EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)

POLICY ANALYSIS METHODS THAT CAN BE USED IN INFORMATION POLICY DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

There are no simple rules and methods that will provide a full and clear understanding of any policy. Policy analysis identifies problems to be addressed by the information policy, examine a range of policy alternatives and recommend the best approach to be taken, based on empirical evidence. A variety of analytical methods exist for accomplishing these tasks. The methods include analysing documents, use of questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and community meetings. Timelines, stakeholder analysis, policy mapping, institutional analysis, policy ranking and policy matrices are also applied in the information policy design.

KEY WORDS: *information policy, policy analysis, policy design, information policy design, information*

1. INTRODUCTION

Information policy impacts and policy making are highly complex political issues and processes. A range of historical factors, hidden agendas, personal politics, chance events and international influences, for example, often all combine to make any particular policy issue extremely difficult issue to analyse. Bearing these limitations and difficulties in mind, the methods described and illustrated in this article help provide some insight into the issues of information policy design. They are by no means the only, or necessarily the best methods to use for any particular analysis. The selection aims to provide ideas that can be developed to interrogate policy issues in a range of different ways (Pasteur, 2001). The policy analysis methods can be in a qualitative or quantitative nature.

2. PURPOSE OF THE ARTICLE

The purpose of the article is to identify policy analysis methods that can be used in information policy design.

3. INFORMATION POLICY

Information policy determines the kind of information collected, created, organised, stored, accessed, disseminated and retained. Who can use the information, whether there will be charges for access, and the amount charged? Information policy also establishes the rules within which private information providers and the media operate.

4. POLICY ANALYSIS

Policy analysis should be composed of the analysis of the specific issue or issues as well as the analysis of the general climate (Flynn, 1985). Policy analysis is interdisciplinary field of knowledge and specialised applied research social science research that applies systematic forms of inquiry, evaluation and argumentation, theories and methods to assess policy alternatives. (Barbados: 2007). It is the use of reason and evidence to select the best policy among a number of alternatives to address a particular policy problem (Barbados, 2007:9). Policy analysis involves identifying the goal of the policies and then assessing the implementation and results to determine whether they are effective. Dyne (1987:xi) asserts that policy analysis is concerned with "who gets what" and more important "why" and "what difference it makes". Nagel (1984:233) asserts that "policy analysis or policy studies can be broadly defined as the study of the

nature, causes and effects of alternative public policies. Policy analysis is sometimes more specifically referred to as the methods used in analysing policies.

5. INFORMATION POLICY DESIGN

Information policy design is a way of devising courses of action to be taken, which is aimed at changing existing situations to preferred ones (Hardt, 2006). Policy design is planning out in systematic way information policies. This creates a road map to policy implementation.

6. TYPES OF POLICY ANALYSIS

The two main classes of policy analysis methods are qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative methods refer to a range of statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics, forecasting methods, regression, analysis of variance and cost-benefit analysis. Qualitative methods include case studies, document analysis and interviews. It is worth pointing out, however, that many types of qualitative data can be coded for quantitative analysis. For example, content analysis is a method of analysis that applies quantitative analysis to data taken from written material.

7. DIFFERENT INFORMATION POLICY ANALYSIS METHODS

Various policy analysis methods are discussed below:

7.1 Analysis of documents

In order to find out about existing policy, a good place to start from is government policy documents and other necessary documents. Policy on paper does not necessarily mean there is policy in practice, or the policy described may not impact on people in the way it was intended. These issues need to be verified using other methods. Analysis of policy documents only helps in understanding policy content 'on paper' – this is not sufficient without an analysis of context, processes, measures and impacts.

7.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be effective in gaining a broad picture of people's views on policy issues. They are useful for collecting a large sample of views for comparison according to different stakeholder groups. The Granada Forest Department produced a questionnaire to provide input into its Forest Policy review process. Sample questions from the questionnaire are illustrated in table 2.1 below:

Table 1: Granada's forest policy questionnaire

(selected questions)

Should the forest department be working with farmers to help reduce soil erosion?
Unimportant   1   2   3   4   5   Important
Should the forest department be working with hunters to jointly manage wildlife populations?
Unimportant   1   2   3   4   5   Important
Should forest products that are sold by Government be subsidised? YES/NO
Do you depend on the forest for your livelihood or for some of your income? YES/NO
Does soil erosion affect you in any way? YES/ NO
What should be done about it?
Please add your thoughts and comments about any forestry or forest-related issues below (or on an attached sheet)

Source: Mayers, J. and S. Bass (1999

7.3 Interviews and, focus group discussions, and village or community meetings

Semi-structured interviews are effective for consulting and discussing with key informants – both those involved in making or influencing policy, as well as those impacted by policy. Oral case histories can be compiled by asking the interviewee to "tell a story" of a particular incident with policy relevance or of a policy process they were involved in. This can reveal insights into the actors involved, the context, the policy content and the impacts. Bear in mind, however, that many policy actors may have other political or personal agendas that may influence their responses in interview, and hence such information should be cross-referenced. For example, asking whether a donor supported policy is effective, is likely to elicit a positive response if the interviewer is perceived as having donor connections.

Workshops, focus group discussions, and village or community meetings are other ways for bringing together groups of stakeholders, with either similar or contrasting perspectives in a particular policy issue in this case the information policy. A range of participatory methods for eliciting information have been developed, many of which are described in the sub-sections below.

7.4 Time lines

Time lines are used to understand the order or chronology of historical events and trends for a subject. It shows time on a specific scale and can be used to visualise time lapse between events. In key informant interviews or group discussions, time lines can be constructed to clarify the ordering of events over time

that led to say a policy change. This method can highlight key catalysts, or chance events that led to change, as well as helping to gain an understanding of long periods without apparent change. The wider discussion around the making of a time line should also be captured, and interesting issues raised can be explored in more detail using other methods. Again, different stakeholders may have contrasting understandings of whether changes have occurred, and may identify mismatches between changes in policy at the macro level and changes on the ground.

7 .5 Stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder analysis is a technique to identify and assess the importance and interests of key people, groups, or institutions that significantly influence policy making processes or are influenced by policy. It is a process of identifying the individual or groups likely to be affected by a proposed action. The method can be used flexibly to investigate and analyse a whole range of stakeholder interests, characteristics, relative power, and circumstances (see table 2.2)

Table 2. Example of a stakeholder analysis table.					
Stakeholder group	Nature of interest in policy decision	Potential impact of policy	Relative importance of interest	Importance of group	Influence (power) of group
Primary stakeholders					
Female headed households	Improved food security	High	High	High	Low
Male headed, surplus producing households	Improved income	Medium	Medium	Low	High
Secondary stakeholders					
Ministry of Agriculture	Increasing production via 'progressive farmers'	Low	High	Medium	Low
Collaborating implementation organisations	Sustaining effective programmes and funding	High	High	Medium	Medium

Source: Based on an example in Grimble, R (1998) Stakeholder methodologies in natural resource management. Socio-economic methodologies best practice guidelines. NRI/DFID.

7 .6 Policy mapping

Policy mapping determines which of the various policies will archive a given set of goal in this case information needs goals. Policy maps can be used to map lines and directions of influence in the policy environment. It is a good visual technique, helping to open up discussion. An example of a generic policy influences map, taken from Mayers and Bass (1999) is illustrated below (figure 2). More complex maps can be created for example showing the influence of different policy actors on the policy making process.
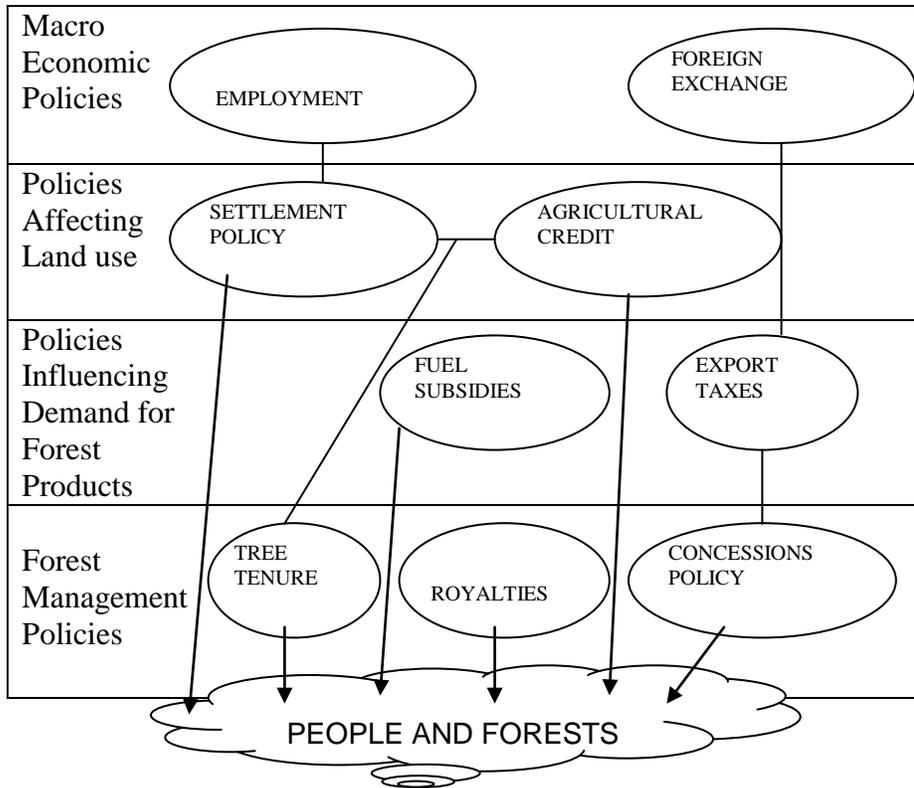
Figure : 1 A generic policy influences map.

Source: Adapted from Mayers, J. and S. Bass (1999)

7.7 Institutional analysis

A range of mapping exercises can be used to explore institutional and organisational relationships. Based on the principle of circles representing organisations, institutions, projects and actors, the connections or distance between them can illustrate different types of relationships. Connections can be represented through overlapping circles, or by connecting lines. Figure 2. below illustrates one such type of mapping exercise in which the size of the circle illustrates the relative importance of the interest group, and the thickness and direction of the arrow that connects it with the issue in question denotes the strength and direction of the relationship. A broken line denotes an informal relationship. Plus/minus signs can be added to show whether the influence is positive or negative.
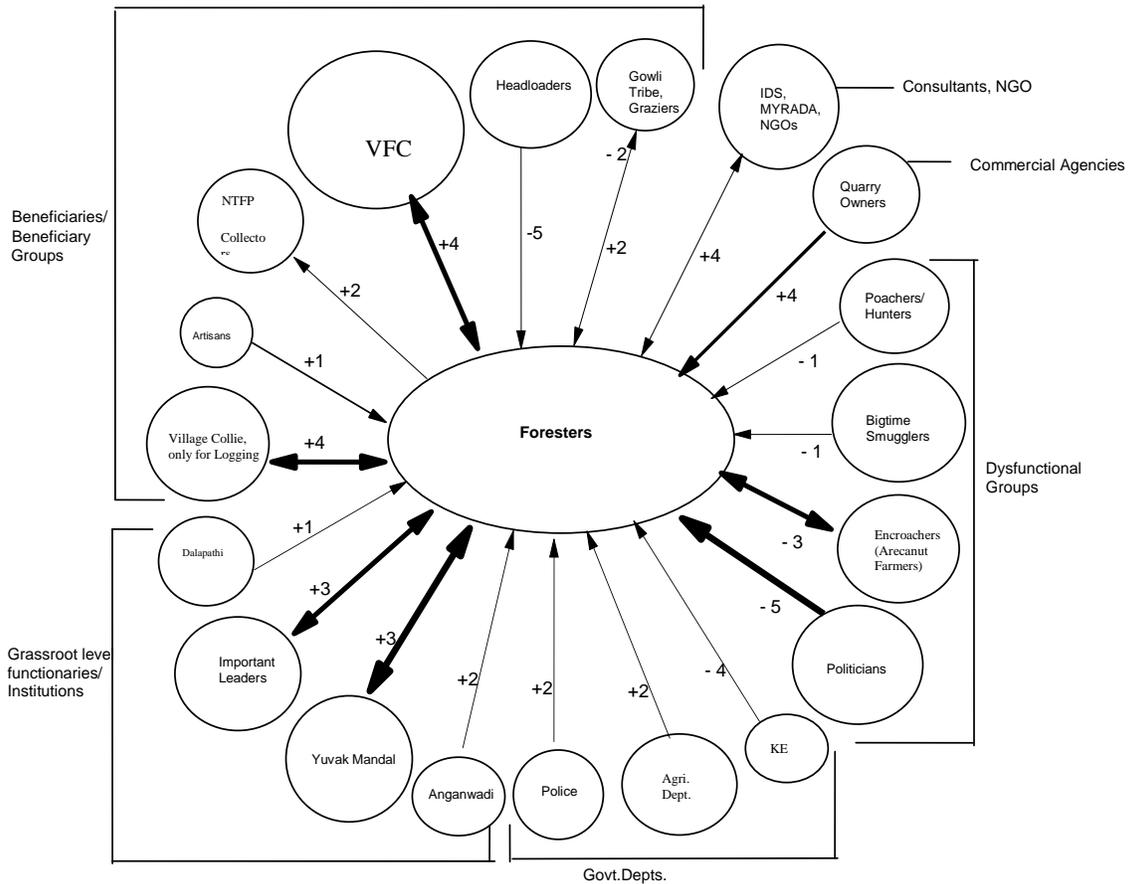
Stakeholder perceptions mapping of foresters group

Figure: 2 Stakeholder perceptions mapping of foresters group

Source: Bird (2012)

7 .8 Policy ranking

The significance of certain policies or policy issues can be ranked in order, or ranked against one another in order to reveal which policy issues or sectors are most relevant to people's livelihoods. This can be carried out by people affected by those policies, as well as by those in positions of authority who might influence decisions in those policy areas.

7 .9 Policy matrices

Matrices can be used for cross-referencing a range of factors in order to identify relationships and influences. The example below illustrates the relationships between different stakeholders in a forest in NE Thailand, and the impact of environmental policy on them. During a stakeholder workshop the matrix was developed to identify the conflicts and complementarities between the stakeholders.

Table 3: Policy matrix of conflicts and complementarities					
	Government departments	NGOs	Wood-based industries	Non-resident land owners	Local people
Government departments	✕ 👍				
NGOs	✕ 👍				
Wood-based industries	✕ 👍	✕			
Non-resident land owners		✕			
Local people	✕ 👍	✕ 👍	✓	✕	✕

Conflicts of interest are represented by ✕ complementarities by ✓and co-operative action by 👍.
(Source: Grimble, 1998).

7 .10 Policy strategy analysis

Flow diagrams can be used to trace and analyse the strategies used by actors, for instance, to influence policy, or to gain access to a restricted resource. The normal course of events is described, and the alternative routes that can be accessed when barriers are encountered.

7.11 Other participatory methods

Other participatory methods that can be used or adapted to investigate policy issues include: resource tenure and rights maps indicating ownership of land or resources; mobility maps showing seasonal movement, migration trends, etc; visioning exercises to elicit priorities, flow diagrams to map policy strategies; and time-lines to draw up policy/livelihood changes over time.

8. CONCLUSION

Policy analysis is crucial for effective and efficient information policy design. In this article we defined information policy and policy analysis. Qualitative and quantitative approaches to information policy design are used. Policy analysis methods in information policy design which include document analysis, questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, community meetings, time lines, stakeholder analysis and policy mapping where the focal point for this article.

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BIO-DATA

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