

THE ROLE OF EVALUATION AT THE STAGES OF POLICY FORMULATION, IMPLEMENTATION, AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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Abstract: Public policy evaluation is a *sine qua non* and unavoidable exercise for any nation states in the world. This paper discusses three major stages of policy evaluation i.e. evaluation at the formulation, implementation and post-implementation or impact assessment. In every stage evaluation must follow appropriate standard and criteria. For the sake of greater public interest and maintaining real worth or value for money, subjectivity should be avoided in doing evaluation studies rather proper objectivity should be maintained through choosing of right professionals or experts for doing right evaluation. In doing evaluation, evaluators should try to choose proper sampling, produce unbiased interpretation and analysis, and maintain reliability and validity with ethical manners. The evaluator or decision-makers should never hide and distort the research findings and the competent authority should ventilate the findings and try to utilize the results and recommendations with no time.

Keywords: evaluation, policy implementation, policy formulation, impact assessment, evaluation standard

INTRODUCTION

Public policy evaluation is a tool for measuring the worthiness, performance and efficacy of any policy or program. In fact, policy process or cycle starts with problem identification/agenda setting and moves through policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, policy analysis or evaluation and the last stage is

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policy change, improvement or termination. Policy analysts opine that evaluation can be taken in pre-policy stage, formulation stage, implementation and post implementation or evaluation stage. In simple sense, policy evaluation can be undertaken before implementation, during implementation and after implementation of any policy or program. In other words, when we take new initiatives or any developmental undertaking we usually do feasibility study or need assessment, or in some cases it can be bench mark survey or this pre-policy phase we can tell that it is formulation stage in the sense of evaluation. After the policy or program is in operation, if evaluation is undertaken during this time it will be implantation evaluation and after implementation if we undertake evaluation it will be policy evaluation or impact assessment or outcome evaluation.

The objective of this paper is to assess the role of evaluation in policy formulation stage, implementation stage and post implementation or impact assessment stage. In so doing, a thorough review of literature and researchers' own reflexivity have been utilized. The prime motivation of this assessment is to fill-in the dearth of understanding how evaluation is encompassed in some of the important stages of policy cycle and provides some guidelines how successful evaluation is to be conducted.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF POLICY EVALUATION

In the simplest sense, policy evaluation is concerned with learning about the consequences of public policy. The central tenet of the policy evaluation research is its focus on the activities of the public sector and its influence on society (Lester and Stewart, 2000). Policy evaluation is the assessment of the overall effectiveness of a national program or policy in meeting its objectives, or an assessment of the relative effectiveness of two or more programs in meeting common objectives (Wholey, John, Hugh, James, and Leona, 1970). Policy evaluations are concerned with the ability of the policy to improve some societal conditions such as by reducing environmental pollution or by reducing crime (Lester and Stewart, 2000). Gerston (1997) defines, "policy evaluation assesses the effectiveness of a public policy in term of its perceived intentions and results". Evaluation in the field of public policy may be defined as an analytical tool and procedure meant to do two things. First, evaluation research, an as analytical tool, involves investigating a policy program to obtain all information pertinent to the assessment of its performance, both process and result; second,

evaluation as a phase of the policy cycle more generally refers to the reporting of such information back to the policy-making process (Wollmann, 2003 quoted in Fischer, Miller, and Sidney, 2007). Evaluation is the process of determining the merit, worth, and value of things (Scriven, 1991). Evaluation is a key analytical procedure in any disciplined intellectual and practical endeavour. Evaluation implies looking backward in order to better steer forward. It is a mechanism for monitoring, systematizing, and grading government activities and their result so that public officials in their future-oriented work will be able to act as responsibly, creatively and efficiently as possible (Vedung, 2005). Policy evaluation refers to the “systematic assessment of the operation and/or the outcome of a program or policy, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standard, as a means of contributing to the improvement of the program or policy (Weiss, 1998).

DIFFERENT STAGES OF POLICY EVALUATION

According to Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey (1998), there are five stages of program evaluation such as; need assessment, assessment of program theory, assessment of program process or implementation evaluation, impact assessment or policy evaluation and efficiency assessment. Amongst the five stages, evaluating the three stages such as; formulation, implementation and impact assessment are so important since appropriate guidelines coming from these stages would determine better outcome with regard to successful accomplishment of any public policy. As such, three relevant stages concerning evaluation have been discussed beneath.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAM THEORY OR EVALUATION OF FORMULATION STAGE

In a new program scenario, need assessment feeds into the development of the intervention program premised on specific program theory. However, assessment of the program theory is critical because some policy implementation fails as a result of wrong theory/logic upon which the program was built (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973). It is also emphasized that if the program theory is faulty, the program is ultimately to fail anyway (Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey, 1998). This can be in the form of inadequate focus and unrealistic assumptions guiding the formulation of the program. Assumptions and expectations give guidance on how the program is to be implemented in order to achieve the program goals and objectives;

and facilitate the conduct of other types of evaluation. Hence, the assessment of the program theory is conducted in order to update, simplify, clarify and make more accessible the underlying theory of program. This type of evaluation was firstly referred to as evaluability assessment in 1970's and changed to assessment of program theory in 1980's and in other literature it is currently being called assessment of program logic since 1990's (Hurworth, 2008). This method involves documentation of the assumptions implicit in program design and an indication of the data required to test these assumptions. In this respect, concepts such as realism, coherence, and relevance are evaluated. This involves the re-construction of underlying theory and the assessment of its constituent parts as well as their mutual connections. Subsequently, a program theory evaluation may proceed to empirically; theoretically or logically test such assumptions and steps implied in the program logic (Hurworth, 2008).

The process also identifies links between planned activities and anticipated outcomes (Hurworth, 2008). According to Chen, H. T. (1990) program theory is a set of interrelated assumptions, principles and/or propositions to explain or guide social actions. The assessment of the program theory is used at planning stage of the new intervention program or at pilot stage. The gist of the matter is that this is to answer the question on how well the services are matched to the social needs they are supposed to resolve. The results coming from this assessment can be used for launching a new program with assurance that conceptualization and design of the program is appropriate. Assessment of program theory is also important because it makes the conduct of further evaluations easy due to the level of clarity established on goals, objectives and other issues as stated above. Hence, it establishes that the program is ready for evaluation using other types of evaluation. In addition, the assessment of the program theory with concepts of evaluability, also establishes the costs of evaluations to be conducted (ERS Standards Committee, 1982).

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAM PROCESS OR EVALUATION OF IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

Following the adoption of program design, there is an act of implementing the program in order to realize the planned benefits to the target group. Implementation involves a lot of resources such as human, physical, financial and logistical resources, among others. These are supposed to be used prudently if the program has to yield the

intended results. With this in mind, the assessment of the program process is conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation. The process evaluation also includes assessment of intensity and reliability with which services are delivered; interactions between clients and practitioners; management strategies and philosophies; and the cost of the program (Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey, 1998). There are two types of assessment of program process. One of them is the process evaluation which can be conducted anytime of the program implementation to assess the program process, activities and operations of the program (Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey, 1998). In particular, this appraisal is interested in assessing whether the program is implemented as planned; it is used for adjusting and enhancing the program implementation; it leads to revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the program; and it results in influencing program's on-going development (Anonymous, undated). Activities under this category may also include field appraisal of the program for the sake of replication; and survey assessing people's attitudes towards the program (ERS Standards Committee, 1982). The main characteristic making it different from the second type is that this is done once during the implementation of the program.

The second type of assessment of program process is the program monitoring which is on-going aiming at ensuring that program day to day operations are conducted appropriately. In fact, this is more of a management tool to facilitate smooth implementation of the program by fine-tuning the processes, activities and operations where problems have been identified. As implementation proceeds, program monitoring assists in documenting what the progress is and this information is important to the evaluation sponsors and other stakeholders to know operational effectiveness of the program to justify its continued support, among others. Both process evaluation and program monitoring provide information for improving the program implementation and accountability purposes with regard to how the resources are used and how effective is the process of program implementation. Besides, as observation is conducted on site new information is generated for future use.

In conducting the process evaluation, two evaluation criteria can be used. Evaluator can refer to the performance indicators are contained in the program design in terms of planned activities, services and costs; and compare these with those found in the process evaluation itself. Alternatively, the evaluator can use specific administrative or service

objectives (Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey, 1998). Based on certain targets, actual levels generated in the evaluation are compared accordingly. Hence, evaluation criteria define the performance measures/indicators and how these are operationalised. Process evaluation is based on these indications to assess whether the program is implemented in an effective manner or it is off track. Process evaluation is also conducted together with the impact assessment in that the activities which produce program outcomes are identified and linked to these effects. In addition, there is also a close relation with the efficiency assessment in that during process evaluation the costs of the programs are also established and quantified. As can be observed, the assessment of program process is vital and feeds into both impact and efficiency assessments.

Most often, the process evaluation embraces the following questions: “What is the program? What are the components of the program? What kind of principles is this program based on? What and why have changes been made? What design changes may be necessary to replicate the program elsewhere? What are the program costs? Has there been change in funding? What about future funding? Why was the program introduced into the community or organization? Which people were involved with the implementation? Is the program actually serving the program population? How are clients recruited? How satisfied are clients with program? How effective are members of staff? How are they trained? How satisfied are the members of staff? What are roles and responsibilities of members of staff etc?” (Anonymous, undated).

Going through these questions, it is clear that the intention is to pin down some factors which may lead to the success of the program implementation for lessons to be used in design of future programs. It is also evident that the aim is to track those variables which may negatively affect the program implementation, leading to program failure and the need to take the corrective measures to improve the performance of the program. The failure in program implementation can be attributed to program design with ambiguous and complex assumptions or unrealistic program targets. On the other hand, failure can be a result of implementation problems such as conflicts among implementers; resistance to change; red tape; and inadequate provision of necessary resources (Bardach, 2005). The importance of process evaluation, therefore, lies in identifying these problems in time and adjusting the program in order to enhance execution.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT OR POLICY EVALUATION

The existence of a social problem in a community justifies the implementation of the program to improve the conditions or eradicate a problem. It is, therefore, the role of impact assessment to assess the extent to which a program produces the intended benefits in society. Of particular importance are the issues regarding whether the desired program outcomes were attained; whether the program was effective in producing the change in targeted conditions; and the program produced unintended outcomes (Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey, 1998).

Procedurally, the evaluator needs to plan for data collection such that the right outcome information is captured. Hence, there is need to develop and specify the outcome variables. This also involves identifying the intended beneficiaries of the targeted program. The design of the impact assessment can be experimental where subjects are divided in the experimental group where an intervention is implemented and in the control group where nothing is done. In this design any change which occurs in the treatment group; but not experienced in the control group is attributed to the intervention program. In the long run, other side effects and ultimate outcomes can also be experienced in the treatment group. In this case, the program is termed as effective. In response, program funders and other stakeholders become satisfied such that the program can be expanded to cover more beneficiaries or it can be continued into the future. However, if changes in conditions take place in both treatment and control groups the intervention is not responsible for that change and the program can be curtailed.

Alternatively, non-randomized quasi-experiments can be used where the subjects of similar attributes such as age, education, marital status and sometimes weight are involved in the assessment of the impact of the intervention program. This is to say that the effects of these factors are controlled for. Hence, any change in the conditions taking place is attributed to the intervention program. If the changes are insignificant after controlling for some factors, the program is classified as ineffective. In this case, the program can be discontinued. For impact assessment to be meaningful, it needs to be linked to the process evaluation in order to have the linkage between the produced effects and the activities producing them. Otherwise, the evaluator is able to assess the impacts; but he cannot know the causes of the effects, succumbing to black box phenomenon. In this case, he can

hardly conclude that it was the program which produced the effects. In addition, the impact assessment should be conducted when there is genuine need for the impact assessment results. This is because the exercise demands a lot of expertise, time and resources, including financial resources. For instance, if there is need to replicate the program, an impact assessment can be conducted to show how effective the program is. The same applies when there is need to continue with or expand the project. This uses resources which are mostly scarce. It is also important to commission impact assessment for mature, stable programs with well-defined model, implying that programs with clear and well documented assumptions and expectations on what is supposed to be done and properly defined program beneficiaries. Hence, impact assessment is important if there is need to account for the resources in terms of how well they have been used, how beneficial the program is to the intended beneficiaries and justifying expansion, continuation or curtailment of the program.

STANDARD FOR DOING EVALUATION

Evaluation must be standard and professional activity. Several standards are available on how to make successful evaluation. According to Evaluation Research Society (ERS) Standard Committee, the standards for doing evaluation can be organized in six sections such as; i) Formulation and negotiation; ii) Structure and design; iii) Data collection and preparation; iv) Data Analysis and Interpretation; v) communication and disclosure; and vi) Utilization. All six of these phases are normally included in all stages of policy and program evaluation.

FORMULATION AND NEGOTIATION

Before an evaluation project or program is undertaken, the concerned parties should strive for a clear mutual understanding of what is to be done, how it is to be done and why, and for an appreciation of possible constraints or impediments. However, the knowledge initially available will vary widely, and the parties to the evaluation should be prepared to modify early formulations as information and circumstances change. These can be performed in the following manner: i) The purposes and characteristics of the program or activity to be addressed in the evaluation should be specified as precisely as possible; ii) The clients, decision makers, and potential users of the evaluation results should be identified and their information needs and expectations made clear.

Where appropriate, evaluators should also help identify areas of public interest in the program; ii) The type of evaluation which is most appropriate should be identified and its objectives made clear, the range of activities to be undertaken should be specified; iii) An estimate of the cost of the proposed evaluation and, where appropriate, of alternatives should be provided; this estimate should be prudent, ethically responsible, and based on sound accounting principles; iv) Agreement should be reached at the outset that the evaluation is likely to produce information of sufficient value, applicability, and potential use to justify its cost; v) The feasibility of undertaking the evaluation should be estimated either informally or through formal evaluability assessment; vii) Restrictions, if any, on access to the data and results from an evaluation should be clearly established and agreed to between the evaluator and the client at the outset; viii) Potential conflicts of interest should be identified, and steps should be taken to avoid compromising the evaluation processes and results; ix) Respect for and protection of the rights and welfare of all parties to the evaluation should be a central consideration in the negotiation process; x) Accountability for the technical and financial management of the evaluation once it is undertaken should be clearly defined; xi) All agreements reached in the negotiation phase should be specified in writing, including schedule, obligations and involvements of all parties to the evaluation, and policies and procedures on access to the data. When plans or conditions change, these, too, should be specified; xii) Evaluators should not accept obligations that exceed their professional qualifications or the resources available to them.

STRUCTURE AND DESIGN

The design for any evaluation cannot be conceived in a vacuum. It is necessarily influenced by logistical, ethical, political, and fiscal concerns and therefore must take these as well as methodological requirements into account. Designs will vary in rigor, and not all measurements are equally objective. However, even with these broad variations, the following standards generally apply. For example, the approach to a case study is as subject to specification as the design of an experimental study; the reliability of judgments is as much at issue as the reliability of objective tests. For this some the evaluators should consider: i) For all types of evaluations, a clear approach or design should be specified and justified as appropriate to the types of conclusions and inferences to be drawn; ii) For impact studies, the

central evaluation design problem of estimating the effects of non-treatment and the choice of a particular method for accomplishing this should be fully described and justified; iii) If sampling is to be used, the details of the sampling methodology /choice of unit, method of selection, time frame, and so forth should be described and justified, based on explicit analysis of the requirements of the evaluation, including generalization; iv) The measurement methods and instruments should be specified and described, and their reliability and validity should be estimated for the population or phenomena to be measured; v) Justification should be provided the appropriate procedures and instruments have been specific; vi) The necessary cooperation of program staff, affected institutions, and members of the community, as well as those directly involved in the evaluation, should be planned and assurances of cooperation obtained.

DATA COLLECTION AND PREPARATION

These standards assume that data collection is carried out within the specifications of a sound design and plan of work. However, at the time the data collection methods are specified, reasonable changes should be made in the design in order to accommodate the realities of the situation. During the data collection process, if logistical difficulties occur or circumstances change significantly, the design and work plan should be revised accordingly. Some issues are very important like: i) A data collection preparation plan should be developed in advance of data collection; ii) Provision should be made for the detection, reconciliation, and documentation of departures from the original design; iii) Evaluation staff should be selected, trained, and supervised to ensure competence, consistency, impartiality, and ethical practice; iv) All data collection activities should be conducted so that the rights, welfare, dignity, and worth of individuals are respected and protected; v) The estimated validity and reliability of data collection instruments and procedures should be verified under the prevailing circumstances of their use; vi) Analysis of the sources of error should be undertaken, and adequate provisions for quality assurance and control should be established; vii) The data collection and preparation procedures should provide safeguards so that the findings and reports are not distorted by any biases of data collectors; viii) Data collection activities should be conducted with minimum disruption to the program under study and with minimum imposition on the organizations or persons from whom data are gathered; ix) Procedures

that may entail adverse effects or risks should be subjected to independent review and then used only with informed consent of the parties affected; x) Data should be handled and stored so that release to unauthorized persons is prevented and access to individually identifying data is limited to those with a need to know; xi) Documentation should be maintained of the source, method of collection, circumstances of collection, and processes of preparation for each item of data; xii) Appropriate safeguards should be employed to ensure against irrecoverable loss of data through catastrophic events.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this stage the evaluators should take care the following issues such as: i) The analytic procedures should be matched to the purposes of the evaluation, the design, and the data collection; ii) All analytic procedures, along with their underlying assumptions and limitations, should be described explicitly, and the reasons for choosing the procedures should be clearly explained; iii) Analytic procedures should be appropriate to the way the data were collected and the types of conclusions to be drawn; iv) The units of analysis should be appropriate to the way the data were collected and the types of conclusions to be drawn; v) Justification should be provided that the appropriate analytic procedures have been applied; vi) Documentation should be adequate to make the analyses replicable; vii) When quantitative comparisons are made, indications should be provided of both statistical and practical significance; viii) Cause-and-effect interpretations should be bolstered not only by reference to the design but also by recognition and elimination of plausible rival explanations; ix) Finding should be reported in a manner that distinguishes among objective findings, opinions, judgments, and speculation.

COMMUNICATION AND DISCLOSURE

In this stage: i) Findings should be presented clearly, completely and fairly; ii) Findings should be organized and stated in language understandable by the decision makers and other audiences and any recommendations should be clearly related to the findings; iii) Findings and recommendations should be presented in a framework that indicates their relative importance; iv) Assumptions should be explicitly acknowledged; v) Limitation caused by the constraints on time, resources, data availability and so forth should be stated; vii) A complete description of how findings were derived should be

accessible; viii) Persons, groups, and organizations who have contributed to the evaluation should receive feedback appropriate to their needs; ix) Disclosures should follow the legal and proprietary understanding agreed upon in advance, with evaluator serving as proponent for the fullest, most open disclosure appropriate; x) Official authorized to release the evaluation data should be specified; xi) The finished data base and associated documentation should be organized in a manner consisted with the accessibility policies and procedures.

USE OF RESULTS

Although the utilization of results cannot be granted but the authority should try to use it in the next possible manner so that it can benefit the program and stakeholders. The following principles should be followed to use the result: i) The Evaluation results should be made available to appropriate users before relevant decisions must be made; ii) Evaluators should try to anticipate and prevent misinterpretations and misuses of evaluative information; iii) The evaluators should bring to the attention of decision makers and others relevant audiences suspected side-effects- positive and negative- of the evaluation process; iv) Evaluation should distinguish clearly between the findings of the evaluation and any policy recommendations based on them; v) In making recommendations about corrective courses of action; vi) Evaluation should carefully consider and indicate what is known about the probable effectiveness and costs of the recommended courses of action; vii) Evaluators should maintain a clear distinction between their role as an evaluator and any advocacy role they choose to adopt.

CONCLUSION

In the case of public policy, evaluation at formulation, implementation and impact assessment stages should be carefully designed. A policy or intervention has to be objectively chosen for addressing the right type or need-based problem instead of using populist stand or using demagogy or rigmaroles. Political maneuvering in the case of adopting public policy is very tough to avoid in many cases. Weak political structure contributes populist policy intervention. However, the expert should tactfully guide the political leaders in this respect so that scarce tax-payers money should be properly utilized in right intervention. Any new undertakings must consider the Constitutional provision or law of the land, appropriate technology, theoretical back-up, means and needs, budgetary provision, mass support etc. After designing the

appropriate policy or program, proper attention should be taken for successful policy implementation. Wrong or weak policy will never bring success whether it is implemented successfully and on the other hand good policy with poor implementation will never bring desired development and transformation of the society. To become a policy implementation successful it is exigently essential to involve the relevant expert or professional from formulation stage up to evaluation stage. Finally, the assessment of impact of any policy should be equipped with required resources, manpower, logistics and technical know-how. For having an objective policy impact assessment the need for proper sampling, experimental design, suitable methodology incorporating either quantitative, qualitative methods or mixed methods, maintaining reliability and validity can never be over-emphasized. Overall, appropriate standards for evaluation should also carefully be followed. Following ERS standard is one of the important means as such.

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