From Capital to Clinic

A resource for effective advocacy for policy implementation
From Capital to Clinic: a resource for effective advocacy for policy implementation

Robust policy is critical to achieving improved health outcomes—but far too often, action stops once a policy is developed and adopted. Policies are only as effective as the extent to which they are implemented, and poor policy implementation holds back efforts to expand equitable access to health services. To translate goals into meaningful outcomes, every policy needs a plan of action, resources, dissemination, and adaptation. Research shows that lack of evidence-based planning, inadequate political commitment and resources, weak capacity of public institutions, and failure to engage communities, frontline workers, and other key stakeholders in decision-making processes lead to sub-optimal policy implementation, subsequently affecting the functioning of health systems.\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^2\)

Advocates play a key role in driving policy implementation. They hold policymakers accountable for effective policy dissemination and communication, development of plans and operational guidelines, allocation of resources, continuous citizen and community engagement, and evaluation of how implementation of the policy is working.

Why a policy implementation resource for advocates?

A number of existing tools and frameworks detail the policy implementation process, as well as critical inputs and enabling factors. But most of these resources were created to guide the actions of decision-makers and/or program implementers, rather than advocates. This resource looks across the policy cycle—from agenda setting and policy development to implementation and evaluation—and outlines actions that advocates can take to support the roles of decision-makers, hold them accountable, and act as a liaison between civil society, health providers, subnational stakeholders, and communities.

While this resource is meant for advocates, their success depends on the supportive action of decision-makers. For this reason, we have also included a list of decision-makers’ responsibilities through the policy process. Having this list in hand will enable advocates to better hold decision-makers accountable for their role in facilitating policy implementation.

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Methodology

The Capital to Clinic tool, developed by PATH with generous support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is the culmination of a consultative process involving practicing advocates, academia, policy experts, and the literature. The Capital to Clinic initiative began in late 2019, when PATH convened a technical advisory group in London to shape the focus and parameters for a scope of work on documenting learnings in the field of policy implementation science. As the foundation for the initiative, PATH first conducted an extensive literature review around policy implementation frameworks and the drivers of policy implementation—including the USAID Policy Implementation Assessment Tool and Brinkerhoff and Crosby’s Policy Characteristics Checklist. This was followed by a series of consultations and discussions that brought together civil society, advocates, academia, and policymakers operating at national and sub-national levels across African countries to discuss bottlenecks and solutions to implementation and policy dissemination practices—including a participatory workshop at the Prince Mahidol Awards Conference where participants discussed methods for evaluating implementation of primary health care policies, as well as two virtual dialogue forums in late 2020. The development of this tool was informed by key takeaways and insights from these consultations, findings from the literature, and practical experience.

Accompanying the tool is a white paper that explores barriers and enablers for successful policy implementation, as well as a one-page summary infographic for advocates to use as a reference sheet.
We recognize that every context is different, and policies exist along a continuum of complexity and ambiguity. As you use this resource, below are a few things to keep in mind:

- **A policy must be fit for purpose and fit for context.** Good policy addresses the root causes of a health challenge with adequate resources, tailored to a specific national or sub-national context. This is critical for gaining the support of both end-users and decision-makers—and determines the extent to which the policy is implemented, funded, and utilized.

- **Policies vary widely based on the complexity of the problem they seek to address.** A policy guiding delivery of a specific health service is less complex than the development and implementation of a policy reorganizing the health system, such as a new national health insurance scheme. Less complex policies are more likely to have clarity around roles and responsibilities.

- **Policy development is an inherently political process.** Disagreement and conflict often arise in setting priorities, agreeing on solutions, and assigning responsibilities—sometimes due to competing interests between those who stand to benefit from the policy and those responsible for resource allocation and implementation. Some policies are more prone to conflict than others, making implementation and budgeting more difficult.

- **Approaches to policy implementation have traditionally been categorized as top-down or bottom-up.** Top-down approaches focus primarily on the design of the policy itself, assuming that if the design is right, implementation will flow smoothly. By contrast, bottom-up approaches emphasize the role of implementers and local networks, allowing for considerable on-the-ground adaptation. More complex policies with competing interests may require a bottom-up approach to policy implementation, while those that are less complex may allow for a more top-down approach. Some policies lend themselves to a hybrid approach.

- **Each national and subnational context is different,** making it difficult to create a generic policy implementation framework. Countries have different decision-making structures and formal and unofficial processes—especially in fragile settings with limited or weak governance structures. The extent to which countries are decentralized also influences implementation, including how policies are disseminated and adapted at the sub-national level.

- **A policy can be updated even as it is being implemented.** Policy implementation should also include mechanisms to facilitate adaptive learning to inform the next iteration of a policy. A monitoring and evaluation plan, including mechanisms to gather feedback from implementers and communities, is critical.

- **The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that the process of policy development and implementation must be adaptable.** Policy implementation can be challenging even when health systems are functioning at full capacity. During the pandemic, however, policies and response plans—often being developed rapidly at the national level—had to adapt in real time as they were disseminated and implemented. The continuation of health services and protection of health workers hinged on creative solutions.

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The actions in the following checklist are generally aligned to stages in the policy cycle—but we recognize this is a non-linear process. Opportunities to influence budget and resource allocation, for example, occur during policy development and costing, as well as pre-determined moments throughout the year as ministries of health and finance propose and negotiate funding amounts. Furthermore, building political will is an ongoing process, while policy implementation must be planned for in the development stage. The actions listed are therefore not in chronological order, and some actions may be ongoing. Additionally, this list is not exhaustive, but instead serves as a starting point for advocates to begin planning their policy implementation advocacy.

Finally, note that the distinction between actions taken by decision-makers and those taken by advocates is fluid. In some cases, a certain action might be the responsibility of a decision-maker—but if they are not acting, advocates may take it on. This is often the case, for example, with identifying policy champions or gathering community input on a policy.
POLICY STEP
Agenda setting and building political will

**POLICY STEP**

**Policy development**

**ACTIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS**

- Identify stakeholders at all levels (national and sub-national) who will be responsible for leading policy implementation and ensure they are bought into the vision.
- Build broad support among other policymakers and technical officers within critical arms of government whose actions may have an impact on the proposed policy.
- Facilitate stakeholder dialogue with all who stand to benefit, or lose out, from successful implementation of the policy to anticipate opposition and build support.

**ACTIONS FOR ADVOCATES**

- Develop an advocacy strategy: identify decision-makers, influencers, and their key interests; opponents of the policy and obstacles; implementers of the policy; and other partners and champions.
- Package and share evidence from research, programming, and other experience/knowledge gained from working with those impacted by the policy.
- Connect with academics, researchers, and technical partners to gather and generate evidence to build a broad support base for policy implementation.

**ACTIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS**

- Establish and lead a taskforce or technical working group responsible for policy development.
- Create opportunities for civil society, advocates, community groups, and sub-national stakeholders to provide input and feedback on the policy via public consultations, meetings, or other mechanisms.
- Develop a comprehensive costed implementation plan that includes dissemination, financing sources, stakeholder engagement, and clear targets and indicators to measure success.
- Review global normative guidance, best practices from other countries, and research to ensure policy is evidence based, feasible, and aligns with current and emerging trends.
- Engage stakeholders responsible for policy implementation in the design phase.
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities in policy implementation, especially delineating between national and sub-national.

**ACTIONS FOR ADVOCATES**

- Participate in the taskforce or technical working group responsible for policy development; contribute technical knowledge to shape policy content and the implementation plan.
- Advocate for a comprehensive costed implementation plan, to be developed in parallel/as part of the policy, that includes dissemination, training, human resource capacity, coordination mechanisms, data collection systems, financing, stakeholder engagement and feedback, and clear targets and indicators to measure success.
- Support or lead landscaping efforts to understand what other policies might need to be updated to align with the new policy.
- Advocate with other ministries/divisions to ensure they are poised to meet implementation needs.
- Engage the media to highlight the key gaps as part of the justification for the policy.
POLICY STEP
Policy adoption

**ACTIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS**
- Raise visibility of the policy with relevant decision-making bodies to build support for adoption and sign off.
- Hold briefings with higher-level decision-makers/gatekeepers on the value of the policy and its implications for the health sector to address potential questions and concerns.
- Build broad consensus for acceptance and sign off by relevant authorities at the national or sub-national level.
- Hold a formal launch event in collaboration with partners and policy stakeholders, if needed.

**ACTIONS FOR ADVOCATES**
- Advocate with high-level decision-makers for adoption and final sign off/approval.
- Develop advocacy briefs with clear calls to action for the adoption of the policy.
- Track statements of support from key decision-makers and implementers to support future advocacy.
- Participate in and/or support a formal launch of the policy. Engage the media, covering the policy signing and launch so that key stakeholders are aware of the policy change.

POLICY STEP
Resource allocation

**ACTIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS**
- If needed, use enacted policy as a political tool to advocate for resources.
- Fulfill commitments made in the costed implementation plan.
- Create an enabling environment for civil society to participate in budget processes and bring community voices to inform budget priorities.
- Where opportunities exist, ringfence and safeguard resource allocations for a policy intervention. This could include enacting laws that create dedicated budget lines and/or allocate a specific amount toward a cause.

**ACTIONS FOR ADVOCATES**
- Participate in and influence resource allocation processes, including utilizing key opportunities across the budget cycle.
- Leverage the costed implementation plan as a tool to secure funding from government, international and local partners, etc. Monitor resource allocation, disbursement, and expenditure—highlighting gaps for further advocacy as well as celebrating milestones.
- Strengthen the capacity of civil society and community groups to engage in financing and accountability for the budget-making process. Incorporate community feedback to inform budget asks.
- Produce and disseminate simplified versions of the budget to increase public understanding and gather feedback on budget priorities.
**Action for Decision-Makers**

- Disseminate the policy according to the implementation plan, ensuring all implementers from national to local levels understand the policy and their role in implementing it.
- Engage high-level influential champions, including media, to popularize the policy and sustain momentum for implementation.
- Engage and consult with key community leaders to encourage buy-in and gain insight on local context and need for adaptations.
- Provide guidance and continuous education to health managers and health workers at sub-national levels to support policy adaption/domestication and implementation.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer practical knowledge and experience exchange between implementing actors.
- Update pre- and in-service training curricula for health workers to support their new roles. This may require coordination with the Ministry of Education.
- Establish coordination mechanisms between government, implementing partners, private sector, professional associations, and civil society.
- Update data collection systems (i.e., health management information systems or logistics management information systems) needed to track policy implementation.
- Continue to ensure resources are allocated and disbursed to support implementation.

**Action for Advocates**

- Support policy dissemination, including media activities, and help government track which audiences have not yet been reached.
- Engage with decision-makers and policy implementers to ensure accountability for sustained action.
- Educate local advocates, patient groups, citizens' organizations, and media on the policy and equip them with tools to monitor policy implementation.
- Support sub-national needs for policy adaption/domestication by gathering information about how well a policy is being implemented and elevating documented gaps/needs at sub-national levels to national decision-makers.
- Document commitments made by decision-makers (through meetings, media coverage, etc.) to support accountability efforts.
- Continue to engage in budget advocacy to ensure adequate resourcing.
- Build the capacity of coalitions to support the implementation of the policy.
Participate in monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation. This may be a formal process led by decision-makers, and/or monitoring activities developed and led by civil society (e.g. score cards, citizen report cards, facility assessments, community advocacy forums).

Document and share experiences and gaps in policy implementation; provide recommendations for improvement.

Leverage this feedback to identify needs for future policy revisions or amendments.

Engage the media as an accountability partner to highlight the successes and gaps.

 ACTIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS

- Support or establish and strengthen community monitoring and evaluation and feedback mechanisms for frontline providers and communities to improve policies.
- Establish an evaluative culture within the health system and strengthen use of data to monitor and evaluate policy implementation.
- Involve key stakeholders in monitoring and evaluating policy implementation/interventions.
- Use evaluation feedback to improve policy and respond to any identified gaps.

 ACTIONS FOR ADVOCATES

- Participate in monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation. This may be a formal process led by decision-makers, and/or monitoring activities developed and led by civil society (e.g. score cards, citizen report cards, facility assessments, community advocacy forums).
- Document and share experiences and gaps in policy implementation; provide recommendations for improvement.
- Leverage this feedback to identify needs for future policy revisions or amendments.
- Engage the media as an accountability partner to highlight the successes and gaps.

Dr. Abdoulaye Bousso (foreground) is coordinator of the Health Emergency Operations Center in DRC, which is responsible for rapid implementation of epidemic response policies including for Ebola and COVID-19. Photo: PATH/Gabe Bienczycki
## Actions across the policy cycle

### ACTIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS

- Provide leadership throughout policy development and implementation and ensure all key stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure the policy and implementation plan are adequately resourced.
- Ensure the policy is fit for purpose—solves identified health problems and will benefit intended end-users—as well as fit for context—considers the political context and realities of the health system.
- Continuously gather and act on input from sub-national leaders, implementers, health providers, civil society, and other partners.
- Establish, maintain, and publicize a policy portal that houses health sector policies, strategies, guidelines, etc. to enhance transparency and accountability.
- Create a collaborative environment for all health actors and partners to work together in catalyzing effective policy implementation for public health impact.
- Put civil society voices forward continuously to ensure community priorities and feedback are incorporated across the policy cycle.

### ACTIONS FOR ADVOCATES

- Continuously engage decision-makers to ensure support, awareness, and sustained political will for policy development and implementation.
- Engage in budget advocacy and accountability tracking to ensure adequate resourcing.
- Package and share evidence from research, programming, and other experience/knowledge gained from working with those impacted by the policy to ensure they are fed back into policymaking.
- Build and support coalitions of like-minded civil society advocates to strengthen citizen agency for holding policymakers and implementers accountable for policy implementation.
- Provide *advocacy capacity strengthening* opportunities and mentorship for civil society and community groups to meaningfully engage in policy processes.
- Engage regularly with the media to highlight key issues across the policymaking and implementation process.

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Dr. Benoit Kebala of the DRC Ministry of Health meets with clinical implementers at Fann University Hospital in Dakar, Senegal. Photo: PATH/Lynn Heinisch
POLICY IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY
Quick reference guide for advocates

- Hold decision-makers accountable for all their responsibilities and commitments across the policy cycle.
- Package and share evidence from those impacted by the policy, and establish feedback loops to inform policymaking.
- Engage in budget advocacy throughout the entire cycle to ensure adequate resourcing.
- Build a civil society coalition to support community groups, highlight local priorities, and provide feedback.
- Advocate for transparency and accountability by making policies publicly available to everyone.
- Engage the media to highlight key gaps and successes throughout the cycle.

Policy development
- Provide evidence to the group that develops the policy
- Engage input from all key stakeholders
- Encourage early consideration of implementation needs

Agenda setting and building political will
- Understand the policy pathway
- Identify the decision-makers and their interests
- Plan advocacy tactics

Policy adoption
- Get policy on meeting agendas for signoff
- Support a formal launch of the policy with the media
- Simplify policy language for key audiences

Policy implementation
- Disseminate the policy to local levels
- Support accountability efforts and establish feedback loops
- Develop and track indicators for successful implementation

Resource allocation
- Understand advocacy opportunities in the budget cycle
- Monitor resource allocation and disbursement
- Produce simplified versions of the budget