

Introduction to policy making processes

Dr Arash Rashidian, MD PhD
Director of Science, Information and Dissemination

Outline



Challenges in understanding, developing and implementation policies

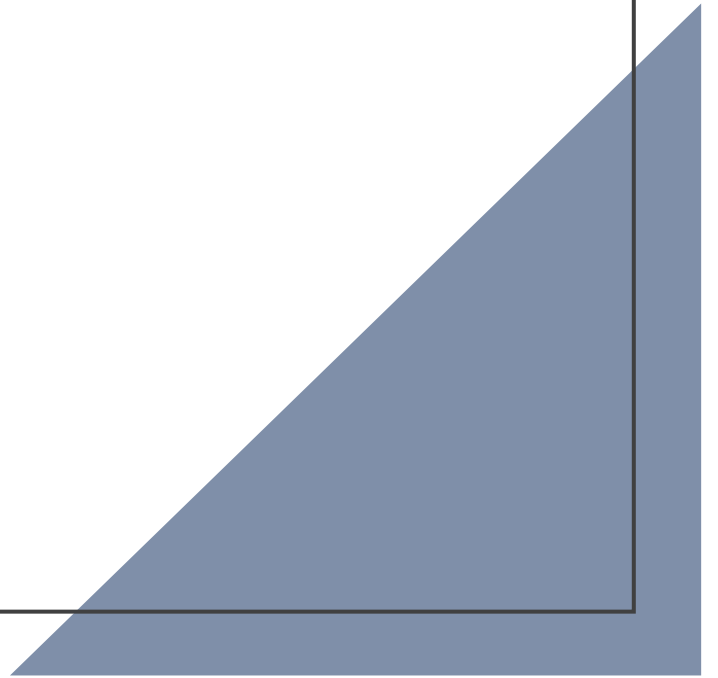


Key policy making processes



Interaction between processes, context, content and key policy actors

Health Policy as a Social/Public Policy



What is a social/public policy

- Challenge starts from defining policies!
- **Policies are sometimes likened to “elephants”**

“Defining policy is rather like the elephant – you know it when you see it but you cannot easily define it” (Cunningham, 1963)

- Overlapping terms used interchangeably in different contexts!
 - Policy, planning, strategy, management, politics

What is a social/public policy

- Courses of action adopted by governments and other important social organizations
 - *“Public policy is whatever governments choose to do or not to do” (Dye, 1972)*
- Adoption or maintenance of an existing course of action
- *Policy intention: “Health and health inequalities tell us a great deal about the good or bad effects of social policies”* Michael Marmot
- Policy decisions in one sector interact with those in another
 - e.g. Health and environment; health and housing

Approaches in defining policy

- Policies are developed at different levels
 - “High” and “low” politics
- International, national and sub-national (e.g. provincial) levels
 - And not sedentary
- Important to note policy-making processes
 - more than “outputs” of decisions, or “inputs” of management
- Defining policies:
 - How policies should occur ...*“prescriptive”*
 - How policies occur in reality ...*“descriptive”*

Policy making stages

essentially there are four stages

Stages

- Problem formation / agenda setting
- Policy formulation
- Policy implementation
- Policy evaluation

Activities

Problem identification and issue recognition

Understand the challenge or problem

- What precisely is the problem?
- What evidence is there?
- Who has an interest in the issue?
- What do we want to achieve?

Policy making stages

essentially there are four stages

Stages

- Problem formation / agenda setting
- Policy formulation
- Policy implementation
- Policy evaluation

Activities

- Review and evaluate research evidence
- Identify options
- Assess national data and evidence
- Consult stakeholders
- Identify risks and barriers and opportunities
- Identify what works well
- Evaluate options, identify pros and cons
 - Incremental changes or radical reforms?
- Achieve consensus and ownership
- Develop recommendations
- Make decision (s)

Policy making stages

essentially there are four stages

Stages

- Problem formation / agenda setting
- Policy formulation
- Policy implementation
- Policy evaluation

Activities

- National policies often requires “translation” to programmatic of those responsible for implementation
- They may also require adaptation to the context
- Draw implementation strategies and plans
- Develop manageable pieces of work
- Define timelines and deadlines
- Allocate responsibilities
- Keep stakeholders informed / involved

Policy making stages

essentially there are four stages

Stages

- Problem formation / agenda setting
- Policy formulation
- Policy implementation
- Policy evaluation

Activities

- Establish performance measures (quantitative and qualitative)
 - Key performance indicator
- Develop plan for measurement and reporting
- Monitor progress / ensure accountability
- Give feedback to those involved with the tasks
- Report on performance
- Evaluate the outcomes of the policy
- Adapt and amend the implementation plan in light of evaluation results

Policy making stages

- Using stages to understand policy-making
 - ***“descriptive” or “prescriptive”?***
- The “stages” imply policy making steps are sequential or cyclical
- Policy-making does not necessarily follow a rational process
 - It often involves incremental decisions that result in small gains
- Policy processes are very context specific, policy actor dependant and vary over time in a country

Policy content is not the only important element in policy-making!

- “ ... health policy means different things to different people. For most people, health policy is concerned with *content* For me health policy is about *process* and *power*. ... it is concerned with who influences whom in the making of policy, and how that happens.”

Gill Walt, 1994

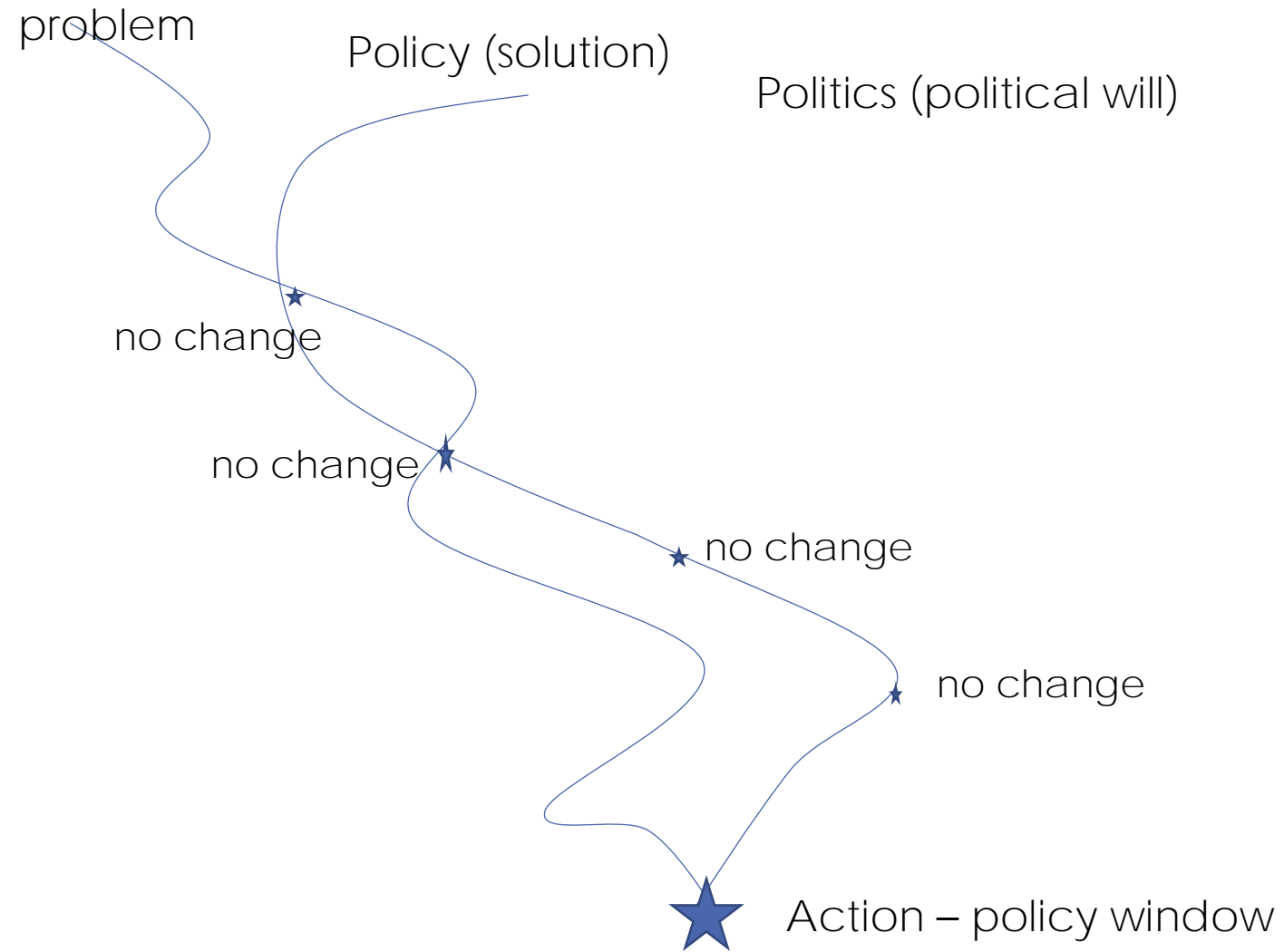
- Example of efforts to reduce alcohol consumption in Hungary (Varvasovszky & McKee, 1998)
 - Different stakeholders – relative power and position
 - Those who wanted it reduced lacked power - i.e. MoH
 - Those who didn't have the will to reduce consumption were in power positions - i.e. MoF; MoC

Approaches in defining policy ...

- The World Health Organization defined health policy as
 - “an **agreement or consensus** on the **health issues, goals and objectives** to be addressed, the **priorities among those objectives**, and the **main directions for achieving them.**” (WHO/EURO, 1999)

Descriptive policy analysis can be used for prescriptive policy recommendations

- A good example: John Kingdon's 3 streams' model (1984, 1995)
- Agenda setting opportunities
 - *windows of opportunity for policy making*



Important note

- The strong interaction between **policy formulation and policy implementation**
- Policy making encompasses both
 - Think of “top down” and “bottom up” approaches to policy making
- Despite the widespread misconception:
 - ‘A good policy that is badly implemented’

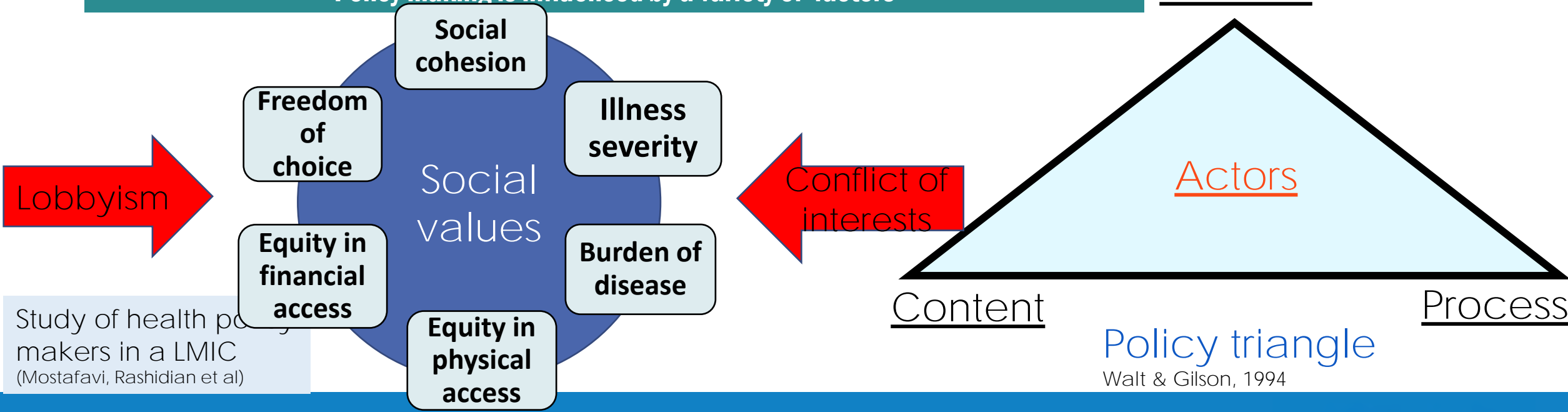
I call this “the chained elephant”
fallacy



Complexities policy-making objectives, processes, and interactions

Policy-maker questions	What are the main priority issues/problems for decision-making?	What are the potential effective and safe policy options?	Are the policy options cost-effective and affordable?	Are the policy options feasible to implement and sustainable?
-------------------------------	---	---	---	---

Policy making is influenced by a variety of factors



Study of health policy makers in a LMIC (Mostafavi, Rashidian et al)