SOME APPROACHES IN POLICY STUDY

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Abstract:

The article, after providing definitions of policy, public policy and analyzing main contents of policy study, turns attention on the two main topics: i) Analysis of some focused approaches for policy study, and ii) Proposal of some recommendations for policy setting in Vietnam.

For the first topic, recommendations are made for approaches such as: recognition of paradox of the role of policy setting and impacts from policies among social groups, identification of standard conformity of policies, proposal of strategies to secure the right course of policies, recovery of "system faults", analysis of consequences of policies to issue solutions to recover at highest level negative impacts from policies.

In connection to Vietnam reality, on basis of point by Prof. Kenichi Ohno, Japanese Institute of Economic Studies: "The system of policies of Vietnam, up to now, does not really give the important contribution for the country's development", the author notes the necessity of an innovative model in policy setting in Vietnam which would attract participation of social layers, particularly business community, social organizations and large public communities where the "technocrat" group of excellent individuals has to have an adequate role.

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1. Policy study

1.1. Definition of "policy" and "public policy"

1.1.1. Policies

- According to the Vietnamese Dictionary, "policies are documents of guiding nature and concrete plans to achieve certain objectives, which are formulated on basis of global political orientation and actual situation".

- Vu Cao Dam, in his work [7], 2011, said policies are the collection of measures institutionized by a managing subject which is oriented to govern the controlled objects to put the later to achieve the objectives defined by the managing subject in strategies for development of a social system. The notion "social system" is understood in a global

sense which may be a nation, an administrative sector, a business and a school.

-   James Anderson, in his work [15], 2003, stated policies are the suit of activities the government decides to implement or not implement with well based intentions and clearly defined targets which impact large populations; or policies are process of targeted actions which is followed consistently for solution of problems.

-   Nguyen Minh Thuyet, in his work [8], 2011, defined policies are the concrete guiding lines of a party or power subject for certain fields together with measures and plant for implementation of this guiding line. The policy structure includes: concrete guiding lines (for realization of global lines), measures and plans for implementation. The policy issuing subjects are political parties, State management authorities and units, companies and etc.

1.1.2. Public policies

-   The author of [11] made reference to the definition by Guy Petter, 1996 which states "Public policies are the ones to reflect wholly the activities of the Government directly or indirectly impacting the life of population. "Private" ones, contrarily, are only the internal rules to settle interior problems.

-   William Jenkin, in his work [8], 1978, noted the public policies are a set of inter-linked decisions by a politician or a group of politicians in tough connection to the selection of objectives and targeted solutions. Therefore, public policies are the set of institutionized intervention policies issued by the State to achieve its governing targets.

-   Also in [8], William N. Dunn, 1992, stated public policies are a complex combination of inter-linked choices including non-action decisions which are issued by State agencies or State officials.

-   Next, in [8], Peter Aucoin, 1971, provided a simple concept that public policies include actual actions made by the Government.

-   Again in [8], Thomas R. Dye, 1984, considered public policies are things the Government decides to do or not to do.

The components of public policies as noted in [8] globally include: i) Intentions which reflect the wills by the in-power authorities, ii) Objectives which are actualized wills, iii) Proposals, called also solutions, which are modes of actions to achieve objectives, and iv) Effects which show the effectiveness of policy implementation.

The main contents related to policies in this paper are related to public policies.

1.2. Main contents of policy study

1.2.1. Global view

Policy study is a process of systematic nature which usually includes the following activities: i) Analysis and assessment of unreasonable matters, effects and feasibility of policies to achieve the defined objectives, ii) Analysis and assessment of impacts of policies in all the aspects, iii) Proposal of recommendations and choices to achieve the defined objectives.

Objectives of policy study include: i) Reduction of incorrectness level and non-desired impacts from policies, ii) Provision of information for decision makers for selection of the best decisions, iii) Provision of systematic assessments for feasibility level and impacts (positive and negative) on economic, social and political aspects during implementation of policies.

1.2.2. Analysis and assessment of impacts from policies

The process of policy study is divided into two main groups of activities: i) Analysis of policies, and 2) Assessment of policies.

- Analysis of policies includes: (i) Forecast of impacts from policies on economic, social and political aspects, ii) Prediction of results and impacts from choices of policies, and iii) Proposal of recommendations.

- Assessment of policies includes: i) Assessment of results (positive and negative) of implementation of policies, ii) Identification of the level the policies achieves the targets, causes of successes and failures during implementation of policies.

The assessment of policies is one of the most important activities in the process of policy study which are to clarify the impacts from policies to various target groups in the society and to the social development in general. This assessment includes also the assessment at pre-implementation stage (forecasts) and the analysis of achieved results at post-implementation stage. The objects impacted by policies are decided into the groups of direct and indirect impacts.

2. Some focused approaches for policy study

2.1. Approach of basic paradox on the rights and impacts from policies [2]

The process of policy setting and the process of policy implementation have always a paradox: Population has a low deciding role during policy setting stage but suffers most impacts during policy implementation stage.

2.1.1. Population usually has a low deciding role during policy setting stage
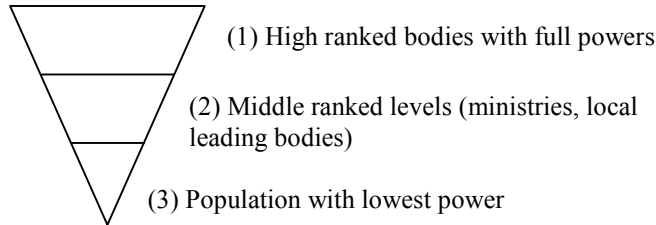

(1) High ranked bodies with full powers

(2) Middle ranked levels (ministries, local leading bodies)

(3) Population with lowest power

Figure 1. Policy setting powers

Fig. 1 describes quantitatively the hierarchy of roles of subjects during the process of policy setting where: i) High ranked bodies (central State bodies) with the most important role (the largest share area in Fig. 1), ii) Ministerial and local agencies, and finally iii) Population with the lowest role (the smallest share area in Fig. 1). Common practice wants that policies are prepared by ministerial agencies then they pass the view collection procedure and then are approved by the highest ranked bodies (the Government, National Assembly of Ministerial leaders). Population can contribute points of view indirectly through meetings or contacts with National Assembly members.

So, up to now, the role of population is less visible during the policy setting process.

2.1.2. Population gets most impacted from policies

Fig. 2 describes quantitatively the level of impacts from policies for various social players. Population is the direct object of policies and suffers most impacts from policies, particularly negative ones.

For example, in terms of environment policies, the population has a low role in environment protection policy setting process but it gets most exposed directly to environment pollution. The same situation is observed in the policy of land withdrawal for industrialization-urbanization purposes where the population has a low role in setting up the Land Law but they are most impacted (positively and negatively) during the implementation stage of Land Law.
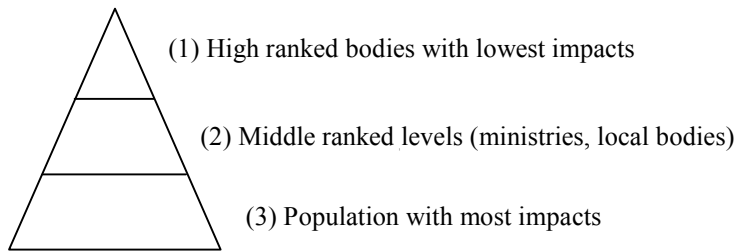
(1) High ranked bodies with lowest impacts

(2) Middle ranked levels (ministries, local bodies)

(3) Population with most impacts

Figure 2. Levels of impacts from policies

From the above approach it is noted that for effective setting and implementation of policies, we need to combine these two figures at the same time for two objectives: i) to secure the important role of leading bodies at the policy setting stage and ii) to fit "the population desires" the we have Figure 3 which reflects the balance of the role of social subjects. It means to enhance the participative role of the large population - the social objects directly impacted from policies. This participation is usually realized through social organizations, professional/vocational associations, scientists, independent consulting organizations and etc.
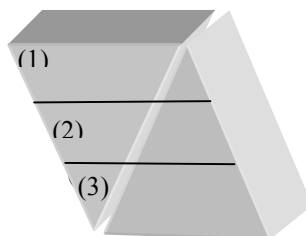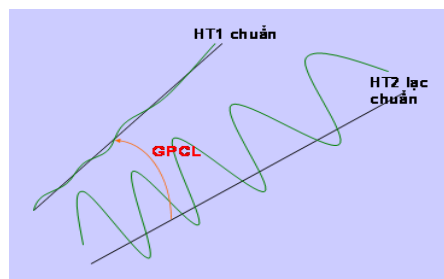

Figure 3. Balance of roles in setting and implementing of policies

2.2. Standard conformity approach of policies

HT1 chuan - Standard conformity trajectory
HT2 lac chuan - Non-standard-conformity trajectory

Figure 4. "System faults" when policies are designed non-standard-conformly

Fig. 4 describes the trajectories of two policy systems. The trajectory HT1 describes a system of policies designed properly and in conformity to standards. Then, during implementation stage, if any "faults" appear they would be "errors" or "disturbances" which are some fluctuations (oscillations) around the trajectory HT1. In the system theory, this type of errors is called "white noise" which means the value 0 of expectation. In this case, the errors would be of casual and local nature and they do not deviate the whole system of policies. It is the case when we can say that "*the policies are right but some light errors are committed during implementation stage*" which assigned faults to implementation activities. Solutions for recovery in this case lead to tough respect of regulations required by defined policies.

Inversely, the trajectory HT2 reflects a policy designed not conform to standards. During implementation of this type of policies, the impacted subjects are not posed closely to the trajectory HT2 because otherwise, they would suffer too many losses from policies and they have tendencies to conduct themselves "against" policies to protect their own "local" interests. Then, in implementation of policies of this type, faults would appear almost everywhere and last long time. The conclusion in this case is that "*the policies have problems*" or "*the system faults exist*". Solutions to recover faults in this case have no way to lead to tough respect of policies but require a type of strategic solutions (marked as GPCL in Fig. 4) which are "*redesign*" the policies to transfer from the trajectory HT2 to the trajectory HT1.

In actual practice, there exist examples of policies of system fault nature, such as the policy of "land withdrawal" for industrialization-urbanization purpose. If this policy was designed in conformity to standards then claims still could come from those who lose lands but these claims would be of single cases of local nature. Once land claims become a large scale in every localities (making more than 70% of the total number of claims over the whole country) and last for long years it is necessary to re-consider seriously the policy in a systematical manner and maybe it is required to "re-design" the policy (amending the Land Law).

2.3. Analyzing approach for consequences of policies

2.3.1. Consequences of urbanization policies [5]

The strong development of urban areas over the whole country leads to fast and increasing concentration of urban population, particularly exodus of rural labors to urban areas in expectation of better jobs. It is this exodus to create the prosperity of cities but they cause numerous consequences for cities including unemployment, traffic jams, low environment hygiene, lack

of houses, schools and medical/health service, and etc. The planning works which are not conducted properly and without strategic vision would create consequences for cities. Together with planning works the control of planning works are required also to create a sustainable developed city.

2.3.2. Consequences of policies of industrialization and conservation of natural heritages

The UNESCO World's Natural Heritage Committee makes multiple recommendations toward the conservation of some Natural Heritage sites in Vietnam, including the cases such as the negative impacts from construction of transport systems, modern houses, irrigation systems and urbanization scale toward the Hue Citadel Heritages (2004), negative impacts from the development of fishing villages and aqua-culture facilities toward Ha Long Bay and negative impacts from the construction of West lines of Hochiminh Road and the management of Phong Nha - Ke Bang Heritage (2005), and etc. It is possible to see the conflicts exist among efforts for development and conservation.

2.3.3. Too hot development of hydro-power plants: multiple consequences

According to the Vietnam UNESCO Committee Report (2012), in practice, after certain development stage, many hydro-power projects cause negative problems for environment, forest lands, cultivating lands, change of hydraulic currents, induced earthquakes which leads to deep impacts of social life.

The analysis in [12] shows that the hydro-power development devastated seriously forests, caused heavy impacts to bio-diversity, losses of cultivating lands, erosion of lands, heavy sediment of lakes, changes of hydraulic conditions, changes of river basins, topographical deformation of estuaries, repeated earth quakes, heavy impacts to eco systems of river basins, pollution of water sources and etc.

3. Some recommendations for policy setting process in Vietnam

3.1. Actual status of policy setting process in Vietnam

The system of legal documents [1] (called together as policies) of Vietnam is based on Law No. 17/2008/QH12 for promulgation of legal regulation documents. According to that the preparation hosting authorities hold a very important role. Article 31 of the Law stipulates: "The preparation committee includes the Chairman (who is the head of the preparation hosting authority) and members (who are leading representatives from related

services/organizations, experts, scientists and etc.". Subjects affected by the system of policies, particularly opponents, social organizations and large population do not participate directly in policy setting process. They are qualified as destinations for "gathering points" as stipulated in Article 35 of the above mentioned Law, namely: "During the preparation process of laws, ordinances and resolutions, the preparation hosting authorities/organizations need gather points from related organizations and directly impacted subjects; and note those problems which demand assessments to fit those subjects they gather points of view, etc."

At actual stage, the most popularized practice is that the preparation committees take initiatives to gather points of view from the subjects they find necessary, mainly paying particular attention to views of related ministries but less attention to gather pints of view from social groups of related interests. Actual regulations on gathering pints of view do not create an environment for subjects capable and willing to participate more regularly in providing opponent views/comments such as lawyers, legal experts, scientists and etc. [4]. Many experts in field of policy setting note the limitations in the legal document setting process actually in Vietnam [3], namely: "the implementation of democratization, publicity and transparency in the legal document setting and issuing process remains limited, the process remains closed, the low scale of views gathering activities and the practice of it remains formal, and the absorption of views/comments by ministries remains passive (they are listening to those ministers who have strong voices in the Government), the works of analysis and assessment of the social status related to the preparation contents remain formal".

3.2. The system of policies does not really push up the country's development

"The actual system of policies of Vietnam, up to now, does not really give important contribution of the country's development". It is the opened remark by Prof. Kenichi Ohno from the Japanese Institute of Economic Studies when sharing his visions to the process of setting policies and strategies of Vietnam at the Vietnam Development Forum (2012). In his visions, in Vietnam there exist so many problems of policies, despite long steps of progress in improvement of investment environment from a low staring point. Vietnam is still practicing a strange policy setting system which depends much on desires of leaders and authority organizations. The Government takes over too many duties and State cadres have to set so many plans and strategies on a limited basis of financial and human resources. At the same time, the business sector and the large populations are not involved actively and pro-actively into preparation process.

In Vietnam, the center controlled economic system had passed its time but the old system still remains. The "subsidizing" legacies remain heavy in the State own sector. Note that the other countries such as Russian and East European countries, where there is no more the government of center controlled type, started to work on other platform. In Vietnam up to now, there is still a large application of old practice, in preparation of policies and strategies, to take first into account the desires of the Government, State owned enterprises and then the visions of consumers. In such a way, it is difficult to meet the practical market requirements.

Figure 5 describes the process of setting policies (for strategies and mater plans) in application in Vietnam where the State organizations (the Government, preparation hosting ministries, Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), other line ministries) keep the important role and the role of enterprises, scientists and social organizations remains low.
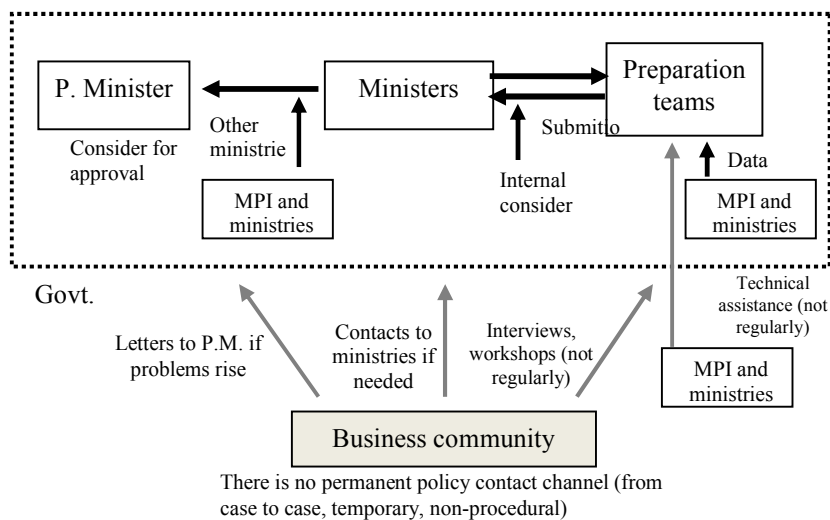
Figure 5. Actual procedure of policy setting in Vietnam [10]

3.3. Proposal of a policy setting procedure for Vietnam

Fig. 6 describes a proposal by Prof. Kenichi Ohno on a policy setting procedure for Vietnam which makes involved all the related stakeholders including the Government, businesses, consumers, foreigners, donors, scientists, experts. Sometimes businesses or scientists can draw a strategy to submit to the Government. The policies are not purely administrative documents by the State.

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐              ┌──────────────┐
│ - Team of excellent technocrats │              │   Prime      │
│   under leadership of the PM    │              │   Minister   │
│                                 │              └──────────────┘
│ - Selection of young and        │        Steering and full      Faithful
│   qualified experts             │        controlling of policy  implementation and
│                                 │        preparation            report
│ - Simplified policy procedures  │              ┌──────────────────────┐
│                                 │              │ Team of technocrats  │
└─────────────────────────────────┘              │ (Policy makers)      │
                                                  └──────────────────────┘
                                            Policy guiding        Faithful
                                            and supervising       implementation
                                                                  and reports
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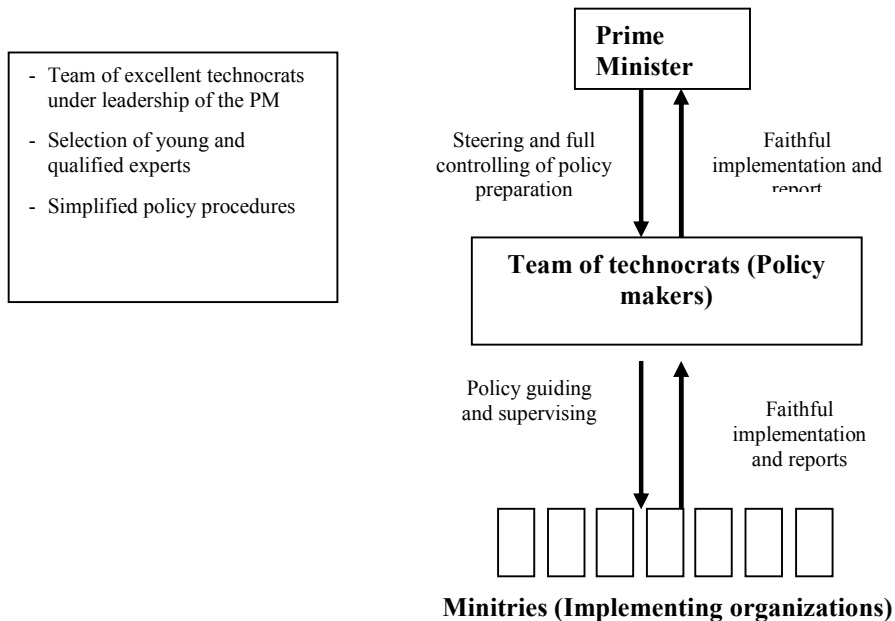
Minitries (Implementing organizations)

Figure 6. Procedure of policy setting based on the proposal by Prof. Kenichi Ohno

In addition, Vietnam should build up a group of technocrats which gathers excellent individuals to play the role of independent consultants under the direct charge of the Prime Minister. These individuals are selected from young and qualified staffs and experts from research institutes, universities. This group will be charged of the duties to prepare national policies. They would have permanent two direction contacts with the prime Minister, ministries and policies implementing organizations.

4. Conclusion

The policy study including tasks to analyze and assess impacts from policies plays the important role to contribute not only to the effective implementation of policies but, more importantly, to the process of comments and improvement of policies to make them fit the objectives of sustainable development and harmonize the willing of leaders and the desires of policy beneficiaries with business sector and population on top.

To contribute effectively to the improvement of policies as above noted, the staff members of policy study should apply new approaches such as the recognizing the paradox of the roles of different policy setting actors and impacts and consequences from policies, understanding the standard conformity of policies, proposing strategic solutions to return policies back

to right trajectories, recovering "system faults", analyzing consequences of policies to propose solution for prevention of negative impacts from policies.

It is possible to note that up to now the system of policies of Vietnam does not really play the important role of contribution to the country's development. One of the important reasons of that is the rules of points gathering activities do not create environment for individuals capable and wishing to contribute comments/recommendations and to participate regularly in the policy setting process. Actually the policy setting process remains heavily of "public service" and "State administration" nature without the substantial involvement of social groups, particularly business communities, social organizations and population with the special and important role of the group of "technocrats". The innovative model of policy setting needs to recovery these shortages./.

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