

## **Problem, Policy and Polity in Agenda Setting: Analyzing Safe Motherhood Program in India**

**Authors :** Vanita Singh

**Abstract :** In developing countries, there are conflicting political agendas; policy makers have to prioritize issues from a list of issues competing for the limited resources. Thus, it is imperative to understand how some issues gain attention, and others lose in the policy circles. Multiple-Streams Theory of Kingdon (1984) is among the influential theories that help to understand the public policy process and is utilitarian for health policy makers to understand how certain health issues emerge on the policy agendas. The issue of maternal mortality was long standing in India and was linked with high birth rate thus the focus of maternal health policy was on family planning since India's independence. However, a paradigm shift was noted in the maternal health policy in the year 1992 with the launch of Safe Motherhood Programme and then in the year 2005, when the agenda of maternal health policy became universalizing institutional deliveries and phasing-out of Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) from the health system. There were many solutions proposed by policy communities other than universalizing of institutional deliveries, including training of TBAs and improving socio-economic conditions of pregnant women. However, Government of India favored medical community, which was advocating for the policy of universalizing institutional delivery, and neglected the solutions proposed by other policy communities. It took almost 15 years for the advocates of institutional delivery to transform their proposed solution into a program - the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), a safe-motherhood program promoting institutional delivery through cash incentives to pregnant women. Thus, the case of safe motherhood policy in India is worth studying to understand how certain issues/problems gain political attention and how advocacy work in policy circles. This paper attempts to understand the factors that favored the agenda of safe-motherhood in the policy circle in India, using John Kingdon's Multiple-Stream model of agenda-setting. Through document analysis and literature review, the paper traces the evolution of safe motherhood program and maternal health policy. The study has used open source documents available on the website of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, media reports (Times of India Archive) and related research papers. The documents analyzed include National health policy-1983, National Health Policy-2002, written reports of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Department, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) document, documents related to Janani Suraksha Yojana and research articles related to maternal health programme in India. The study finds that focusing events and credible indicators coupled with media attention has the potential to recognize a problem. The political elites favor clearly defined and well-accepted solutions. The trans-national organizations affect the agenda-setting process in a country through conditional resource provision. The closely-knit policy communities and political entrepreneurship are required for advocating solutions high on agendas. The study has implications for health policy makers in identifying factors that have the potential to affect the agenda-setting process for a desired policy agenda and identify the challenges in generating political priorities.

**Keywords :** agenda-setting, focusing events, Kingdon's model, safe motherhood program India

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