008.
8. U.S .Constitution Online. 2010. The Constitution of USA: section 3 of article 01 and section 01 of article 02

<http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html>

Accessed on 15.09.2011

9. Mc Cracken J; Participatory Policy Making. World Alliance for Citizen Participation-CIVICUS, 2005.
10. Tadesse E *et al.*; The People Shall Govern: A Research Report on Public Participation in the Policy Process. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, and Action for Conflict Transformation, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2006.
11. Moravcsik A; Is there a 'Democratic Deficit' in World Politics? A Framework for Analysis. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
12. Rasalingam S; Tamils must ask for what is reasonable and accept their role in the conflict, Midweek Review, The Island, Upali Newspapers Limited, Colombo, 2008.
13. Somasiri H; Participatory Management in Irrigation Development and Environmental Management in Sri Lanka. Journal of Developments in Sustainable Agriculture, 2008; 55–62.
14. Sutton R; The Policy Process: An Overview, Working Paper 118, Overseas Development Institute, London, 1999. Available at: www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/1868.pdf