



The policy process –part one

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Understanding public policy making

- The policy process is also known as policy cycle (Jones, 1970) or stage-based model.
- Public policy is vital as it influences all aspects of human life.
- Public policy making is a complex, messy and unpredictable.
- Policy processes are where governmental policies are formulated and implemented and they are crucial to understanding changes and stability in media and communication governance (Sabatier, 1991; Steen-Johnsen & Sundet, 2024),
- Policy making is correlated with politics and power.

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- We misunderstand policy process if we ignore politics and focus only on “evidence-based policy making.
- There are variances in policy results due to behaviour of policymakers, problems faced, and actors they meet determine (Steen-Johnsen & Sundet, 2024).
- There is need to ensure language clarity.
- Policy results vary by region, political systems, time frame.
- To understand and recognise policy makers and the influence.
- Policy making environment contains many actors, rules, and networks.

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- Thus, it is important to get policy right and explain what is expected.
- Policymakers have to use cognitive shortcuts to get information and analysis.
- They use bounded rationality in two ways i.e. seeking reliable sources of information and analysis.
- 2ndly, irrational i.e. using gut instincts, habits, emotions, and beliefs.
- Complex policymaking environments limit policymaker control.
- An environment contains many policymakers and influencers.

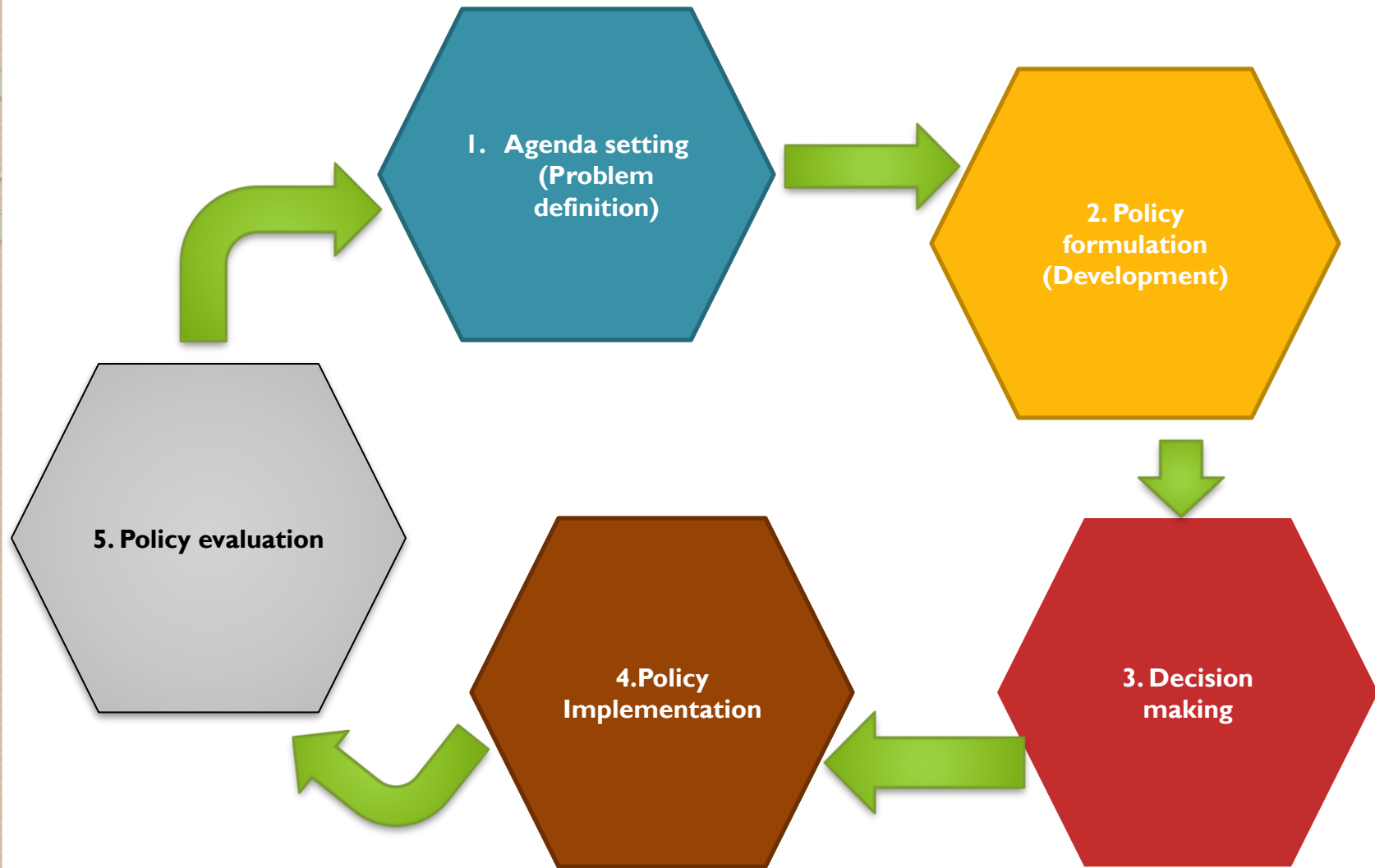
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- Policy analysis takes place in a policymaking environment over which no one has full knowledge or control.
- Without enough knowledge of the policy process, its hard to tell good versus bad policymaking.
- Understanding *power dynamics helps us understand* how policy is and should be made.
- There is a big difference between a policy process that does not work and a process we do not understand.

The “ ideal” and real” policy process

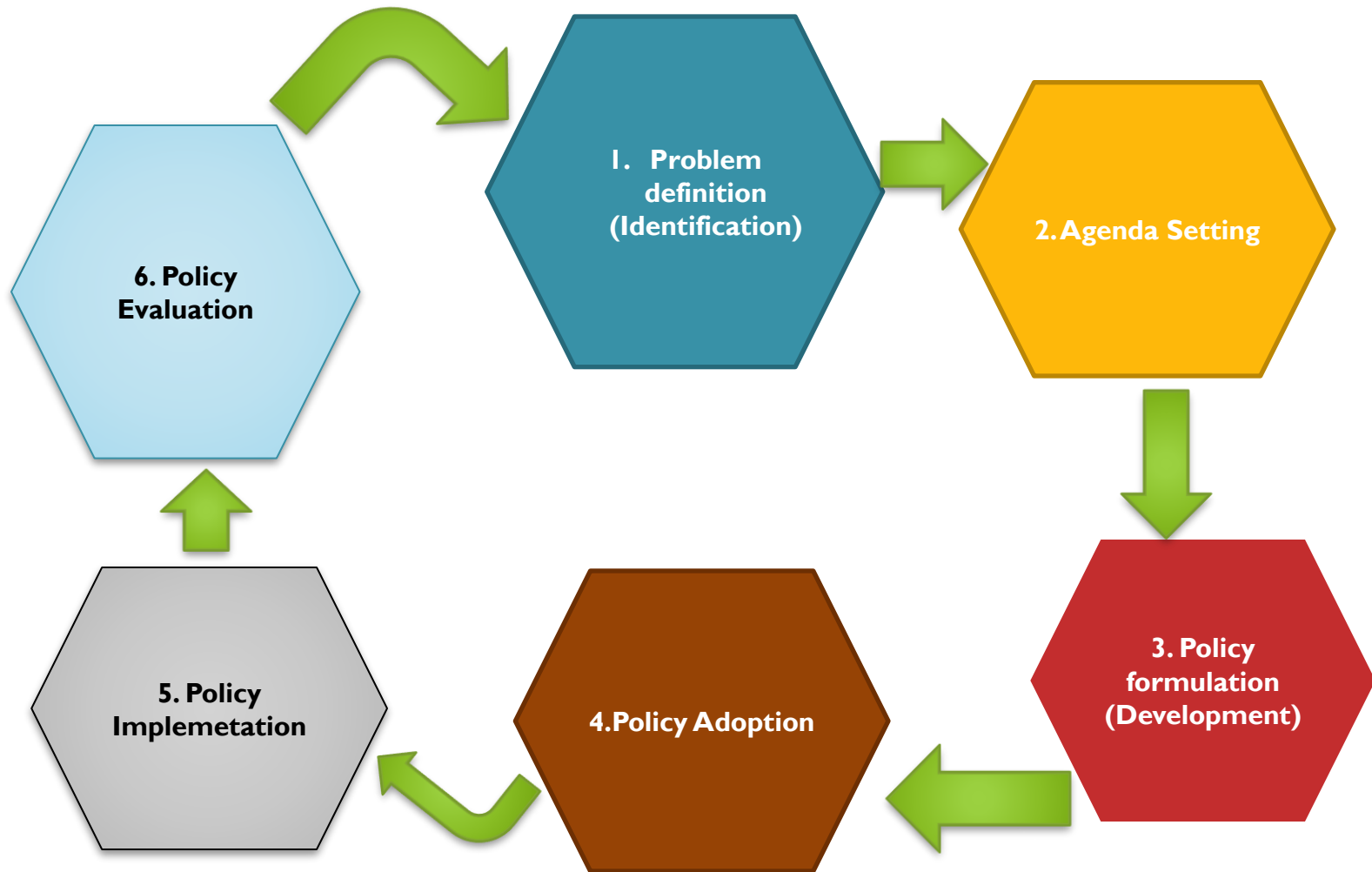
- “Ideal” and “real” policy processes distinguish between the normative and empirical approaches to policy making.
- Ideal policy process follows the rational-comprehensive model (Lindquist, 1999; Steen-Johnsen & Sundet, 2024).
- Comprehensive rationality follows the complete process (Lindblom, 2018; Cairney, 2020).
- The ideal policy is more technocratic focused than political or interest group focused.

The 5 Stage Model (Public Policy Process)



Source: Howlett & Giest, 2012; Howlett et al. 2009

The 6 Stage Model (Public Policy Process)



Source: Lindblom, 2018; Cairney, 2020

"real" policy process

- Real" policy process does not necessarily follow a linear, rational sequence (Lindquist, 1999).
- Is influenced by a myriad of factors. Does'n't necessarily follow a linear, rational sequence
- It's often may not occur in a predetermined order (Sabatier, 1991).
- The real policy process involves power dynamics, influence of political and interest groups.
- The real policy process involves power dynamics.
- The "real" policy process is also known as "muddling through" or incrementalism (Lindblom, 1959; Colander, 2003; Scott, 2010).
- This dichotomy between the ideal and real policy processes offers insights into the gap between policy as it should be and policy as it is.

Policy agenda setting

- A five-stage model of the policy process has been most commonly used.
- This is the initial stage involving initial sensing of the problem and devising various solutions (Howlett & Giest, 2012).
- This initial stage embeds problem definition which some authors have given as a separate stage on its own.
- Policy agenda setting is a process in which certain issues become the focus of government attention and action, while others are excluded or given less priority (Zhu, 1992; Smith & Shiffman, 2018).
- It is a competitive process where actors, ideas, and interests vie for access to define which problems should be prioritised and be framed.
- The multiple streams approach is used to explain how agenda setting works within the working of the policy window (Kingdon, 1995).

Cont

- Agenda setting is influenced by a wide range of factors like media framing, interest group lobbying, public opinion, and institutional dynamics (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009).
- **Policy windows** refer to a short period of time during the policy-making process when the necessary conditions align, allowing an issue to enter the formal agenda (Kingdon, 2011).
- The convergence of the three streams (the problem, the policy, and politics) make the Policy windows open.
- Policy window can open for any eventuality or as a result of influence of policy entrepreneurs who may advocate for their solutions and push for policy agenda (Birkland, 2019).

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- The policy window can be opened by any one stream (Cairney, 2020).
- Policy window does not stay open for very long, an “idea”’s time may come, but it also “passes”.
- **Policy entrepreneurs** are individuals who exploit opportunities to influence policy outcomes to increase their self-interests—without having the necessary resources required for achieving this goal alone (Cohen, 2016).
- They are not satisfied with merely promoting their self-interests but use innovative ideas and strategies.

Policy issues and why they become issues

- Policy issues are defined as societal problems or concerns that require government attention and action.
- They have significant impact on the public interest.
- They require collective solutions that cannot be effectively addressed by individuals or the market alone.
- They become “issues” because they are perceived as problematic, contested, and require actions or interventions, often due to their effects on values, resources, or power distribution in society (Dye, 1992).
- The definition and framing of problems as policy issues are also shaped by political actors (Cobb & Elder, 1980).
- Policy issues are not just objective problems but socially constructed and inherently political and central to the policy-making process (Stone, 2022).

Issue identification

- Is the process of recognizing, defining, and framing societal problems that demand government attention or action (Cohen, 2016; Smith & Shiffman, 2018).
- Its framing influences the policy alternatives and crucially determines its adoption on the policy agenda (Birkland, 2019).
- Policy Actors contribute to problem elevation, while institutional and cultural contexts shape which problems are seen as legitimate for policy intervention (Cobb & Elder, 1980).

Why issues become issues

- Because they transcend private concerns and are socially constructed as matters of public significance.
- This often happens because they involve competing values, scarce resources, or power dynamics (Stone, 2022).
- Therefore, issues become issues because they are perceived as problems and positioned within the political system as warranting collective resolution.

Actors in policy agenda setting and why?

- ✓ government officials
 - ✓ Legislators
 - ✓ Bureaucrats
 - ✓ Interest groups & public
 - ✓ Advocacy coalitions,
 - ✓ Policy entrepreneurs
 - ✓ The media (Fraussen & Halpin, 2020).
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- Each has different resources, such as expertise, legitimacy, political authority, or public support (Cohen, 2016; Smith & Shiffman, 2018).
 - Agenda setting is more than a technical process.

Qn (a) Using NEMA as example in Ugandan public policy making, assess the power dynamics to determine who holds real decision-making power among the various actors.

(b) How do less powerful stakeholders still influence Public policy outcomes?

How does agenda-setting work?

- It is a dynamic and nonlinear process that determines which issues move to the policy agenda.
- This process is shaped by the interaction of problem recognition, policy alternatives, and political streams (Politics, policy & problem) (Kingdon, 1995).
- This interaction is referred to as “punctuated equilibrium (Baumgartner and Jones (2009; Cairney, 2020)
- Agenda setting works through both rational assessment and political negotiation.

Public participation

- Public participation in public policy promotes democratic governance, legitimacy, accountability, and inclusiveness (Riduan, 2024; Hendriks, 2012).
- It entails engaging citizens and stakeholders in the development and implementation of policies rather than elite capture.
- Public participation strengthens transparency, trust, and ownership of the process, reducing resistance to policy implementation (Xiang, 2024).
- Critics, however, argue that participation is often weakened by unequal access, elite capture.
- Regarded as a costly and time-consuming process that can potentially exacerbate conflict (Zakhour, 2020; Cornwall, 2008).
- Public participation requires well-designed processes that ensure inclusivity
- Effectiveness, and efficiency must address power imbalances and structural inequalities.

Problem identification (Research and advocacy)

- Involves highlighting a particular issue or situation in society that the government needs to address.
- Conducting research provides evidence to frame the problem, define its parameters, and identify possible policy solutions.
- Advocacy raises public awareness, mobilizes stakeholders and political will for consideration on the policy agenda (Wolff,2018; Kingdon, 2011; Birkland, 2019).
- Advocacy groups and policy entrepreneurs are instrumental in shaping policies problems and how they are framed and understood to draw attention to the issue (Cairney, 2019).
- Problem identification is not a neutral process that only considers objective facts and evidence.
- It is influenced by competing interests, ideologies, and resource constarints, making some problems having more weight than others (Wolff,2018; Stone, 2012).

Problem definition and structuring

- Problem definition is seen as a political act, to try to establish whose interests matter, and how it is viewed as good or bad evidence (Cairney, 2020).
- Problem definition and structuring refers to the ways social or political issues are identified, framed, and clarified in a manner that makes them actionable for policymakers (Birkland, 2019).
- Effective problem structuring requires empirical evidence, clear boundaries, and articulation of causes and consequences (Cairney, 2019).
- Ill-defined problems can lead to inappropriate or failed interventions or policy (Kingdon, 2011).
- Framing is not value-free, as competing narratives and political interests shape the process dimensions (Stone, 2012).

What do you need to define a policy problem

- Policy process research helps us understand the role of problem definition and solution development.
- Understanding exactly audience when defining problems and what we can realistically expect them to do with our solutions.
- Beginning with your “clients diagnosis”, placing it in a wider perspective to help analyse it critically (Vining (2017; Mintrom, 2012).
- Policymakers need to first identify the discrepancy between the current and desired state of affairs and back it up with data and evidence (Birkland, 2019).
- Facts and stakeholders’ experiences and should be clear about the cause, scope, and affected population (Dye, 2017).

What are the Types of Solutions Available to Solve Policy Problems?

Solutions for policy problems include;

- ✓ Regulatory (rules and standards)
- ✓ Market-based instruments (taxes, subsidies, incentives)
- ✓ Public provision of goods/services
- ✓ Information-based solutions (education, awareness, campaigns) (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003).
- The appropriateness and effectiveness of each type depend on the nature of the problem, the available resources, and political factors.
- In real-world settings, it is more common to see the combined application of policy instruments (Peters, 2019).
- To address a social problem, a mix of solutions is essential and consider both their technical efficacy and public acceptability.

Problem prioritization

- Problem prioritization in public policy refers to the process of deciding which issues should receive immediate attention and resources.
- Multiple streams framework guides that problems gain priority with alignment of political will, public concern, and available solutions (Kingdon, 2011).
- Policy entrepreneurs, advocacy coalitions, and the media play a greater role (Birkland, 2019; Cairney, 2019).
- Prioritization always reflecting power dynamics and institutional biases, and can leave important but less visible or vocal problems ignored or delayed.



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THANK YOU FOR LISTENING