

The PILA Framework & Policy Flux



INITIATIVE ON
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Understanding change in complex institutional environments

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1. Introduction

The Policy and Institutional Landscape Analysis (PILA) framework (Figure 1) has been developed under the CGIAR Initiative on National Policies and Strategies (NPS) to examine policy change over time across diverse geographies. It is a tool primarily aimed at the policy research community. Building on the work of Elinor Ostrom and others, the framework helps map the origins, structure and direction of policies¹ across a spectrum of food, land and water systems. Of particular concern is how policy coherence evolves over time - referred to as 'policy flux' in the framework - including related to normative coherence (adherence to wider policy goals and objectives), horizontal coherence (across specific sectors), and vertical coherence (from design through to implementation).

Ultimately, the PILA framework seeks to help in understanding how and where opportunities may arise for timely and targeted research support for policy design, implementation and evaluation. These 'windows of opportunity' (after Kingdon, 1984), can arise at early stages of design or during implementation - or even at policy monitoring

¹ Broadly speaking, we use the term 'policy' to refer to public policy, i.e. the actions and decisions that governments take affecting all of society, rather than specific individuals. The instruments through which these decisions are delivered commonly take the form of policy documents, and are labelled as such, though in some cases they may also encompass legislative documents, strategies, developmental programs and other decrees and schemes.

and evaluation stages. Each policy window is specific to the kind of policy process identified, the major stakeholders involved, and the long-term policy objectives envisaged.

PILA analysis has been included in the completion of flagship reports in six countries (Nigeria, India, Colombia, Kenya, Laos and Egypt). All these reports have examined policy coherence across food, land and water systems, with, in most cases, a strong focus on water policies. The reports have analyzed how policy landscapes have been shaped in selected policy areas, the significance of different kinds of coherence and, through deeper analysis, how specific policies have been implemented at subnational and local levels. During the research, the framework itself has been revised and strengthened, including the identification of an important ‘middle’ of systems complexity.

2. Methodology

The PILA framework builds on power, political economy, systems and policy analysis. Within Work Package 1 on Policy Coherence under the NPS Initiative, PILA has provided a means by which to analyse policy processes and degrees of flux across different policy landscapes. This includes contributing understanding of the role that both informal and formal institutions play in determining the rules of the game constraining or enabling change in policy design and implementation (March & Olsen, 2008). In the case of India, the framework helped identify policy challenges at the level of community implementation, and, specifically, the opportunity to support vertical coherence through targeted leadership training in conjunction with local policy implementers (See Box 1).

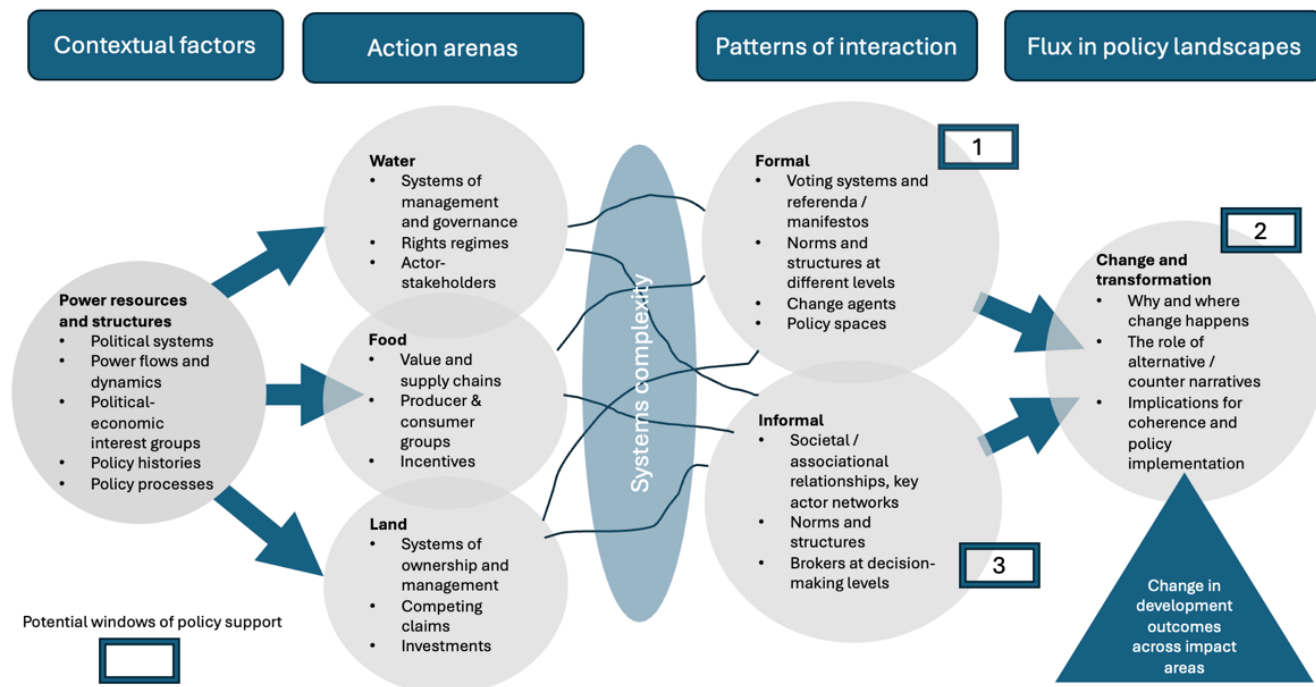


Figure 1: The PILA framework: Source: Authors, building on Ostrom et al. 1994 & Ostrom 2009

Building on a combination of approaches, the framework utilizes Ostrom’s Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework (Ostrom, 2009), as well as tools of political economy analysis (Mcloughlin, 2014) and systems thinking (Arnold and Water, 2015). The uniqueness of the framework lies in its identification of ‘policy flux’, encouraging deeper analysis of the links between policy change, systems processes that shape change and development outcomes over time. This is especially relevant to competitive political systems where contestation over policy narratives and institutional mandates may reflect diverse sets of discourses, values and ideas (Hay, 2006). More broadly, therefore, applying the framework helps deepen our understanding of the contexts in which ideas shape and change policy and, ultimately, how policy outcomes are delivered (Béland, 2016).

PILA framework elements are grouped together in a structure and order that enables a systematic approach to understanding policy and institutional environments (see Figure.1). The elements of the framework appear sequential, but do not have to be followed in strict order. In fact, it is important to loop back and re-examine earlier elements during application of the framework. For example, if the importance of informal patterns of interaction is

deeply-rooted in longer-term historical contexts, the research should examine these 'origin stories' in more detail. As such, the framework allows for consideration of policy and institutions genealogy (Gale, 2001).

The key elements of the framework are outlined below:

2.1 Contextual factors

Power resources and structures: This element of PILA asks questions such as what kind of political system exists and how does this affect the ways in which power flows and influences policy narratives. Examples include how electoral transitions and manifesto creation by political parties 'sets out their stall' on policy issues; or, in less competitive political systems, how different institutions of bureaucracy (or parts of a bureaucracy) reflect divergent policy narratives. In addition, how are positions of power in policy processes embedded in varying ideological positions and the directions taken by different policy constituencies, including civil society groups. This is important because it helps in framing our understanding of policy flux later in the analysis, including how much policy change is politics-driven, more science-(evidence) driven or perhaps rooted in societal movements and activism.

Box 1 Policy making contexts - India

Policymaking is a partially closed-door event (Basu 2019; Livemint 2021) in India taken up by a committee constituted by respective ministries owning the policy. ...After the policy draft is revised internally, it is released into the public domain for open consultation, and comments are invited from the public for a specified period. Comments received are then integrated as seen by the drafting committee/ministry. The draft is then sent for cabinet approval, and after being revised by a parliamentary committee, it is released as a policy. For those not part of the drafting committee, how much of the perspectives and suggestions are integrated into the policy document remains a matter of speculation. Policies, even those that envision community participation with active civil society organization engagement as their goal, often have a limited seat at the table while designing those policies or their implementation. Panchayati Raj Institutions are often left behind because of their limited capacities to engage.

Source: Battacharjee et al, 2024

Secondly, within this wider context, we need to identify the most prominent political-economic interest groups involved in specific policy spaces and processes. This includes identifying histories of group interactions - e.g. dairy industry interests converging with wider agricultural policy, or large-scale irrigators within water policy environments. It is important to provide at least some broader historical context to policy processes as this aids our understanding of current policy emergence. Analysing context therefore includes assessing how past policies have been developed and how consultation and engagement

have been shaped by earlier lessons, perhaps resulting in the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups. This analysis should include an understanding of how and whether gender and equity considerations made their way into earlier policy processes and outcomes.

In Egypt, uncovering key political and economic contexts behind the development of policies involved a systematic review of food, land, and water policy histories. This revealed a shift from socialist to liberal and neo-liberal governments affecting agricultural and water policies, including complex roles played across public institutions, the private sector and civil society in developing and implementing policies and the resulting divergent impacts on food production, the wider economy and trade.

More generally, framing part of the contextualisation in terms of power analysis (e.g. Lukes, 1974; Foucault, 1980) helps establish deeper understanding of what determines policy outcomes - from the exercise of ideational power through to the co-option of particular interest groups. This includes analysing how policy making and implementing institutions establish relationships within a political system, including the form and frequency of these relationships under more centralised or more devolved, even federal, state systems.

2.2 Action arenas

Action arenas describe the space within which policy processes are constructed by both formal and informal actors. This element explicitly builds on the work of Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Development framework (Ostrom, 2009), exploring environments in which decisions are made across policy domains covering water, food and land systems. Suggestions for areas to investigate under each category are provided below. Note, however, that these are not comprehensive and will change relative to different national and regional contexts.

Water - What systems of management exist and under which kinds of governance arrangements? How are these related to the structures and resources described under context? For instance, in a decentralised political environment, how do basin, sub-basin and watershed structures interrelate with decentralised political and/or

Box 2 The FLW policy environment in Colombia

At the informal level, the results of the policy mapping highlight the active involvement of 79 actors in the formulation, implementation, or evaluation of 113 public policies related to food (64), land (47), and water (31) sectors in Colombia. In alignment with the institutional mapping outcomes, the policy mapping underscores that 81% of actors are engaged in the food sector, 59% in the land sector, and 39% in the water sector. This correspondence reflects a proportional relationship between the institutions designated with the responsibility of designing and implementing public policies in the three sectors and the practical engagement of these institutions in policy-related activities within the realms of food, land, and water. These findings illuminate the synergy between the formal roles ascribed by the institutional structure and the active contributions of actors in shaping the policy landscape across these critical sectors. In summary, while most institutions overseeing policies extend across the food, land, and water sectors, there is a notable concentration of actors and policies within the food policy arena. This concentration primarily revolves around economic activities related to agricultural production, often centered in the agrifood sector. In contrast, both the land and water policy arenas exhibit a stronger emphasis on environmental activities, specifically directed towards the conservation of natural resources in their respective sectors. This dichotomy is a defining characteristic across the government entities and policies in Colombia concerning the food, land, and water sectors.

Source: Buritica et al, 2023

administrative structures? An example might be catchment management organisations and local district government in Uganda. Similarly, what kinds of rights regimes and laws are in place and shaping elements of specific policies (including potential policy boundaries, and how they are implemented)?

Food - In relation to food system action arenas (in some countries, the dominant policy arena - see Box 2), key elements may include core food value and supply chains in both country and regional contexts. In addition, it is important that we know which key producer and/or consumer groups are active either directly or indirectly in specific food systems, given their potential or actual stakeholder engagement role and/or more discrete behind-the-scenes lobbying. Importantly, their influence will have significant knock-on effects on water and land policy.

Land - In relation to land policy, there are important systems of land tenure that can have a bearing on policy development, implementation and outcomes, including the relationship between land and water ownership and riparian rights. Land management and the regulation and resolution of sometimes competing and overlapping claims to ownership is one such area that could assume prominence in different policy processes, depending on the policy history of tenure relations in a particular country.

Between Action Arenas and Patterns of Interaction we have added to the framework the 'spaghetti' of systems complexity, exemplified in many contexts including Kenya (see Box 3). The reason for this 'muddy middle' is to emphasise that the ways in which food, land and water systems interact with processes of decision making - both formal and informal - is rarely, if ever, simple. Rather these interactions are constantly changing, subject to new policy entrepreneurs emerging, and old narratives being subsume by new realities including, for instance, the influence of digital environments. This systems complexity is, therefore, both institutional and non-institutional, linked closely to the emergence of new environments of interaction including how social media tools and apps now encourage the rapid establishment of new, but more informal, policy making and shaping groups.

Box 3 Kenya and policy making complexity

The process of developing food, land, and water policies in Kenya is both lengthy and expensive because it is driven by the following factors: MDAs (Ministries, Departments and Agencies) and counties lack adequate capacity to develop quality policies and strategies. As a result, many policies lack actionable points and do not incorporate cross-cutting issues. Given the constitutional requirement to ensure public participation, many of these drafts fail at various points. The forums for developing or revising policies are driven by motivations other than the ones stated. This is one reason for not preparing strategies to ensure the horizontal coherence between the food, land, and water sectors. While development partners are willing to support MDA and counties in developing policies, they prefer to fund them to refine existing draft policies. This is undermined by the lack of capacity....To compound matters, development partners do not have a coordinated approach even in a given sector. As a result, leaders from both national ministries and counties take advantage of this compartmentalized approach to secure multiple funding to convene stakeholder meetings, which are never concluded. Subsequently, most of the policies remain as drafts for up to 10 years. Ideally, a policy should be completed within two years to enable a newly elected government to implement the policy for about three years before the term expires and, therefore, be in a position to assess the impact.

Source: Mburu et al, 2024:

In the Egypt case, to help 'unpack the spaghetti', the report selected the main national strategies and delimited common problems and policy objectives that bind these strategies together. This policy frame then simplified the complexity of food, land, and water interactions and guided the analysis of policy coherence, helping to analyze whether policy instruments deployed are synergetic or conflictual towards achieving this policy frame (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016).

2.3 Patterns of interaction

This part of the analysis examines the 'how' of influence over policy construction and implementation, placing a spotlight on both formal and informal patterns of interaction between actors, including who is included or excluded and how they shape final policy outcomes.

Formal interactions: Building on the contextual analysis, formal interactions examine how structures such as voting systems and referenda – e.g. in relation to specific policy measures outlined in manifestos and/or under voting processes – have helped to determine policy environments. These formal patterns of interaction have, furthermore, been shaped by wider norms and structures at different levels, including, for example, the social norms surrounding gender roles in a society that may be enshrined in social sector policy and legislation. They also have an important bearing on who is involved and how public participation takes place in policy dialogues and multi-stakeholder engagement processes. This analysis can involve mapping out the implications of the information flow and feedback mechanisms, and how and why actual policy processes may have diverged from those originally planned, including in relation to levels of and success in formal consultation across stakeholder groups.

Informal interactions: An important complement to formal patterns of interaction are informal associations and relationships built via social networks and other systems that significantly shape policy environments including, for example, science networks associated with academic schools of thought, epistemologies and/or other institutions. The importance lies in how these might convey ideas to 'policy entrepreneurs' (Mintrom & Norman, 2009) or even mediate relationships between different print, broadcast and social media influencers and specific policy positions.

These more informal processes may be harder to identify and attribute significance to, but their presence is likely to have important implications for the setting of policy objectives, public framings of policy and what or who constitute key policy goals and targets. Some of these relationships involve brokering science knowledge used to inform policy and in which processes think tanks and other convening organisations play important roles.

In Egypt, the types of exchanges and interactions were defined into four types of flows: hierarchical, funds, information sharing, and technical assistance. These networks were mapped by studying the mandates of each actor in law, their implementing roles in developmental programs, and key informant interviews then conducted with the main stakeholders. The results highlighted the substantial engagement of centralized ministries at the national level, donors and financial institutions, international development agencies, and research centers. Despite the high social capital of some other constituencies such as community-based organizations or farmers, they still lacked knowledge on different innovations (power within), the capacities to organize themselves and mobilize finance (power with), and to influence decision-making (power to).

2.4 Flux in policy landscapes

Policy is rarely static but rather exists in a state of flux. This very nature can make the pursuit of policy analysis hard to accomplish, particularly in policy environments where there is a paucity of available data and information. Understanding the type and frequency of policy flux is the basic purpose of applying the PILA framework. Taking it a step further, it is also useful to distinguish why some policy landscapes may be more volatile across different geographic and thematic contexts (e.g. water policies versus agricultural policies) and whether some countries and regions are noticeably more volatile than others in terms of policy change.

A second question to ask in future could be what does 'optimum change' look like in a specific policy environment and context? One issue currently emerging is the accelerating speed at which climate change is impacting food, land and water systems in highly vulnerable geographies and, therefore, whether policy processes are sufficiently robust and effective to respond in a timely manner. In short, is policy flux sufficient to enable effective climate resilience?

3. Further resources

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