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National Ministry of Health

Health Policy Process

Handbook

Secretariat for Health Policy, Planning and Research

Introduction

One of the major functions of the National Ministry of Health is to lay down policies, strategies, standard operating procedures and such documents to guide the different departments and programmes operating in the public health sector. A Health Policy Unit in the Secretariat for Health Policy, Planning and Research has been guiding the development of such documents.

But, this short handbook on how to conduct policy process is produced for the benefit of different departments and programmes. It starts with a short introduction to health policy and then different stages in the policy process are explained. This is the first edition, which we hope will be useful, but comments and suggestions are welcomed for the next edition to be better. Please contact Dr. Mustafa Salih Mustafa, Assistant Undersecretary for Health Planning, Policy and Research, FMOH for your input (*e-mail mustafa.sm@fmoh.gov.sd*).

Acknowledgement;

The materials used in this handbook has been adapted from the training material of the University of New South Wales, Australia, available online at:[i] http://www.policy.unsw.edu.au/manual/planning/PDP_Outline.pdf.

What are health policies?

Health care policies may be seen as *''the network of interrelated decisions which together form an approach or strategy in relation to practical issues concerning health care delivery''*[ii]. Logically planning follows policy and policy may be seen as a higher-order activity. Policies are the result of the **decisions about how we will do things**; therefore it can take any of the following forms;

- – Statements/approach
- – A series of practices, procedures and guidelines
- – Regulations and laws
- – Strategic plans

Stages in the development of a policy:

- The policy is said to have an **official existence** when it is formally agreed upon by the appropriate legislative or authorizing bodies.
- A policy statement acquires **real significance** if it is implemented (put into action)
- Implementation is an integral part of the policy process

The policymaking is an iterative process, but for practical reasons it can be explained in 8 stages or phases which make the policy cycle (or spiral). Also, these phases may run concurrently and not necessarily one after the other, as show in figure. Each of these stages are briefly explained in the next section. .

The Policy Process Cycle/ Spiral
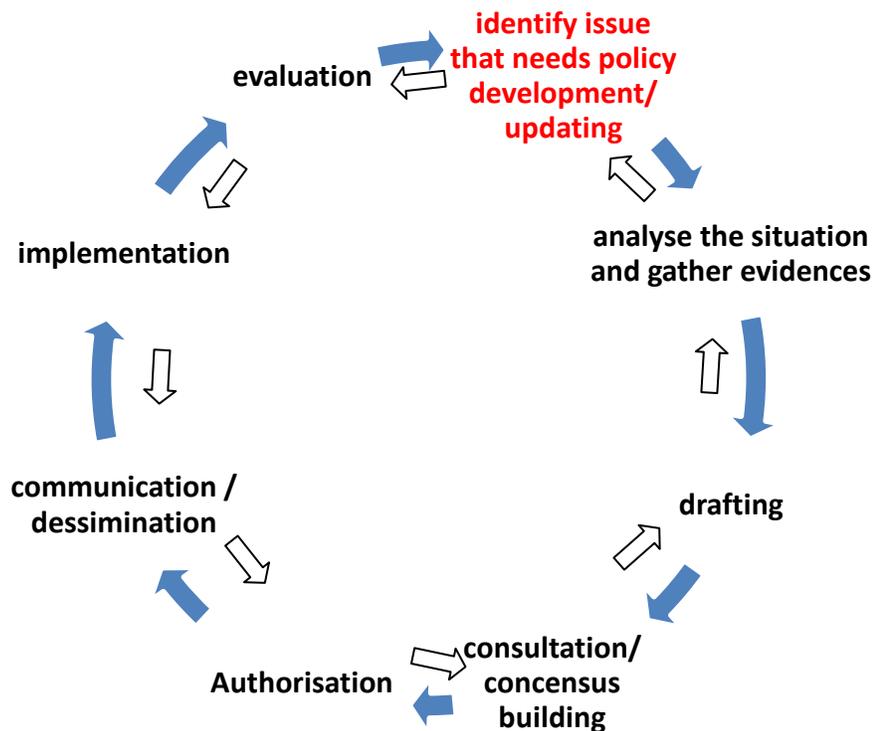
Phase one: identify issue that needs policy development/ updating

The first step is the identification of issue that needs to be brought on political agenda for policy development. For the selection of an issue, and before embarking on policy process, it will be worthwhile to consider and ponder over the following questions;

- Is there a legitimate or justifiable need for developing a policy for the issue identified?
- Why the issue requires policy development?
- Does the issue need a new policy or it can be tackled and addressed by amendment or addition within an existing policy?
- What type of policy document is needed; policy statement(s), procedures, decree, etc?
- Who is /are the responsible officer/s for developing the policy document?

Phase 2: analyze the situation and gather evidences and define options

Once the issue has been identified and put on the agenda, the next step would be the developing of policy options that would address the issue. But, before defining options, it is essential to analyze the context and in that regards consider/project what if the issue is not addressed and policy is not made; understand the context of the issue in order to identify the root cause, and in this process bring in the evidence.

Health systems research will help gather such evidence that would help in avoiding designing unworkable options or inappropriate policy decisions. At this stage the following could be a useful guide:

- Analyze the problem/issue from all angles to determine a policy response.
- Determine how the issue is currently being managed: identify the strengths/weaknesses.
- How do others, i.e. organizations in similar situation would react and address the issue(s) on the agenda for policymaking?
- Conduct a literature review in order to learn from the academia and experience at the national and international level.
- Review best practices both nationally and internationally.
- Identify areas of policy overlap with documents that already exist in order to avoid duplication or conflict
- Investigate the legal and policy framework identifying legislative and regulatory requirements for the policy.

The holistic analysis of the context will provide insight into the issue and assist in defining the objectives and policy options for the resolution of the issue on the agenda. In this process, the following guidelines can be used:

- Define policy options for addressing the issue on the agenda
- Evaluate different policy options for their workability.
- Clarify the problem and feasible solutions.
- What will be the impact of each policy option?

NB: the concerned department in the ministry of health at this stage may start identifying the technical assistance that might be required.

Phase 3: Drafting

There is no single one format for drafting policies. But, it is advised to use the template used by FMOH (annexure 1) in drafting the national health policy. It is important to consider the following:

- Ensure each policy statement is easy to understand and interpret and essentially does not raise questions.
- Ensure consistency with the national and state legislation and existing policies.
- Clearly articulate what is wanted of the individuals and groups, and why.
- Policy content must be practical and implementable.

Phase 4: Consultation

Consult with the people/units or stakeholders who will be affected, positively as well as negatively, by the policy and/or who will be responsible for its implementation. In order for a meaningful and systematic consultation process, the following guidelines can be useful:

Develop a consultation plan

- Brain storm to identify target groups and individuals that have stakes in the policy that is being developed;
- Bring the identified stakeholders together and agree on the overall goal of the consultation process and the role/part each group or individual stakeholder has to play.
- Identify consultation methods to be used in the policy process.
- Set and agree on the deadlines for the completion of assigned tasks by each stakeholder.
- Identify and agree on the appointment of a focal person to communicate with the stakeholders and compile draft policy;
- Identify and assemble a Policy Reference Group to review draft policy.

Web Consultation

- Post the document in the web site of the FMOH and ask comments and suggestions from wider stakeholders, including the civil society and sectors allied to the health sector.

Re-draft the Policy

- Consider all feedback received through web or individual and group consultation are incorporated in the draft policy;
- Comments received during the consultation process will be critical in determining practical strategies to implement the policy;
- Revise and update the plan for implementation and monitoring the policy based on the feedback received and the final document
- Undertake final quality check/proofread for typographical errors.

Phase 5: Authorization

- The draft policy should first be presented and discussed in the Undersecretary Council of the FMOH.
- Final approval of the policy is to be obtained from the National Health Coordination Council.
- Laws and regulations should be submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval and finally to the National Assembly for ratification.

Phase 6: Communication

Although communication occurs throughout the policy development process, following measures need to be taken for the final policy document:

- Print and distribute the policy to all stakeholders
- Communicate policy through advocacy workshops, coordination meetings, etc
- Post the policy in the web site of the FMOH (www.fmoh.gov.sd)

Phase 7: Implementation

- Implementation plan, including monitoring is an integral part of the policy, and policies and process undertaken for the policy are useless if not implemented.
- The implementation plan should identify clear assignments and responsibilities to staff/units concerned with policy implementation.
- Adequate resources, human, financial and material, should be identified as part of the implementation plan

Phase 8: Review

A regular review of policy helps to ensure that relevant and effective policies are retained, policy gaps are identified and redundant policy is eliminated. During review, the policy intent and implementation are revisited and the effectiveness of the policy's deployment and any unexpected outcomes are considered. The review acts as a link forward to the first phase of the cycle,'' identify issues that needs policy development/ updating''

Annex 1: Suggested format for policy development at FMOH

- FOREWORD
- INTRODUCTION, INCLUDING SITUATION ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE
- VISION
- MISSION STATEMENT
- GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- THE POLICY STATEMENTS
- POLICY IMPLEMENTATION
- POLICY MONITORING
- ACKNOWLEDGMENTs
- ANNEXES
- REFERENCES

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[i] The University of New South Wales (UNSW) POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS, accessed online '' http://www.policy.unsw.edu.au/manual/planning/PDP_Outline.pdf'

[ii] Barker. C. (1996) The Health Care Policy Process. London, Thousands Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publication