

AN ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC POLICY CAPACITY DETERMINERS AND PARAMETERS

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ABSTRACT

Policy making is a complex and dynamic process involving various actors and stages, such as formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The effectiveness of public policy depends on the capacity of actors and institutions primarily to formulate, communicate, execute, and assess policies in a comprehensive manner. This study explored the determinants and parameters of policy capacity, identifies critical gaps, such as evidence base, enforcement, and stakeholder engagement. A qualitative approach was used, including literature reviews, field observations, key informant interviews (KIIs), stakeholder consultations, and focus group discussions (FGDs) in five cross reference countries viz. Nepal, India, China, Bhutan and Rwanda. The research identified major key determinants (knowledge, policy skills, political abilities, systemic ability, institutional abilities, leadership skills), and 31 parameters essential for enhancing policy capacity. These findings provide a practical framework to strengthen the capacity of policy actors, ultimately improving the agricultural system and contributing to sustainable development goals through well-informed, evidence-based policy recommendations.

Keywords: Determiners, Parameters, Policy capacity, Policy process

INTRODUCTION

A policy is a comprehensive statement that outlines future goals and aspirations, providing guidelines for achieving those goals. Hill (2014) defined policy as the outcome of political influence, which dictates and sets boundaries for the actions of the state. Public policy refers to a government's decision or action to solve a

social problem, implementing a specific strategy for planning and implementation (Arfina Osman, 2017).

Public policy making is not merely a technical function of government rather it is a complex interactive process influenced by the diverse nature of socio-political and other environmental factors. Policy making is a complex process that involves negotiation, bargaining, and accommodation of various interests, giving it a political flavor (Enserink *et al.*, 2022; Brovina & Arifi, 2023). It is a dynamic process that involves various groups with different interests at different stages. It involves several processes such as problem assessment, agenda setting, policy drafting, adoption, implementation and evaluation (Enserink *et al.*, 2022).

The people involved in the policy making are termed policy actors. These includes individuals, groups, or organizations involved in the formulation, implementation, or evaluation of policies within a governmental or institutional framework (Turnbull, 2008). These actors play crucial roles in shaping public policies that impact societies and economies. Anderson (1979) categorized policy actors as official and non-official actors influencing policy decision-making process. In the policy process, official actors hold legal authority to create and enforce public policies. These include legislators, who have the power to draft, review, and amend policies as necessary; executives, who provide technical assistance and institutional knowledge in policy formulation, with elected officials making the final decisions; and the judiciary, which ensures that policies align with constitutional principles. Non-official policy actors include individuals, interest groups, think tanks, civil society organizations, universities, political parties, NGOs, and the media. Although they lack formal roles, these actors influence policy through educating, advocating, lobbying, and exerting pressure on policy decision-makers (Enserink *et al.*, 2022; Guo *et al.*, 2021).

Policy capacity encompasses the ability of governments and organizations to proficiently formulate, execute, and assess policies. It is the ability to predict and affect change and to acquire and apply knowledge to make intelligent decisions about policy; establish programs to implement the policy; attract and absorb resources; manage resources; and evaluate present policies to guide future action. (Karo & Kattel, 2018). There are several issues and gaps on policy capacity in developing nations, including policy coherence, no policy works habits, lack of information, poor enforcement, accountability systems, insufficient policy capacity research and intervention, and inadequate funding for policy implementation (Mugwagwa *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, poor implementation policies have produced inferior outcomes. It is crucial to analyze government policies, including legal and institutional provisions, identify gaps and restrictions, and connect directly to the policy formulation process, including the

ability of policy actors and institutions (Mukherjee *et al.*, (2021); Karo & Kattel (2018). Policy effectiveness and capacity are directly connected. Actors represented individuals, organizations, and systems/structures who are involved in policy formulation, and implementation processes. Policy actors' credentials, experiences, and inherent abilities promote the success and relevance of any policy, which are often measured by policy outcomes as policy effectiveness. Policy actors need comprehensive expertise, skill sets, and competencies through research and development (Wu *et al.*, 2015). Only capable actors can develop public policy with scientific prediction. Finally, such qualified policy actors support strengthening administrative and governing capacities and certainly support to scale up of the state capacity (Gleeson *et al.*, 2011).

A policy capacity gap occurs when there is a difference between the intended goals of a policy and the actual outcomes. Policy gaps can manifest in several ways. Gap of Knowledge, information and precision data for issues selection. A **capacity gap on policy design** reflects issues within the policy itself, such as unclear objectives or unrealistic expectations, which hinder effective implementation (Weible *et al.*, 2012). A **capacity gap on communication, negotiation and stakeholders' engagement in policy process** arises when policies are not effectively communicated to those responsible for their implementation, leading to misunderstandings and inconsistent practices (Bardach, 2012). A **capacity gap on compliance** arises when there is a failure to adhere to policy requirements, often due to lack of awareness or conflicting interests (Müller, 2015). A **capacity gap** on policy implementation occurs when policies are not effectively put into practice due to resource constraints or poor management (Hill & Hupe, n.d.). A capacity gap on **monitoring and evaluation** occurs when there is insufficient monitoring and evaluation to ensure policies are followed and to measure their impact, making it challenging to identify and address implementation issues effectively.

The main objective of this research was to identify and analyze policy capacity determinants and parameters, thereby providing actionable insights for policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners. Ultimately, this study also aimed to contribute to sustainable development goals through evidence-based policy recommendations tailored to local needs and challenges.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to examine the agricultural policy processes and policy capacity of five cross reference countries; Rwanda,

Bhutan, India, China and Nepal. Data collection included an extensive review of academic literature, governments' documents, and policy reports to develop a robust conceptual framework. Field observations in these cross-reference countries were conducted to evaluate the practical implications of their policy processes. Semi-structured interviews and key informant interviews (KII) were held with representative policymakers, government officials, subject experts, members of cooperatives, leading farmers, central government ministers, senior officials of various ministries, foreign experts, and representatives of development partners.

The Rwandan field study was done with close facilitation and coordination of Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources- MINAGIR and Centre for Tropical Agriculture, CIAT team Rwanda in June 2024. We specially performed KII with National farmers leaders and field research team of CIAT for Northern Province Musanze district; discussed and visited with local agriculture technician, cooperative group and farmers; senior staffs in Kivu Tilapia fishery farm Eastern province Kayonza district Bymana cell, Kabeza village. Chief Planning division with senior staffs in Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, Kigali. We have participated three days seminar in Kigali named "Global Dialogue Kigali-2023" with the experts of twenty more countries and veterans think tank from Rwanda. In that seminar we discussed with Foreign Minister, Chairman of Rwandan Development Board, and foreign representatives from development partners. Similarly, we had visited Bhutan for field study which was closely facilitated and coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture, and Rotary club of Bhutan. Five KII and FGDs were conducted in Bhutan with the planning section of the Ministry of Agriculture; experts from the Royal Bhutan University, civil society and private entrepreneurs, parliamentarians and politicians, and senior staffs of National Centre for Organic Agriculture, Yusipang, Thimpu. We participated three days seminar in Bhutan with the experts of various countries and renowned think tank from Bhutan in May and June 2024. Short meeting with Prime minister of Bhutan, opposition leader and former minister, NGO partner of Bhutan government and international development partners were also done to understand the policy process. Similarly, a visit to India was done with close facilitation and coordination of Centre for Policy Studies, India. Five KII and FGDs were conducted in India with the experts of public policies, University Professors, and Indian thinktanks; planning section of the Ministry of Agriculture, experts from the JNU, Delhi University and IIT Mumbai civil society and private entrepreneurs, parliamentarians and politicians, and senior staffs of Indian present and former bureaucrats. We had also participated the three days seminar in India- "Policy Process in Global South; 5th India Public Policy Network Conference

December 2024. Similarly, In Nepal an observational visit to all seven province was done along which comprehensive KII with policymakers, government officials, members of cooperatives, leading farmers, local elected leaders, Provincial leaders, Parliamentarians, Provincial Ministers, Agriculture committee from provincial assemblies, central government ministers, senior officials of various Ministries, foreign experts, and representatives of development partners. A policy dialogue workshop was organized in Annapurna Rural Municipality; Senior bureaucrats in ministry of Agriculture and Land Management and Agriculture Ministers and Parliamentarians in Gandaki Province. Policy dialogue program was also conducted with association of fishery farmers and other stakeholders in Chitwan, Bagmati Province. Workshop with deputy chair of local bodies in Nawalpur district was conducted. Policy dialogue meeting with agriculture sub-committee, Sudurpaschim Provincial Assembly, Dhangadi was done. Agriculture sector stakeholders meeting in Biratnagar and Surket were also well organized. Similarly, Policy dialogue on *Raithane* (indigenous) crops was accomplished in Nepal, and public policy dialogue was also co-organized with Rotary club and Public Policy Hub at a national level seminar in Kathmandu. In our study period we reached almost same type of nature of Key Informants among five countries. Specially, in China we deeply analyzed agriculture and public policy process related literatures. We reached all types of policy actors like state actors and non-state actors among cross references country including Nepal. By using those collected qualitative data, the common framework of policy capacity parameters and determiners was drawn and synthesized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study findings highlights the effect of capacity of policy actors directly influencing the quality of the policies they produce. The findings revealed that policy processes often lack comprehensive integration of essential factors, such as knowledge, skills, political abilities, ethical standards, systemic abilities, institutional capacities, and leadership skills. These gaps hinder the ability of both official and non-official policy actors to design, implement, and sustain impactful policies. Furthermore, the study findings underscored that non-official policy actors, such as civil society organizations and advocacy groups, often face barriers in influencing the policy process due to limited access to institutional platforms, inadequate knowledge, and insufficient lobbying, or advocacy capabilities. Therefore, this study has identified seven major determiners of policy capacity: Forms of knowledge, set of policy skills, political abilities, ethical standards, systemic ability, Institutional abilities, and policy leadership.

Knowledge as a determinant of policy capacity

The findings of our study has underscored the knowledge as the most important determinant of capacity of policy actor in the policy-making process across all five countries analyzed. The country-specific insights revealed distinct patterns in how knowledge influences policy formulation:

- **Rwanda:** Emphasized indigenous knowledge and contextual perspectives, such as traditional Imihigo practices, which are deeply embedded in the policy process and reflect a commitment to community-driven goals.
- **India:** Prioritized professional and scientific knowledge, aligning policies with global standards to strengthen its competitive position on the world stage.
- **China:** Focused primarily on scientific knowledge while incorporating indigenous and contextual knowledge to complement its policy framework base on their policy related literatures.
- **Bhutan:** Placed significant importance on indigenous knowledge, particularly in exploring the concept of happiness, which serves as a central pillar in their policy-making efforts.
- **Nepal:** Leaned towards modernization, emphasizing scientific and professional knowledge to guide its policy transition into a contemporary framework.

Across all respondents, the consensus highlights that knowledge is the cornerstone of policy capacity. Four dimensions—scientific, professional, contextual, and local knowledge—emerged as the key parameters essential for robust policy development. By integrating these dimensions policymakers can ensure their decisions are well-informed, comprehensive, and effective. The absence or imbalance of these dimensions in any policy results in inefficiencies and undermines the state's ability to progress on developmental indices and achieve its aspirational goals.

Wu *et al.*, (2015) also reported knowledge as a fundamental determinant of policy capacity encompassing a broad spectrum that includes contextual, indigenous, professional, and scientific insights. In recent decades, there has been a growing emphasis on evidence-based policy worldwide, recognizing that evidence is knowledge derived from research, indigenous insights, and various other sources (Capano & Malandrino, 2022). Contextual knowledge ensures that policies are tailored to specific environments and circumstances (Schmitt *et al.*, 2024) , enhancing their relevance and effectiveness. Mielke *et al.*, (2022) AND Schmitt *et al.*, (2024) mentioned that policymakers should possess contextual knowledge, a critical aspect of policy capacity. Indigenous knowledge incorporates traditional wisdom and practices (Zidny *et al.*, 2020), providing valuable perspectives that

are often overlooked. By integrating indigenous knowledge into policymaking, policymakers can develop more comprehensive and culturally sensitive policies (Zurba & Papadopoulos, 2023) that respect and preserve traditional practices. This approach not only enhances policy relevance and effectiveness (Raychelle *et al.*, 2022) but also empowers indigenous communities by recognizing their contributions and promoting inclusivity. Scientific knowledge contributes evidence-based information and innovative approaches, grounding policies in robust research and data (Edler *et al.*, 2022a). Policymakers with a strong grasp of scientific knowledge can identify policy issues based on empirical evidence, logical reasoning, and peer review (Edler *et al.*, 2022b). The finding of our study resonates with the scholars that identifies different forms of knowledge as one of the major determiners of policy capacity.

Set of policy skills as a determinant of policy capacity

Based on insights from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) across five countries, the findings revealed that a diverse set of skills among policy actors significantly influences the success of policy processes. Respondents emphasized four key skills: negotiation and communication, policy problem analysis, application of contemporary policy theories and perspectives, and policy drafting skills. Rwanda demonstrated remarkable progress in utilizing these skills, contributing to consistent improvements in development indicators. Similarly, India's strength lies in the negotiation and communication abilities of its policy actors, while China's focus on policy problem analysis and drafting ensures effective implementation. Bhutan prioritizes applying contemporary policy theories to address contextual challenges, and Nepal's respondents at all levels of government stressed the importance of integrating these skill-related components into policy processes.

These findings collectively highlight that policy actors' skills are universally essential for robust policy-making and effective governance. The ability to negotiate and communicate fosters consensus-building, while strong problem analysis and drafting skills ensure precision and coherence in policy design. Applying modern policy theories enables adaptation to emerging challenges and fosters innovative solutions. Manazir (2023), also argued that the ability to apply theory and perspectives in policymaking leads to more effective, sustainable, and responsive policies that can address complex challenges in a holistic manner. Across all countries, respondents agree that prioritizing these skills is integral to achieving effective policy formulation and implementation.

Political abilities as a determinant of policy capacity

Our study highlights the pivotal role of political abilities among policymakers as a critical determinant of policy capacity. Across the four political systems analyzed—Nepal and India's democratic prime ministerial systems, China's communist regime, Rwanda's democratic presidential system, and Bhutan's constitutional kingship—strong political abilities consistently emerged as a key factor influencing policy effectiveness. Respondents widely acknowledged that without the political abilities of policymakers, achieving actual policy goals becomes unattainable. Four core abilities were identified as crucial for a merit-based policy process and timely achievement of policy objectives: the ability to synthesize public policy preferences, make policy decisions, handle political risks and crises, and manage readiness for policy inaction. Policymakers must identify potential political risks associated with policy initiatives, including opposition from powerful interest groups, public backlash, and unintended consequences (Hood *et al.*, 2001).

Comparative findings reveal distinct priorities across the political systems. Respondents emphasized that in the communist regime of China and the democratic presidential regime of Rwanda, the focus is on decision-making abilities, crisis handling, and policy inaction readiness. In contrast, the democratic regimes of India and Nepal prioritize synthesizing public policy preferences and handling political risks and crises. Bhutan's constitutional kingship emphasizes synthesizing public preferences and policy inaction readiness. Across all systems, respondents stressed that political abilities are indispensable to policy capacity and critical to achieving effective governance. These abilities enable policymakers to navigate diverse challenges, align policies with public interests, and ensure resilience and adaptability in dynamic political landscapes.

Ethical abilities as a determinant of policy capacity

This study identifies the pivotal role of ethical abilities among policymakers as a critical determinant of policy capacity. Policymaking, as highlighted by respondents, is a highly sensitive and impactful task directly tied to the welfare of people and the enhancement of a state's developmental progress. Ethical standards among policy actors are instrumental in shaping policies that not only improve a nation's global standing but also ensure the equitable and sustainable growth of its citizens. Across the five countries studied, respondents unanimously acknowledged the significant influence of ethical abilities on policy effectiveness. Respondents identified four essential parameters for upholding ethical standards in policymaking: (1) General ethical maturity, including principles like "no harm," "no misconduct," "no conflict of interest," and "no violence"; (2)

Cognizance and social responsibility; (3) Sustainability and consciousness-driven thought; and (4) Patriotism. These abilities equip policymakers to address complex challenges with integrity and foresight. Respondents highlighted leaders such as President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck of Bhutan, and President Xi Jinping of China as exemplary ethical leaders who have significantly contributed to nation-building through their ethical leadership. The study concludes that all policymakers should strive to emulate these leaders, fostering ethical maturity as a cornerstone of effective and responsible governance. This argument has been put forward by other scholars as well; Ethics is a fundamental determiner of policy capacity, ensuring that policymaking is conducted with fairness, integrity, and equity (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2021b). Policymakers must demonstrate ethical maturity (Charo *et al.*, 2021) by adhering to principles that prevent harm, misconduct, conflict of interest, and violence.

Systemic abilities as a determinant of policy capacity

Our study highlights the critical role of systemic abilities among policymakers as a key determinant of policy capacity. Respondents from all five countries consistently emphasized that a systemic approach—defined as an automated chain of input, process, and output—is essential for ensuring policy sustainability, impartiality, and efficiency. They argued that policies become more merit-based and effective when the system drives the policy process. In contrast, a lack of systemic intervention in policy processes increases the risk of monopolization by individuals, leading to inefficiencies and potential policy failures. Respondents identified four essential parameters for managing a systemic chain in policy processes: (1) Comprehensive systemic provisions for policy processes, (2) Backward systemic linkages to ensure continuity with past policies, (3) Forward systemic linkages to guide future actions, and (4) Performance automation to enhance efficiency and accountability. P anticipation of different stakeholders before policy formation helps in building consensus, increasing the legitimacy of the policy, and ensuring that it addresses the needs of those affected (Bryson, 2011).

The responded successful examples of systemic abilities include Rwanda's Imihigo system for performance assessment and its digital agriculture system, and international development partner mobilization in agriculture which have created great outcomes. Similarly, the public policy process in Kerala, India, stands out as a model of systemic ability in governance, Strong bureaucratic intervention of India is great part of systemic abilities. China's achievements in corporate sector development and the cooperative movement in agriculture, and land management

is further illustrating the importance of systemic interventions. Education system of Bhutan showed a similar better systemic example. These examples underline the significance of systemic abilities in fostering robust, sustainable, and effective policy frameworks, providing valuable lessons for policymakers worldwide (Figure 1 and 2).

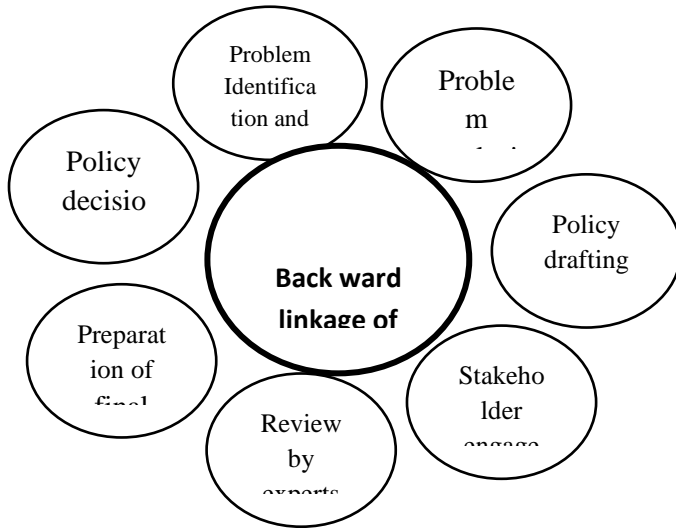


Figure 1. Backward linkage of policy preparatory stage

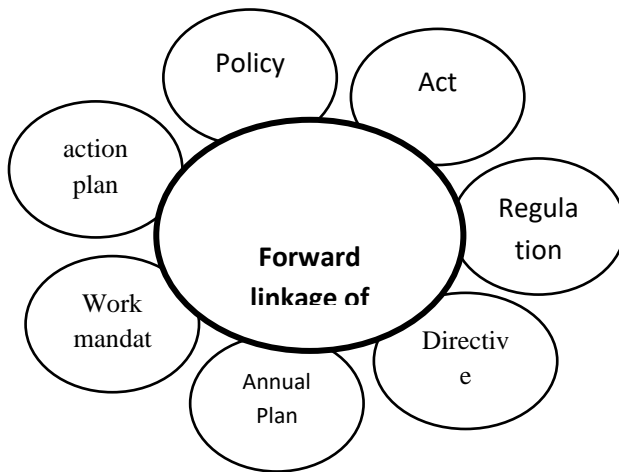


Figure 2. Forward linkage of policy implementation stage

Backwards systemic linkage involves reviewing and integrating past experiences and lessons learned into the current policy formation process. This requires thorough stakeholder engagement, consultation, and coordination, ensuring that all relevant parties are involved before policy formation, whereas forward systemic linkage involves essential steps after policy formation. It is crucial to maintain open lines of communication with all relevant stakeholders to monitor the policy's impact and make necessary adjustments. Stakeholder engagement during policy implementation helps in identifying any issues early on and addressing them promptly (Bryson, 2011). Therefore, forward and backward systemic linkage is identified one of key parameter of policy capacity among the policy actors.

Institutional abilities as a determinant of policy capacity

Our study underscores the critical role of strong institutional abilities in policy process. Institutional abilities as a fundamental determinant of policy capacity. Respondents from all five countries consistently emphasized that strong institutions are essential for states to perform effectively and fulfill their responsibilities toward citizens. A majority of respondents from diverse sectors agreed that every action within the policy process must be institutionalized to ensure sustainability, impartiality, and efficiency. They highlighted that systemic approaches to policymaking must be anchored in robust institutions, as only strong institutions can ensure the successful implementation of whole policy process.

Field study findings revealed four essential parameters for enhancing institutional abilities in the policy process: (1) Comprehensive organizational **structures** that support the policy process, (2) Adequate and uncompromised allocation of required resources, (3) Effective corporate governance to uphold transparency and accountability, and (4) Strong coordination, collaboration, and implementation mechanisms. Perception of respondent found divided, however, majorities are acknowledged their institutional capacity of the Communist Party of China (CPC) has been ruling since 1949; Ruling party of Rwanda Rwandan Patriotic Front ruling from 1994, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been continuous ruling since 2014; the policy actors learn their long-term institutional abilities. Respondents emphasized that these institutional abilities are pivotal for fostering policy sustainability and delivering impactful governance outcomes. The findings highlight the need for a firm commitment to building resilient institutions to achieve policy goals and enhance overall state performance.

Policy leadership abilities as a determinant of policy capacity

Our study highlights the pivotal role of leadership abilities among policymakers as a cornerstone of policy capacity and nation-building. Respondents consistently emphasized that leadership is an inherently sensitive and impactful task, directly tied to the welfare of citizens and the advancement of a state's developmental trajectory. Leadership abilities serve as an ideological instrument, shaping policies that elevate a nation's global standing while ensuring equitable and sustainable growth for its people. Across the five countries studied, respondents unanimously recognized the profound influence of leadership abilities on policy effectiveness and governance.

The study identified five essential parameters for effective leadership in policymaking: (1) Ideology setting as a guiding principle for policy direction, (2) Developing competency as a foundational trait of policy leadership, (3) Building courage to navigate challenges and drive transformative decisions, (4) Demonstrating commitment to achieving policy goals, and (5) Fostering leading maturity for responsible governance. Leaders such as President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck of Bhutan, and President Xi Jinping of China were highlighted as exemplary figures who have significantly advanced nation-building through their visionary leadership. The findings underscore that policymakers worldwide should strive to cultivate these leadership abilities, as they are integral to fostering effective governance, addressing complex challenges, and driving sustainable progress.

CONCLUSION

This study presents a clear framework for understanding and enhancing policy capacity, identified seven key determiners for effective policy processes. Furthermore outlined 31 parameters that play a crucial role in strengthening policy implementation and achieving sustainable, impactful outcomes of the policy. The seven determiners—knowledge, set of policy skills, political abilities, ethical standards, systemic ability, institutional abilities, and leadership skills—offer a comprehensive view of the multifaceted nature of policy capacity. Each of these determiners is broken down into specific parameters, covering both technical and non-technical aspects, official and non-official actors of policy development and execution.

Policy actors grouped in two categories official and non-official, for official policy actors, these parameters and determiners continuously strengthened through different ways and means. However, for non-official policy actors, having the proper knowledge, skill sets, and political and institutional influence is crucial

and difficult to strengthen in short term. Only once these elements are in place can they play a meaningful role in the policy process, contributing through education, advocacy, lobbying, and pressure. By identifying these critical areas, our study offers valuable insights into the determiners policymakers need to enhance in order to effectively address both current and emerging challenges.

Strengthening these determiners and parameters will not only improve policy effectiveness but also help in the creation of policies that are inclusive, adaptive, resilient and implementable in the face of both local and global dynamics. The effectiveness of non-state actors in the policy-making process is pivotal for ensuring well-informed and inclusive outcomes. Their roles in educating the public, providing expert counsel, advocating for marginalized voices, and lobbying for change are integral to creating equitable policies. Weak performance in these areas undermines the foundation of merit-based policy development. Consequently, assessing their capacity through clear benchmarks becomes essential. Civil society organizations, political parties, and universities must demonstrate strong competencies in these areas to fulfill their critical roles in shaping impactful and sustainable policy frameworks. The findings from this study provide a strong foundation for future research and practice in the field of policy capacity. They offer policymakers, institutions, and scholars a clear framework for evaluating and improving their capacity to achieve better governance and meet policy goals.

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