Public Decision Making

Workshop One
What is Public Decision-Making?

Handout Document

Workshop Run Date: Monday 30 October 2023

Created and Hosted by Rhiannon Halling

What is Public Decision-Making?

Workshop One (1)

Public decision-making refers to the process of making choices, determining actions, and reaching conclusions that affect the general public or a specific community. It involves considering the interests, concerns, and needs of individuals and groups within the public sphere and finding solutions or policies that serve the common good.

In public decision-making, various stakeholders, such as government officials, policymakers, community representatives, and citizens, come together to discuss and deliberate on issues of public importance. This process typically involves gathering information, analysing data, evaluating potential options, and engaging in dialogue to understand different perspectives and reach consensus or make a collective decision. It is an essential element to effective democracy.

The key characteristics of public decision-making include:

1. **Public Involvement**: Public decision-making aims to include the voices and perspectives of individuals and groups who will be affected by the decision. It encourages active participation from stakeholders through public consultations, town hall meetings, surveys, public hearings, and other forms of engagement.

2. **Transparency:** The decision-making process should be transparent, ensuring that information and data relevant to the decision are made available to the public. Transparent processes help build trust, allow for scrutiny, and enable stakeholders to understand how decisions are reached.

3. **Accountability**: Decision-makers are accountable for their actions and are expected to act in the best interests of the public. Public decision-making processes should include mechanisms for oversight and

accountability, ensuring that decisions align with legal frameworks, ethical standards, and the overall welfare of the community.

4. **Inclusivity**: Public decision-making strives to be inclusive, considering the needs and perspectives of diverse groups within society. Efforts are made to involve marginalised communities, minority groups, and individuals with different backgrounds to ensure that decisions are fair and equitable.

5. **Rationality and Evidence-Based**: Public decisions should be based on rational thinking, objective analysis, and evidence. The process may involve gathering data, conducting research, consulting experts, and evaluating the potential impacts of different options. Evidence-based decision-making helps ensure that choices are informed and grounded in facts rather than personal biases or uninformed opinions.

6. **Public Interest:** The overarching goal of public decision-making is to **serve** the public interest and improve the well-being of the community as a whole. This entails considering the long-term consequences, sustainability, and overall benefits of the decisions made.

Public decision-making processes can vary depending on the specific context, governance structures, and cultural norms of a given society. However, the fundamental principles of inclusivity, transparency, accountability, and serving the public interest remain central to the concept.

Public decision-making is crucial for a well-functioning society as it allows individuals to participate in shaping policies and decisions that affect their lives. It ensures that the diverse needs, perspectives, and experiences of different groups within the population are considered, including those associated with intersectionality.

Intersectionality refers to the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability, among others. It recognises that individuals can experience multiple forms of discrimination and oppression based on the various dimensions of their identity.

Considering intersectionality in public decision-making is essential for:

1. **Equity and Inclusivity:** Intersectionality highlights the unique challenges faced by individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups. By including diverse voices in decision-making processes, policymakers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and needs of these groups. This promotes fairness, inclusivity, and helps identify and address systemic inequalities.

2. **Representativeness:** Public decision-making should ideally reflect the composition of the society it serves. Intersectionality emphasises that no single individual or group can fully represent the experiences and perspectives of everyone. By involving diverse individuals and communities in decision-making, it increases the likelihood of capturing a wide range of viewpoints, promoting more informed and representative policies.

3. **Avoiding Bias and Discrimination:** Traditional decision-making processes can often be influenced by bias and discrimination, resulting in policies that disproportionately affect certain groups. By incorporating intersectionality, decision-makers can recognise and challenge these biases, working towards more equitable outcomes. It helps uncover hidden barriers and ensures that policies do not inadvertently perpetuate discrimination or exacerbate existing inequalities.

4. **Enhanced Policy Quality**: Intersectional approaches encourage a more nuanced understanding of complex social issues. Considering various intersecting identities leads to a deeper analysis of the root causes and impacts of different policies. This comprehensive perspective helps in crafting more effective and targeted solutions, taking into account the diverse needs and experiences of marginalised communities.

5. **Social Cohesion and Solidarity**: Public decision-making processes that actively engage intersectionality foster social cohesion and solidarity among diverse groups. By valuing and respecting the voices of individuals from different backgrounds, it promotes a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. This collaborative approach enhances social cohesion, builds trust in institutions, and strengthens social bonds within society.

Incorporating intersectionality into public decision-making is vital for achieving a fair and just society. It ensures that policies and decisions address the unique challenges faced by individuals with intersecting identities and promotes inclusivity, equity, and social cohesion. By valuing diverse perspectives, decision-makers can craft policies that better reflect the needs and realities of the entire population. We do not need bias, but we do need informed decision-making.

The CRPD

The Convention of the United Nations on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is a list of rights that people with disabilities have. The Convention is made up of different parts called articles. Normally, each article is created for each right.

Article 29 is about the right to take part in politics. This article says that all people with disabilities have the same right to take part in politics as other citizens. The Convention also asks governments to make sure that people with disabilities have the same chances to take part in politics as anyone else. This means they have to support people with disabilities as they would with any other candidate or politician. By taking part in politics, people with disabilities can make sure that governments make laws and decisions that are good for people with disabilities.

The right to vote and stand for elections is very important. It gives people with disabilities a chance to make important decisions. It also means that people with disabilities are equal before the law with other citizens.

Gender and Decision-Making

A gender perspective is important for the very simple reason that 'policies impact on men and women's lives in one way or another'. Because of economic and social differences between men and women, policy consequences (intended and unintended) often vary along gender lines. It is only through a gender analysis of policy that these differences become apparent, and solutions devised.

Public policy has the capacity to either perpetuate or eliminate discrimination and gender inequality. It is only by making gender a central consideration in the development and implementation of public policy that we can hope to advance gender equality and women's human rights in Australia. The risk in failing to do so is that public policy responses will not only perpetuate existing forms of

oppression against women and limit women's and men's autonomy but will also create new forms of gender oppression and undermine broader efforts to achieve equality.

Breaking Down the Process

1. **Identifying the Issue:** This is the stage we identify and define the gap in policy and law. We figure out the problem at hand and identify it, clear objectives are stated.

2. **Stakeholders:** Good policy and decisions require rigorous consultation and engagement with stakeholders, including those who are experts in relevant fields. Experts such as academics and professionals who can supply knowledge and advice which helps create effective law and policy. Stakeholders include those who are affected by the decision, those who have vested interest. We also consider those who are opposed.

3. **Gathering Information/Background:** This step is where you gather all the past relevant documents, considerations, recommendations, polls, surveys, discussions etc. This is also where you can gather the findings from stakeholders.

4. **Develop Options/Alternatives:** This is where you create all the possible solutions that can be used. This stage will involve all stakeholders necessary for this.

5. **Evaluation:** It is important to evaluate and weigh up the evidence, to determine the relevant considerations and key facts. A key fact is something whereby the existence or nonexistence of the fact can affect the decision. The evidence must be relevant to the questions before the decision-maker and accurate so that any material facts can be established. When evaluating the evidence, the decision-maker must ignore irrelevant considerations.

6. **Weigh the Evidence:** Draw on your information and emotions to imagine what it would be like if you carried out each of the alternatives to the end. Evaluate whether the need identified in Step 1 would be met or resolved through the use of each alternative. As you go through this difficult internal process, you'll begin to favour certain alternatives: those that seem to have a higher potential for reaching your goal. Finally, place the alternatives in a priority order, based upon your own value system.