

Role of Different Actors in the ICT Policy Making Process in Bangladesh

Tanzir Mosabbir*

In the Policy formulation process various actors are involved formally and informally and shape the process in the different stages including defining, considering, and accepting/rejecting options with a view to having a policy output capable of serving their own purposes.¹ After facing problem or in anticipation of problem in any sector of public interest that do not have or have weak policy guidelines, government initiates the policy making process through its respective organ(s). In absence of any previous policy suitable for this sector the government of Bangladesh initiated the process for formulating ICT policy at the end of 1990s and appointed an committee consisting of several government officials, experts and representatives of interest- groups with the assignment of formulating ICT policy for Bangladesh. But it is hardly possible to understand the dynamics of policymaking process analysing only the role of actors formally appointed for this purpose. Policy formulation is the result of interactions between a diverse set of actors from both the state and society. The main objective of this article is to describe and analyze the role of different actors, involved in the policy formulation process of Bangladesh's Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) policy. Keeping the reality and the objective in mind the article first makes a brief theoretical analysis of policy formulation process that is necessary to relate the research findings to the existing policy literature. Next, it discusses the policy formulation process according to the sequential events and presents a combined figure from which an overall chronological picture indicating the involved actors and activities can be illustrated. The following section analyses the role of state and societal actors in the policy formulation process and present critical observations of their role.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Rahshahi University, Rahshahi, Bangladesh

1 This term is similar to that of 'key influential', used to describe a person or association or organization which initiates alternatives or vetoes proposals of others in the settlement of an issue (Housego, 1964, p.5). Individuals or groups, sometimes referred to as 'stakeholders', who have a stake in a policy issue because they affect or are likely to be affected by a governmental decision (Dunn, 1981, p. 47; Mitroff, 1983, p.4).

Methodology of the Study

This study is a case study of the ICT policy formulation process where data have been collected both from primary and secondary sources using different research tools and methods such as interview, focused group discussion, survey of literature as well relevant government documents and so on. Twenty-four interviews were conducted during February and March 2005. In February, we conducted 10 interviews among the 13 members of the Formulation Committee of National Information Technology Policy (FCNITP). The interviewees were contacted earlier over the phone and asked to be respondents in the research. Several (8) of the subsequent interviewees were selected based on the opinion of the initial (core) group in accordance with the snowball sampling technique; the remaining interviewees (6) were intentionally selected and interviewed in March 2005. The convenor and secretary member of FCNITP have been repeatedly interviewed in February and March for clarification of the information.

For having a complete picture of the policy formulation process and the role of actors involved, government documents on policy formulation, such as meeting and workshop minutes, correspondence letters, and government reports from the Ministry of Science and Information, Communication and Technology (MSICT) and BCC have been utilized following *content analysis method*.

A Theoretical Framework of Policy Formulation

Policy analysis has emerged as a formal discipline of study only since the mid-1970s (Trow, 1988: p. 197) and is still regarded as a nascent discipline. Sabatier (1991: p. 153) states that policy analysis lacks a commonly accepted, clearly articulated, and empirically verified body of knowledge. Hogood and Gunn (1990: p. 26) note that terms such as 'policy analysis', 'policy science', and 'policy studies' are used by various authors in different ways, but often the terms are used interchangeably. Dibski (1993: p. 3) contends that policy analysis as a field of study is characterized by breadth of scope, complexity, and a paucity of theoretical development. Therefore, there is an unavoidable trend in this discipline to use different theories and models of Political Science and Economic in many aspects of the field.

The Policy Subsystem Approach

To address the weakness of traditional approaches to understanding policymaking, some scholars advocate increased attention to the effects of different policy subsystem structure or types on the functions of the policy

process (Peter, 1998, p. 22; Skok 1995, pp. 325-326; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993, p.5). The focus of such analysis is commonly placed upon a process of interest intermediation (Schubert & Jordan, 1992, p.1), i.e., the interaction of political administration and pressure (or interest) groups. Attention to different types of policy subsystems is rooted in concepts of pluralism and corporatism (Blom-Hansen, 1997, p. 670). Both of these traditions stress the expanded role of public bureaucracy and outside interest groups in policymaking, and emerged in reaction to more conventional institutional descriptions of the policy process (Jordan, 1990, p.293). Pluralism envisions more complex policymaking processes involving bargaining and negotiation among diverse and competing interests with uncertain outcomes and no expectations for government to protect the public interest (Schneider and Ingram, 1997, p. 8). Corporatism envisions an overall central authority that controls policy sectors through the manipulation of small numbers of peak associations in specially privileged relationships with the state (Jordan, 1990, p. 296).

A policy arena can be defined as "*policy space*²" in which public institutions exercise jurisdiction over human activity. For example, information communication and technology constitutes a policy arena in which several state (concerned ministries, divisions or agencies) and local institutions share responsibilities for establishing policies and administering different programs and initiative on it. In theory, at least a policy arena is, at the outset, empty space. Only when actors enter that space from state, society and international and act collectively take on an organized character and structure. So we can called this fundamental unit containing all possible international, state and social actors and institutions directly or indirectly affecting a specific policy arena as a *policy universe*. A policy subsystem is, then, simply a collection of policy actors addressing a common policy issue within a policy area. i.e., a subset is drawn from these potential members of policy universe which comprises a sectoral *policy subsystem*. The policy subsystem is a space where relevant actors discuss policy issues and persuade and bargain in pursuit of their interests. During the course of their interaction with the other actors, they often give up or modify their objectives in return for concessions from others. These interactions, however, occur in the context of various institutional arrangements surrounding the policy process, which affect how the actors pursue their

2 For further development of the concept of "policy space," see Anthony Down, 1967. *Inside Bureaucracy*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, pp. 211-215.

interests and ideas and the extent to which their efforts succeed (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003).

A seemingly infinite variety of actors and institutions have the potential to constitute a policy subsystem. The composition of such a system varies over time according to country, policy sector, or “domain” (Jordan & Maloney, 1997 cited in Howlett & Ramesh, 2002). Consequently, policy experts have suggested numerous terms and semantic uses for the subsystem concept. Indeed, more than 20 types of subsystems have been outlined in the literature, with most offering some insight into how subsystems operate. In addition to such diverse composition, many scholars believe that the subsystem approach presents a rich and rewarding explanation of how public policy is created. The precise composition of such a subsystem, as well as its components’ relative significance, results in an empirical question that can not be defined a priori. The only certainty lies in the fact that policy actors and institutions emerge from within the machinery of the state as well as society at large. Therefore, regardless of the frame used to examine or analyze a policy subsystem, it is essential to understand the actors’ roles in identifying public problems and solutions. As a result, this discussion will critically explore these roles to create a rough outline of the policy subsystem of the policy formulation process.

Policy Formulation Process in Bangladesh: The ICT policy

In Bangladesh, public policy making is the responsibility of the concerned ministry or division, as per clause 4(ix) of the *Rules of Business 1996 I* (Government of Bangladesh 1997). More precisely, in a Ministry or Division, the Minister who is responsible for policy matters initiates the policy-making process.

The policy formulation process of ICT was initiated by the concerned ministry in early 1999; it was approved by the Cabinet on 07 October 2002. The process was quite long and complicated. This section discusses briefly policy formulation process of ICT according to three separate points: 1) initiation 2) committee activities, and 3) submission.

Initiation of Policy Formulation

In the case of the Information Communication and Technology (ICT) policy in Bangladesh, the *Executive Committee of the National Council for Science and Technology (ECNCST)* of the *Ministry of Science and Technology (MSICT)* made the decision (Resolution No. 3.2.1) to draft an Information

Technology (IT) policy during their 12th meeting, which was held on February 16, 1999 (Government of Bangladesh 2002). Following the ECNCST decision, MSICT appointed a 13-member Formulation Committee of National Information Technology Policy (FCNITP).

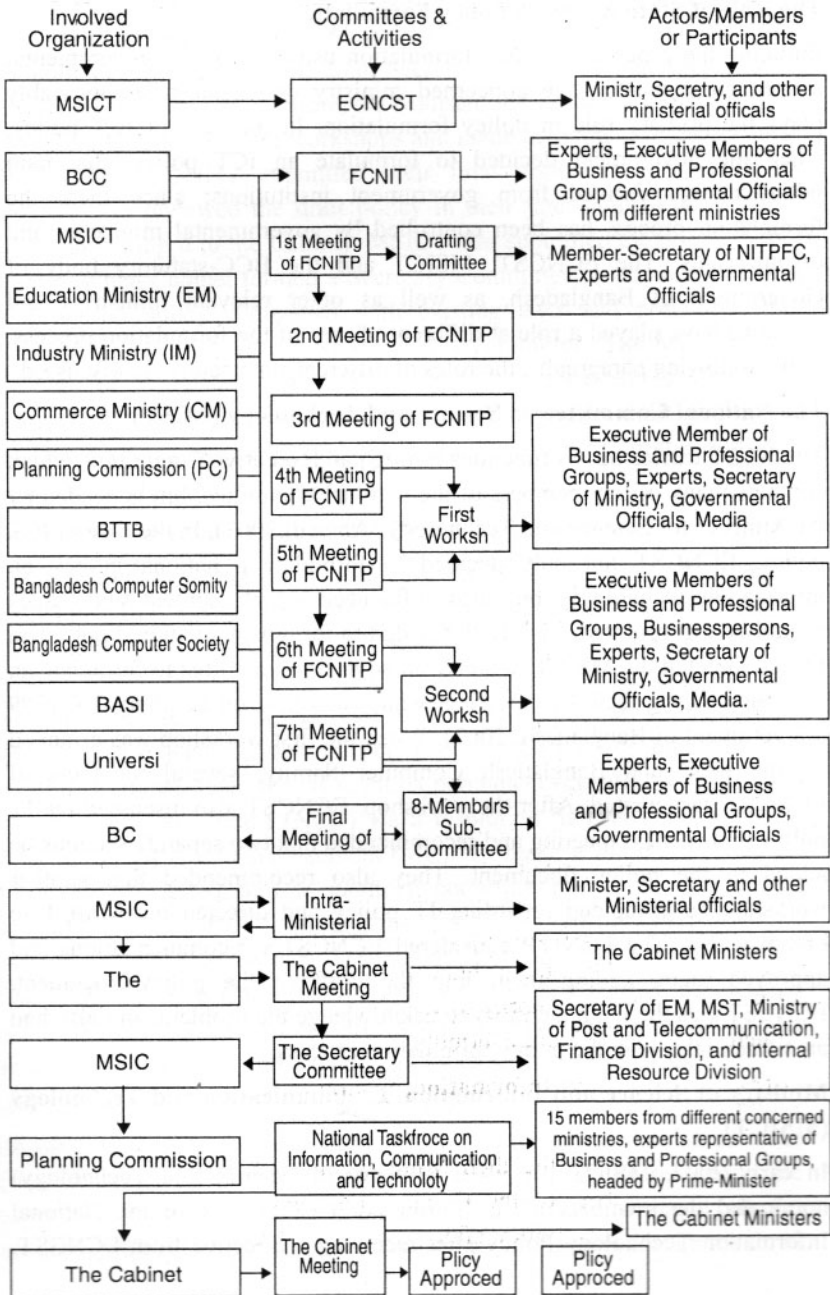
Activities of Appointed Committee

The *Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC)*, an autonomous body of MSICT, organized several meetings of FCNITP and arranged several workshops with interest groups, experts and interested citizens to gather ideas and suggestions for the ICT policy. After several FCNITP meetings and workshops, in which various stakeholders participated, the FCNITP finally reviewed all aspects of the draft policy and decided to finalize it as the draft National Information, Communication and Technology Policy on 13 May 2001.

Submission of Draft Policy and Its Approval

In late May 2001, the BCC sent this final draft policy to the MSICT for review. Two intra-Ministerial meetings of the MSICT were held, on 20 June 2001 and 24 June 2001, to deal with the drafted ICT policy. On behalf of the National IT Formulation Committee, the drafted policy was presented to the MSICT on 01 July, 2001. On the same date, the drafted policy was sent to the Cabinet for consideration. The Cabinet formed a Secretary Committee comprising several secretaries from different ministries and divisions for scrutinizing the draft IT policy; these meetings of the Secretary Committee were held on 30 April 2002 and 14 May 2002. Under the new ruling party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the third meeting of the National Taskforce on Information, Communication and Technology, with the Prime Minister as chair, was held on 08 August, 2002. At this meeting, a suggestion was made that the National Information, Communication and Technology Policy, as formulated by the Ministry of Science and Information, Communication and Technology (MSICT), should be sent to the Cabinet for consideration. MSICT sent a required number of copies of the National Information Communication Policy (with abstract) to the Cabinet on 22 September 2002, and the Cabinet approved it on 07 October, 2002. (Government of Bangladesh 2002). In the following diagram, the formulation process of the ICT policy is depicted.

Figure 01 : Policy Formulation Process of ICT Policy in Bangladesh



The Role of State Actors in Policy Formulation

Initiating the process of policy formulation usually requires governmental action; consequently, the concerned ministry or organization invariably plays the primary role in policy formulation. In the case of ICT policy, when the government decided to formulate an ICT policy, the main initiative was derived from government institutions; since then, the formulation process has been controlled by governmental ministries and organizations. The ECNCST, MSICT and the BCC-statutory body of Government of Bangladesh, as well as other relevant ministries and divisions have played a role at different phases of the formulation process. In the following paragraphs, the roles of different state actors are discussed.

The National Committee on Science and Technology (NCST)

The NCST carries out its functions through an Executive Committee, which contains many of the members of the national committee, but is headed by the Minister for Science and Technology (Ahmed, 2003). In the case of ICT policy, ECNCST not only decided to formulate a national policy on information technology, but also influenced which content and issues should be incorporated. ENNCST decided to formulate a national policy on IT and directed the MSICT to create an advisory committee to formulate an IT policy during their 12th meeting, which was held on February 16, 1999 (Government of Bangladesh, 2002). When the first workshop was arranged by the BCC and Bangladesh Computer Samity, several members of ECNCST participated. After the workshop, ECNCST also discussed the IT policy in their next meeting and recommended that two separate sections be added to the policy document. They also recommended that another workshop be scheduled regarding IT policy and directed the MSICT to organize this. The FCNITP considered ECNCST's recommendations and approved them, adding them into the draft of the policy document. ECNCST was the main authority to acknowledge the problem, and also had an influential role in the policy formulation process.

Ministry of Science and Information, Communication and Technology (MSICT)

In early 2002, MSICT (the then Ministry of Science and Technology) nominated the members of the Formulation Committee of the National Information Technology Policy after receiving a directive from ECNCST.

MSICT was the primary ministry of government concerned with creating a policy on IT. However, MSICT played a coordinating role to formulate the ICT policy in Bangladesh. The Joint Secretary of MSICT participated as a member of FCNITP. Furthermore, the Minister and Secretary of the MSICT actively participated in both workshops and made their suggestions for ICT policy. When FCNITP submitted their final draft policy to MSICT, members also reviewed the draft policy in their inter-ministerial meeting before submitting it to the Cabinet. MSICT also submitted the policy to the Cabinet. When Cabinet formed a Secretary Committee to examine whether the proposed policy conformed with existing laws and principles, the secretary of MSICT was a member of this committee. The Minister and Secretary of MSICT also were members of the National Taskforce on Information, Communication and Technology, where draft policy is considered after it has been reviewed by the Secretary-committee and sent to the Cabinet for final approval.

Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC)

The Bangladesh Computer Council is the apex body in the country formulating and implementing policies on information and communication technology. The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) established the National Computer Committee (NCC) in August 1983 to expedite and streamline the use of computers and information technology in the defined direction. To expand the area of activities and balance its functions, the government transformed the NCC into a permanent organization called the National Computer Board (NCB) via a resolution in 1988, and placed it under the Ministry of Establishment (ME). To make it more effective, the NCB was converted into a statutory corporate body, the Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC), through the BCC Act 1990. In 1991, the BCC was under the Science and Technology Division of the Ministry of Education. (Jewel & Chowdhury, 1993). On August 14, 1993, the Science and Technology Division transformed into a fully-fledge ministry named the Ministry of Science and Technology by government ordinance.

BCC played the most important and active role in the ICT policy formulation process. The executive director of BCC was nominated to be the member-secretary of FCNITP, and BCC assigned the secretariat the responsibility of formulating ICT policy. The BCC arranged all the meetings of FCNITP and finalized the drafted ICT policy for approval. At

the very first FCNITP meeting, the member-secretary of FCNITP and BCC officials presented a framework and guidelines for a national ICT policy. FCNITP also appointed a drafting sub-committee, wherein BCC's executive director and member-secretary of FCNITP was the convener along with other two experts from universities and one governmental official from BTTB. The drafting committee largely formulated the draft policy of ICT, following the suggestions and recommendation made by FCNITP. The Convener of the FCNITP admitted:

At the first meeting of FCNITP, some BCC officials and the executive director of BCC provided a PowerPoint presentation and submitted a framework for IT policy. Then we discussed that framework and made our suggestions. During that meeting, we also formulated a drafting sub-committee, in which the executive director of BCC played the leading role as committee convener. The main framework of the ICT policy was generated by this committee with the help of BCC officials and nominated members for this committee. Other BCC officials also participated in our meeting, even though they were not formal members of the committee. We discussed the formulated draft and made suggestions for it. However, I cannot say that we made drastic changes to it (personal communication, February 22, 2005).

When FCNITP made the decision to include an action plan with the policy, BCC played the foremost role in formulating that action plan. The BCC arranged both workshops, in collaboration with the Bangladesh Computer Samity and MSICT, respectively. After the second workshop in the formulation process, FCNITP created an 8-member sub-committee to finalize the policy. The Executive Director of BCC also participated as a convener of that committee. When FBCCI submitted a national policy for ICT to MSICT, MSICT sent it to the BCC for comments. A meeting of BCC was held on 08 June, 2002 chaired by the presiding Executive Director of BCC for the evaluation of National Policy on Information and Communication Technology (second draft) made by FBCCI. BCC's role principally was in formulating rather than approving the draft of the national ICT policy. To formulate the draft ICT policy, BCC hosted all meetings, arranged workshops, maintained all correspondence, recorded all meetings and workshop minutes, documented recommendations and

suggestions from meetings and workshop and, above all, contributed BCC officials as active participants in the ICT policy formulation process.

Other Ministries and Divisions

The ICT is a multi-faceted contrivance to spur development. It can use, as instruments for human resource development, its open business opportunities. It also creates employment, is a means for earning foreign currency, and much more. Such multi-dimensional characteristics of ICT require the involvement of different ministries in policy formulation. Our research data demonstrate that different ministries and governmental organizations are involved in the policy formulation process. Within FCNITP, 8 of 13 members came from different ministries and governmental organizations. Top-ranking governmental officials were not nominated for FCNITP; instead, mostly mid-level officials (joint-secretary level) and below from different ministries and governmental organizations were nominated.

Members of the FCNITP came from the Ministries of Education, Industry, and Commerce, and from the BTTB, the Planning Commission and Bank of Bangladesh. When the BCG and the Bangladesh Computer Samity jointly organized a seminar to facilitate feedback on ICT policy, thirty-two government officials were invited; fifteen actually participated in the process and eight attended the discussion. After the MSICT sent a draft of its ICT policy to the Cabinet, the Cabinet sent it to the Secretary Committee for review, this committee being comprised of top-ranking secretaries from different ministries and divisions. The draft ICT policy also was sent for review and recommendations to the National Taskforce on Information, Communication and Technology (NTICT) headed by the Prime Minister (PM), wherein several governmental officials participated as members.

National ICT Taskforce

For the development and proper monitoring of the implementation of various projects, a Task Force was formed, headed by the Prime Minister. The 15-member Taskforce started under the Planning Commission (PC). The members were drawn from different concerned ministries and governmental organizations. Members included relevant Ministers, Secretaries, representatives of ICT-related private sectors, academics, the FBCCI, and a few others, including the Chairman of the Bangladesh Telephone Regulatory Commission (BTRC), and the Managing Director of Grameen Bank. MSICT provided the draft ICT policy to the third meeting of the National ICT Task Force for review. The MSICT also provided the other policy document generated by FBCCI to the same meeting, along with comments from the BCC regarding the policy document. The National ICT

Taskforce considered the draft ICT policy and sent it to the Cabinet for final approval.

The Cabinet

The Cabinet is a small body of senior ministers responsible for directing the policy-administration of the state. As per clause 4(ii) of *The Rule of Business 1996*, no important policy decision shall be undertaken except with the approval of the Cabinet. In other words, the Cabinet is the ultimate authority, in terms of approving policy. In particular, the policy-related issues, which must be cleared by the cabinet, include: (a) all cases related to legislation, including promulgation of ordinances; (b) cases involving vital political, economic or administrative policies; and (c) proposals relating to change of any existing policy or Cabinet decision. The prime minister, who holds executive power, heads the council of ministers, or cabinet, which answers to the parliament. The council of ministers is made up of cabinet ministers, ministers of state, and deputy ministers—all of whom are held accountable to the principle of collective responsibility. The Cabinet has its own structure by which to assess and examine selected policies via different cabinet committees (Aminuzzaman, 2003). In the case of ICT policy, the concerned ministry, MSICT, sent the drafted ICT policy to the Cabinet. The Cabinet then sent it to the Secretary Committee for review. The draft ICT policy again came to the Cabinet for final approval after it had been reviewed at a National ICT Task Force meeting. Finally, the Cabinet approved the National ICT Policy.

From the above discussion, it is evident that the roles of state actors in the policy formulation process mainly are twofold. One role is in formulating draft ICT policy as members of FCNITP, and the other is approving the ICT policy. With respect to the ICT policy, the state actors played a prominent role in both instances. In the FCNITP, eight governmental officials were nominated out of thirteen members. All governmental officials in FCNITP had been Joint Secretaries or less. There has been a tendency for a nominated member to send a representative, instead of that nominated member participating himself. In this regard, we observed that the convener of the FCNITP informed all at each meeting that the nominated members for FCNITP had no option of sending representatives on their behalf (Chowdhury and Shobhan, 1999 August). However, we found several examples of representatives being sent for nominated members, including instances involving the Deputy Secretary and the Senior Assistant Secretary. The participation rate for the first five meetings of FCNITP (participation data for the other three meetings were not available) was 60% among the nominated governmental officials. At the first workshop,

(similar data was not available for the second workshop), thirty-two governmental officials were invited among seventy-one invited guests. Forty-six percent of those invited actually attended, and 53% of the 46% participated in the discussion. Six secretaries from different ministries and divisions were invited, but only one secretary from MSICT participated in the workshop. Among the various state actors, BCC played the leading role in the formulation of draft policy. When the final draft was submitted to MSICT, the formulated policy draft went through multiple settings involving state institutions for approval. The role of state actors in both cases was reasonably dominant.

Role of Societal Actors in Policy Formulation

The state government took the initiative to formulate policy, as well as to set the rules of participation in the process. Nevertheless, membership has been at the discretion of the government. Governments often seek to strike a balance between allowing for the participation of stakeholders in policy making and retaining overall control. Atkinson and Coleman (1992, p.155) state: "Public officials want to escape blame, but also to claim credit. They want to husband political power, but they must mobilize social forces to obtain it in the first place." State governments have long used various advisory mechanisms to bring interests and expertise together. Membership in these advisory bodies typically has included a mixture of ministerial, bureaucratic, group and individual representatives. The various social actors can participate through various access points in the process. When MSICT created an advisory committee to formulate ICT policy, this committee included various experts and interest groups. The role of different societal actors inside and outside the committee will be discussed briefly.

Role of Business Groups

The Bangladesh business community still is in its very early stages of development and modernization, and its dominant traditional features tend to be reflected in the associations it has attempted to create to represent its interests. The role of business communities in the policy formulation process of ICT was not significant. However, the business community was dominant in shaping the agenda. Business is a small component, but also a rapidly growing sector of ICT. The Bangladesh Computer Society was the only organized business association, when the government made its decision to formulate a policy. By 1998, BASIS and ISPAB also had been formed, but neither was well organized yet. The President of the Bangladesh Computer Samity was the only representative of the business community out of the thirteen members of the ICT policy formulation committee. Analyzing the minutes from the first five FCNITP meetings, it

is notable that the president and general secretary participated at the first meeting, but both were absent from the second meeting. For the second meeting, FCNITP invited the presiding President of BASIS to attend, and he participated as an invited member. However, he did not participate at the next meeting. At the next meeting (i.e., the fourth meeting of the FCNITP), the newly elected President of Bangladesh Computer Samity participated, but he too was absent at the next meeting. Instead of the President, the General Secretary participated at the fifth meeting. Therefore, it is evident that participation of both business associations was inconsistent. Furthermore, when the drafting sub-committee was formed at the first meeting, there was no representative from the business association. At the first and second workshop, business leaders and representatives did offer recommendations. The former President of the Bangladesh Computer Samity commented on the role of the business association in FCNITP as follows:

We attended the workshops where the drafts were discussed, and criticized each and every line specifically. Then recommendations were made. We also spoke regarding our opinions gathered from experience. Knowing fully the recommendations provided at the workshops, they (the policy makers) did not pay any heed to them during their policy making. Therefore, our comments were turned into loud utterances without producing any effect. They (the policy makers) failed to recognize the real problems and so our aspirations were not reflected. The big procedural wrong was that the role of industry was neglected in their process. Consequently, the policies they adopted have failed largely. Conversely, the JRC Report formulated in 1997 was much more practical and pragmatic. That report was framed on the basis of discussion with academicians. We have had enough opportunities to interact with academicians to indicate to them what our problems are and what types of solutions we need. Thus, the Report contained specific solutions to specific problems. For instance, when the withdrawal of tax on computers became necessary, not only the bureaucrats but also the industrialists thought that it could not be achieved. But the matter gradually was pursued and raised to that higher level, until the government ultimately was convinced and agreed to withdraw taxes (personal communication, February 18, 2005).

In early 2002, when the government-initiated ICT draft policy almost was finalized, the FBCCI also created a policy document pertaining to ICT for

government consideration. The former President of the Bangladesh Computer Samity also commented on the role of FBCCI and the need for such counter initiatives, as follows:

FBCCI played a splendid role in the withdrawal of taxes pertaining to computers in 1998. They played the role of supportive advocate in that case. Beyond this, it is important to mention that FBCCI did not have any strong footholds with respect to ICT up until the year 2000-2001. It did not have any Standing Committee for formulating or assisting any policies. It only acted as a representative when a member attended any meeting. Consequently, it could not generate any planned or systematic effort to uplift the ICT sector. Its activities were limited only to the withdrawal of vats and duties, though Bangladesh Computer Samity and BASIS had representatives in the FCNITP. The meaning of such representation means that the representatives must have represented the industry in terms of ICT. But it was discovered, at some point, that they were not able to phrase the matter in a proper context. My personal view is that importance is being allocated to the opinion of a single member of an association, presuming it to be the opinion of the whole body (association). However, it may happen that the individual member's opinion may differ from that of the industry as a whole. My personal view is that they did not properly ensure that the business community/business association had fair representation at meetings dealing with policy making. We attended the seminar (the arranged workshops on ICT policy) and clearly put forth our suggestions. But we have some doubts as to whether those suggestions were properly pursued by the representatives of the business community in the committee meeting. When we realized that our associations have failed, we concluded that the government had failed to pay attention to our opinions. Hence, we then generated a policy document and provided it to the Standing Committee of FBCCI for release to the MSICT. At that time, the FBCCI had a Standing Committee on ICT. We used the FBCCI as a platform for this initiative (personal communication, February 18, 2005).

The FBCCI also mentioned the reason for such an initiative in the preamble section of their alternative policy document, as follows (FBCCI Taskforce Report, 2002):

It has been about two years since the Government formed a committee to draw up a National ICT Policy. Meeting after meeting, deliberation after deliberation, seminar after seminar has been held. What eventually has been produced, as the 'IT Policy of

Bangladesh', does not cater to the needs of all stakeholders. The creation of technology is research; but its application is business. Unfortunately, the committee entrusted with this task ignored this vital dimension in any policy framework. As a result, the draft policy, as circulated, is heavily theoretical. Suggestions given by the business community at the various seminars on draft policy were not incorporated.

In a meeting held on 8 January 2002, the FBCCI created a committee called the *FBCCI Task Force on ICT Policy of Bangladesh*, consisting of 13 members drawn from four different business stakeholders; namely BASIS, Bangladesh Computer Samity, ISPAB and TechBangla. The Task Force was entrusted with the responsibility of preparing a suitable and workable ICT Policy by 12 February 2002. The first Meeting of the Task Force was held on 16 January 2002. The Task Force decided to form a 3-member drafting team. The Task Force also decided that each of the three major stakeholders- BASIS, Bangladesh Computer Samity & ISPAB - should submit their input to the drafting team within a week. The drafting team met several times, studied all available material, and decided on a Report Format. The Task Force held their second Meeting on 3 February 2002, at which the Report Format was approved. The draft team submitted the Draft ICT Policy to the convener of the Task Force on 9 February 2002. The Task Force, in its third Meeting held on 10 February 2002, deliberated on the Draft Policy and finalized the Policy after necessary changes (FBCCI Taskforce Report, 2002). The FBCCI Taskforce primarily was formed by the different business associations in this sector. The convener of the Task Force was the President of ISPAB and the co-convener was the former President of the Bangladesh Computer Samity. The FBCCI Task Force submitted their report to MSICT for their review and approval as a policy. The MSICT sent it to BCC for comment. With the BCC's comments, the FBCCI Task Force Report was sent to the National ICT Taskforce for consideration. However, the National ICT Taskforce only considered the ECNCST-initiated (i.e., government initiated) ICT policy document before sending it to the Cabinet for approval.

Role of Professionals and Experts

ICT issues are technical in nature. Those who can identify the problem must have some knowledge to select the best solution from the various alternative options. For this reason, specialist professionals invariably become involved in the policy formulation process. The Bangladesh Computer Society was only professional association that participated as a member in the FCNITP. Over the first five meetings, three different

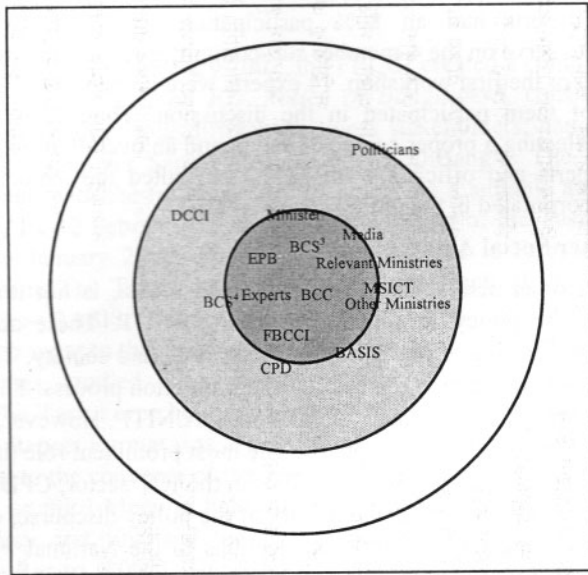
members of Bangladesh Computer Samity participated in three meetings, just to ensure the company's representation. No representative of Bangladesh Computer Society participated in the first FCNITP workshop. Experts became prominent in the policy formulation process because of the technical nature of the problems that might arise. Their advice and recommendations were essential to the process. Four experts participated in FCNITP; all were professors at public universities. Over the first five meetings, experts had an 80% participation rate, with two experts nominated to serve on the 4-member sub-committee responsible for drafting the policy. For the first workshop, 14 experts were invited, five participated, and four of them participated in the discussion. Their knowledge was crucial in selecting a proper course of action and an overall direction for the policy. Experts and officials from BCS contributed the major ideas and agendas incorporated in the policy documents.

Role of other Social Actors

The role of other actors, like think tanks and media, is not immediately apparent in the policy formulation process for ICT. These actors were intermediary, existing at the border between state and society. The role of think tanks also was indirect in the policy formulation process. They did not participate directly as nominated members of FCNITP. However, the think tanks tried to influence policy options. The most prominent role they played was by Canter for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in the ICT sector. CPD sought to contribute towards enhancing the quality of the policy discourse, during the course of the campaign in 2001 for elections to the National Parliament. CPD's objective was to prepare a series of pre-election policy briefs with a view to educate the political parties about the important problems that had been arousing public concern. A distinctive feature of these policy briefs lay in their preparation through interactive dialogues involving major stakeholders, including policy-makers, parliamentarians, the business community, leaders of major political parties, the media, development partners, students, trade union leaders, NGOs, other civil society representatives and grass-root activists (Shobhan and Rahmullah, 2003). The CPD made a Task Force to prepare a 16-policy brief on the different important strategic issues. The ICT had been selected to be one of the 16 priority issues on which task forces had been formed to develop the policy briefs. The role of the media also was indirect in the formulation process. It was very dominant during agenda setting, in that the media reported problems and advocated for particular policy solutions. Within the policy formation process itself, however, members of the media only were invited to attend the two workshops.

In the following figure, we try to portray the different actors' tentative positions in terms of their role in the broader policy subsystem of policy formulation.

Figure 02: Tentative Position of Involved Actors in Policy Formulation Stage³⁴



Critical Observations of the Role of Actors in the Policy Formulation Process

Several critical observations can be made from the above discussion of the role of actors in the agenda-setting process. The following section presents some of the critical observations regarding the role of actors in the policy formulation process.

First, state actors were the most dominant throughout the policy formulation process. They were the highest participants in the advisory committee, highest participants in the workshop seminar, and in all the decision-making points in the process. The concerned ministry initiated the formulation of the ICT policy. The functional agency (BCC) was the main organizer assisting the advisory committee (FCNTIP). The ministry had the discretion

3 Bangladesh Computer Samity

4 Bangladesh Computer Society

to control entry into the committee and nominated a number of governmental officials and bureaucrats from different ministries and agencies in FCNITP, creating the traditional bureaucratic dominance and giving a number of bureaucrats the opportunity to make decisions on behalf of the state while pursuing their organizational objectives. The government was the largest single user and spender in the ICT sector from the very beginning in Bangladesh and the relevant ICT issues were multi-dimensional in nature, which is why several ministries and government agencies received the opportunity to voice their opinions. In the 1980s and 1990s, the societal forces were not organized enough to raise their voices effectively; meanwhile, governmental officials were quite skilled in dealing with such issues as its members represented the experts in their respective fields. Their involvement in such issues on a regular basis ensured that they had the insights and skills to succeed. In the case of the ICT sector, the state was the pioneer of the potential users from the 1970s. Therefore, many kinds of professionals were found only in the government sector and were involved in formulating policies in many respects from the 1980s onward (Rahman, June 12, 1989; Rahman, June 13, 1989; Rahman, September 16, 1989).

Second, the experts were also the dominant actor in the advisory committee, where the policy document was initially framed. The functional agency—BCC—also played a key organizing role. The representatives of functional agencies, bureaucrats, and experts became involved in close alliance in the activities of the advisory committee. These actors were the key members of FCNITP as well as the drafting sub-committee and the finalizing sub-committee of the policy document. These experts—as members of FCNITP and other sub-committees—played an active and consistent role. The evidence suggests that a tradition of working together existed among the experts of universities and governmental agencies in this sector from the 1980s. During this time, the universities and different governmental agencies housed the potential computer users. The National Computer Committee (NCC) was formulated according to the recommendation of the Bangladesh Computer Society, which was mainly the organization of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) teachers of the time. Several BUET teachers served in advisory roles in NCC and National Computer Board (NCB). When the concerned NCB formulated various guidelines and suggestions for using computers and the development of this sector, the university teachers acted as experts and actively participated in the meetings (Rahman, June 12, 1989; Rahman, June 13, 1989; Rahman, September 16, 1989). Such involvement of experts,

technicality of the issues, and role of experts as policy entrepreneur were some of the reasons for their active involvement in the process.

Third, it is observed that the voice of business and professional groups was excluded in the process of formulation. Only one member served as the representative from both business and professional groups in FCNITP and no representatives were involved in the drafting sub-committee. The overall role of the representatives from both business and professional group in the FCNITP was characterized as irregular and inconsistent. The attendance of committee members in first the five meetings is shown in the following table.

Table 01: Participation of Actors in FCNITP

Meeting	Date	Participants of FCNITP			
		Experts	Govt. Officials	Business Association	Professional Association
1 st Meeting	09 August, 1999	04	03	01 (President of Bangladesh Computer Somity)	01 (President of Bangladesh Computer Society)
2 nd Meeting	08 December, 1999	02	05	01 (President of BASIS)	Absent
3 rd Meeting	19 January, 2000	02	06	01 (President of Bangladesh Computer Somity)	Absent
4 th Meeting	09 April, 2000	04	06	01 (General Secretary of Bangladesh Computer Somity)	01 (President of Bangladesh Computer Society)
5 th Meeting	16 August, 2001	04	04	Absent	01 (President of Bangladesh Computer Society)

Source: Collected from the meeting minutes of FCNITP

From these data, the FCNITP clearly lacked representation from interest groups. Furthermore, the second and third meetings had no representatives from professional associations, and the fifth meeting had no representative from the business association. However, the most important observation from the analysis of the meeting minutes is the lack of regular and continuous participation of the same representative from the business association in the FCNITP. Three different representatives of the Bangladesh Computer Somity participated in first, third, and fourth FCNIPT meetings. In the first meeting, the then-President of the Bangladesh Computer Somity participated; in the second meeting, no representative participated. In that meeting the BCC invited the President of

the newly formed BASIS to participate. In the third meeting, the then-newly elected President of Bangladesh Computer Somity participated, but he did not participate in the fourth or fifth meetings. The then-General Secretary of the Bangladesh Computer Somity participated instead. The same picture has been found in the case of the professional association. The then-President of the Bangladesh Computer Society also irregularly attended the meetings. An important workshop was arranged on 22 July 2000 by BCC to gather suggestions and recommendations from different stakeholders; several executive members of business associations and businesspersons attended and participated in the discussions, providing several suggestions. In the fifth meeting of FCNITP, the main agenda was to make necessary changes and modifications to the draft IT policy in light of the suggestions and recommendations provided at the workshop held on 22 July 2000. Those in attendance reviewed each and every suggestion, one by one. Of the 32 suggestions reviewed, 15 were rejected, 14 were accepted, and 3 already appeared to have been included in the policy. No business association member was present at this important meeting to contribute their voices. When other business actors and associations felt that their voices had gone unheard in the process, they tried to reach the policy makers by developing a taskforce report. However, the report was sent to the BCC for review by the MSICT. The BCC reviewed the report and commented that some of the points should be considered for insertion in the policies. However, no attempt was made to consider the taskforce report by the secretariat, secretaries committee and the Cabinet, where final decision was made.

Finally, when the business group felt that it had gone unheard in the formulation process and its aspirations was not echoed in the draft ICT policy, it used the head of the business group—FBCCI—to promote a counter policy, attacking the ICT policy process in the document. Similarly, CPD, the major civil society organization, organized the concerned civil society stakeholders prior to the 2001 national election in order to influence the election manifestos. In that ICT taskforce report, they also criticized the process and the draft ICT policy as a policy document. Therefore, it is evident that criticism emerged about the process of policy formulation and the content of the formulated draft ICT policy.

Thus, in the policy formulation process, the state and expert actors appeared to play a dominant and successful role. These groups' ability to collaborate and working within the policy formulation guidelines ensured that they were active participants. Moreover, their experience in working in such environments ensured that they had the knowledge of the process necessary

to make their voices heard. However, the same cannot necessarily be said of the business groups. Although the business group members attempted to participate in this policy formulation process, they believed that had not way to make their voices heard. Their attempts to influence the process failed. As a result, they criticized the process and the resulting policy.

Conclusion

This article described actors' role in the policy-formulation process and the structure of the policy subsystem. The multidimensional nature of the ICT policy led several government ministries and agencies to participate in the process. In addition, the BCC controlled the entire process, in some cases even determining who could participate. Experts were other key actors who participated actively. However, societal actors' representation was very low; only two actors from business and professional groups were nominated to the FCNITP. The business group was an inactive and inconsistent participant in the FCNITP meetings; however, other business group actors attempted to influence the policy by submitting recommendations not only in the various seminars and workshops arranged for policy formulation, but also through an alternative policy document submitted to MSICT. In addition, the role of other societal actors, such as civil society organizations, was evident in the formulation of an alternative taskforce report on ICT for the newly elected government in 2001. Thus, the ICT policy formulation was characterized as a government-initiated and dominated process.

References

- Ahmed, Z. U. (2003). In *Banglapedia: National encyclopaedia of Bangladesh*. Retrieved June 16, 2006, from http://banglapedia.net/HT/S_0161.htm
- Aminuzzaman, S. M. (2003). In *Banglapedia: National encyclopaedia of Bangladesh*. Retrieved October 10, 2006, from http://banglapedia.net/HT/F_0149.htm
- Atkinson, M. M., & Coleman, W. D. (1992). Policy networks, policy communities and the problems of governance. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 5(2), 154-180.
- Baumgartner, F. R., & Jones, B. D. (1993). *Agendas and instability in American politics*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Blom-Hansen, J. (1997). A "new institutional" perspective on policy networks. *Public Administration*, 75, 669-693.
- Chowdhury, J. R., & Shobhan, A. (1999, August). *1st meeting minutes of formulation committee of national information technology policy*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: BCC.

Dibski, D.J. (1993, April). *Vertical equity versus efficiency in financing rural education: A conflict in values*. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, GA.

FBCCI Taskforce (2002). *FBCCI recommendations on national ICT policy*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Author. Retrieved November 12, 2006, from www.fbcci-bd.org/ictp.pdf

Government of Bangladesh. (1997). *Rules of Business*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Cabinet Secretariat.

Government of Bangladesh. (2002). *Report on the Policy Formulation of ICT*. Dhaka, Bangladesh, MSICT.

Hogwood, B.W., & Gunn, L. A. (1990). *Policy analysis for the real world*. Oxford University Press. (Original work Published 1984)

Jewel, G. N., & Chowdhury, T. M. (1993) BCC er post-mortem: Bangladesher Bangla Bharater Niontroney (Post-mortem of BCC: The Bengali of Bangladesh under control of India). *Computer Jagat*, 4(3),

Joordan A. Grant and William A. Maloney (1997). Accounting for Subgovernments, *Administration and Society*, 29, 5:557-84.

Jordan, G. (1990). The pluralism of pluralism: An anti-theory? *Political Studies*, 38, 286-301.

Peters, B. Guy. (1999). *Institutional theory in political science : The new institutionalism*. London: Pinter.

Rahman, A. (1989, June 12). *Meeting minutes of National Computer Board on June 12, 1989*. NCB, Dhaka.

Rahman, A. (1989, June 13). *Meeting minutes of National Computer Board on June 13, 1989*. NCB, Dhaka.

Rahman, A. (1989, September 16). *Meeting minutes of National Computer Board on September 16, 1989*. NCB, Dhaka.

Sabatier, P.A (1991). Towards better theories of the policy process. *Political Science and Politics*, 24, 147-156

Schneider, A., & Ingram, H. (1997). *Policy design for democracy*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Schubert, K., & Jordan, G. (1992). Introduction. *European Journal of Political Research*, 21(1-2), 1-5.

Shobhan, R., & Rahmullah, M. (2003). *The role of civil society organizations in influencing the policy discourse in Bangladesh*. Retrieved November 12, 2006, from www.cpd.org

Trow, M. (1988). Policy analysis. In J.P. Keeves (Ed.), *Educational research, methodology, and measurement: An international handbook* (pp. 197-202). Oxford: Pergamon.