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Challenges of National TB Control Program Implementation: The Malaysian experience

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Abstract

The focus of the study was given on the National TB Control Program implementation, which is a policy that governing the tuberculosis infectious in Malaysia. The study intends to discuss what are the challenges faced by the Ministry of Health while implementing the program. Among the identified challenges were inadequate human resources, lack of public awareness and the distinction of TB management at each state. The conclusion of this study is drawn on the premise of providing plausible suggestion that will promote good governance for the MOH and strengthening the current policy for a better future implementation.

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1. Introduction

Health policy implementation has given tremendous impacts towards the public. The health policy can be defined as any actions taken by the government and other actors in the society that aimed at improving the health of population. In other words, health policy goals is for addressing health determinants and disease which have the substantial impact towards public health status (Niessen et al., 2000). The outcome of the implementation has whether brought a positive effect to one and others or it could be failed to be delivered, thus the public continues to suffer with the occurred health problems. Whether to compare it from period distinction or different region, it has proved that the health policy in the

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current period has improved in term of the treatment or management. While it was not an easy duty for the government to implement the policies, regardless of their capacity, they are required to perform the task effectively and efficiently. Therefore, it is a government act and decision to do something or not to do something within the context of public policy (Simon, 2007; Dye, 1981). Furthermore, the government and its agencies have the authority to implement any acts that considered need and suitable in order to achieve the objectives of policy (John, 2011). Therefore, holding the authority especially in decision making is important to convince the public to accept any decision made. Besides, it also creates the legitimacy upon the action taken (Vob et al., 2009). However, considering any alternatives and finalising the decision should give the priority to the majority group, but never neglect the minority group so that everybody can benefit from the enacted policy.

1.1. Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study which was employed interview method and reviewing government documents as the primary sources of data. The informants of this study were the bureaucrats, who have knowledge and experience about the implementation of the National TB Program in Malaysia. They were not only involved in the implementing process, but also working together in giving input to the policy makers before any policies related to TB been regulated and monitoring the process and evaluating the output and outcome of the TB programs. Besides interviewing the informants, this study also reviewed the documents such as Practice Guideline for the Control and Management of Tuberculosis, National Strategic Plan (NSP), Act 342 Prevention and Control of Infectious Disease, Guideline on Prevention and Management of Tuberculosis for Health Care Workers and related circulars as it would be more official written statement have made by the government (i.e. Ministry of Health).

2. Policy Implementation

Public policy can be seen as a form of society management especially from the perspective of modern political system where it has a clear structure of society with vary of interests and desires. Public policy study analyses government action and performance as well as how the power has been practiced and implemented (Birkland, 2001). According to Cochran and Malone (1999), public policy is a decision that has made by the government with the aim to address issues related to public. Thus, it shows that it is a kind of public management which include the political process and the activity of creation, distribution and application of power (Arts and Tatenhove, 2004). Likewise, Goggin (1986), defined policy implementation as,

“...problem solving that involves behaviour and has both administration and political content. The manner or style of implementation is a result of certain implementing decision that are made and actions taken between the time that a plan is adopted by the authorities and the time when it is more or less successfully put in place.”

The implementation activity usually started after the aims and objectives of the policy have been identified beforehand (Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975). As in Malaysian practice, the implementation of the policy will take place after the decisions were finalised in policy validation phase whereby at this level some rules and regulations will be regulated. Indirectly, it is a must to public to comply with the policy. If anybody commits such an offense, they can be prosecuted according to law setting. For example, Act 342 Prevention and Control of Infectious Disease, under Part V, Offences and Penalties, any person guilty of an offence under this act, the offenders could be prosecuted by imprisonment (not exceeding five years) or fine or both.

A study by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) has identified three main components that could lead to the failure of policy implementation. The three factors are: (a) too many participants or actors involved; (b) too many perspectives that lead to determine own decision making, and; (c) too many players caused too many decisions that need to be considered. For Elmore (1979), policy implementation could fail due to the lapses of planning, specification and control. Thus, it is not surprise if the public sector has often been subjected to criticism for inefficiency, red tape, lack of flexibility, ineffective accountability and poor performance (Noree Alam Siddiquee (2006). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the real problem and formulating the best policy for the right time. However, we should bear in mind that, the policy could not be the best formulation, but it is the most suitable option implemented for the current

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