

Incorporating People's Needs into Policy Formulation

Rita Giacaman
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There are two reasons why it is important that policy formulation takes into account the inclusion of people's needs: so that socio-economic and sustainable development of the nation is ultimately achieved, and in order to ensure the implementability of the policies without utilizing force.

All too often, national level policies are shaped in such a way as to pre-empt the possibility for realizeability. In order to develop national level policies that can fulfill people's needs and aspirations and that are implementable, it is crucial necessary to develop an overall vision or view of what kind of society we would like to shape for the future.

This is our situation today:

No data base

No understanding of conditions and processes

With a view for control, funding etc.

For the interest of the few, or omitting major sectors of deprived people

And the questions are:

- ◆ What approach to policy formulation is utilized to shape these policies and the future development of the country?
- ◆ Who formulates national level policies?

In very general terms, formulation of national level policies takes one of two approaches- with different shades of gray, or combinations, in between

One approach to the development of economic and social policies focuses on attempting to assist marginalized and deprived groups to not fall 'out of society altogether' in a rather charitable approach of assistance and the maintenance of rock bottom minimum living standards. Another approach to social entitlement entails the notion that a citizen of a country is entitled to basic health, educational, and social services as a right of birth and as a fundamental human right. Moreover, one approach entails the definition of policy from the top down, with one or two 'experts' formulating everything, probably without being informed by a knowledge of the area, or practice, while the other entails the participation of those who have long worked in the field, NGO's and otherwise in an active debate and discussion over what best policies to formulate, given particular circumstances. This approach also entails the participation of everyone in the process of monitoring, evaluation, re-formulation of policy and further planning.

In this area, there is rising suspicion that the top down approach is being utilized by the authorities today to set the future policies, including the health policies of this country. There is also suspicion that it is the charitable approach that other people are forsaking that is being adopted. I have recently succeeded in having the great privilege of having access to a draft document presented to the Authorities delineating social entitlement policies. I and others read it very carefully, and maintain that the document represents amazing eclecticism: on the one hand, the author goes on and on about the need to move into civil society and the role of NGO's. On the other hand, every other sentence dictates the control of the Authorities over policies and the reduction of the role of NGO's to delivering services to those groups that the authorities cannot handle: you drop on them your burdens and you keep the benefits! What is even more striking is the fact that such documents and policies are not published, not distributed for the population to read and discuss, but are merely presented to the few so that they could decide the fate of the rest.

This is not what a move to civil society means. Rather, it means the maintenance of the flexibility, independence and creativity of NGO's and other groupings and sectors composing Palestinian society, and their incorporation into policy formulation, planning, monitoring, evaluation and action. It means the appreciation of their experience, the understanding of their problems, and the utilization of their knowledge in practice to serve those unfortunate people called Palestinians. It means their animation and working with them in partnership rather than an attempt to control them and especially their sources of funding.

It is my contention that NGO's, especially in the health sector, have performed and will continue to perform a crucial role for the benefit of the majority. It is also my contention that the health and other NGO's form the nucleus for our hope to develop of a healthy Palestinian society in the future. It is also my contention that, at this stage, the Authorities are in a pressing need for the activities, partnership, skills and experience of the NGO's. So let us start the re-structuring process by developing structures of re-presentation and policy formulation based on experience and professionalism, not personal allegiances and factional interest. Let us develop ongoing committees of dialogue and mutual respect, composed of all the groups and parties that have so far made Palestinian history. Let us work together based on the sound principles of democracy and working for public good.