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Challenges in the Implementation of the Social Amelioration Program:
Policy Evaluation

Katherine Ann F. Tolentino*

College of Education, Bulacan State University, Philippines

[*Corresponding author]

Abstract

This research has the potential basis for understanding and assessing the success or failure of participation and empowerment in the Social Amelioration Program of the government. However, to reinforce the sphere to inculcate types of professional development to prepare public administrators to work with various institutions and individual actors across governance domains and sectoral boundaries, specifically in administering different programs for the public.During the pandemic, subsidies allowed marginalized social groups to afford necessities. The SAP intends to ameliorate the socioeconomic impact of pandemic-related policy actions. The Public Policy Approach is a systematic and scientific study of public policy (Caiden 1982). The policy approach is the understanding and improvement of the public-policy-making system, as enunciated by Gautam Lokhandwala (2022) which was used in the study as the basis.This study utilized qualitative research method.The SAP implementation has not gone without a hitch.The problem confronting policy evaluation is the determination of the goals of the program and its congruent to the implementation in public.

Keywords

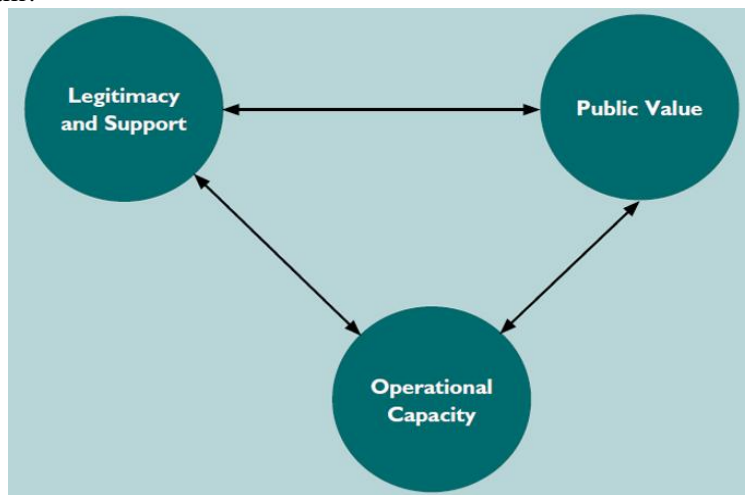Social Amelioration Program, Public Policy Approach, Policy Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Public administration as a practice is as old as ancient civilization. In Philippine settings, there is still a very important question, which is: for whom is public administration? (Brillantes & Fernandez, 2008). Public administration is the cultivation of organized society and its capacity to lead it by virtue of laws and regulations. Caiden (1982) argues that public administration pushes communities to achieve a common goal that is public-oriented. Thus giving birth to the Social Amelioration Program, which gives priority to the poor, marginalized, and vulnerable sectors, especially during the emergence of public health emergencies. This has been asserted and operationalized through a compendium of administrative orders from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). The SAP intends to ameliorate the socioeconomic impact of pandemic-related policy actions. The government passed the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act, No. 11469, on March 25, 2020, which includes the provision and implementation of the SAP. As a practice, governments carry out actions based not only on equality but also on equity. There was an urgent need for restructuring the institution based on the demands of time and in the quest of the public interest to cleanse the system and improve the efficiency of the government through the implementation of programs. The state and the government are constitutionally mandated to serve and protect the people (Article II, Sec. 4, 1987), promote general welfare (Article II, Sec. 5, 1987), and promote a just and dynamic social order through policies that provide adequate social services (Article II, Sec. 9, 1987) of the Philippine Constitution.

This study serves as a basis for understanding and assessing the success or failure of participation and empowerment in the Social Amelioration Program. This would also assist in the review and modification of existing policies and programs regarding participation in the Social Amelioration Program of the government. It has the potential to provide increased awareness and further improvement of their role in the tripartite councils insofar as policy determination of the social and economic programs of the Social Amelioration Program. Therefore, the following are the questions that this research aims to answer:

1. What is the socioeconomic status of the beneficiaries of the Social Amelioration Program?
2. What are the government intervention scales to intervene in the economic order to bring social equity as measured in terms of government responsibility in affirmative action programs, work ethics, and social rights?

3. Do organizational attitude to change, organizational commitment, and staff training and support significantly affect the policy implementation of the Social Amelioration Program of the government?
4. How does the government address the issue of accountability and efficiency in administering the Social Amelioration Program?

Fig. 1 Moore's Strategic Triangle

Note: The photo was taken from Shayne Kavanagh (2014), Defining and Creating Value for the Public, Government Finance Review, October, pp. 57–60, at http://www.gfoa.org/sites/default/files/GFROct1457_0.pdf, accessed September 12, 2017.

The Strategic Triangle of Moore (Moore, 2013) shows that public value is created when a given strategy or action has democratic legitimacy, as emphasized in the Social Amelioration Program. Thus, it was supported by the legislature, the executive department, and the local government in its implementation. Thus, the feedback system is of utmost importance, specifically the feedback of the public as well as the beneficiaries of the program.

METHOD

Participants
The respondents involved in this study were the beneficiaries of the Social Amelioration Program in the province of Pulilan,Bulacan. Qualitative data was gathered through face-to-face interviews with a number of significant people who were assigned to the implementation of the Social Amelioration Program.This study used purposive sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

Data collection and Analysis
The researcher utilized a qualitative research method. In this method, the researchers understand the participants' beliefs, experiences, attitudes, and behaviors in their interactions with the government in relation to the implementation of the Social Amelioration Program. The best practices of every local government as it generates non-numerical data.In this qualitative method of research, the researchers specifically used the phenomenological study design. According to Neubauer and others (2019), phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world. Phenomenological research uses Thematic Analysis (TA) with six phases (Cresswell 2013): 1) familiarization with the data; 2) coding; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) writing up.

RESULTS

The Concrete Plans for the Implementation of SAP
The Social Amelioration Program was like a piece meal program. There were many local government units who experienced different barriers in dealing with the system of service to the public. Some have also criticized the speed with which the subsidies are rolled out, the uncertain Social protection transfers help individuals to strengthen and accumulate productive assets and thus help them to enha(Barrientos and Scott 2008; Alderman and Yemtsov 2012). Hence their future income earning capacity Holmes et al. (2008) suggest that social protection reduces the constraints faced by extremely poor households to engage in productive activities. Evidence signals that social protection programmes can significantly contribute to reducing the prevalence and severity of poverty (Barrientos and Niño-Zarazua 2010). The spirit of equity was seen in the Social amelioration program because it deals with the adequacy of support to those who were indeed in need. Barrientos and Scott (2008) suggest that social transfers need to be regular and reliable and offer adequate levels of support in order to facilitate household investment and graduation from poverty. ILO (2011) suggests that social protection can contribute to women's empowerment and social cohesion. UNICEF's Social Protection Strategic Framework illustrates that social protection should directly support actions that tackle social exclusion in accessing services and achieving an adequate standard of living (UNICEF 2012).

DSWD is in charge of coordinating SAP implementation with LGUs. A working committee was formed to design a plan to identify qualified recipients, carry out the cash distribution, monitor and report on implementation progress to the President and Congress, and protect the fund from fiduciary risks. The oversight committee updates the President and Congress on implementation status every week. The report details the amount and use of government funds that have been supplemented, reprogrammed, reassigned, and realigned. The cash subsidies are distributed in two stages. The DSWD is in charge of the SAP implementation and chairs the intra-agency group that oversees the implementation.

The Mechanism for Distributing Cash Funds to Eligible Beneficiaries of SAP
After the survey and interview, the chosen eligible beneficiary will be given a SAC form issued by the LGUs. The beneficiary will fill out the form and submit it to the assigned personnel of the respective LGU. The national government provided funds to the local government units.Then the social workers will distribute cash to eligible beneficiaries.

The Issues in Disbursing the Cash Fund for SAP-Eligible Beneficiaries
The DSWD, as the primary authority tasked with disbursing cash transfers, is institutionally and organizationally weak. The institution had to change policies and administrative procedures. DSWD is slow, tentative, timid, and less transparent. It fears violating the law, especially the Data Privacy Act. It is scared of the COA, resulting in underperformance and weak strategies for disbursement of cash funds to the LGUs. Furthermore, DSWD implemented stiff rules that challenged the informal sector and tight liquidation. This situation can hinder the distribution of the next tranche of cash grants.

Moreover, there are issues with LGUs choosing unqualified beneficiaries. Because of these actions, they received criminal threats and civil and administrative liabilities. LGUs are also weak. They became dependent on the DSWD's Listahanan. There are also reports on the operational issues, emphasizing predetermined slots for who will receive the cash fund from SAP.

The Eligible Beneficiaries to Receive the Cash Fund
The SAP-eligible beneficiaries include the vulnerable sectors of the society.

Specified Roles of the DSWD and LGUs in the Implementation of SAP
The DSWD is primarily concerned with the disbursement of cash transfers. The institution is expected to have an up-to-date list of beneficiaries, which is crucial in distributing the cash fund. The department distributes the cash transfers to the beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). Meanwhile, the LGU is responsible for other low-income families in the formal sector that the 4Ps do not cover.

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DISCUSSION
Casting strategy was in relation to maximizing who should gain from the program. Reiterate the DSWD's proposal in relation to data programming that could help the government in identifying the beneficiaries of the program. Some beneficiaries received more than one subsidy from other different government agencies. This can be avoided by updating a centralized database regularly, resulting in more effective resource utilization.

Better coordination and open communication from the local government to the different barangays in the localities is required to improve targeting. That strategy helped the local government units together with officials of barangays to serve the needs of the public smoothly. The local officials identify barangays with more vulnerable households by using data-driven initiatives. Through systematic data gathering and filling it could determine the residents that were not covered in the first apportionment and warrant that their proper categorizing in the second.

Based on the lists of apportionment the local officials were properly guided that equity exists that protects the most vulnerable public. The distribution of food was more smooth sailing than the distribution of cash, thus the local officials justified the system in distributing food that would somehow save the public from hunger. Due to the dearth of supplies, it is also important to keep program benefits from being misdirected. Food subsidies were given to high-income people, which, while not technically mistargeting, is an inefficient use of resources. Transparency is essential in the fight against corruption to resolve "*palakasan*," or when those eligible were not reached or deemed ineligible. Upon the presentation of criteria for lists of recipients posted in public places and official government websites increased openness reduced allegations of inequalities. Checks and balances portrayed bigger pictures that gave the public rights to report anomalies if and when exists during the implementation of the program.

The origin of the phrase social amelioration, for example, provides us a clear image of how to proceed: social from *socialis*, which means unified, and amelioration from *ameliorate*, which means to improve. The SAP was hailed for its scale and timeliness until execution challenges revealed the delivery systems' shortcomings for effective and efficient implementation. Additionally, in order to ensure the success of the program, it is important for public administrators to receive specialized training and education that prepares them to work with various institutions and individual actors

across governance domains and sectoral boundaries. Furthermore, effective implementation of the Social Amelioration Program will likely require government investments and social welfare reforms. These reforms may include universal access to high-quality early childhood education programs, affordable housing options that meet the demand, and strategies to increase housing mobility and revitalize neighborhoods. Furthermore, it is essential to address the barriers that prevent agencies from utilizing data analysis and implementing evidence-based policies to improve the administration and impact of government-funded social service programs (Liebman 2017)

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