

Abstract: The Question is, was policy-oriented learning part of the policymaking process in South Africa's post-apartheid economic policies?

Political analysts have recently become interested in the learning process of policymakers and government in formulating and implementing public policies. The role they play in public policy is important as they are responsible for promoting the general welfare of a country. Their thinking, decision-making process and understanding of public policy issues determine the kind of policy adopted, and subsequently the impact it has on society.

Within this context, the paper examines South Africa's policymaking process between 1994 and 2006, where three economic policies namely the Reconstruction Development Plan (1994), the Growth Employment and Redistribution (1996) strategy and the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (2006) were adopted. Grounded in the theory of policy change, particularly looking at the concept of policy-oriented learning, this study examines the formulation processes of each of these policies to establish if how and to what extent learning influenced the decisions behind South Africa's economic policies. Policy-oriented learning is broadly understood as a constructed and conscious change in thinking about policy issues, which in turn provide a better understanding of the effects of certain policy instruments. It looks at the relationship between policy change and generally holds that policymakers and the government can learn from their experiences, shared ideas and belief systems and draw lessons from other policymakers. What they learn can be used to modify their present actions based on their interpretation of how previous policies have performed. In other words, this learning can lead to a change in policy or an adjustment of an existing policy. Thus, in examining the different policy changes, South Africa experienced between 1994 and 2006, a policymaking pattern is found.

The study finds that in addition to social, political, and economic factors influencing policy decisions, the strategic interactions between civil societies, political movements, key stakeholders and the sharing and obtaining of knowledge between these parties influences policy decisions as well. In fact, learning plays an important role in the policymaking process.

Keywords: policy-learning, policymaking, policy change, economic policy, RDP, GEAR, ASGISA.