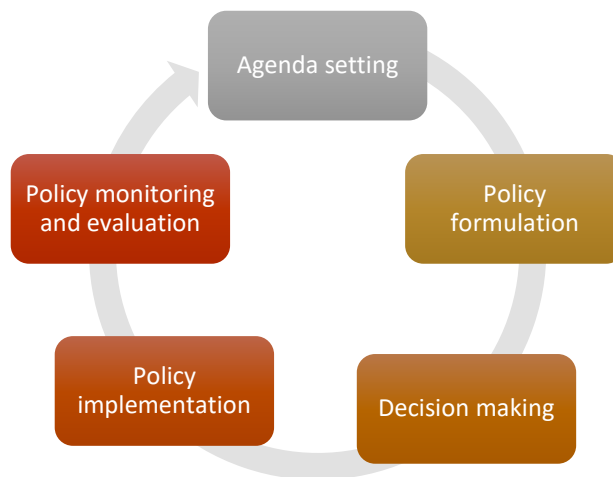# Handout 3: The policy cycle and roles CSOs can play along the cycle

In theory, government policies follow a cycle made up of five stages as shown in the chart below. In reality through, policies rarely conform to this pattern. For example, it has been known to happen that political influence can impact on the cycle, for instance once a new Government comes into power, it may decide to terminate a policy even before it is implemented or during implementation.

The policy cycle is said to be made up of five distinct stages:

1. *Agenda setting, problem definition and articulation*: this involves recognising a problem or gap which would benefit from the creation of a new public policy, or the change of an existing policy. Then expressing clearly the practical and political reasons and evidence as to why the state should prioritise work for state intervention. The issue is then put on the government's (formal or informal) agenda ;
2. *Policy formulation*: this involves discussion and debate between governmental officials, interest groups, and individual citizens over how best to address the issue. Setting clear goals and listing the steps to achieve them. Discussion of alternative solutions, potential obstacles, and identifying how to measure the effects of the policy change. It is at this stage that proposals and demands are transformed into government policy documents, actions or programmes as well as laws and regulations;
3. *Decision-making*: **Acceptable formulation** means that the proposed course of action is likely to be *authorized* by the legitimate decision makers, usually through *majority-building* in a bargaining process. That is, it must be *politically feasible*. If the policy is likely to be rejected by the decision-making body, it may be impractical to suggest it. This is the political phase of policy formulation. This is the stage in the policy cycle where options have been evaluated, choices made between options and decision taken to bring onboard i.e. follow through with chosen option/s. This then ushers in a range of activities designed to provide resources for the successful accomplishment of the option/s. This stage includes the definition of policy

objectives and consideration of alternative approaches responding to the identified gap or problem, looking at the expected outcomes, effects and impacts of each alternative approach, its strengths and weaknesses, worst and best case scenarios, etc. Decisions are made on what criteria is to be used to decide: e.g. cost-benefit analysis, environment impact assessment, risk analysis, political considerations;

4. *Policy implementation*: This represents the stage where government executes an adopted policy as specified by the legislation or policy action. At this stage, various government agencies and departments responsible for the respective area of policy, are formally made responsible for implementation.

5. *Policy monitoring and evaluation*: this can involve monitoring the actual implementation of the policy as well as evaluation of the policy at the end of the planned implementation. Both processes assess how effective the new policy has been in addressing the original problem. This often leads to additional public policy changes. It also includes reviewing funds, and skills and commitment of implementing agencies, to ensure that the policy can be maintained. At the stage where the policy is being evaluated, there is a possibility of looping back to stage one.

Roles that CSOs can play along the policy cycle

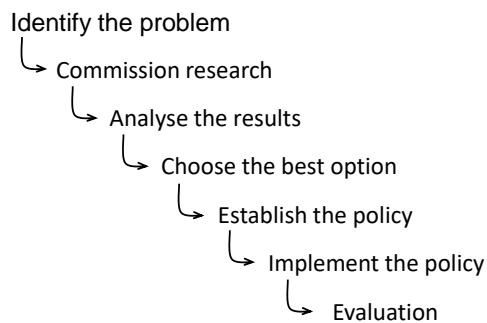| Stage in the policy cycle What is involved in the stage	Possible activities that can be undertaken by CSOs
Agenda setting	
Problem definition and articulation: Recognising a policy problem or the need for policy change and expressing the necessity of state intervention. **Agenda setting: Selection of a recognised problem and putting it on the government's (formal or informal) agenda for serious consideration of public action.**	• **Research** (situation analysis, impact assessments etc.) to identify the problem • **Context assessment** to establish institutions and other actors involved • **Community consultative meetings** to gain the views of the community members • **Stakeholder consultative meetings** (beyond the community) • **Publication and dissemination of data** on the identified problem • **Building networks and coalitions** with other CSOs to work together on the issue • **Roundtable meetings** with key leaders in government to alert them of the problem • **Community awareness-raising** on the identified issue • **Training of community members** on the given issue • **Training of staff members** to build their knowledge and skills on the issue, the policy process, and Government procedures • **Awareness raising** on the issue among local leaders (Councillors, District level officials)
Policy formulation	

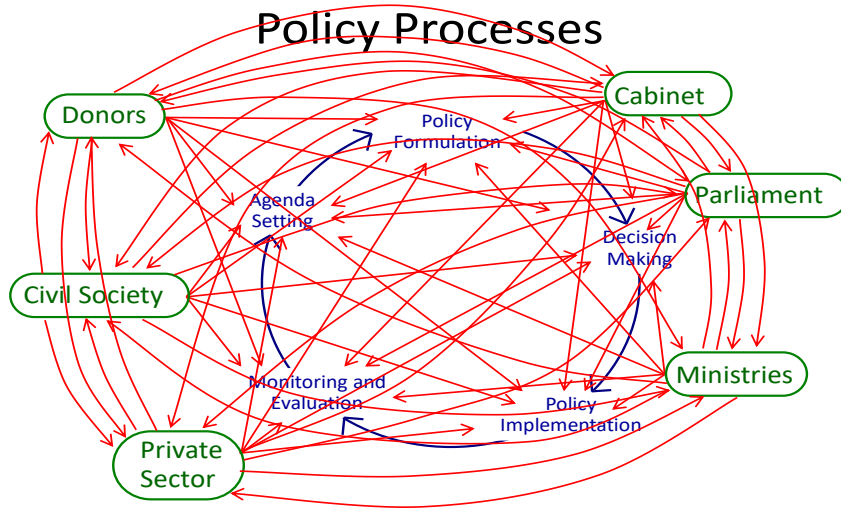|	
Policy formulation: Proposals and demands are transformed into government policy documents, actions or programs, based upon the definition of clear objectives.	• **Lobbying** identified stakeholders to get agreement on what the policy and its objectives should be • **Roundtable meetings** with identified stakeholders • **Commenting** on the draft policy documents • **Live debates** or call-in programmes, engaging electronic and print media to encourage live debate around the issue • **Producing articles** for the media on the issue • **Advocacy** targeted at the general community to build a critical mass of support among citizens • **Network**ing with other CSOs to advocate on identified issues • **Participating** in given national platforms for engagement (Sector Advisory Groups, District Development Coordinating Committees, etc) • **Producing guidelines** on available platforms for engagement with government and showing at which stages and in which ways CSOs can become involved. • **Capacity building** for CSOs on their participation at given national platforms
Decision making	
Decision making: This involves making a decision about which direction to take. **This is the political phase of policy formulation. This is the stage in the policy cycle where options have been evaluated, choices made between options and decision taken to bring onboard i.e. follow through with chosen option/s.**	• **Research/analyses** on issues known to be under consideration, or that ought to be priorities, with the hope of influencing the policy being formulated • **Idea generation** so that there are a wide array of alternative approaches from which to select the optimum approach • **Preparing proposals to government** on alternative policies • **Lobbying** identified stakeholders to get agreement on what the policy should be • **Roundtable meetings** with identified stakeholders
Policy implementation	
Policy implementation: This can include detailed sequential action planning and budgeting, ensuring adequate skills and training, setting up the systems for coordination and monitoring, and ensuring compliance by the responsible agencies.	• **Research** (social audits, use of score cards, budget tracking) to see if implementation is ongoing • **Producing and disseminating written information** on the available policy • **Awareness raising** among the community members on the policy being implemented and access to benefits/services if appropriate • **Advocacy** to hold Government accountable for speed of implementation etc. • **Piloting demonstration projects** as policy experiments thus offering an opportunity to CSOs to demonstrate solutions to

	policy problems (e.g. CSOs engagement in provision of home based care as a way of increasing acceptability of a new approach to health services for the chronically ill) • **Participating** in the implementation process, e.g. widening the reach of implementation of a given programme
Policy monitoring and evaluation	
Policy monitoring: This involves ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of the policy through internal and external feedback and accountability mechanisms. **Policy evaluation: This can involve evaluation and review of the policy in action, research evidence and views of users. At this point it is possible to revert to stage one.**	• **Research** on results and impact of the policy implementation • **Building capacity** of community members to conduct monitoring of the implementation of the policy • **Tracking and monitoring** of the implementation of the policy • **Providing feedback to policy makers** on the policy implementation and its outcomes and impact • **Advocacy** at different levels, depending on the responsiveness of government to civil society feedback, to hold Government accountable for ongoing quality of implementation.

Policy processes – theory and reality

Policy processes are not...

Identify the problem
→ Commission research
→ Analyse the results
→ Choose the best option
→ Establish the policy
→ Implement the policy
→ Evaluation

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Policy Processes

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