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Summary of "Policy Impact Evaluation"
by Jerry Jenkins

Purpose of Study:

This report was commissioned to survey domestic experience in policy evaluation and to suggest how this experience could be adapted for policy evaluations in international development.

Overall Summary:

After reviewing the domestic evaluation literature, Jenkins concludes that writings on policy evaluation and policy impact represent a conspicuous void. Jenkins therefore tries to link policy evaluation issues to policy implementation writings in order to: 1) define the policy evaluation problem; 2) demonstrate that previous analyses of "policy implementation" represent "false messiahs" for policy evaluation; 3) articulate the reasons why; and 4) suggest that before evaluating policy impact one must first assess the extent to which policies are actually being implemented in the field. Jenkins then develops a questionnaire and methodology to analyse the degree of "positive interdependence" among central bureau and field staff in terms of their shared perceptions of the relevance of particular policies to particular projects. This would provide "the agency with a suggested methodology for evaluating the extent to which its development policies--what they say--are translated into what its representatives do in the host country." Essentially, this would provide a "policy evaluation feasibility analysis" that would identify those policies that were most appropriate for evaluation.

Chapter Summaries:

Chapter I
Reconnoitering a Goal: Policy Impact Evaluation

Jenkins differentiates "policy impact evaluation," which focuses on the "correspondence between what was to occur, as envisioned by policy producers and whatever did occur, as a result of actions by policy implementers," from "impact evaluation" which focuses on the consequences of projects however they are implemented. Although he was commissioned to review the domestic "policy evaluation" literature and to adapt it for AID's use, Jenkins concludes that the study of "policy impact" has received little scholarly consideration, even though it is a central concern of the mass media. Jenkins further suggests that most media considerations of "policy

impact" inappropriately divorce policy implementation from policy evaluation. He argues that to evaluate policy impact, one must first determine the extent to which policies are in fact implemented.

Chapter II Policy Implementation—Still on its Head

The publication of Wildevsky's IMPLEMENTATION nearly 15 years ago stood the concept of policy implementation on its head by demonstrating that much of what we would consider "policy" is developed by "street-level" policy-makers coping with problems of implementation in the field. According to Jenkins, the problem with "street-level policy-making" is not that it occurs, but rather that we rarely know the extent to which it occurs and thus the extent to which "pre-implementation" policies are in fact applied. However, this knowledge is an essential basis for meaningful policy impact evaluation.

Jenkins identifies seven approaches to policy evaluation and the problem of policy/implementation congruence, but all are "false messiahs," which cannot resolve the problem:

1. Act like the problem does not exist.

Many policy analysts never consider the extent to which formal policies are actually implemented or what this implies for policy evaluation.

2. Contribute to the problem.

Some authors redefine the policy being implemented to reflect their positional or professional interests (as policy producers, program evaluators or program implementors), without empirically assessing policy or program content.

3. Redefine roles (obviating the separation of powers).

The GAO's Evaluation Institute has suggested a new Congressional oversight process less concerned with legislating explicit policies and more focused on monitoring and redefining policies as they are implemented. This close control over executive branch implementation would, in Jenkins' view, "obviate the separation of powers intended by the constitution."

4. "Redefine more roles (obviating federalism)."

In an analysis of block grants, the GAO's Evaluation Institute identifies the policy problem as the need to make block grants more "accountable," that is, more focused on the achievement of "national" objectives. These "national" objectives, though, are seen to conflict with the objectives of state and local block grant administrators. Moreover, according to Jenkins, achieving "national" objectives generally means achieving the aims of earlier categorical funding. In Jenkins' view, this

definition of accountability obviates the new "federalism" upon which block grants are based.

5. "Act like ambiguity is THE problem."

Some theorists act as if policy ambiguity itself is the problem, without considering why policies are ambiguous.

6. "Act like experimentation is THE answer."

Other theorists assume that experimentation is the only source of cumulative knowledge and that policy ambiguity results from too little experimentation or too little receptivity to experimental results. According to Jenkins, this ignores the fact that many policy improvements occur without formal experimentation; that policy formulation is a political process; that most policy problems are ill-structured; and that natural science experimentation has limited applicability to social and behavioral problems. Jenkins points out that the call for experimentation goes coincide with the positional interests of its social science proponents.

7. "Act as if the policy situation provides the answer."

Some authors argue that policy should only be defined through implementation within particular situational constraints; policies in other words should be discovered rather than imposed. Jenkins argues that accepting this position makes policy--general principles about what can or should be done--simply non-existent.

Chapter III

Toward Standing Policy Implementation on its Feet

According to Jenkins the ascendance of "street-level" policy-making and the increasing ambiguity of pre-implementation policy results from the increasing demands placed on government in relation to what government knows how to do. "Knowledge" about how government should act lags behind demands that government to solve a growing number of "messy" social problems with unclear solutions. Proposed "solutions" therefore strongly reflect the positional interests of the proposers--both traditional "stakeholders," and a growing array of implementation and evaluation professionals. There has also been a proliferation of policy specialties and subspecialties which further impedes coordination, creates an overly cumbersome policy apparatus, and inhibits the formulation of comprehensive approaches.

Jenkins argues that as a result policy is increasingly defined in narrow areas through the interplay of particular interest groups during implementation; it is, in other words, "street policy." When policy is formulated so vaguely and narrowly,

policy formulation and evaluation become dominated by professionals who focus on those policies that are most easily defined and those issues that are most easily evaluated.

Chapter IV

Policy Impact: Conceptualization for Evaluation

Jenkins argues that policy impact cannot be evaluated until the meaning of policy impact is better conceptualized. To evaluate policy impact, we must first ascertain what "policies" are and whether they are implemented. According to Jenkins, the first and central step in evaluating policy impact is determining the extent to which policy-makers and implementers share perceptions of what policy is and how it should be reflected in programs. The critical component, in other words, is the degree of "positive interdependence" among policy makers and implementers.

Jenkin's develops a questionnaire to assess the extent to which program implementers and policy-makers share perceptions of how pre-implementation policies are and should be reflected in projects being implemented. Jenkins then develops a method to analyse the degree of congruence (of positive interdependence) among these groups and to categorize this congruence depending on whether there is high or low interdependence within implementation and policy groups and high or low interdependence among them. He suggests that the best candidates for "policy evaluation" are policies with high interdependence in both categories.

Jenkin's concludes that greater concern for policy evaluation, and especially for the degree of congruence among policy-makers and implementers is critical if central policy principles are to be adequately tested in application.

Memorandum

July 6, 1984

To: See Distribution

From: PPC/CDIE, W. Haven North *MJH*

Subject: Final Report - Policy Impact Evaluation *PW-PAP-932*

Jerry Jenkins of the Sequoia Institute was requested last fall to do a study on "Policy Impact Evaluation" or, stated differently techniques for evaluating the impact of A.I.D. policies on the A.I.D. program and A.I.D. projects. The report was commissioned to review domestic U.S. experience in policy evaluation and suggest how this could be adopted for policy evaluations of A.I.D.'s programs and projects.

A copy of the final report and a four page summary prepared by Gerald Britan of PPC/CDIE is attached.

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