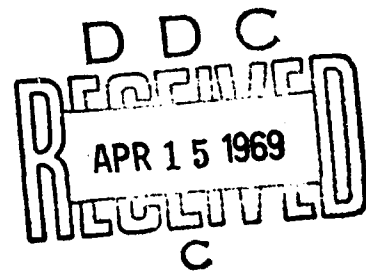


AD 685699

ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT AND POLICYMAKING IMPROVEMENT

Yehezkel Dror

March 1969



P-4021

//

ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT AND POLICYMAKING IMPROVEMENT

Yehezkel Dror^{*}

The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California
and

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (on leave)

During the early stages of development studies and development policies, the rather optimistic assumption was often accepted, that socio-economic development can be achieved independent of weaknesses in the political and administrative system. With progress in the study of development processes and with the accumulation of frustrating experiences, this simple assumption was revised so as to somewhat take into account the interdependence of social, economic and political phenomena, and some necessary political and administrative requisites of accelerated overall development were identified.

Political stability, strong symbols of identification, ability to recruit support, implementation capacities, some professionalization of the bureaucracy and some acceptance of a merit system -- these illustrate the characteristics of the political and administrative system, recognized as requirements for accelerated socio-economic development (though insufficient by themselves). Many development aid activities are directed at encouraging these and related characteristics, from civil service

* Any views expressed in this paper are those of the author. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the view of The RAND Corporation or the official opinion or policy of any of its governmental or private research sponsors. Papers are reproduced by The RAND Corporation as a courtesy to members of its staff.

Prepared for publication in Civilisations, Volume XIX, 1969.

training to strengthening the armed forces so as to resist subversion, from improving organizational structures and procedures to encouraging widespread distribution of the instruments of mass communication as an essential tool for "nation building." These are without doubt highly desirable activities, as clearly all the above mentioned political-administrative characteristics are indeed essential for accelerated development. But it seems to me that at least one critical aspect of the political-administrative system, which constitutes one of the most important variables for shaping all facets of development, is very neglected in theory and action alike: this is the policy-making function.

Not that policymaking is completely neglected: quite some attention is paid -- in theory and even more so in practice -- to central planning organizations, budget procedures and monetary controls. Often, also, serious efforts are made to improve operational policies in respect to some selected subject, such as education, agriculture, concrete industrial projects and water management. But the main components of central public policymaking are usually neglected in the study of development processes and excluded from intensive self-improvement efforts and from international and bilateral aid activities.

The omission of treatment of the main policymaking components, despite their constituting a critical factor in determining the probabilities of success in accelerated development endeavors, is not too difficult to understand. Three clusters of reasons do explain, at least in part, this situation:

a. The study of policymaking and systematic approaches to policymaking improvement are new even in the most highly developed nations. Policy sciences knowledge is still in its infancy; proved policymaking improvement suggestions are scarce; and qualified professionals in the policy-relevant disciplines (or, more correct, "interdisciplines") are scarce and are much in demand in their home countries, in addition to being difficult to identify and often disliked by more traditionally trained administrations.

b. Effective policymaking-improvement involves changes in the main components of the policymaking system, that is, in the political institutions. Patterns of decision-making by the senior ministers and by the Cabinet, information flow to the legislature, the social roles of intellectuals and universities -- these are just a few illustrations of the foci of attention of any serious efforts to improve policymaking. Much can be done to adjust recommendations to prevailing power structures, indigenous values and personal styles of the dominant political figures. But even after all possible adjustment, improvement of policymaking involves significant changes in the political institutions. It therefore is a very sensitive area, particularly hostile to foreign experts and external aid -- which tend simultaneously to be absolutely essential and completely unacceptable. The result is that experts and aid concentrate on more technical activities, which are very useful but are often completely frustrated because of weaknesses in public policymaking.

c. In order to achieve worthwhile improvements in the policymaking processes of development countries (and

of highly developed countries as well), a whole set of interrelated improvements is necessary, which together reach the critical mass needed for making any real impact on such complex, diffuse and aggregate a process. True, the apparently more simple structure of the public policymaking system in development countries may lower the relevant threshold and relatively fewer changes -- in comparison to a highly developed country -- may influence the quality of policymaking. But appearance may be misleading, with many complexities being invisible to the insensitive eyes of the foreign observer, only to reveal themselves when interfered with; also, the resources in qualified personnel, political support, span of attention, information etc. needed for improving policymaking are extremely scarce in most development countries, often making even a small critical mass impossible to achieve without very effective new types of aid, which at present are unavailable.

Each one of these three clusters of barriers to the improvement of policymaking in development countries is by itself sufficient to explain the absence of activities in this direction. Each of the first two reasons also explains the neglect in theories of development of the role of the public policymaking system. Taken together, those factors reinforce one another and constitute in combination most serious hindrances to policymaking improvement in the development countries.

Nevertheless, policymaking improvement seems highly necessary for accelerated development. There is evidence to indicate that parts of the development process are quite independent from conscious, goal-directed, social

actions -- being more the result of basic socio-economic, psycho-cultural and cross-national evolutions. There are also indications that parts of the development process can be stimulated through a series of "shock policies," any one of which will do, so that careful selection of a policy is not necessary. Even granted these assumptions (and not all will equally subscribe to them), still the quality of policymaking is very important: better policies can make quite a difference for the rates, directions and sequences of accelerated development, and bad policies can radically increase the human and socio-economic costs of development and strongly retard it. Because of the broad scope of public policymaking and its widespread impacts on different facets of development, it constitutes a high-leverage variable, improvements of which will often have widespread and fargoing impacts (though difficult to measure). Therefore, investments in policymaking-improvement may be very efficient in terms of benefit-cost, being often one of the optimal uses of limited energy and resources, both internal and aid-supplied.

My conclusion is, that in development efforts major emphasis should be put on improving the policymaking system -- in research, theory and practice.

One of the characteristics of efforts to improve policymaking is, that a pragmatic approach is inadequate. Weaknesses in policy machines have no clear-cut immediate symptoms which permit diagnosis by the time-honored method of obvious "pains where the shoe presses" and treatment through "debugging," that is removal of the external manifestations of trouble. The policymaking system is too complex and its features too submerged for such a

"practical" approach. Instead, we need careful study of a given policymaking system and sophisticated redesign. Such study and redesign require in turn thorough theoretic understanding of the operations of the policymaking system as our open-ended, complex and dynamic, social and political decision-making institution on one hand; and explicit models of preferable decision-making modes and structures, including creative invention of designs moving in the direction of the preferable models and still being feasible under given political-social-human constraints, on the other hand. In respect to the improvement of policymaking at least, good theory is thus an essential foundation for good practice. A main operational conclusion of my analysis is, therefore, that intensive efforts should be made to advance as rapidly as possible research and study on policymaking in development countries and on designs for its improvement.

This I regard as an important conclusion, having immediate implications for the allocation of attention and the distribution of resources. But we can proceed one step further.

As already mentioned, policy sciences -- which focus on the study and improvement of policymaking -- are still young even in the highest developed nations. Nevertheless, the present state-of-the-art in policy sciences, in combination with available knowledge in the various development study disciplines, do already permit some recommendations in respect to the improvement of policymaking in development countries. These recommendations are tentative and must be revised in view of the conditions and needs of each country. But they serve the double functions of

(a) concretizing the contents of the terms "improvements of policymaking" and "redesign of the policymaking system" in respect to development countries; and (b) of supplying immediate operational suggestions for policymaking improvement, implementation of which can and should start immediately, without waiting for the results of future study and research. (Such implementation activities in turn are a main source of added knowledge and, as a result, better operational suggestions -- experimentation and collection of field experience being essential for building up policy science knowledge relevant to accelerated development conditions.)

Available knowledge seems to support, among others, the following illustrations of operational recommendations for improvement of policymaking in development countries:¹

1. The operations of the highest political decision-making organs, such as the president, prime minister and cabinet, should be improved through (a) restructure of information input; (b) provision of staff aids for analysis; (c) monitoring of implementation results; and (d) changes in deliberation preparations (e.g., background papers and briefings).

2. The macro-structure of the government should be subjected to reconsideration, including the number of ministries, the composition of the cabinet (e.g., ministers without portfolios), the relations between different levels of government, the role of quasi-government

¹The systematic theoretic basis for these recommendations is presented in my book Public Policymaking Re-examined (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Corporation, 1968).

agencies etc. This reconsideration should look at the picture as a whole and from above, focusing on basic features and not the details of sub-structure and procedure.

3. The higher civil service patterns should be reconsidered, with special attention to their policy functions. For instance: easy interchange between governmental, other public, quasi-public and perhaps private organizations and compulsory rotation in the government seem essential for preserving imagination and readiness to innovate. Fixed-term appointments and freedom to engage in various forms of political activity may well meet better the needs of some development countries than the British-type career civil service patterns. Academic training in social science and analytic methods may be preferable for the policy level civil servants, requiring radical changes in the management and administrative technique orientations of many of the training centers in and for development countries.

4. Social science and analysis professionals should serve as central staff officers for policy issues, in addition to and instead of the traditional civil servants, budget officials and economic feasibility examiners. A special profession of "development policy analysts"² may be required, for heading staff analysis units working on the higher policy level in the main ministries, on the cabinet level and for the legislature (if the latter has autonomous policymaking functions).

See Yehezkel Drot, "Policy Analysts: A New Professional Role in Government Service," Public Administration Review, Vol. XXVII, No. 3 (September 1967), pp. 197-203.

5. Policy-oriented research and study in the involved country should be encouraged by establishment of special interdisciplinary policy analysis units and by motivating local universities to focus on national policy-relevant research. The policy analysis units should enjoy considerable freedom in their studies, but maintain confidential relations with the government.³

6. Innovative action must be initiated to improve the qualifications of the politicians. This is clearly possible within many given basic values and ideologies, for instance by encouraging politicians after their election and/or appointment to engage in studies, paid for by the government or by external aid. Design of suitable courses for politicians from development countries is one of the urgent needs.⁴

7. New orientations and modes for considering policy-alternatives under conditions of accelerated development must be designed, tried out and conveyed to the main policy-makers -- politicians, civil servants and professionals alike. These orientations and modes should be adjusted to the high degrees of uncertainties involved in efforts to direct accelerated development -- e.g., through contingency planning, sequential decision-making, self-insurance, sensitivity testing, social experimentation, etc.

³For an illustration, see my detailed suggestions in "An Israeli Institute for Policy Analysis: A Proposal," Civilizations, Vol. XVII, No. 4 (1967), pp. 435-441.

⁴For a design of such a course, see Yehezkel Dror, "The Improvement of Leadership in Developing Countries," Civilizations, Vol. XVII, No. 1/2 (1967), pp. 72-82.

(in contrast to prevailing development planning models, most of which tend to repress or at least ignore uncertainty).

These seven illustrations should be sufficient to concretize the main ideas of this paper and demonstrate their importance. These illustrations also clearly bring out the difficulties of realizing any advances in policymaking-improvement. Intense, dedicated and innovative efforts are necessary if we want to meet the challenge of contributing to better accelerated development through improving public policymaking in the development countries.