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Explain what's public policy. Examine the Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARCH) policy and explain how design intervention can improve it. (Word limit: 1000)

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PAPER TITLE: Elucidation on Public Policy and the Affordable Rental Housing Complexes Policy in India with Suggestive Design Interventions

Contents:

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2. Defining Public Policy
3. Analysis of ARHC policy along with past reflections
4. Suggestive Design Interventions for its improvisation
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INTRODUCTION

प्रजासुखे सुखं राज्ञः प्रजानां तु हिते हितम् ।

नात्मप्रियं हितं राज्ञः प्रजानां तु प्रियं हितम् ॥

- Kautilya, Arthshastra

This quote was emphasized by Prof. Narayan in class, and it propelled me to think about the true essence of public policy. Kautilya's famous words stating that 'The monarch should seek happiness in the happiness of his citizens, his welfare is in their welfare, his good is not in what pleases him but in what pleases the citizens' in context to India as a democracy can be rightly implied as 'The welfare of the 'nation' lies in the welfare of its people' and hence, the design of public policies should fundamentally be centric to collective good of the society and its people. Just to recapitulate Dr.Bholey, had explained Laswell's view on public policy stating that concepts of policy and design are almost synonymous with each other with their distinct characteristics of multidisciplinary aspects, problem solving approach and normative nature. This coherency thereby arises the need for design thinking and systemic approach to create more human-centric policies that are practical, implementable, and beneficial for the long-term. In a country with heterogenous population like ours, it is even more imperative to have pragmatic approach to craft policies with purpose of human development by improvising the service delivery through public policy design.

What I found rather profound was that just like a doctor cannot solve all the problems with one medicine, policies too require customized solutions based on the concerns being addressed. One such problem stated in class was Urbanization and its related challenges in Indian cities and further it was explained with the ARHCs policy which I will be recapitulating in this paper. Furthermore, being design student and specially after understanding the importance of design and the need for its intervention for better policy making, I would propose a fresher perspective that can give a holistic approach to the existing policy design and reap higher orders of profit for both its people and the planet.

DEFINING PUBLIC POLICY

Public policy is a proposal made entirely to solve real world problems, enacted entirely by the government.

In the words of Chandler and Plano,

"Public policy is the strategic use of resources to alleviate national problems or governmental concerns."

They lay the foundation of trust between the public and the government. An optimized public policy can be made only when the people are carefully heard because ultimately it will impact the lives of its citizens. Public Policy is a proposed course of action of a government within a given environment providing opportunities and obstacles which the policy aims to utilize and overcome to realize a given role. The above definition clearly states that public policies are governmental decisions and resultant actions in pursuance of certain goals and objective. It requires a thoroughly close-knit relation and interaction between the important governmental agencies – the political executive, legislature, bureaucracy, and judiciary.

Public policies are, therefore, a set of policies including laws, plans, actions, and behaviors of a government. They are plans and methods of action that govern the society in the given legal and constitutional framework of the nation. Policies reflect the intent of the government towards its social commitments and priorities and are considered as the fundamental

principles underpinning the set of rules and regulations. The problems policies address could be as basic as food, shelter, housing, literacy, health, and as complex as environment, urbanization to host of other economic policies.

Nature of Public Policies

- Goal Oriented
- Collective actions
- Decision is made.
- Public policy is positive in the sense that it depicts the concern of the government and involves its action to a particular problem on which the policy is made. It has the sanction of law and authority behind it.
- It involves decisions by the governmental officials regarding not taking any action on a particular issue.

Characteristics of Public Policy Formulation

- Complex: Policy making involves many components which are interconnected by communication and feedback loops.
- Dynamic: It is a continuous process that requires regular input of resources and motivation. It also changes with time.
- Lays down guidelines: Public policy, in most cases, lays down general directive on the main lines of action to be followed.
- Public Interest: A larger public interest guides the policy making strategy.
- Requires wide consultation since policies are long term and require critical design thinking before execution.
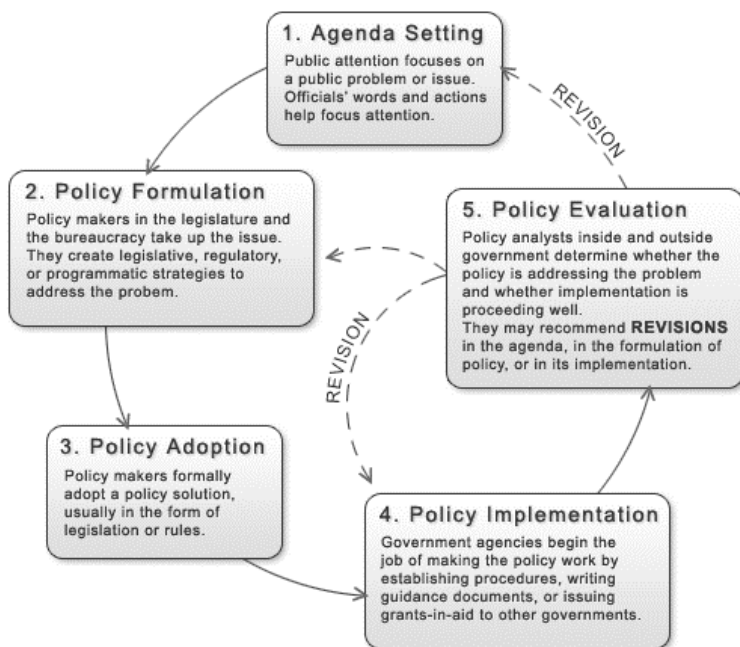
Types of Public Policy

- **Substantive:** These are policies related to general welfare and development of the society, the programmes like provision of education and employment opportunities, economic stabilization, law and order enforcement, anti-pollution legislation.
- **Regulatory**: These are concerned with regulation of trade, business, safety measures, public utilities. Organizations like LIC, RBI make these regulations on behalf of the government.
- **Distributive**: These are meant for specific segments of society and are related to area of grant of goods, public welfare, or health services. Examples include adult education programme, food relief, social insurance, vaccination camp etc.
- **Redistributive:** The Redistributive policies are concerned with the rearrangement of policies which are concerned with bringing about basic social and economic changes. Certain good and services that are divided disproportionally are streamlined.
- **Capitalization:** Under this policy, financial subsidies are given to state and local governments by Union governments.
- **Constituent:** It related to constituting new institutions/mechanisms.
- **Technical:** Policies framed for arrangement of procedures, rule, and framework which a system shall provide for discharge of actions by various agencies on the field.

The initial seeds of the public policy were sown in 1940s and have made a significant impact on the world over the period. Soon after the independence, India opted for planned economic development. It was believed that it is economic development that will usher social and political development culminating into human development. In India, this role was primarily taken up by Planning Commission to formulate policies and develop perspectives that could define the direction which country would follow. For all policy directions, the Five-Year Plans (FYP) became the major source. The first major goal of public policy in India has been in the area of socio-economic development. Major policy formulation was done in the area of industrial and agricultural development. The Five-Year Plans (FYPs) focused on key elements for

development in India. For instance, while 1st FYP focused primarily on agriculture, second one aimed for massive industrialization of the country. In subsequent plans, focus areas included – industrial growth, agricultural productivity, defense expenditure, exports, public development expenditures, poverty, rural development, infrastructure, market reforms and social infrastructure among other things.

Ideally, formation of public policies is through a series of stages known as the policy cycle.

1. Agenda Setting
Public attention focuses on a public problem or issue. Officials' words and actions help focus attention.

REVISION

2. Policy Formulation
Policy makers in the legislature and the bureaucracy take up the issue. They create legislative, regulatory, or programmatic strategies to address the probem.

5. Policy Evaluation
Policy analysts inside and outside government determine whether the policy is addressing the problem and whether implementation is proceeding well.
They may recommend **REVISIONS** in the agenda, in the formulation of policy, or in its implementation.

REVISION

3. Policy Adoption
Policy makers formally adopt a policy solution, usually in the form of legislation or rules.

4. Policy Implementation
Government agencies begin the job of making the policy work by establishing procedures, writing guidance documents, or issuing grants-in-aid to other governments.

ANALYSIS OF AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING COMPLEXES POLICY [ARHC[
FOR URBAN/RURAL MIGRANTS

'When public policy is directed towards urban spaces, it is directed towards people who sit at the margins'

-   Julianne Malveaux

Urban migrants consist of workers who come from rural areas or small towns, seeking better employment opportunities in urban areas. To maximize their savings, they compromise with their living conditions to send remittances to the family. They usually live in slums, informal/ unauthorized colonies, or peri-urban areas to save rental charges. They spend lot of time on roads by walking/ cycling. It also causes anxiety, psychological breakdown, and health problems because of compromise on rest and hygiene conditions. In July 2020, The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, Announced the Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARCH) scheme, as a sub scheme of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban (PMAY-U). ARCH aims to address the housing needs of the urban poor and migrants through rental housing, brought to national attention by the reverse migration triggered by the COVID pandemic induced lock-down.

This scheme shall follow a 3-E Strategy for implementation of ARHCs by adopting effective and efficient mechanisms as illustrated below:

Empowering States/ UTs | Ease of doing business | Ensuring Sustainability

Two-Pronged Implementation Strategy

1. Utilizing existing **Government funded vacant houses to convert into ARHCs** through Public Private Partnership (PPP) or by Public Agencies
2. **Construction, Operation and Maintenance of ARHCs** by Public/ Private Entities on their own available **vacant land** for 25 years.

Type of DUs	Carpet Area (sqm)	Unit Structure	Ratio under ARHCs
Single Bedroom	Up to 30	1 bedroom, living room, kitchen, bathroom, toilet etc.	Ratio of DUs and dormitory beds may vary as per project requirement.
Dormitory	Up to 10	Separate bed, side table, shelves, lockers, common facilities of kitchen, toilet etc.	
Double Bedroom	Up to 60	2 bedroom, living room, kitchen, bathroom, toilet etc.	A maximum of one-third (33%) of total DUs in the project is permissible as ARHCs.

Beneficiaries

1. Beneficiaries for ARHCs will be **urban migrants/poor, labour, street vendors**, rickshaw pullers and other service providers.
2. Also, **industrial workers** along with migrants working with market/trade associations, educational/health institutions, students, or any other persons of such categories.

The aims and objectives are as follows:

1. To address the vision of 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' significantly by creating a sustainable ecosystem of affordable rental housing solutions for urban migrants/poor.

2. To achieve overall objective of "Housing for All" encompassing the need of affordable rental housing for urban migrants/poor. ARHCs will provide them dignified living with necessary civic amenities near their place of work.

3. To create a conducive environment by incentivizing Public/Private Entities to leverage investment for creating affordable rental housing stock to take care of their own requirements for workforce and cater to neighboring areas if they have available vacant land.

Past Rental Housing Schemes

ARHCs are not the first attempt to build public rental housing for urban migrants. The oldest of these schemes implemented by the Bombay Development Department (BDD) dates to the 1920s and was targeted at migrant millworkers. Commonly known as BDD chawls in Mumbai, the state government in 1921 assumed the responsibility of constructing single-room tenements. As noted in the First Five Year Plan of India (1951-56), the BDD started with an ambitious plan of constructing 50,000 tenements, but the project had to be halted after building merely 15,000 due to the mounting construction costs and the inability of the beneficiaries to afford the rent amount. Almost a hundred years later, in 2008, the Maharashtra state government introduced a similar rental housing scheme for migrants: the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority – Rental Housing Scheme (MMRDA–RHS). This scheme had an ambitious target of constructing half a million single-roomed tenements within a span of five years, from 2008 to 2013, using a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) approach. Eventually, the project was rendered <u>untenable</u> due to various factors such as uninhabitable density targets, lack of interest by private players, and lack of capacity of the public agency to manage

rental housing stock. Both the schemes discussed here exhibit a discernible shift of government approach from a state regulated housing provision of BDD tenements to the MMRDA–RHS scheme resting on private player participation. The MMRDA–RHS experience demonstrates how overreliance on the private market may inhibit the implementation of the ARHC scheme in the case of low participation from private players. In general, the policy history shows a recurring pattern of ambitious designs which remain unrealized either because they do not match the needs and capacities of beneficiaries, or they lack buy-in from private stakeholders despite offering handsome incentives.

Challenges Confronting ARHC

After a close reading of the policy documents considering these observations, I identified multiple challenges that may hinder the implementation of the ARHC scheme.

1. Instead of direct intervention by the state, the ARHC scheme depends heavily on other market players for implementation. The scheme mentions that implementation agencies need to carry out repairs of old vacant government houses or build new housing units. As discussed in the context of MMRDA–RHS, the scheme may run the risk of getting no takers from the private sector.
2. The policy documents do not discuss the means-testing method to identify the potential beneficiaries of the scheme. As there are no explicit income criteria mentioned for eligibility, it may lead to the scheme missing the most vulnerable migrant populations in favour of those who are relatively better off.
3. The dwelling unit allotted to an individual can only be used for residential purpose and no commercial activity is allowed inside the premises. This condition stands in contrast with the way of living for many urban migrants for whom dwelling space is also a site for carrying out home-based work.
4. The scheme offers no flexibility to individual beneficiaries who will invariably plan to expand their family and life in the city. Migrants usually adopt an incremental housing process which allows them a cost-effective and flexible housing option in urban settings.
5. By having a participatory process, the scheme does little to empower the migrants in terms of their access to housing. Instead, the scheme heavily favours private actors such as real estate developers, job contractors, and informal employers who already exercise disproportionate control over the lives of migrants.
6. Unprecedented times such as covid-19 have also risen questions on migration from rural to urban areas in the minds of these people. Due to lack of concern and complete negligence from the government towards them during this period there lies a risk in reduction in the rate of migration from rural to urban areas.
7. With development of smart villages there is a high probability of very few migrants willing to move into urban settlements over this long period of 25 years.

SUGGESTIVE DESIGN INTERVENTIONS FOR ITS IMPROVISATION

For designing the ARHC policy, my approach would have been more innovative by nature, inducing a systemic level thinking for better service delivery through the policy. One of the major shortcomings in our current public policy making style is the 'fragmented thinking' approach and disconnect within the larger system during formulation and implementation of its actions. Each department works in silos and follows an 'individualistic' way of working. What lacks here is the concept of 'cohesive thinking approach' wherein, various departments brainstorm together on the project and come up with 'parallel policies' that ensures better outcomes and manifestation of the policy creation. In the system there should be a concept of 'handholding' and not 'handwashing' for better designing and execution of the policies cohesively.

For instance, the current ARHC policy lacks ecosystem around the built lands thereby 90% of the houses under this scheme remain vacant, so there arises a **need to design policies to build ecosystem around these buildings**.

For social development the community engagement infrastructure can be built up such as community parks, ceremonial areas, learning cohorts, qualitative health-care facilities, digital infrastructure spaces, for physical as well as cognitive development of the people.

Within architecture and planning, the elements and outcomes of design can be difficult to conceptualize and manage. I believe that the ARHC scheme will certainly find substantial demand among urban migrants. However, an inclusion of a **clearer definition of the targeted group and a suitable means-testing method for screening the eligible beneficiary to reduce the unintended consequences of the scheme**. Furthermore, **closer attention to the specific nature of the targeted groups demand through participatory methods is imperative** for aligning the policy goals with the needs of the people. It is observed that **the target section selected for the residing in these houses ends up renting them out to generate income due to lack of earning opportunities** nearby. Therefore**, the integrated model should envision the support structure which could generate the employment opportunities** for them.

Such schemes act as mirror of the Government/policy makers about the integration of the various concepts which are advertised by different departments. These housing societies are the micro model of the development which the govt. wants to give to their people, it's the reflection of their vision and work towards them. Bringing the '**Future concept of self-dependent, self-sustaining integrated housing model** will include future technologies with focus on green rating, where we could see more use of technologies such as that of solar grid which could act as a source for the energy demand; for water needs, the rainwater harvesting techniques should be used in these societies; similarly using biogas for cooking; waste management techniques etc.' All these technologies exist as pride of the respective department however, the collaboration must be made here in these societies to make the vision seen by all. **The outcome of such model housing will have the ultimate beneficiary as the people who will live there with utmost sense of pride in their dwellings**.

Based on these clarifications, **a more robust and dynamic model for rental housing provisions and ensuring affordability** can be accomplished. Results confirm that stronger design intervention has helped improvising areas with denser population, thus providing a more efficient place to live in.

CONCLUSION

Complexities exist in every system, but it can be simplified by strategically designed interventions that induce new approaches to find desirable, viable as well as feasible solutions. Public policies deal with the larger issues of social well-being, and design can help achieve them with its skills, strategies, and innovations. For optimum results, 'co-creation' can be the magic wand wherein 'involvement of non-governmental inputs and informal debates' encourage 'out of the box' perspectives while designing policies. I propose that a body of policy makers should be constituted with individuals from diverse fields to design public policies for the multifaceted problems prevailing around us. These wicked problems can be dealt by deducing solutions not solely for the body but to quench soul and so we need to take into consideration all tangible and intangible parameters while designing such policies that profit the people as well as planet.

NOTES

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