Management Strategies and Engineering Sciences 2027; 9(5):1-14



# A Qualitative Analysis of Factors Affecting Public Policy Implementation with an Emphasis on Participatory Governance and Institutional Capacity: A Case Study of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan

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**Received:** 2026-02-10 **Revised:** 2026-07-21 **Accepted:** 2026-07-28 **Initial Publish:** 2026-10-20 **Final Publish:** 2027-05-01

**Abstract**

The present study aimed to qualitatively analyze the factors affecting public policy implementation, with an emphasis on participatory governance and institutional capacity, in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan. This applied study employed an exploratory qualitative approach, and the data were collected through semi-structured interviews with experts in public administration and public policymaking. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis through three stages of open, axial, and selective coding. The findings revealed that public policy implementation in this ministry is confronted with a set of multidimensional challenges, including weaknesses in the organizational structure, shortages of financial and human resources, managerial system inefficiencies, weak institutional communication, a policy–implementation gap, and cultural resistance to change. Among these factors, participatory governance and institutional capacity were identified as the central and determining components. The results indicate that limited stakeholder participation, the absence of sustainable institutional mechanisms, and weak interaction between the government and civil society have reduced policy effectiveness. Furthermore, resource constraints, inadequate technological infrastructure, and an ineffective monitoring system have seriously limited the organization's implementation capacity. The findings demonstrate that participatory governance and institutional capacity interact with each other and play a fundamental role in successful policy implementation, while the absence of either may result in public policy inefficiency. Consequently, improving policy implementation requires the simultaneous strengthening of participatory mechanisms, enhancement of institutional capacity, and reform of administrative and managerial structures. The proposed conceptual model may provide an appropriate framework for analyzing and improving public policy implementation processes in similar contexts.

***Keywords:*** *public policy, participatory governance, institutional capacity, public policy implementation, policy gap*

**How to cite this article:**

Ahmad Sharaf, N., Kazemi Rahbar, M., & Mehdizadeh Farsangi, S. (2027). A Qualitative Analysis of Factors Affecting Public Policy Implementation with an Emphasis on Participatory Governance and Institutional Capacity: A Case Study of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan. Management Strategies and Engineering Sciences, 9(5), 1-14.

## 1. Introduction

Public policy implementation constitutes one of the most complex and challenging stages of the policy process because it represents the point at which abstract policy intentions, governmental decisions, and strategic objectives are transformed into concrete actions, institutional practices, and social outcomes. Although policy formulation often receives substantial scholarly and political attention, the success or failure of public policies is ultimately determined by the effectiveness of implementation mechanisms. Public policies may be designed based on appropriate objectives and rational analyses; however, weaknesses in administrative structures, institutional arrangements, resource availability, coordination mechanisms, and implementation capacity can significantly limit their effectiveness. Therefore, understanding the factors that

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influence implementation has become a central concern in public administration and policy studies. Public policy implementation is not merely a technical process of executing predetermined decisions but rather a dynamic and interactive process involving multiple actors, institutional constraints, organizational behaviors, and contextual conditions [1].

The implementation of public policies has increasingly been recognized as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by interactions among governmental agencies, social actors, political institutions, and administrative systems. Traditional approaches that viewed implementation as a hierarchical process driven primarily by central government authorities have gradually been challenged by governance-based perspectives emphasizing networks, collaboration, and shared responsibility. In contemporary public administration, implementation success depends not only on governmental authority and bureaucratic capacity but also on the ability of institutions to establish effective relationships with non-state actors and coordinate collective action. Research on public policy implementation demonstrates that policy outcomes are strongly influenced by the institutional environment, organizational capabilities, communication processes, and the degree of alignment between policy objectives and implementation realities [2]. Similarly, meta-analytical research on policy implementation highlights that implementation challenges often emerge from complex interactions among structural limitations, managerial weaknesses, resource constraints, and fragmented institutional responsibilities [3].

One of the major developments in contemporary public governance literature is the growing emphasis on participatory and collaborative governance as a mechanism for improving policy implementation. Participatory governance refers to institutional arrangements in which governmental agencies, civil society organizations, private-sector actors, and affected communities participate in decision-making processes and contribute to the design and execution of public policies. This perspective challenges government-centered models by arguing that complex social problems cannot be effectively addressed through unilateral governmental action. Instead, sustainable policy outcomes require cooperation, negotiation, knowledge exchange, and the integration of diverse stakeholder perspectives. Governance networks have therefore become an important analytical framework for understanding how public organizations operate in environments characterized by interdependence and complexity. According to governance network theory, public-sector effectiveness increasingly depends on the capacity of organizations to manage relationships among multiple actors rather than relying exclusively on hierarchical authority [4].

Collaborative governance has particular significance in the implementation of social policies, where outcomes are directly connected to citizens' needs, social participation, and the cooperation of multiple institutional actors. Social policy implementation often involves complex challenges related to poverty reduction, employment, welfare provision, social protection, and vulnerable populations. In such contexts, government agencies require meaningful collaboration with communities, non-governmental organizations, private-sector institutions, and other public bodies. Collaborative governance provides mechanisms for enhancing legitimacy, improving responsiveness, increasing transparency, and strengthening public trust. However, collaboration is not automatically effective; rather, it requires appropriate institutional design, clear roles, sustainable relationships, and supportive organizational conditions. Recent studies emphasize that collaborative governance should be designed according to specific policy contexts and implementation requirements rather than applied as a universal model [5].

The effectiveness of collaborative governance depends significantly on the existence of institutional mechanisms that support cross-sectoral interaction and long-term cooperation. Collaboration requires more than temporary partnerships or informal communication among actors; it requires institutionalized structures that define responsibilities, facilitate information exchange, and maintain coordination over time. Studies on collaborative governance indicate that successful collaborations develop through continuous processes of relationship building, adaptation, trust formation, and institutional learning. These processes are influenced by historical conditions, existing institutional arrangements, and the capacity of organizations to sustain collective action [6]. Furthermore, systematic reviews of collaborative governance demonstrate that collaboration operates across multiple dimensions, including institutional, relational, managerial, and contextual dimensions, all of which influence whether collaborative arrangements can generate effective public outcomes [7].

In addition to participatory governance, institutional capacity represents another fundamental determinant of successful public policy implementation. Institutional capacity refers to the ability of organizations and public institutions to mobilize resources, coordinate activities,

manage information, develop appropriate procedures, and translate policy objectives into effective actions. Without sufficient institutional capacity, even well-designed policies may fail during implementation because organizations lack the necessary human resources, financial resources, technological infrastructure, administrative systems, and managerial capabilities. Policy implementation capacity has therefore become a central concept in explaining variations in policy performance across different institutional settings. Recent research emphasizes that implementation capacity is not limited to internal organizational resources but also includes the ability of institutions to coordinate with external actors and adapt to changing environments [8].

Institutional capacity is particularly important in developing and transitional governance contexts, where public organizations often face limitations related to resource scarcity, administrative fragmentation, weak coordination mechanisms, and unstable institutional environments. Capacity constraints may influence not only the technical execution of policies but also the legitimacy and sustainability of policy interventions. Effective institutions require the ability to establish stable procedures, maintain accountability systems, utilize information effectively, and develop adaptive responses to emerging challenges. A governance capacity perspective suggests that institutional effectiveness depends on multiple dimensions, including organizational competence, relational capacity, analytical ability, and the capability to coordinate collective action among different stakeholders [9].

Recent scholarship further demonstrates that institutional capacity and collaborative governance are closely interconnected rather than independent factors. Institutions with stronger capacities are generally better positioned to create and maintain collaborative relationships, while effective collaboration can contribute to the development of institutional capabilities through knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and collective learning. Crisis management and governance reform studies indicate that institutional capacity, leadership, and collaboration form interconnected foundations for effective governance responses, particularly under conditions of uncertainty and complexity [10]. Similarly, research on collaborative capacity emphasizes that sustaining partnerships requires organizational capabilities that support coordination, communication, and long-term commitment among participating actors [11].

The relationship between institutional capacity and participatory governance is especially relevant in the context of ministries responsible for labor and social affairs, where policy implementation requires coordination among government agencies, employers, workers, social organizations, and communities. Labor and social welfare policies involve multiple stakeholders with diverse interests, making centralized implementation approaches insufficient for addressing complex social challenges. In such environments, collaborative governance can enhance policy responsiveness by incorporating stakeholder knowledge and improving communication between policymakers and policy beneficiaries. At the same time, institutional capacity determines whether government organizations possess the resources, structures, and managerial capabilities required to transform collaborative decisions into practical outcomes. Therefore, examining the interaction between participatory governance and institutional capacity provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding public policy implementation effectiveness.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan represents an important context for examining these issues. As a key institution responsible for implementing employment, labor, and social welfare policies, the ministry operates within a challenging administrative environment characterized by complex social needs, resource limitations, institutional constraints, and the necessity for coordination among diverse stakeholders. Effective implementation of policies in such a context requires not only administrative competence but also mechanisms that encourage stakeholder participation, strengthen institutional relationships, and improve organizational adaptability. Despite the importance of these factors, limited empirical attention has been devoted to understanding how participatory governance and institutional capacity jointly influence public policy implementation within Afghanistan's administrative context.

Previous studies have provided valuable insights into public policy implementation, collaborative governance, and institutional capacity; however, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing literature has examined these concepts separately, while fewer studies have explored their interactive role in explaining policy implementation outcomes. Second, research on governance capacity and collaborative arrangements has often focused on developed institutional environments, leaving less understanding of how these mechanisms operate in contexts characterized by administrative and institutional challenges. Third, there is a need for context-specific models that identify the structural, managerial, cultural, and relational factors influencing

policy implementation within public organizations. Recent evidence from grassroots collaborative processes indicates that successful collaboration is shaped by contextual conditions, institutional arrangements, and local governance practices rather than by collaboration alone [12]. Likewise, studies on cross-sectoral institutional linkages highlight the importance of strengthening connections among organizations to improve social policy ecosystems and enhance implementation capacity [13].

Accordingly, analyzing the implementation of public policies in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan requires an integrated framework that considers both participatory governance and institutional capacity. Such an approach can provide deeper insights into why policies succeed or fail and can identify mechanisms for improving administrative performance, stakeholder engagement, and policy effectiveness. By adopting a qualitative exploratory approach, the present study seeks to uncover the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of experts regarding the factors influencing policy implementation and to develop a context-sensitive conceptual model.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to qualitatively analyze the factors affecting public policy implementation in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan, with particular emphasis on the roles of participatory governance and institutional capacity.

## 2. Methodology

In terms of its objective, the present study is classified as applied research because it was conducted to identify and explain the components affecting public policy implementation within the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan. In terms of its nature and approach, the study was conducted as qualitative research using an exploratory approach. The primary focus of the study was the in-depth extraction of concepts, dimensions, and mechanisms associated with participatory governance and institutional capacity in the public policy implementation process. In the qualitative phase, the study population consisted of public policy experts, executive managers, and specialists affiliated with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan. Participants were selected through purposive sampling combined with a snowball approach, whereby individuals were recruited based on their practical experience, specialized knowledge, and sufficient familiarity with public policymaking and implementation processes. This sampling approach facilitated access to rich and in-depth data.

The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were designed around the principal themes of the study, including participatory governance, institutional capacity, challenges associated with public policy implementation, organizational structures, the level of stakeholder participation, and institutional barriers. At the same time, the interviews retained sufficient flexibility to enable the researcher to ask supplementary questions during the conversations and gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions. Each interview lasted approximately 40 to 70 minutes and was audio-recorded and documented with the participants' informed consent.

The data collection process continued until theoretical saturation was reached. In other words, the interviews were discontinued when no new information was added to the dataset and the responses had reached a level of conceptual repetition. This indicated the adequacy of the collected data and the richness of the qualitative information obtained in the study.

Following data collection, all interviews were transcribed in full and converted into written text. At this stage, every sentence, key expression, and important concept was documented without omission or alteration of meaning to preserve data accuracy. Where necessary, indications of pauses, emphasis, and repetition were also considered in the semantic analysis. The transcribed data were reviewed several times to ensure their accuracy and consistency with the audio recordings.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data. This method enables researchers to divide textual data into smaller units of meaning and subsequently organize them into coherent patterns and themes. The analytical process was conducted through three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During open coding, the data were divided into initial meaning units, and preliminary codes were extracted. During axial coding, similar codes were classified into more coherent categories, and the relationships among them were analyzed. During selective coding, the categories were integrated and refined to extract the principal themes of the study.

Throughout this process, efforts were made to analyze the data with minimal theoretical preconceptions so that the concepts would emerge directly from the empirical data. This approach enhanced the internal validity of the study and reduced researcher bias. Ultimately, the qualitative analysis

led to the identification of the principal dimensions of participatory governance, institutional capacity, organizational structure, managerial system, the policy–implementation gap, and organizational culture, which formed the basis for developing the study's initial conceptual model.

## 3. Findings and Results

In the present study, the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews were examined using thematic analysis. Through the processes of open, axial, and selective coding, the principal concepts, categories, and dimensions of public policy implementation were extracted. This section provided the foundation for developing the research model and played an important role in identifying the key components.

First section analyzes the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. The purpose of this stage was to extract the most profound views, experiences, and perceptions of experts and specialists in governance, public policymaking, and social welfare concerning public policy implementation in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan. These data played a fundamental role in shaping the conceptual model of the study and constituted the basis for extracting the principal components and dimensions of the research.

The interviews in this study were conducted using a semi-structured method. This method enabled the researcher to use a predetermined framework encompassing the principal themes of the study while retaining the flexibility required to ask supplementary questions and explore the participants' responses in greater depth. The primary interview themes included participatory governance, institutional capacity, public policy implementation challenges, the role of organizational structures, the extent of stakeholder participation, and institutional barriers.

The interviews were conducted in person and, in some cases, virtually. Efforts were made to incorporate diverse perspectives from academic experts, executive managers, and specialists in social policymaking in Afghanistan. Each interview lasted approximately 40 to 70 minutes and was audio-recorded and documented with the participants' informed consent.

During the interviews, theoretical saturation was used as the criterion for terminating the data collection process. Accordingly, the interviews continued until no new information or concepts were added to the dataset and the responses became repetitive. This process enhanced the scientific credibility of the qualitative data.

After the interviews had been completed, all audio recordings were carefully transcribed and converted into written text. This stage is considered one of the most sensitive phases of qualitative analysis because the accurate transfer of spoken concepts into written form directly affects the quality of the final analysis.

During the transcription process, efforts were made to record all sentences, key expressions, and important concepts without omission or alteration of meaning. Pauses, emphases, and repetitions were also incorporated into the analysis when they carried semantic significance. Once prepared, the texts entered the coding and thematic analysis stage.

To improve data accuracy and dependability, each transcript was reviewed several times and, in some cases, compared again with the corresponding audio recording. This process reduced potential errors and increased the credibility of the qualitative data.

Following the complete transcription of the interviews, the textual data entered the qualitative analysis stage. At this stage, the data were divided into smaller units of meaning, and the coding process began. This process comprised three principal stages:

- Open coding
- Axial coding
- Selective coding

The purpose of this process was to transform the raw data into concepts and categories and, ultimately, to extract the principal dimensions of the public policy implementation model.

In this study, the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews with experts in public administration, governance, and public policymaking were analyzed using thematic analysis. The principal objective of this stage was to transform raw data into meaningful concepts, organize those concepts into coherent categories, and ultimately extract the theoretical structure required to design a public policy implementation model for the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan.

The data analysis process was conducted systematically through three consecutive stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This approach was based on classical qualitative data analysis methods and enabled the extraction of deeper layers of meaning from the interview data. The process also facilitated the transformation of initially

dispersed and unstructured data into a coherent and interpretable conceptual model.

Throughout this process, efforts were made to conduct the data analysis with minimal theoretical preconceptions and to extract the concepts directly from the empirical data. This procedure enhanced the internal validity of the study and reduced researcher bias.

During the open-coding stage, the raw interview data were divided into smaller units of meaning. This stage is considered one of the most sensitive phases of qualitative analysis because the researcher extracts preliminary concepts directly from the data without imposing predetermined frameworks.

In the present study, the interviews were analyzed line by line, and key sentences, meaningful expressions, and important points were extracted. These data were subsequently converted into preliminary codes. The codes represented the experts' perceptions of the status of public policy implementation in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan.

**Table 1.** Sample Open Coding of the Interviews

| Statements Extracted From the Interviews | Open Code |
|---|---|
| The absence of coordination among executive units has slowed program implementation. | Weak interorganizational coordination |
| The ministry's financial resources are insufficient for the scale of its welfare programs. | Limited financial resources |
| Many decisions are made without stakeholder participation. | Weak participatory governance |
| The administrative structure is highly centralized and inflexible. | Administrative centralization |
| The ministry does not have a sufficient number of specialized personnel. | Weak human capital |
| An effective monitoring and evaluation system is absent. | Weak monitoring and evaluation system |
| Communication between the government and the target community is extremely weak. | Weak government–society communication |
| Transparency in decision-making processes is low. | Lack of administrative transparency |
| Policy implementation is characterized by delays and slowness. | Slow policy implementation process |
| Laws and regulations are sometimes contradictory. | Conflicting laws and regulations |
| Coordination among ministries is weak. | Weak intersectoral coordination |
| Information technology capacity for policy implementation is low. | Weak technological infrastructure |
| Employee training is neither up to date nor sufficient. | Weak employee training system |
| Employees have low levels of work motivation. | Reduced employee motivation |
| Administrative corruption is observed in certain departments. | Administrative corruption |
| Decision-making is excessively politicized. | Politicization of decision-making |
| Statistical data required for accurate decision-making are unavailable. | Weak information system |
| Policies are disconnected from realities in the field. | Policy–implementation gap |
| Private-sector participation in program implementation is limited. | Weak private-sector participation |
| Nongovernmental organizations play a limited role. | Limited role of NGOs |
| Budgets are not distributed equitably. | Unequal resource distribution |
| Managerial accountability is low. | Weak managerial accountability |
| Performance evaluations are not conducted periodically. | Absence of continuous evaluation |
| Decisions are decentralized, dispersed, and fragmented. | Lack of decision-making coherence |
| Organizational resistance to change exists. | Resistance to change |
| The organizational culture is not conducive to reform. | Weak organizational culture |
| Employee protection regulations are insufficient. | Weak employee support system |
| Intraorganizational communication is ineffective. | Weak organizational communication |
| Planning is neither long-term nor sustainable. | Weak strategic planning |
| Policies are not properly implemented or monitored. | Weak policy monitoring |
| Evidence-based decision-making is limited. | Weak data-driven decision-making |
| Cooperation among government institutions is limited. | Weak interinstitutional cooperation |
| The organizational structure is complex and multilayered. | Complexity of the administrative structure |
| Protective policies for vulnerable groups are insufficient. | Weak protective policies |
| Stakeholders have limited access to information. | Limited access to information |
| An integrated social service system is absent. | Lack of service integration |

The extracted codes demonstrate that the issues associated with public policy implementation in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan are multidimensional. These issues can be classified into several broad domains, including organizational structure, institutional resources, governance, executive management, and institutional communication. These findings indicate that implementation challenges are not limited to a single dimension but instead result from complex interactions among multiple structural and behavioral factors.

**Table 2.** Initial Classification of Open Codes Into Conceptual Domains

| Conceptual Domain | Related Open Codes | Conceptual Analysis |
|---|---|---|
| Organizational structure | Administrative centralization, complexity of the administrative structure, weak interorganizational coordination, weak intersectoral coordination, lack of decision-making coherence | The Ministry of Labor has a highly centralized administrative structure characterized by institutional complexity and weak horizontal and vertical coordination, which have reduced the speed and quality of policy implementation. |
| Institutional resources | Limited financial resources, weak human capital, weak technological infrastructure, unequal resource distribution, weak employee support system | Shortages of financial, human, and technological resources constitute some of the most important barriers to effective public policy implementation in the ministry. |
| Participatory governance | Weak participatory governance, weak private-sector participation, limited role of NGOs, lack of service integration | Limited stakeholder participation and weak interaction between the government and civil society have reduced policy effectiveness and legitimacy. |
| Executive management and internal governance | Weak monitoring and evaluation system, absence of continuous evaluation, weak managerial accountability, administrative corruption, politicization of decision-making | Managerial and supervisory inefficiencies have resulted in deviations in policy implementation and reduced organizational accountability. |
| Communication and information | Weak government–society communication, weak organizational communication, limited access to information, weak information system, lack of administrative transparency | Weak information and communication flows have reduced transparency, public trust, and decision-making efficiency. |
| Policymaking and implementation | Slow policy implementation process, policy–implementation gap, weak data-driven decision-making, weak strategic planning, conflicting laws and regulations | The gap between policy design and implementation results from weak planning, the absence of reliable data, and institutional inconsistencies. |
| Organizational and behavioral culture | Reduced employee motivation, resistance to change, weak organizational culture | Behavioral and cultural factors play an important role in reducing organizational readiness to implement reforms and new policies. |

The findings from the open-coding stage demonstrate that public policy implementation in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan is confronted with a set of complex and interconnected challenges. These challenges cannot be analyzed exclusively at the executive or operational level because their roots can be observed in institutional structures, shortages of human and financial resources, governance system inefficiencies, and limitations in communication mechanisms.

Moreover, the results indicate that the absence of participatory governance, as one of the most important deficiencies in the implementation system, plays a decisive role in reducing policy effectiveness. In many cases, decisions are made centrally and without stakeholder participation, thereby reducing the social acceptance of policies and diminishing the efficiency of their implementation.

Furthermore, weaknesses in the organizational structure and excessive centralization have deprived the ministry of the flexibility required to respond to the changing needs of society. Combined with limited financial and human resources, this issue has imposed additional pressure on the implementation system and adversely affected the quality of policy implementation.

At this stage, the open codes extracted in the preceding stage were transformed into preliminary concepts. These concepts represented a higher level of abstraction than the raw data and served as a bridge between the raw codes and the principal categories.

**Table 3.** Transformation of Open Codes Into Preliminary Concepts

| Conceptual Domain | Open Codes | Preliminary Concepts |
|---|---|---|
| Organizational structure | Centralization, structural complexity, weak coordination | Administrative structural inefficiency |
| Organizational structure | Weak intersectoral coordination | Lack of institutional coherence |
| Institutional resources | Limited financial resources | Shortage of sustainable financial resources |
| Institutional resources | Weak human capital | Weak human capacity |
| Institutional resources | Weak technological infrastructure | Inadequate technological infrastructure |
| Participatory governance | Weak stakeholder participation | Absence of institutionalized participation |
| Participatory governance | Weak role of NGOs | Weak civil society participation |
| Executive management | Weak monitoring and evaluation | Ineffective control system |
| Executive management | Administrative corruption | Weak administrative integrity |
| Communication | Weak government–society communication | Institutional communication gap |
| Policymaking | Policy–implementation gap | Misalignment between policy and implementation |
| Organizational culture | Resistance to change | Institutional resistance |

The extracted concepts indicate that implementation-related problems in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan can be analyzed through three principal dimensions:

- Structural inefficiency
- Weak institutional capacity
- Weak participatory governance

These three dimensions constituted the initial foundation for the formation of the analytical categories in the subsequent stage.

At this stage, the preliminary concepts were classified into principal components based on their semantic similarities and conceptual relationships. These components represented a higher analytical level than the preliminary concepts and played an intermediary role in forming the dimensions of the model.

**Table 4.** Classification of the Research Components

| Principal Category | Related Preliminary Concepts | Analytical Explanation |
|---|---|---|
| Organizational structural inefficiency | Administrative structural inefficiency, lack of institutional coherence | The centralized and complex structure has impeded implementation flexibility. |
| Weak institutional resources | Shortage of sustainable financial resources, weak human capacity, inadequate technological infrastructure | Resource limitations constitute one of the principal barriers to policy implementation. |
| Weak participatory governance | Absence of institutionalized participation, weak civil society participation | The lack of stakeholder participation has reduced policy effectiveness. |
| Managerial system inefficiency | Ineffective control system, weak administrative integrity | The absence of an effective monitoring system has resulted in implementation deviations. |
| Policy–implementation gap | Misalignment between policy and implementation | There is a lack of linkage between policy design and policy implementation. |
| Weak institutional communication | Institutional communication gap | Communication between the government and the target community is weak. |
| Weak organizational culture | Institutional resistance | Employees resist organizational change. |

The results demonstrate that the extracted components reflect three fundamental challenges within the implementation system:

1. Weaknesses in structure and organization
2. Weak institutional capacity
3. Weak governance interactions

These three dimensions served as the principal analytical pillars in the subsequent stage, namely the extraction of the model's dimensions.

At this stage, the identified components were placed at a higher level of abstraction and transformed into the principal dimensions of the research model. These dimensions constituted the final qualitative analytical framework and formed the basis for developing the study's conceptual model.

**Table 5.** Principal Model Dimensions Extracted From the Qualitative Analysis

| Principal Model Dimension | Constituent Components | Theoretical Description |
|---|---|---|
| Participatory governance | Absence of institutionalized participation, weak civil society participation, communication gap | The extent of participation and interaction between the government and stakeholders during policy implementation |
| Institutional capacity | Weak financial resources, weak human resources, weak technology | The organization's ability to implement policies effectively in terms of resources and structure |
| Organizational structure | Structural inefficiency, lack of institutional coherence | The efficiency of the administrative structure and the level of internal organizational coordination |
| Managerial system | Ineffective monitoring, weak administrative integrity | The quality of control, supervision, and accountability in policy implementation |
| Policy–implementation gap | Misalignment between policy and implementation | The degree of divergence between policy design and policy implementation |
| Organizational culture | Resistance to change | The organization's readiness to accept reform and innovation |

The extracted dimensions demonstrate that public policy implementation in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan is a multidimensional phenomenon in which structural, institutional, and behavioral factors operate simultaneously.

Among these dimensions, participatory governance and institutional capacity play central and determining roles, whereas the remaining dimensions function as supporting or constraining variables.

More specifically, weak institutional capacity reduces the organization's implementation capability, while weak participatory governance diminishes the legitimacy and effectiveness of policies.

This section presents the initial qualitative research model for explaining the public policy implementation mechanism in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan, based on the findings obtained from the open, axial, and selective coding stages. The model emerged from the systematic analysis of interview data obtained from experts and seeks to demonstrate the relationships among the most important extracted categories within a coherent conceptual framework that may be further developed for quantitative analysis. Within this framework, public policy implementation is regarded as the final and central outcome of the policy system, the quality of which depends on the interaction of several structural, institutional, and behavioral variables.

The findings demonstrate that the two principal constructs of participatory governance and institutional capacity exert direct and determining effects on the quality of public policy implementation. Participatory governance refers to the level of interaction, synergy, and genuine participation among the government, public institutions, the private sector, and civil society in policy decision-making and implementation processes. In this model, participation is regarded not merely as a formal mechanism but as an institutionalized process that can significantly improve policy implementation effectiveness by increasing transparency, accountability, and the alignment of stakeholders' interests. Conversely, weak participatory governance produces a gap between the government and the target community, reduces public trust, weakens coordination among stakeholders, and ultimately decreases the efficiency of public policies.

Alongside participatory governance, institutional capacity constitutes the second fundamental pillar of the model and encompasses a set of organizational capabilities, including specialized human resources, sustainable financial resources, an efficient organizational structure, information technology infrastructure, and managerial and supervisory systems. Institutional capacity represents the organization's degree of readiness and ability to transform policies into effective implementation measures. The qualitative analysis demonstrated that weaknesses in any of these dimensions directly disrupt the policy implementation process and reduce the speed, quality, and effectiveness of public policy implementation. Institutional capacity therefore serves as the primary foundation for policy implementation and plays an infrastructural role in the success or failure of public programs.

In addition to these two central variables, the model identifies a set of contextual factors that moderate the relationship between the principal variables and public policy implementation. These factors include organizational structure, the managerial system, organizational culture, the quality of institutional communication, and the extent of the policy–implementation gap. A centralized and complex organizational structure may reduce flexibility in policy implementation, whereas weaknesses in managerial and supervisory systems may reduce accountability and increase implementation deviations. Similarly, an organizational culture resistant to change and weaknesses in intraorganizational and interorganizational communication may undermine the positive effects of participatory governance and institutional capacity.

In this model, the relationships among the variables are conceptualized as interactive and multilevel. In other words, participatory governance and institutional capacity do not affect the quality of public policy implementation independently but operate through interaction with one another. Even when an appropriate level of participation exists, weak institutional capacity may prevent policy objectives from being achieved. Conversely, institutional capacity without effective stakeholder participation cannot generate sustainable and effective outcomes. Accordingly, synergy between these two variables constitutes a necessary condition for successful public policy implementation.

Ultimately, the qualitative research model demonstrates that public policy implementation in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon in which institutional, structural, and behavioral factors operate simultaneously and interactively.

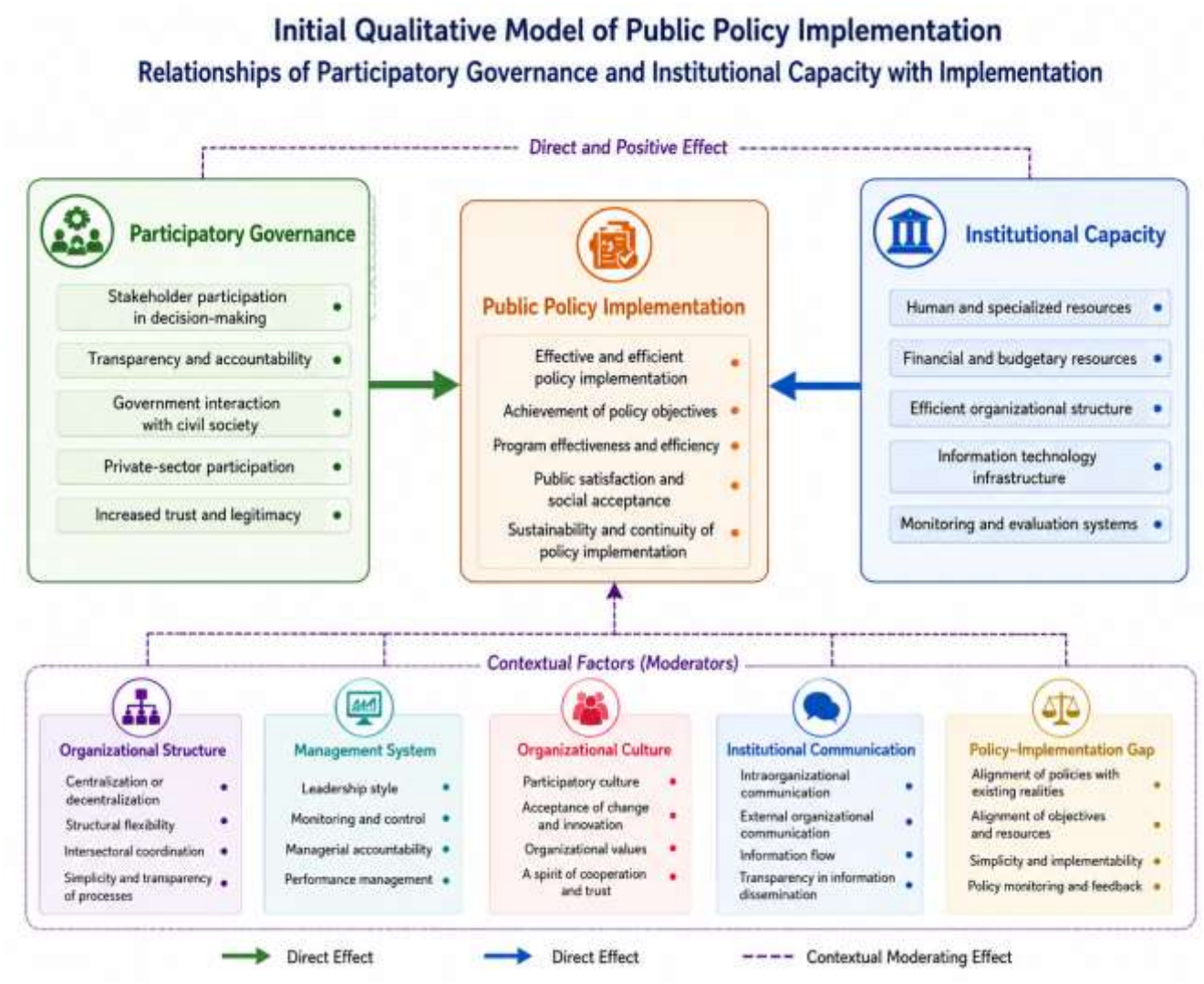


**Figure 1.** Public Policy Implementation Model

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to qualitatively analyze the factors affecting public policy implementation in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan, with particular emphasis on participatory governance and institutional capacity. The findings demonstrated that public policy implementation in this institutional context is a multidimensional process influenced by interconnected structural, institutional, managerial, cultural, and relational factors. Through thematic analysis and the processes of open, axial, and selective coding, six major dimensions were identified: participatory governance, institutional capacity, organizational structure, managerial system, policy–implementation gap, and organizational culture. Among these dimensions, participatory governance and institutional capacity emerged as the two central and determining factors influencing the effectiveness of public policy implementation. The findings indicate that limited stakeholder participation, weak interaction between government and civil society, inadequate institutional mechanisms for collaboration, insufficient human and financial resources, weak technological infrastructure, and ineffective monitoring systems have substantially constrained policy implementation effectiveness.

The identification of participatory governance as a central determinant of policy implementation effectiveness confirms the growing recognition that contemporary public policies cannot be successfully implemented through purely hierarchical administrative approaches. The findings showed that insufficient participation of stakeholders, limited involvement of civil society organizations, and weak private-sector engagement reduce policy legitimacy, public acceptance, and implementation efficiency. These results are

consistent with governance network perspectives, which argue that public-sector organizations increasingly operate within complex networks of interdependent actors and must develop mechanisms for collaboration and coordination rather than relying solely on bureaucratic authority [4]. In this perspective, effective policy implementation requires the active involvement of multiple actors who possess different forms of knowledge, resources, and capacities. The present findings extend this argument by demonstrating that in the Afghan administrative context, the absence of participatory mechanisms creates a disconnect between policy designers and policy beneficiaries, thereby weakening the practical effectiveness of public interventions.

The results regarding the importance of participatory governance are also aligned with studies emphasizing that collaboration must be institutionally designed and adapted to specific policy environments. Collaborative governance is not simply the existence of interactions among actors; rather, it requires structured processes that support communication, trust-building, shared decision-making, and sustained cooperation. The findings of the present study revealed that the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs lacks sufficiently developed mechanisms for institutionalized stakeholder participation, which limits the ability of the organization to mobilize social resources and incorporate diverse perspectives into implementation processes. This finding supports the argument that collaborative governance arrangements must be designed according to the purpose, context, and institutional conditions in which they operate [5]. Furthermore, systematic reviews of collaborative governance have demonstrated that successful collaboration depends on multiple dimensions, including institutional arrangements, relational capacities, managerial practices, and contextual support factors [7]. Therefore, the weakness of participatory governance identified in this study should not be interpreted merely as a lack of stakeholder involvement but as a broader institutional deficiency in creating sustainable collaborative structures.

Another important finding was the central role of institutional capacity in determining the effectiveness of public policy implementation. The results showed that shortages of financial resources, insufficient specialized human resources, weak technological infrastructure, and ineffective administrative systems significantly restrict the ministry's ability to translate policy objectives into operational outcomes. These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing that implementation capacity is a fundamental condition for successful policy execution. Policy implementation requires organizations not only to possess formal authority but also to have the necessary resources, skills, procedures, and adaptive capabilities to manage complex implementation environments [8]. In this regard, the present study confirms that institutional capacity functions as the operational foundation through which policy intentions are transformed into practical actions.

The findings also support the argument that institutional capacity should be understood as a multidimensional concept rather than a simple measure of organizational resources. The results indicated that capacity limitations existed across several interconnected areas, including human resources, financial management, information systems, monitoring mechanisms, and organizational coordination. This finding corresponds with governance capacity frameworks that emphasize the importance of multiple dimensions of institutional capability, including organizational competence, coordination ability, analytical capacity, and the ability to establish effective relationships with external actors [9]. Thus, improving policy implementation requires comprehensive capacity development rather than isolated interventions targeting only one organizational component.

The study further revealed that participatory governance and institutional capacity operate interactively rather than independently. Although stakeholder participation can enhance policy legitimacy and responsiveness, insufficient institutional capacity may prevent organizations from converting participatory inputs into effective implementation outcomes. Similarly, strong administrative capacity without meaningful participation may result in technically efficient but socially disconnected policies. This finding is consistent with recent research indicating that collaborative governance requires adequate organizational capabilities to sustain partnerships, coordinate activities, and maintain long-term collaboration [11]. The interaction between these two dimensions suggests that effective public policy implementation requires both relational capacity and administrative capability.

The identification of contextual factors, including organizational structure, managerial systems, organizational culture, institutional communication, and the policy–implementation gap, provides further insight into the complexity of policy implementation processes. The findings indicated that centralized and inflexible organizational structures reduce administrative responsiveness, while weak managerial accountability and

insufficient monitoring mechanisms increase implementation deviations. These results correspond with studies emphasizing that implementation challenges are often rooted in organizational and institutional arrangements rather than solely in policy design. Public policy implementation is affected by administrative procedures, leadership practices, communication patterns, and organizational behaviors that shape how policies are interpreted and enacted in practice [2]. Therefore, the implementation process should be examined as an organizational phenomenon influenced by internal structures and external relationships.

The findings related to the policy–implementation gap also reinforce previous theoretical discussions regarding the difference between policy intentions and practical execution. The study revealed that some policies are disconnected from field realities, lack sufficient operational clarity, or are not supported by adequate resources. Such gaps reduce the feasibility and sustainability of policy interventions. Public policy research has long emphasized that successful implementation depends on the compatibility between policy objectives, available resources, administrative structures, and implementation environments [1]. The current findings demonstrate that in the context of Afghanistan's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, reducing the policy–implementation gap requires stronger coordination mechanisms, improved evidence-based decision-making, and closer alignment between policy formulation and implementation capacities.

The results also highlight the importance of organizational culture and institutional communication as factors shaping implementation performance. Resistance to change, limited organizational learning, weak internal communication, and inadequate information-sharing mechanisms were identified as barriers to effective implementation. These findings are consistent with research showing that collaborative and adaptive governance requires organizations capable of learning, communicating, and responding to changing conditions. Studies of collaborative processes indicate that successful governance reforms depend on the development of shared values, trust, and communication mechanisms among participating actors [6]. In addition, evidence from grassroots collaborative governance processes suggests that sustainable collaboration emerges through gradual relationship development, institutional adaptation, and continuous interaction among stakeholders [12].

The findings of the present study also contribute to understanding policy implementation within developing and institutionally constrained contexts. While much of the existing literature on collaborative governance and institutional capacity has focused on relatively stable administrative environments, this study demonstrates that these concepts are equally important in contexts characterized by institutional challenges and limited resources. In such environments, strengthening implementation requires simultaneous attention to administrative capacity, stakeholder engagement, and institutional reform. Research on governance reforms under complex conditions similarly emphasizes that institutional capacity, leadership, and collaboration represent interconnected foundations for improving governance performance [10]. Furthermore, strengthening cross-sectoral institutional linkages can improve coordination and create more effective ecosystems for social policy implementation [13].

Overall, the findings suggest that improving public policy implementation in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan requires an integrated approach combining participatory governance and institutional capacity development. The proposed model indicates that policy implementation effectiveness is not the result of a single organizational factor but emerges from the interaction among institutional resources, collaborative mechanisms, administrative structures, managerial systems, and organizational culture. These findings contribute to the public administration literature by providing a context-sensitive explanation of how governance and capacity-related factors shape policy implementation outcomes. The study demonstrates that sustainable policy implementation requires both the ability of institutions to perform administrative functions effectively and their capacity to establish meaningful relationships with stakeholders.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the qualitative design and reliance on expert interviews may limit the generalizability of the results to other ministries, governmental organizations, or national contexts. The findings reflect the perceptions and experiences of selected experts within the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan and may not fully represent the perspectives of all stakeholders involved in policy implementation. Second, the sensitive nature of administrative challenges, such as organizational weaknesses, resource limitations, and governance problems, may have influenced participants'

willingness to openly discuss certain issues. Third, although efforts were made to achieve theoretical saturation and ensure analytical rigor, qualitative interpretation inevitably involves researcher judgment in coding and categorizing themes. Finally, the study focused primarily on institutional and governance-related factors and did not quantitatively examine the relative influence of each identified factor on policy implementation performance.

Future studies are recommended to examine the proposed model using quantitative approaches and larger samples of governmental organizations to test the relationships among participatory governance, institutional capacity, and policy implementation outcomes. Comparative studies across different ministries, provinces, or countries with similar administrative challenges could provide broader insights into the applicability of the model. Researchers may also investigate the role of additional variables, such as leadership style, political environment, digital transformation, public trust, and organizational learning, in shaping implementation effectiveness. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable for examining how institutional capacity and collaborative governance mechanisms evolve over time and how reforms influence policy implementation processes.

Based on the findings, policymakers and managers in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Afghanistan should prioritize the development of institutional mechanisms that facilitate meaningful stakeholder participation, including structured consultation processes, partnerships with civil society organizations, and stronger cooperation with private-sector actors. The ministry should also invest in strengthening institutional capacity through human resource development, improved financial management, digital infrastructure, and effective monitoring and evaluation systems. Reducing administrative centralization, improving internal communication, promoting evidence-based decision-making, and developing a culture supportive of innovation and change can further enhance policy implementation effectiveness. An integrated governance approach that combines administrative capability with participatory mechanisms can provide a stronger foundation for sustainable public policy implementation.

## Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

## Acknowledgments

Authors thank all participants who participate in this study.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

## Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

## Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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