4 A Participatory Development-Oriented Research Methodology

Implicitly if not explicitly, all development theories incorporate a methodology, an agenda of steps for deciding what policy to propose. This chapter assesses the three different methodologies policy-oriented researchers commonly use: ends-means, creeping incrementalism, and problem-solving. Of these, problem-solving provides the most rational foundation for development policy- and law-making.

ENDS-MEANS

The conventional theoretical framework for decision-making explicitly incorporates an ends-means methodology: ‘[I]n order to decide rationally, policy-makers must specify their objectives; lay out the alternatives by which the objectives may be accomplished; evaluate the consequences of each alternative; and choose the action that maximizes net benefits’ (Majone, 1989:121; cf. Lindblom, 1963). The ends-means approach, however contradicts all the criteria for an adequate development theory: it denies the possibility of basing policy and law on reason informed by experience; it does not require feedback; and it fosters authoritarianism.

The Denial of Reason by Experience: the Assumed Dichotomy Between Facts and Values

At the critical point of determining development objectives, ends-means methodology makes learning from experience impossible. Following philosophical positivism, its proponents assume a sharp dichotomy between facts and values. Facts, they assert, are data external to the observer, the Is. Values, which determine the Ought, depend on the individual’s subjective configurations. Is and Ought constitute discontinuous spheres. The choice of ends depends on Ought propositions,
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that is, on values; the choice of means, on Is propositions, that is, on facts. In determining what ends to pursue, law-makers rely on values (Majone, 1989), either their own or those identified as community opinion (Long, 1969).

This assumption of an Is–Ought dichotomy has three adverse consequences. First, if ends depend entirely upon 'values,' and if experience and values suffer a complete divorce, then the process of choosing particular ends precludes consideration of social experience. Ends-means limits investigation primarily to assessing the consequences of employing alternative means to attain the ends chosen according to authority’s (not necessarily stated) values.

Second, in the ends-means approach, law-makers typically proceed directly from stating their goals to proposing possible solutions. Because it contains no explicit requirement that they investigate the causes of social problems, law-makers have no way of ensuring that their solutions will do more than poultice symptoms. Because they exclude consideration of causes, ends-means decision-makers exclude academics (whose special expertise consists of research into causes) from contributing to the law-making process. Universities embody most third world countries’ richest reserve of social knowledge, but ends-means often excludes their expertise from law-making (Coleman, 1975:19; Braybrooke, 1987:2).

Third, by assigning means exclusively to the realm of the Is, ends-means implies an amoral thrust. If the choice of means excludes valuations, its ethical status rests solely on the proclaimed validity of the ends: the ends justify the means.

Limited Feedback Channels

The ends-means methodology’s implication that ends depend primarily on decision-makers’ values narrowly limits feedback to the course-changing variety (Box 3.4). Many ends-means theorists do build evaluation schemes into their projects, but these primarily provide feedback about the means used to reach the preset goals. Ends-means’ underlying premises tend to block consideration of altering either the goals or the institutions that pre-shaped them.

An Authoritarian Perspective

Finally, ends-means implies an authoritarian perspective. If law-makers need not bring experience to bear upon their choice of ends, they