

Selsela Reha

Starting from scratch: *The best and the worst of times for higher education policy change in post-war Afghanistan.*



Universiteit Leiden

MASTER THESIS

Public Administration, Economics and Governance
The Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs
on July 17th 2018.

Supervisor: Elena Bondarouk
Second reader: Natasha van der Zwan

Abstract

The vast literature on policy analysis of higher education in conflict - affected settings left out important insight on how policy change occurs in a context among the least fertile ground. Hence, a successful application of the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) in conflict-affected setting is non-existent. Considering that there are widespread critiques concerning the ambiguity of key elements and whether the framework actually provides a universal language, the objective of this particular study is twofold. The first objective is to investigate the policy change process of higher education in post-war Afghanistan, through the lens of the MSF. The second objective, is to test the applicability of the MSF in conflict-affected setting, after the further optimization of the key elements of the theory. By doing so, this will not only provide a better understanding of the policy change process in Afghanistan, but also reveals whether the MSF indeed provides an 'universal language' that can be empirically validated, while far beyond its original focus of study. By conducting a theory-driven comparative within-case analysis, this study was able to identify and examine the five elements of the MSF and determine the causal mechanisms of the policy outcome. The findings of the case evidently demonstrate that the MSF universal concepts provide a helpful guide to establish an understanding of Afghanistan's policy processes and policy making. The study, however, did find that the conceptualization of the key elements within the framework has not accounted for departures that consists within irregular policy systems, such as the one in Afghanistan. As this research has been a modest contribution, more research is needed to replicate these results in order to further optimize and improve the MSF in post-war setting.

List of Acronyms

ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AMDGs	Afghan Millennium Development Goals
ARTF	Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund
HEP	Higher Education Project
HRW	Human Right Watch
IAUP	International Association of University Presidents
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
IIEP	Institute for Education Planning
MDGS	Afghan Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Afghan Ministry of Education
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoHE	Afghan Ministry of Higher Education
MSF	Multiple Streams Framework
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NHESP I	National Higher Education Strategic Plan 1
NHESP II	National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2
SHEP	Strengthening Higher Education Program
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	The UNs Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nation's Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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1 Introduction

As a consequence of more than 30 years of war, instability and insurgency has left a heavy toll on Afghanistan's institutions and its way of life. The growing conflict was increasing the likelihood of poverty moving from one generation to the next, as children were unable to attend school and more families fled their respective homes. As a result, Afghanistan currently faces an uncertain economic outlook in which growth has slowed down. On-going insecurity impedes investment and encourages many of the most productive and well-educated citizens to migrate to countries with better economic opportunities, services and security (UNDP, 2018). Among the many problems, the most significant problem is that Afghanistan is confronted with unemployment. Afghanistan is listed among the world's highest rates of unemployment, which hovers around 40 percent (TOLO news, 2018). Mohmand (2017) reasons, that the increasing rates of unemployment is not solely because of the poor economic conditions, it is a result of many factors, including, remarkable population growth, an ineffective law and order system, corruption, weaknesses of a heavy centralized structure, and malfunctioning education systems.

This shows that the post-war Afghanistan was left with many urgencies that required immediate action and investment. However, according to a 2002 World Bank report: "knowledge has become the most important factor in economic development. It is higher education that is the main producer of knowledge around the world, and it is primary repository and source of knowledge production in the developing world" (p. 7). The World Bank continues to stress that: "today, economic growth is as much as a process of knowledge accumulation as of capital accumulation" (p.8).

Due to all the pressing needs, higher education in conflict environments is often under-recognized as a potential driver of recovery. Consequently, as the internationally-led post conflict interventions have been focused specifically on basic education, education authorities are often left to deal with the needs of higher education, based on their own limited resources (Buckland, 2005).

However, in consideration of the numerous obstacles existing in the midst of continued war, Afghanistan has indeed managed to transform its higher education system. In retrospect of events; the defeat of the Taliban and the development of an interim government in 2001, it is impressive to witness the extent of change - considering that Afghanistan is a fragile state. Afghanistan has made substantial changes with regards to female participation in public higher education. With the Taliban's regime at an end, practically zero female students were enrolled to almost more than 31,000 women being registered in public higher education facilities as of 2014. Public higher education in general has continued to increase with approximately 7,881 students registered in 2001 to more than 170,000 today. As for the private higher education sector, which only emerged in 2006, the sector now entails around 130,000 students with an overall total of 300,000 students as of 2014- a stark increase from one percent of

university-age students in higher education to almost ten percent (Hayward, 2015).

The seven-year time frame involved several policies and changes that when joined together resulted in a major shift towards improvement of the overall higher education system (Hayward, 2015). From this, it can be argued that countless opportunities for change do arise simultaneously during and after conflict. 'As the quote by Charles Dickens says best over 150 years ago in his opening line of *A Tale of Two Cities*:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; ... it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us..."

As history has illustrated, higher educational change during and in the aftermath of war signifies one of the best times, and at the same time as one of the worst (Nicolai, 2009). 'In a similar fashion, Collier (2007) further notes that: although conflict and post-conflict situations "typically start out with very poor governance and policies, they are highly fluid (No fixed shape): change is easy." (p.151).

Despite the growing scholarly interest in the evaluation of the higher education sector in conflict-affected settings, the dominant approach of this field of has left out important aspects of the agenda setting phase. As a result, our knowledge of what shaped drastic policy outcomes in post-war environments, in which new foundations are necessary for policies, still remains relatively limited (Milton & Barakat, 2016).

Explaining and developing an understanding of higher education in conflict-affected settings requires the analysis of policy change. The Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) has proven to be a valuable lens on the understanding of the agenda setting phase. It is especially useful in meeting the challenges that confronts complex policy studies. A significant motive behind the selection of the MSF for this study is its capacity to identify causal trajectories in the policy process and the analytical exploring of the effect of opportunities. As the MSF is built on three constituent independent processes (problem, policy and politics), the framework helps trace the origins of initiatives and how policy change can be a result of a combination of incremental as well as sudden and abrupt decisions-making steps (Kingdon, 2014). In contrast to other influential policy change theories, the MSF holds the potential to account for actors' behaviors. The model argues that actors are rational, but function in a specified context, which necessitates an understanding of their rationality in such situational positions (Cairney & Jones, 2016).

However, the study of the MSF in post-war countries is unexplored as yet. The MSF is built on universal concepts as essential parts of the policy process, which allows for its insights to be translated to a lot of cases (Cairney & Jones, 2016). Yet, as the original MSF approach was developed to examine the policy process in the US, it poses the question of whether the MSF provides an 'universal language' that can be empirically validated, while far beyond its original focus of study (Cairney & Jones, 2016). With this in mind, this study aims to explore the following question:

To what extent can the MSF explain the policy change in the higher education sector in Afghanistan, during the Karzai Administration.

This study will evaluate the driving forces of higher education policy change from after the fall of the Taliban until the establishment of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP II), through the lens of the MSF. Analysis of the policy change process in Afghanistan is not readily available in the academic literature and this study intends to fill the gap.

The theoretical contribution of this study to the established literature is based on two commonly mentioned critiques on the MSF that still need to be unpacked. The first position holds that the model remains rather ambiguous, due to its lack of precision on how to translate the different elements of the theory to different cases (Zahariadis, 2007). The second position holds that the focus of the model has been predominantly on western democracies, and therefore questionable in terms of whether it has the ability to provide universal concepts (Cairney & Jones, 2016).

Considering these critiques, this study aims to determine whether these 'universal concepts' indeed travel well to conflict-affected settings. It is important to keep in mind, that the US's policy system has extensive separation of powers and a political system with many access points, of which the actors and processes are well understood, (Ridde, 2009). This greatly differs to policy systems which have been affected by conflict. Denney and Wild (2011) argue that policy change in these settings is a slow process and requires support and commitment from the international community.

This suggests that that we have to recognize that the dynamics in the government, different participants as well as situational factors may determine the agenda setting phase. Translating the key concepts of the MSF in an unexplored setting requires including missing assumption, that were not accounted for when Kingdon developed his model (Cairney & Zahariadis, 2016).

Therefore, this study aims to make a unique and important contribution to the literature of comparative public policy research. It intends to do so by translating the key concepts of the MSF which are built on universal concepts. By further optimizing the constituent parts of the MSF to typical post-war cases, it will become easier to clarify the lens's causal drivers and logics. This will not only provide a better understanding of the policy change process, but also an exciting opportunity to reveal the total value of the model in a conflict setting.

Alongside the theoretical contribution, this study is also of both societal and practical relevance. Considering that drastic changes to Higher education (HE) system have taken place in Afghanistan's post-war era despite the complexity within which the HE operates. It could therefore be argued that if significant transformation is possible even in a context among the least fertile ground for change in such a short period of time, its success seems promising for other sectors and countries with similar circumstances. It is of relevance to document the changes occurring within the policy process, in order to account for adaptations, needs and demands. This is especially important in the domain of higher education where continuous alterations of policy are

necessary in order to keep up with universal standards. A case study that unpacks a particular policy domain provides insightful lessons into paradigm shift and more specifically what major factors have triggered or facilitated policy change. Policy assessment also contributes to the evaluation of certain policies, in which policies can be adapted over time in order to achieve optimum performance and results. Therefore, documenting the process can be used to provide guidance to practitioners in advocating for a particular policy.

READER'S GUIDE

The remaining chapters of this study are organized as follows. The second chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the theory on policy change. This is followed by a discussion that briefly presents key elements of Kingdon's MSF and will point out the limitations, which will be the focusing point of this study. The next section unpacks each element of the MSF in more detail and will further clarify and modify this model in order to provide a more concrete guide to conflict environments. The third chapter consists of four sections. The first section offers a description and justification for the research methodology for the case study. It elaborates why the application of the MSF in conflict settings will be best analyzed by a case study method. This is followed by a concise reasoning of the case selection, and why this case is a good catalogue for other conflict-affected countries. The third section outlines the selection of process tracing method for the examination of the MSF. The fourth section entails the data analysis. It begins by explaining the different sets of empirical material. Afterwards, the five different elements of the theory are operationalized into measurable indicators and what type of material has been selected in order to be examined for each element of the theory in question. To continue, the fourth chapter examines the findings of the MSF, by applying it to the policy change processes of higher education in Afghanistan. It evaluates the five separate elements of the theory through the mapping of events and develops evidence surrounding both the actors and processes for the development of the NHESP II. The fifth chapter intends to answer the research question. It begins with a discussion of the findings of the case analysis, in terms of contributions and limitations, before making conclusions that answers the research question. Finally, based on lessons learned of conducting this research, the last chapter will offer some propositions for future research and a policy recommendation.

2 Theory

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The following chapter consists of two sections. The first part positions the study within the literature review. It begins by providing an explanation of the nature of policy change, which is important for the understanding of its complexity. This is followed by a discussion that details the context of John Kingdon's 'Multiple Streams framework' (MSF) and will elaborate on the contributions as well as limitations. The topic of policy change is an intensively applied research area in the study of public policy and political science. Although policy outcomes are usually easy to trace, the process of how policy change occur is a complex undertaking (Cerna, 2013). A variety of analytical models have offered a guide to simplify the complex process of policy change.

Among these models, the MSF remains the dominant approach for the study of policy change. Yet, a number of limitations need to be considered. The most frequently mentioned limitations revolve around two positions. Firstly, the model fails to provide precision on the different elements, and therefore the application remains rather vague. Secondly, many scholars have questioned whether the concepts are indeed as universal as Kingdon suggests. Especially, because the model has principally been focused on western democracies.

Until now, there are only a few studies that examined MSF beyond its original focus of study, and it lacks in its applicability to conflict-affected settings. This suggests that a further development to the MSF is needed when moving the study from a conventional United States reference to little-studied areas in the world. Because of this, the second section of this chapter will embed the developments of the framework and will unpack the above-mentioned limitations. This will be done by further clarifying and optimizing MSF's universal concepts to be applicable to conflict-affected settings.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2.1 THE NATURE OF POLICY CHANGE

Policy analysis as a field of study has depended greatly on the use of analytical models to simplify the complexities and determine the impactful forces of policy processes. (Pump, 2011). The vast literature on policy-making reveals that most authors refer to the policy-making process as a "complex, messy and often ill understood" process (Dye, 1984; Hill, 2009). Given the multi-layered nature of the phenomenon, empirical studies of policy analysis have been conducted through various lenses. Depending on the type of research, the levels of conceptualization can range from broad, to more specific ones. As described by Dye (1984), public

policy is either whatever governments choose to do, or not to do, or can be defined specifically as substantial structural elements of the policy process. Moreover, whilst it may be argued that policy-making is a smooth and dynamic process (John, 2003), several other scholars have argued that policy-making consists of a series of stages (Hill, 2009; Kingdon, 2014).

2.2.2 EVALUATION OF THE MULTIPLE STREAMS FRAMEWORK

Although each a number of analytical models of policy change offers a unique and informative approach to policy change, there is little doubt that Kingdon's multiple streams framework remains a key influence in the study of policy change (Cairney & Jones, 2016). Since Kingdon's publication of his book in 1984 – *Agendas, alternatives and public policies*, the MSF has been an extensively cited work.

By analogy with innovative approaches, such as the advocacy coalitions and the punctuated equilibrium model¹, Kingdon also challenges traditional models. Scholars proceed to debate that prior approaches fail to reflect all situations in the policy making process, by assuming that all decisions are rational and are situated in a linear and strict hierarchical policy system (Teodorovic, 2008; Mclendon, 2003). The MSF approach to interpreting the trajectory of public policy gained eminence in the nineties and was thought to be a significant theoretical achievement in public policy analysis (Sabatier, 2007). The author John Kingdon presented the initial model in the year of 1984. Within his explanation of *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, Kingdon seeks to define the reasons why only particular ideas and not others make it on to the governmental agenda.

As the MSF is built on two different approaches, which relate to the tracing of origins of initiatives, by both rational and comprehensive decision making and incrementalism. By tracing these origins, Kingdon desires to inform his audience that the exact origin of policy change differs from case to case. He also explains that the comprehensive and rational decision-making approach should accentuate the fact that policymakers are not always rational in their final decisions. The author provides justification by pointing out their failure to set out goals clearly and compare other solutions to the preferred one in hand in an efficient manner. In addition, Kingdon conveys his disagreement with Charles Lindblom, in which he argues that policy change occurs in stages, and not simply in an incremental manner (Kingdon, 2014; Lindblom, 1979). Instead, he explains the idea of incrementalism as a strategy in which people are generally risk averse when it comes to major policy change. This suggests that actors in the policy process would rather initiate smaller changes in order to achieve desired results (Brouwer 2015).

¹ The objective the advocacy coalition framework is to explain policy change and stability through the role of coalitions, while the punctuated equilibrium explains that change in systems is interrupted by period of drastic changes (John, 2003). Although the MSF integrates a comparable descriptive model (such as bounded rationality and framing), it however, offers a more falsifiable proposition for a holistic explanation of policy change (Weber, 2016).

As Carrin, et al. put it, “the policy process is constituted both by stability and change, rather than one or the other alone, and cannot be characterized exclusively in terms of incrementalism or rationality” (p.20).

The notion of policy streams was initially developed by Cohen, March and Olsen (1972), the same authors who established the Garbage can model (GCM) that relates to organizational decision-making. These models functioned as a foundation for Kingdon’s multiple streams framework. Kingdon made noticeable changes to the original Garbage can Model of organizational decision-making to the domain of national policy-making (Kingdon, 2014). Kingdon founded his model on the claim that decision-making requires coordination of three generally separate streams of decision processes, formally known as: the problems streams, politics stream and finally policy stream. Although the streams are mostly independent of one another there lies a critical juncture in which all three streams join. This therefore indicates, “a problem is recognized, a solution is available, the political climate makes the time right for change, and the constraints do not prohibit action.” (Kingdon, 2014, p. 88). Moreover, it is important to pay attention to policy entrepreneurs who at this moment have constructed policy proposals and have anticipated problems or alterations in the political stream to appear in order to attach and relate their solutions. Such a process may essentially lead to the notion of policy change (Kingdon, 2014).

While the MSF is widely accepted as a key influence in the study of policy change, it suffers from critiques that are worth pointing out. The most commonly mentioned critiques are revolved around two positions: (1) the first position argues that the model remains rather ambiguous, due to the lack of precision on how the translate the different element to different cases (2) the second position holds that the focus of the model predominantly has been on one single system, and therefore questionable whether has the capacity to provide universal concepts.

To further unpack the first position, it is important to understand why scholars are of the view that the model remains ambiguous. Scholars and policymakers raise doubt on what kind of influence the framework has and how far the concept can be taken (Sabatier, 1999). A review of the literature shows there is not “one best way” to evaluate the Multiple stream analysis. The MSF has made important contributions to policy theory, but these contributions remain remarkably separate. Some scholars argue that this is due to the lack of precision in explaining how “policy windows open, operate and close” (Sabatier, 2007). Additionally, observers have also questioned whether the prescribed separate streams are rather interdependent instead of independent (Robinson & Eller, 2010). On this basis, the issue of ambiguity complicates a specific determination of the problem, especially when analyzing fuzzy policies or complex political systems. ‘Therefore Zaharadis (2007) argues that: “it becomes difficult to differentiate relevant from irrelevant facts, which could lead to false or misleading interpretations” (p. 68).’ All the same, Zahariadis (2007) defends this notion, by stating that the idea of independence is simply a conceptual tool meant to uncover

their foundations, rather than preconceived assumptions.

The second position and the most frequent used critique on the MSF is whether the model provides a universal language. Kingdon's established work concentrated on one case (the United States) and a few policy areas such as health and transport. The MSF framework has contributed to important concepts and ideas in contemporary studies, that may have broad applicability across a variety of systems. Yet, the literature has developed with an overwhelming focus on just a single system in mostly western states and not complex third country governments (Cairney & Jones, 2016). It is therefore important to identify that the US political system with extensive separation of powers, bicameralism and federal dynamics differs from other western democratic systems, let alone countries in a post-war setting (Ridde, 2009). Hence, it poses the question of whether the model can be empirically validated, while far beyond its original focus of study (Cairney & Jones, 2016; Zhu, 2008).

Despite of all these above-mentioned critiques, scholars argue that this should not be held against the theoretical value of the model (Odom-Forren & Hahn, 2006). Cairney and Jones (2016) state in their article, that the simplicity and flexibility of the model make it easy to test hypotheses and advance comparative policy analysis. The authors further reason, that it does not matter that scholars examine different countries, since they have a common language when they are compared. Cairney and Jones (2016) reason that regardless of the type of system a country represents they have at least five things in common in their agenda setting phase:

1. *Ambiguity* (there are many ways to frame the problem).
2. *Competition for attention* (few problems reach the top of the agenda)
3. *An imperfect selection process* (new information is difficult to gather and subject to manipulation)
4. *Actors have limited time* (which forces people to make choices before their preferences are clear)
5. *Decision-making processes are neither 'comprehensively rational' nor linear* (p. 5-6)

Considering the fact that the MSF draws on these above mentioned important "universal" concepts, allows the framework to be of comparative value. Many scholars contend that the flexibility of the MSA is a key feature, and therefore enables to operationalization of the findings to some extent (Cairney & Jones, 2016).

There are a small number of studies that analyzed in more detail how "universal" fundamental MSF concepts are. In particular, the study of Zhu (2008), refers to an exploration of the extent to which a policy theory derived from studies of the US can be used to explain policymaking in China. In the original US study, one would expect that technical infeasibility would rule out a policy solution. Nonetheless, this prove to not be the case for China, as technical infeasibility was a factor of change. Or another example, the study of Zaychenko (2003) illustrates,

that whilst the role of policy entrepreneurs in a modern democracy is undeniable, this might not be the case in more closed political systems. It was anticipated that due to the lack of transparency of the policy-making process in Russia, minor adjustments to the framework are required in order to translate the different streams.

This shows that while these are only a small number of cases that have been analyzed outside the context of western democracies, universal concepts have a general commonality. However, these studies have shown that the conceptualization of the fundamental elements within the framework has not accounted for departures that consist within irregular policy systems. It also lacks in explanation in terms of how streams mix and join within policy systems that are not clear cut. Meaning, every stream's focusing point depends crucially on national structural features and therefore may require alterations in the understanding of the MSF. For instance, the policy stream in the context of the US would regard interest groups as major players, since the political system has many access points. Contemporary areas of study specifically produce concerns around new factors of influence in the policy stream (such as international, transnational and supranational) and new roles for policy entrepreneurs (Cairney & Jones, 2016). Additionally, as pointed out by Henry, Ingold, Nohrstedt (2014), in order to understand the relationship between political institutions and policy change in developing countries, researchers need to focus much attention to underlying, social, economic and political constraints (e.g. state-society interactions, corruption, financial crisis and power relations). Hence, translating this model needs adjustments for other settings and perhaps requires including missing assumptions, that were not accounted for when Kingdon developed his model (Cairney & Zahariadis, 2016).

2.2.3 CONCLUSION

To this day, there are limited studies of MSF in developing countries, and a successful application of the framework in conflict-affected settings is non-existent. Although the original model was developed to examine the policy process in US, the model suggests for its insights to be extended well beyond its original focus as it is built on universal concepts. Before proceeding to the further explanation of the different elements of the theory, it is crucial to mention that the MSF approach has two commonly mentioned critiques that require further consideration. First of all, studies have shown that the model lacks rather unclear on how to translate the different elements to different cases. Second of all, scholars have posed the question on the model's ability to provide universal concepts, since it has predominantly been focused on western democracies in its conceptualization of the different elements of the model. Although, studies have illustrated that MSF's universal concepts are generally helpful in the understanding of the policy change process, it does suggest the relevance of

theoretical departures when bringing an established theoretical perspective into a new context. Simply put, there is still a research gap in knowledge and literature which needs to be filled by conducting further research. In order to contribute to the literature of comparative policy analysis, study will put the theory into further test by taking it more to an extreme case than previous studies have done, in order to determine whether MSF's "universal language" indeed travels well. Before testing the theory, this study attempts to account for the two above mentioned limitations by offering new insights to the comparative policy analysis research. As the different concepts of the MSF are known to be ambiguous, this study will offer a more concrete guide that is applicable to the context of conflict-affected environments. It does not only provide a better understanding of the process of policy change, but also the overall usefulness of the model in conflict-affected settings. This study will proceed by shedding light on the different elements of the MSF and explains how the different streams can be optimized in order to make it translatable to conflict-affected environments.

2.3 KINGDON'S MULTIPLE STREAMS FRAMEWORK

Before we take a more detailed look on the process of policy change of the higher education sector in Afghanistan, it is important to emphasize on the contextual theory surrounding the policy process in post-war countries (Cairney & Jones, 2016). Considering the increasing complexity of modern day conflict, recent thinking has introduced the term of a '*fragile state*'. This terminology refers to states that are incompetent to safeguard security, ensure human rights and deliver the basic requirements for development. In this context, the focus has shifted in recent years beyond question on how to end wars, towards the question of 'peace building' (Call & Cousens, 2007). This concept explains the development and reconstruction processes that assist a country to peacefully move to a post-conflict situation. Scholars have suggested many efforts that could advance a country in this transitional phase and the 'windows of opportunity' that come along (Nicolai, 2009). Several cases of policy reforms in conflict-affected environments uncover that there is no standardized way in which policy change should occur in conflict-affected and fragile settings (Nicolai, 2009). Therefore, it is essential to first understand what the sector governance opportunities and challenges are in particular. It is appropriate to assume that both opportunities and challenges affect the policy change process and consequently impact the different streams according to the context.

Furthermore, Kingdon stresses on the importance of differentiation between participants and processes (Kingdon, 2014). It should be recognized that in a wide array of countries, different participants as well as situational factors may be involved in the entire policy process than those determined by Kingdon in regard to the American context. Hence, to prove the frameworks applicability outside conventional US and EU structures to post-war settings, requires further

improvement and optimization to be consistent with the national situation of the country examined (Cairney & Zahariadis, 2016). With that in mind, the following sections will examine each stream more closely and will attempt to integrate the contextual factors that are related to state fragility in a conflict-affected setting, for the MSF to be applicable to such cases

2.3.1 PROBLEM STREAM

Problems are central in most debates and policy decisions, which explains why the role of problem definition has become an area of increased study in recent years. The identification of a problem is the first step in Kingdon's approach. The problem stream essentially refers to various problems that governments look at or are interested in at any given moment in time. However, with many potential problems that are presented by individuals in and around the government to focus on, Kingdon (2014) attempts to understand why only some problems capture policymaker's attention and others do not.

Defining and framing the problem is essential, this is because whichever means are used to frame the problem leads to alternative solutions that follow. There are no specific objective indicators to determine the order of attention allocated to problems. Considering this, perceptions of problems can evolve rapidly. It is important to note that only a small amount of problems pin down policymaker attention. Establishing and ensuring attention is a major objective which must be acted upon immediately, in order to make sure that attention does not get redirected elsewhere. Generally, there are a number of systemic methods in which to deliver information to policymakers in terms of *indicators, focusing events and credible feedback* (Kingdon, 2014).

Alongside systematic methods, it is important to also consider the public sphere and how this differs in western democracies and post-war countries. According to Von Kaltenborn-Stachau (2008), the public sphere has a decisive role on the participants in the policy discourse and in turn influence how issues are raised. Although these MSF's systematic methods are rather clear, it is important to first understand the public sphere in a conflict-affected setting, before being able to assess the problem stream in these settings. The initial study by Kingdon, did not account for the difference in citizen-state relations among western democracies and conflict-affected states. This is why this section will also offer further explanation of *the public sphere*, and how this can affect the discussed systematic methods of the problem stream.

2.3.1.1 SYSTEMATIC METHODS TO RAISE AWARENESS

Kingdon explains indicators as tools utilized to examine the magnitude of the condition or to distinguish changes in a particular condition, for example the existence of a disease or the financial costs of the program. He proposes that policymakers use indicators in multiple ways. Indicators do not just determine the

issue, but rather are used to evaluate the magnitude of an already existing issue that has developed into a problem demanding governmental attention (Kingdon, 2014).

Moreover, problems require emphasis at times, in order to gain the attention of people in and around governmental institutions. The push required is usually provided by a specific focusing event such as a crisis or disaster that serves as a call of attention to the problem itself (Kingdon, 2014). "Focusing events are usually characterized as sudden, uncommon, and harmful" (Birkland, 1998, p. 54). Moreover, focusing events bring clarity to policy deficiencies may thereafter help consolidate policy change. In certain situations, focusing events trigger some of the most abrupt changes in policy (Kingdon, 2014).

In a manner corresponding to the multiple streams framework, feedback helps present problems to policymaker's attention whilst also making them more apparent. This takes place when programs are not functioning as planned, when implementation of policies do not correspond to the legislative mandates or when new problems develop due to program's enactment or unforeseen consequences. Feedback may be achieved through systemic approaches, for example monitoring and evaluation studies, but it is also formulated through informal channels such as citizen's complaints and bureaucrats who are involved in administrative responsibilities (Kingdon, 2014).

2.3.1.2 THE PUBLIC SPHERE

From a democratic perspective, the ideal public sphere is one that would expect state structure, including all branches and institutions, to be transparent and informs the public of its undertakings, public debates, administrative decisions and legislative acts. Nevertheless, by assuming conflict-affected countries have the same functioning public sphere, would leave out important aspects of the policy puzzle, such as the exclusion of participants in the policy debate. Besides that, the aftermath of war usually has severe consequences for several policy domains. This entails that there is usually no national dialogue in place for feedback opportunities, because there are at times no policies to reflect upon (Von Kaltenborn-Stachau, 2008). In other words, the process of feedback is not as straightforward in these settings, and thus require more nuance between the number of actors involved, and perhaps creative ways to yet provide feedback.

Furthermore, it is widespread that the creation of a transparent platform for policy debate is a vital mechanism for change. Several cases in conflict-affected settings uncover that these states have a long way ahead to achieve this, but the ambition is usually there. This includes providing accurate and meaningful information about legislative decisions, political programs and so on. As a result, these settings usually do not have engaging and active civil society that enables the public to contribute and respond to public discourse. A lack of engaging citizens in the public sphere leaves individuals without information and the

chance to raise awareness of societal problems and to influence and shape policy decisions.

What the original model disregards, is that the role of the international community is key when applying the problem stream in a post-conflict setting. The end of conflict generally provides opportunities for the international community to be actively involved in re-engaging with national actors to address urgent security, humanitarian and development needs and issues. Experiences of post-war settings have demonstrated that it is usually them that citizens turn for credible information and analysis, and not the government. As the international prevents countries from slipping back into its old habits, post conflict governments are usually influenced by problem framing of the international community (Von Kaltenborn-Stachau, 2008).

Hence, it justifiable to expect that issues stand a greater chance to be viewed as problems in post-conflict setting when the international community is actively involved in addressing urgent security, humanitarian and developmental needs. Also, the involvements of the international community are expected to evoke sudden changes in indicators involving items of higher social value that affect the general public, establish standards for feedback, or generate focusing events.

2.3.2 POLITICS STREAM

The second autonomous stream is otherwise known as the Politics stream. This means that policymakers actually have the incentive and convenience to turn the proposal into an actual policy. Policymakers have to analyze the problem and be responsive to the presented solution. Usually they customize their interest according to their own beliefs and the current perceptions of the public's mood and the support of parties and interest groups alike. Occasionally, only a complete change of the government may be the sole means of providing such an incentive. Similarly, to the two other streams, the 'Politics stream' has its own structure, which consists of: *national mood, efforts and positioning of organized political force, and administrative turn over* (Kingdon, 2014). Nevertheless, in contrast to western democracies, countries in a conflict-affected setting face high levels of instability and violence. The aftermath of war is usually coupled with political instability, a deteriorating security situation and limited freedom of thought. Situational limitations of conflict-affected environments (such as corruption, unemployment and national security problems) influence the political climate in many ways (Milton, 2018). This section will elaborate on these limitations and argue that policy solutions in a conflict setting still have a chance of being adopted, despite these limitations.

2.3.2.1 MOOD

The first component of the political stream is the national mood. It is derived from the generalization that a great number of citizens have mutual views towards a

certain issue. National moods most certainly change and such changes can potentially influence both policy agendas and outcomes. It is important to highlight how governmental actors use such moods to promote certain proposals on their own agendas, and what they do in order to avoid other ideas and policy proposals from rising in popularity. With this in mind, shifting national moods are powerful enough to affect the administration's success in establishing and initiating new proposals (Kingdon, 2014). According to the MSF, the national mood is not a random phenomenon, but rather driven by both economic and political conditions in a country (Kingdon, 2014). For that reason, the national mood in a fragile setting can be influenced by numerous factors, namely: national security problem, corruption and future prospects.

First of all, national insecurity can break the confidence in the prospect of higher education reform and reduces the opportunities that come along from both the supply and demand side (Milton, 2018). This becomes particularly a major challenge when a decline in trust leads to growing refusal of donor to invest in the country (Hayward, 2015) For example, ongoing tensions leave university campuses outdated and overstretched, and in worst cases even destroyed. In the case of Libya, the worsening security situation halted the university building construction scheme, as nearly all the foreign contractors refused to return to complete the projects. On the other hands, fear and insecurity is also a demand-side barrier. Attacks on schools, teachers and students are common across conflict-affected areas (Justino, 2014). Besides, at times of political instability the education systems are sometimes seen as the guardians of tradition. Teachers for example have been taught a certain way and it becomes difficult for them to see the need for any kind of educational innovation (Nicolai, 2009).

Second of all, corruption is another factor that can influence the national mood. Corruption usually leads to the most severe obstacle to the effective reform of the higher education sector in fragile settings. The risk of corruption can be intensified in fragile settings, which are often characterized by weak governance structures, inadequate political leadership and reduced human, organizational and institutional capacity of government (Rose & Greeley, 2006). It can be argued that the level of corruption in a given country can influence people's perception and support. Corruption undermines the legitimacy of the state and reduces trust in national institutions, not only in the eyes of international community but also of its citizens (Milton, 2018).

Especially, the chance of turning a given proposal into an action is directly influenced by the availability of financial resources. This indicates that it of utmost importance that there is effective allocation of financial resources. While there is a high demand for education in general, it is at the same consists of the largest sector employers in many countries. This makes the potential impact of corruption even higher than in other sectors (Rose & Greeley, 2006). There are cases in which donors shy away from projects, believing that funding would lead to a loss or a waste. As a result, countries miss out on the financial support.

Hence, it is anticipated that when the corruption level is high in a given county, the public has little trust and incentive to promote alternative proposals and turn proposals into actions. However, at the same time in some exceptional cases, corruption can also mobilize attitudes for change in which the public is of the view that corruption can only be dealt with through the investment in human capital (Milton, 2018).

2.3.2.2 ORGANIZED POLITICAL FORCES

The second part of the political stream tackles what Kingdon (2014) explains in traditional political science terms as: interest group pressures, political mobilization, and the behavior of political elites. These components build the way people in and around the government analyze the level of consensus or disagreement around explicit organized interests. In accordance with this idea, political leaders should determine the amount of support or opposition that exists towards ideas or policy proposals. Moreover, even if there is much opposition it does not mean that the presented idea will fall off the governmental agenda, however policy-makers must consider the price and consequences of pushing forward unpopular or undesired proposals. This leads to the idea that the perception of the degree of support existing must be carefully studied in the policy community before a policy change can be considered appropriate.

In order to examine organized political forces in the context of fragile states, it is important to understand the notion of political will. Broadly speaking, political will is associated with the sustained commitment of politicians and administrators to invest political capabilities in order to succeed in achieving particular higher education objectives. Political will is a combination of two equally significant concepts, namely, legitimacy and objectives. For this reason, political will be further explained by a categorization of three interrelated concepts.

Starting off with Commitment, this concept refers to individuals or group of individuals sharing common interest including political parties or states (level of consensus). In contrast to western democracies, post war countries usually need to re-establish their overall government system. In the context of higher education goals commitment can either be legal or political. 'Pauline and Greeley (2006) explain this as follows: "Goals and targets, such as those associated with EFA and the MDGs can be part of political commitment aimed at enhancing accountability of politicians, managers and educators by providing monitorable targets. Being part of these international commitments can afford legitimacy to countries from the international community providing them with opportunities to benefit from increased aid (for example through the Education for All Fast Track Initiative - FTI), which, in turn, can enhance capacity to fulfil their commitments" (p.5).' Whereas, psychological abuses, sexual harassments and right to education for all, is measured by legal commitments. However, countries in these settings, usually do not have the capacity to enforce it.

Next, leadership is evident at the community, local and national levels. At the local level support for education might be initiated by teachers, civil society,

NGOs, traditional and religious leaders etc., while in other cases change is driven by national leaders, or the international community. In an idealistic case, these actors cooperate simultaneously to guide the process of reform. Nevertheless, in fragile contexts such relationships and partnerships are often fragmented and need re-constructing as such states move towards progress and recovery (Pauline & Greeley, 2006). Nicolai (2009) stresses that: “the push for partnership strengthened the influence of civil society in many ways and they have taken on a wide variety of roles in advocacy, implementation, technical assistance, research and, of course, fundraising” (p. 93).’ As discussed by Hayward (2015), a joint vision by major leaders, is necessary for building trust in leadership. The balance of the different roles appears to be changing in which citizen-based organization have been able to grown and take on more important roles within their own countries. It is important to maintain these interventions for a period of time. It is not realistic to assume that a fragile state can alone solve major funding and implementation issues in a short period of time (Denney & Wild, 2011).

Lastly, responsiveness entails relationships of accountability between citizens, their government and educational providers. In the majority of cases, policy responsiveness will only occur if the demand is expressed clearly enough to initiate a response from key decision makers and those who provide the relevant services. This process is known as ‘long route’ accountability, which may not be applicable in fragile states where governments are often non-existent, or lack legitimacy. In these cases, a ‘short route’ process to accountability between communities and non-state educational providers is likely to be more impactful (Rose & Greeley, 2006).

2.3.2.3 ADMINISTRATIVE TURN OVER

Various events within the internal government structure can also impact the process of agenda setting. Some of these changes are: changes in priorities among incumbents, a turnover of key personnel, or an administration change. The MSF denotes that when a turnover does occur, it can actually make issues on the agenda possible, but on the other hand previous issues considered to be less important generally fall off the agenda. Moreover, it is critical to note the impact of a new administration in office. As of general standards, the new administration has authority over which issues to push for or not. However, when an administration is leaving office, this means that their issues have less of likelihood to reach any formal agenda. Focus events within any government often signify a particular moment, or a policy window in which the three streams may integrate and place issues on the decision-making agenda (Kingdon, 2014).

Analysis of the policy process in fragile states reveals that administrative turn over can indeed have great impact on the likelihood of an issue to reach any formal agenda. Several cases have demonstrated that political and power approaches of emerging leadership can influence potential for change. In specific, frequent turnover of ministry officials can impede previously made reform efforts,

and a marginalization of individuals that were related to reform efforts (Nicolai, 2009). Nevertheless, at the same time, many specialists of higher education in fragile states, repetitively suggested that administrative turn over could serve as one of the most critical windows of opportunity. Especially in reference to partnership with external agencies, national acceptance for change to reinforce strategic capacity is usually there (Nicolai, 2009). Denney & Wild (2011) further elaborate that in order to realize these opportunities, the involvement of external agencies should be in the early phases of the planning. Especially when a government is newly established, there is usually national acceptance for innovative changes.

To sum things up, situational limitations of a conflict setting can indeed influence the policy streams in many ways. Yet, despite these limitations policy solutions still have a chance of being adopted. For this however to happen, we need to acknowledge the following. First of all, policymakers in a conflict-affected environment are receptive to proposals that they 'own', options that converge with the current perception of the public's mood, and items that face that is affected by conflict-affected setting. It is therefore applicable to assume that policy solutions have a higher chance of being adopted when they explicitly mention how the situational limitations can be minimized or prevent its occurrence. Moreover, policy solutions also have a higher chance of being adopted when political will involves sustainable commitment and partnership at the international, community, local and national level.

2.3.3 POLICY STREAM

The policy stream is mostly separated from the other streams, Kingdon recognizes that there are many solutions just waiting for the relevant problem to be solved (a correct fit in other terms). To put it differently, Kingdon's explanation of the policy stream, the policy stream can be understood as a solution to a problem that is available or can be established. Attention can swiftly shift from one issue to another, which is significant and problematic because feasible solutions involving drastic policy change usually take time to materialize (Kingdon, 2014). Kingdon describes policy solutions as:

Whirling around in a 'policy primeval soup', 'evolving' as they are proposed by one actor then reconsidered and modified by a large number of participants. This takes place within communities of 'researchers, congressional staffers, people in planning and evaluation offices and in budget offices, academics, interest group analysts' (Cairney & Zahariadis, 2016, p. 28).

In order to manage the disconnect between shifting attention and slow solutions for policy development, policy communities establish a consensus of solutions in

anticipation of potential problems in the future, and then find the appropriate time to either make use of or encourage attention to a particular problem (Cairney & Zahariadis, 2016). In addition, the actors in the policy domain are continuously adapting their ideas and as with natural selection, where only the strongest and most capable idea survive. This is the principal domain in which the notion of alternative specification occurs. In this process, many alternatives are set up and numerous proposals are considered.

What is more, is that crisis might change the nature and operational procedures of the policy stream and requires additional understanding of underlying mechanisms, such as poor governance, political instability, institutional resilience towards change and lack of ownership (Ackrill, Kay, & Zahariadis, 2013). Therefore, the section will also provide an additional explanation on how the relevant factors of the policy stream: *the softening up process and criteria for the survival of proposals*, can be translated to conflict-affected settings

2.3.3.1 SOFTENING UP

Kingdon (2014) distinguishes the ideas of softening up from alternative theories that assume power and influence are the most significant means in which proposals are accepted. To better depict what is being said, instead of opting for lobbying, softening up actually relates to the process of persuasion. Policy entrepreneurs present bills, organize congressional or parliamentary hearings, give speeches, conduct studies such as reports or papers, and hold conferences for participatory discussions. Occasionally, they organize these particular events in order to test receptivity and acceptance of their proposed ideas. It is important to mention that the information received from this entire process is noteworthy, because proposals usually end up back into the same platforms that address ideas in order to allow for re-configuration and greater consideration.

Kingdon (2014) further argues that the notion of softening up is essential before any proposal can be appraised seriously, and without such a process, proposals cannot be successful or implemented in anyway, despite them perhaps being of added value. Kingdon (2014) further explains his ideas by stating that together; the art of persuasion and 'softening up', should clarify the well-defined qualities of the proposal that should ultimately establish a unanimous consensus.

In Kingdon's original study the term 'softening up' refers to the US Federal level solutions. In this context issues generally take time to become accepted within the government or policy network. This formulation is therefore exclusively through the examination of US cases, which has a unique institutional structure (Béland & Howlett, 2016). However, given the distinctive nature of political institutions of other countries, this process can differ in many ways. First of all, there have been cases in which policy punctuations occur when issues break out of one policy-making venue. Second of all, in contrast to US federal government,

other countries have the opportunity to import and adapt ready-made solutions. This process can particularly be the case when ad hoc coalitions are formed to address specific short-term goals. Besides, in contrast to the unique US federal political system other countries have the opportunity to import and adapt ready-made solutions (Cairney & Zahariadis, 2016).

However, the political nature of post-war settings would suggest that poor governance and political instability creates an organizational fragmentation, and therefore the process of softening up is likely to take longer (Winthrop & Matsui, 2013; Cairney, 2012). This longer path can be explained by the inability of local governments to provide strong leadership and support that is required for an issue to become accepted in a policy domain.

An added explanation of this is that poor governance and political instability is usually coupled with the incompetence to have the social or institutional resilience to overcome crisis in short period of time. Conflict-affected governments have been cut off from international developments and practices in the field of education for years or decades. Due to this, leadership positions have a long period of minimal resources and usually without full control of particular parts of the country. Alongside a limited local perspective, the increasing complexity of conflict in fragile contexts, makes it almost impossible to import ready-made solutions to immediately deal with the encountered problems (Nicolai, 2009). This again indicates that the role of international actors as either a promoter or supporter of policy change are vital. Therefore, it is important that a joint vision and strategy is created among domestic and international agencies (such as aid donor, humanitarian and development partnership) for the persuasion of solutions to particular issues (Winthrop & Matsui, 2013).

2.3.3.2 CRITERIA FOR SURVIVAL

Following Kingdon's logic, proposals (after going through both processes) should essentially have a greater possibility of survival when matching three particular criteria's which are formally known as: technical feasibility, value acceptability, efficiency and the efficiency of anticipated costs (Kingdon, 2014).

- First of all, technical feasibility directly relates to the practical aspect of an idea. All details of a proposal must be worked out before anything can be regarded seriously. There are questions that must have answers surrounding the notion of feasibility such as: "is there a willingness to achieve what it actually should achieve?" and "what the likelihood for such a proposal is to be implemented?" In correspondence to Kingdon's propositions, policy actors must believe that the proposal will be functional if it is implemented.

In terms of technical feasibility, post-war experiences have illustrated that while there is an increased level of awareness among policymakers on the role of education and higher education in fragile states, translating that awareness into clear, funded policy priorities remains a challenge. Winthrop & Matsui (2013) point out that this is indeed true among education development policymakers at both the country and global level. The authors found that there are several cases that failed to prioritize higher education and conflict-affected issues into national education plans.

Furthermore, there are several cases where development policymakers failed to acknowledge what type of government actions are needed as responses to higher education sector within fragile states that could potentially enable departure of the status quo (Nicolai, 2009). This could explain why expanding access to primary education and ensuring basic safety and protection for children overshadows the importance of higher education for policymakers (Hoogbeek & Marks, 2001). It is therefore recommended that national policymakers and development partners should focus more on a limited number of education priority programs but should not neglect the role of higher education. It is hence anticipated in order for higher educational policy change to occur, a realistic plan should include higher education prioritization, and a comprehensive and inclusive higher education reconstruction programme that overcomes previous higher educational grievances (Ratcliffe, 2009).

- Second of all, value acceptability stands for whether or not the values of the policy experts making the proposal are in fit with members of the policy community itself. The values have to address the notions of both equity and efficiency and not solely reflect liberal and conservative schools of thought. By general standards, proposals that address inequities and imbalances or unfairness often do end up on the governmental agenda. However, proposals that are considered unfair or incomplete in terms of equity and efficiency usually spark controversy and refusal. In other words, if the public arena not in support of such a proposal, the policy community will follow in its footsteps and deems the proposal as unsatisfactory (Kingdon, 2014).

Thus, value acceptability refers to proposals that are acceptable in the light of values held by members of the policy community. These values include concepts such as equity and efficiency but given the closed nature of the policy process in fragile states, and its lack of transparency, this might not apply to these settings. This demonstrated that the original MSF approach does not refer to circumstances of value acceptability in post-war contexts. Kingdon assumes that policymakers have sufficient time to work out many solutions to a problem. From this can be said that sufficient reasoning exists to suggest that the policy community have less of a significant role in decision-making of alternative proposals when it comes to

states in crisis. The notion that leaders in these settings are expected to make swift and disclosed decisions indicates that alternatives are not always being considered within policy community platforms (Ackrill, Kay, & Zahariadis, 2013).

- Lastly, efficiency is critical for the survival of a proposal and the unavoidable question over whether the benefits of a particular proposal justify the costs is extremely relevant for members of the policy community to take into account. Meaning, if any proposal is not affordable it is more than likely to not be considered, regardless of its relevance or necessity

With regards to efficiency, higher education proposals in post-conflict countries depend extensively on foreign aid, grants and loans (Milton, 2018). In terms of donor support modalities several studies concluded, that many fragile states are in need of government led aid effectiveness groups to inform donor priorities (OECD, 2011). As yet, fragile governments depend extensively on the international community, and their energy and resources have been most directed at basic education. Thus, the other sub-sectors with insufficient resources, that is required for a proposal to sustain (Heleta, 2017).

Next to foreign aid, efficiency in the function of development partners is equally as important. It essential that a system entails balance between change and continuity. Given the complex system of higher education, the policy reform of higher education in a conflict-affected context, may consist of incremental problem-specific decisions. In other words, policymakers may draft higher education proposals that they consider as safe and realizable in a short period of time. In many conflict-affected settings human capital is likely to be extremely low, due to an out flow of skilled individuals (Denney & Wild, 2011). It therefore is crucial that alternative proposals prioritize skill development that is linked to sustainable development and recovery of the system and career pathways, as this will decrease national dependence on foreign aid in the longer run (Ratcliffe, 2009). The overarching deduction is that whichever donor modalities are proposed, they should enable progressive country leadership and sector governance and accountability arrangements, for any sustainable solution (OECD, 2011).

To sum up, a successful proposal is one that goes through the motion of 'softening up' and adheres to all three criteria explained above. Therefore, the availability of sustainable policy solutions in a post-war setting depend on: technical feasibility in terms of policy prioritization; value acceptability that is affected by a crisis; sufficient financial donor support that is needed for a sustainable solution, as well continuity and change in the higher education system through progressive leadership and accountability arrangements. Moreover, because of poor governance and political instability in fragile settings, organizational fragmentation is unavoidable. This is expected to lead to rigid institutions and accordingly the process of 'softening up' is likely to be longer.

2.3.4 POLICY ENTREPRENEURS

Individual policy entrepreneurs are critical to the establishment of policy streams. Kingdon describes policy entrepreneurs as follows:

‘Policy entrepreneurs are people willing to invest their resources in return for future policies they favor. They are motivated by combinations of several things: their straightforward concern about certain problems, their pursuit of such self-serving benefits as protecting or expanding their bureaucracy's budget or claiming credit for accomplishment, their promotion of their policy values, and their simple pleasure in participating (Kingdon, 2014, p. 204).

Ultimately, whatever their positions may be, their roles include persuading others in the policy sector to support certain policy ideas and proposals (Kingdon, 2014). As Weible and Cairney (2017) put it, it all comes down to timing and luck when making a policy case, however, policy entrepreneurs know how to influence timing and create their own luck.

While the important role of policy entrepreneurs in a highly diverse and competitive policy environment of a modern democracy is undeniable, this may not be the case in policy systems of conflict-affected environments. It is important to realize that the role of the policy entrepreneur in a conflict-affected setting is most likely limited due to high levels of instability within and outside the government (Nicolai, 2009). Therefore, by considering policy entrepreneurship in these settings, requires additional understanding of the concepts community engagement and local ownership.

Winthrop and Matsui (2013) discuss in their working paper on education in fragile states, that the critical role of community engagement cannot be emphasized enough. The prioritization of education by individuals and communities can at times serve as the agents of change during and after conflict. ‘As stated by Nicolai (2009): local stakeholder - principals, teachers, students and parents - can play an important role’ as drivers of policy change (p.47) In contrast to modern democracies, supporting education in post-conflict settings often takes great resourcefulness and personal courage. It is often believed that reconstructing higher education systems is a complex process that requires technical assistance from external agents (such as UN, the World bank and NGO's).

For that reason, Milton (2018) further points out that “national and local ownership” is a key asset. In some conflict-affected environments, higher educational reforms have been implemented without meaningful local ownership². In the context of high donor influence in post-conflict, this has often led to tension. To put it differently, foreign higher education models and policies will be transferred by external forces that have little knowledge of local context and what

² This notion refers to the degree to which policy change is led by domestic forces (Milton, 2018).

is needed for a sustainable higher education system of assistance of external agents (Milton, 2018). Collier (2007) purposes a number of suggestions, but reasons that the most significant reforms come from within. Many experts argue, that the best way to achieve meaningful ‘ownership’, is through government departments and through NGOs operated by national specialists (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Ghani and Lockhart (2007) correspondingly support the argument by stating that:

Good governance depends on a credible path of upward social mobility for young people; this path cannot be created without in-country investment in institutions of higher learning that provide the leaders and managers that would constitute the key constituency for change and make the state, market and civil society function (Milton, 2013, p. 96).

In summary, in order to understand the role of policy entrepreneurs it is necessary to consider the significance of local agents, and the resourcefulness of external agencies' participation. Therefore, it is appropriate to argue, that local and national ownership is a necessary condition for the role of policy entrepreneurs in fragile settings, but not sufficient for positive change. Thus, in accordance to this notion, policy entrepreneurs are more likely to couple the three streams when they are more persistent and build sustainable coalitions through national and external agents. However, without meaningful national ownership, it is challenging for policy entrepreneurs to achieve sustainable and applicable future policies they advocate for.

2.3.5 POLICY WINDOW AND THE COUPLING OF THE STREAMS

What follows, is the operational roles of policy windows and their detailed interpretation. The concept known as a ‘policy window’ is the “the result of an iterative process between problems, solutions, actors and events.” (Natali, 2004, p. 1080)’. Policy windows are extremely significant because they are usually established when all three streams integrate. Therefore, when a problem is recognized, a solution is thereby constructed and encouraged by a policy entrepreneur leading to a political change that allows for a shift in policy. This event explains the moment in which proposals are linked to political constraints, and others are introduced once the agenda alters. With this in mind, it is key to note that the policy window is open for a very brief period in which all the different streams join and are fully integrated (Kingdon, 2014).

It is important to take into consideration, that conflict is often coupled with unique challenges for educational policymakers and practitioners. Collier (2007) further notes that although conflict and post-conflict situations: “typically start out with very poor governance and policies, they are highly fluid: change is easy.” (p.151). This flexibility has facilitated a great deal of latitude for those that were keen to change the status quo. Path departing changes in conflict-affected settings were particularly generated through strong leaders, together with clear plans and

the ability to mobilize great support (Milton, 2018).

Moreover, the coupling process offers an understanding of how the significance of the ‘window of opportunity’ paved the way for policy entrepreneurs to push their problem conceptions, political forces and proposals into the stage known as ‘choice opportunity’. The result of which relies on how the components are mixed and joined. The agenda is affected increasingly by both the political and problems stream while the other options are usually influenced by the policy stream itself (Kingdon, 2014). It is paramount to be apprehensive of the concept that windows can in fact be unpredictable. Referring to the unpredictable part of the policy window, what happens is that the joining of streams is not planned for and it coerces the government to move towards one trajectory rather than the other. This is precisely why it is crucial to examine the perceived window as it can lead to major consequences (Kingdon, 2014).

Along these lines, a powerful change in policy regardless of its setting will most likely happen when problems, policy proposals and political streams follow through from one another in an unambiguous package (Kingdon, 2014).

Each of key conceptual parts that are related to conflict-affected settings have been translated into the essential parts as described in Figure 1 below. The translation of contextual factors in each of the streams will provide a better understanding of how an increased probability of change in a conflict-affected environment is likely to happen.

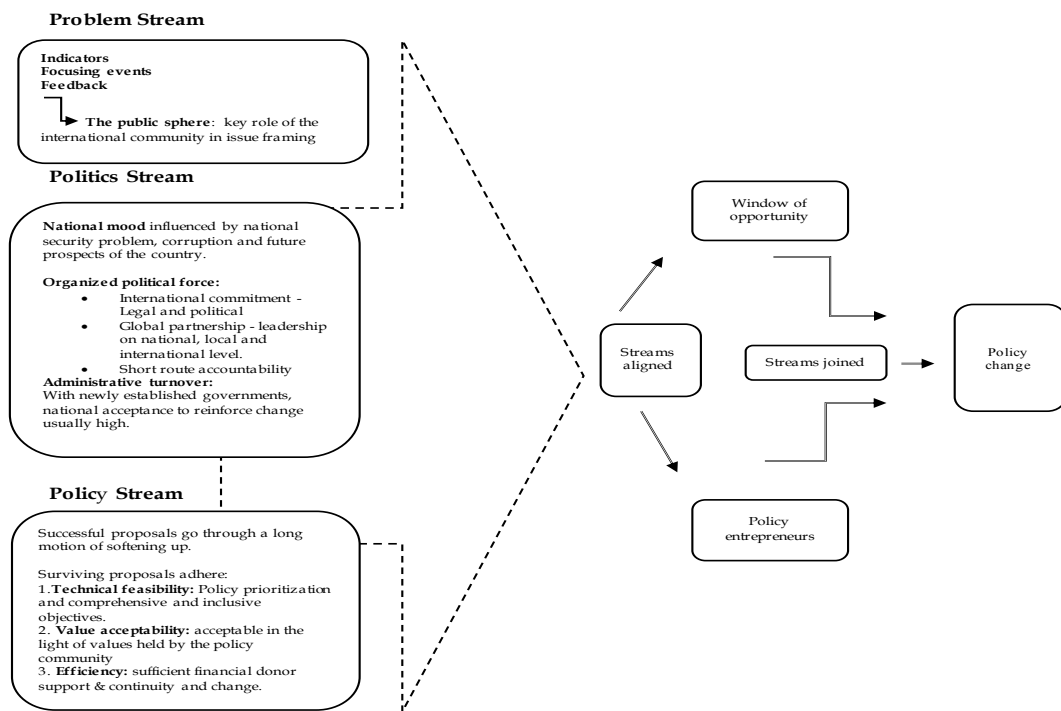


Figure 1: Overview of the multiple streams Framework of policy change in the context of conflict-affected settings.

3 Methodology

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a detailed description and justification for the research methodology implemented within this study. The aim of this study is to test to the applicability of the MSF in conflict settings. Therefore, this chapter will first provide a brief explanation of the method used in order to test this study's objective. It will be followed by a reasoning of the case selection and why higher education reform in Afghanistan serves as a compatible case to test and examine the usefulness of the MSF in conflict-affected settings. Since this methodology consists of single case study analysis, the scope to generalize will be limited. In order to strengthen the external validity of the study process tracing method will be applied. This chapter will further elaborate, how this method will aid research to make strong within case causal inferences about causal mechanisms. Afterwards, the collection of empirical material will be discussed. In addition, this chapter will define the operationalization process of the five elements of theory that require operationalization into measurable indicators. Overall this chapter offers an in-depth discussion of the potential limitations of this particular research.

3.2 METHOD

In order to analyze how policy change occurs in conflict-affected settings, an in-depth case study approach will be utilized. In general terms, a policy process can involve numerous actors from different and contradicting views. These different actors can consist of different interest groups, levels of government, external agencies, legislative and researchers. Consequently, it can be quite complex to investigate how the policy came about. An unavoidable criticism of complexity, is that complexity can make results of a study less certain. However, King, et al. (1994) debates that uncertainty does not make a research less scientific.

With regards to uncertainty, Gerring (2004) emphasizes on accuracy and thorough consideration. He argues that due to the intricacy of evaluation principles, there is always a risk of the case not being representative, and that scientists should consider the interference of biased and subjective factors altering an analyses discourse.

In addition, once again one of the frequently mentioned limitations of the PT applied to within-case research designs, is that the findings of the causal-effect relationship will be limited to that case only. Conversely, Kay and Baker (2015) debate that a closer look on this matter reveals, that single case studies can be sufficient in providing valid explanations. Case studies are particularly

comparable to a population of similar cases using common theoretical framework.

Considering this, one of the objectives of this study is to generalize its findings to other conflict-affected environment environments by using a common theoretical framework, the MSF. As Daxner (2010) suggests:

A common trend across many post-conflict environments is the demand for higher education. Of course, there are enormous differences in the sheer quantities and socio-geographical challenges, and also are there significant cultural differences. But these differences do not hinder a solid comparison, by which we can find that certain structures of post-war higher education are comparable (p.4).

Given the fact that there are many commonalities and shared experiences across post-war settings, strengthens the causal relationship with higher education (Milton, 2018). Clear paratamers therefore serve as the crucial component of the research. As the MSF is built on universal concepts, makes it the ultimate theory in meeting the established objectives of this research.

Although there are indeed commonalities across a variety of cases, different case-specific empirical observations still exist on how the policy process actually works, and the circumstances in which policy changes are enabled. As claimed by (Popper, 1982) that “all swans are white” is not the most appropriate inference to case research. In other words, scientists cannot be certain that the entire population of swans are white in color (Wikfeldt, 2016). Therefore, this study aims to prove that if the MSF is likely to explain process of policy change in a post war country, it is likely to be the case in other conflict-affected settings as well.

3.3 CASE SELECTION

This study performs a theoretical analysis of the higher education sector change in Afghanistan through an in-depth case study of the policy change process. As discussed by Zainal (2007), case selection is a crucial part of empirical research as it largely sets out the degree to which the findings of the selected case can be generalized to the larger target population. It is therefore important to first to justify the case selection, namely the adoption of the Higher Education Strategic Plan 2010-2014 in Afghanistan.

While education has been a prevalent topic of scholarly debate, its implication has often been neglected in conflict-affected settings. In addition to that, the evaluation of the higher education sector has generally been neglected in terms of research and policy. As yet, very little is known on how higher education policy change occurs in fragile countries (Milton & Barakat, 2016).

An important reason why previous studies’ work on the policy process of higher education falls short, is due to its nonlinearity. A nonlinear process assumes that the world is a web of complex incentives, constraints and connections. This

poses complexity when examining higher education in a specified conflict setting, whereby rapid and turbulent change is more than often an inevitable component (Davies, 2003). Especially, considering the contemporary nature of multi-level governance, many scholars extensively pointed to the need of reflecting policy change processes from a multi-level perspective with a range of actors involved (Hooghe & Marks, 2001).

To advance the literature, the research conducted in this study aims to explain that the agenda setting aspect of the MSF provides a “universal language” that could help explain the policy change process of higher education in a conflict-affected setting. In order to achieve this objective, this study has chosen a case that differs significantly from western democracies but has the power to establish clear parameters that could easily apply to other conflict-affected cases. This helps to provide further explanation on how the policy process differs in western and conflict-affected settings.

An in-depth analysis of the policy change process of the higher education sector in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime, is a particularly useful one. When considering the higher education transformation process in Afghanistan, the extent of complexity and progress within the environment make it a compelling case to further comprehend.

The process of policy change began in 2002, and the first higher education strategic plan was adopted in 2009. This policy substance was the first document that reflects on vision, mission and values, strategies and interventions, in terms of a national consensus on higher education policies (NHESP II, 2009). The selection of this policy substance therefore provides an interesting case for the analysis of the MSF. The different elements of the MSF, allow for comprehensive guide to unpack how the Higher Education Strategic Plan II came about, in terms of opportunities, agenda setting, actors and political environment. Although Afghanistan has much to achieve in order to solidify the quality and broadness of higher education which are the hallmarks of its objectives, its successes until now are impressive and the lessons derived from it are valuable (Hayward, 2015). In this regard, one could argue that if the MSF can provide a substantial guide to explaining the policy outcomes of higher education in Afghanistan, it could also potentially apply to other conflict-affected settings. The following section will present further explanation on how the selected case study will be examined.

3.4 POLICY PROCESS TRACING

According to Sabatier and Weible (2007), in order to have a better understanding of the complexity of the policy process, the researcher should construct a straightforward approach to the situation. Therefore, in order to provide a better understanding and simplify the policy change process, the policy-process tracing is an appropriate methodological model. Process tracing has emerged as an influential method of tracing causal mechanisms in qualitative social science

research, most particularly in within-case empirical analysis (George & Bennett, 2005).

Policy-process tracing (PT) method offers several methodological advantages, including building and testing theories of policy change over time. By tracing mechanisms over time, the method provides answers to the problem of complexity in policy studies. In other words, policy outcomes cannot be studied in isolation; instead, they require an examination of a condensed web of relationships concerning states, the private sector, civil society organizations and individuals as well as an analysis of their collective influences (Kay & Baker, 2015). Here, the understanding of the complex interplay of actors and contextual factors poses a great challenge. 'Nevertheless, Checkel (2006) is of the view, that even in a research environment of fragile settings of poor, fragmented and incommensurable data, the PT method can still provide a "how-we-come-to-know nuts and bolts for mechanism-based accounts of social change [and directs] one to trace the process in a very specific, theoretically informed way.'" (Checkel, 2006, p. 365)'. For all of these reasons, an exploratory, in-depth research involving many views point and multiple paths of causal processes linked with outcomes, would be a suitable approach to the research question concerning the policy change process higher education sector in Afghanistan.

The process- tracing method was initially established in the 1970s. The theory was initially clearly constructed by George and Bennett in their book: *Case Studies and Theory Development in Social Sciences*. Nevertheless, Beach and Pedersen (2011) argue in their article: *What is process tracing actually tracing?* that yet little progress has been made in the development of PT methodology. The confusion appears to mostly lie on what kind of mechanism PT is actually tracing. Their main argument is that the conclusion about the PT methodology can be easily cleared up by differentiating the method into three distinct variants: theory-testing PT, theory-building PT and explaining outcome PT.

As this study aims to explain that the agenda setting aspect of MSF provides a "universal language" that could help explain the policy process of higher education sector change in a conflict-affected setting, the first variant discussed is most applicable. Theory-testing PT provides a deductive approach in which a researcher conducts a study based on an existing theory, a single case study is selected which thereby tests whether the hypothesized causal mechanisms are present or not. The other two variants however, are not inclusive of generalizable theories and also denounce the capacity to trace causal mechanisms. More details on the theory-testing PT will be given in the next section.

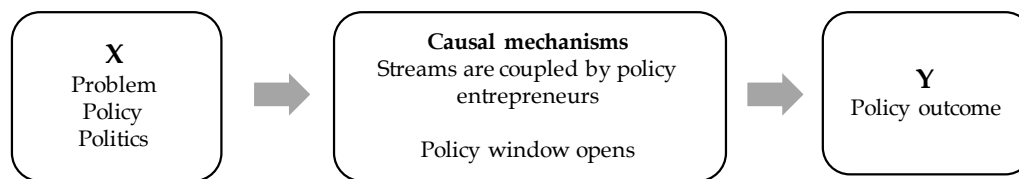
3.4.1 THEORY- TESTING PT

In order to explain the policy process of higher education transformation the emphasis will be put on the causal mechanisms from the existing theorization of the MSF. 'According to Beach and Pedersen (2011) "causal mechanisms describe

both the initial condition of a causal process and the outcome, but, equally important, the theoretical mechanism in between X and Y that produces the outcome” (p., 9).’

In order to identify the causal mechanisms, a deductive and inductive path will be used, that is linked to theory-testing. Conceptualization in this case is a deductive exercise, in which logical reasoning formulates a causal mechanism. However, in practice, theory-testing also has inductive elements, particularly concerning the operationalization of the empirical examinations. To put it differently, in order to determine if the theory is indeed valid, this study draws on existing empirical work to make case-specific empirical predictions (Beach & Pedersen, 2011).

The theory-testing research design consists of three steps: conceptualization, the development of a set of observable indicators and operationalization. To begin with, the first step of theory-testing PT is to conceptualize a conceivable mechanism. In this case, it is important to determine whether the MSF can provide an explanation of the policy outcome. The following figure outlines how the MSF is conceptualized as a mechanism.



As the figure shows the three different streams will be identified as different explanatory variables X. The components of policy entrepreneurs and policy window will be conceptualized as causal mechanisms, which when incorporated with the (Xs) result in a policy outcome (Y). The policy outcome in this case is conceptualized as the National Higher Education Strategic plan (NHESP II) 2010-2014 established in 2009. This has been further conceptualized as a major reform. This signifies change that is feasible and targeted at a policy level. In general, a reform is required to have progressive and positive intent, even if such attributes are not found within the policy result itself (Nicolai, 2009)

The next phase involves developing a set of predicted observable manifestations for each piece of the causal mechanism. That being said, the core of theory-testing PT is a clearly defined empirical test of whether a hypothesized causal mechanism exists in the evidence provided of a selected case. This is followed by the collection of empirical material in order to figure out if predicted observable manifestations are present or not. In this case, if substantial evidence is found, we can assume that the hypothesized causal mechanism is present in the study.

The final step entails the mechanism being conceptualized and operationalized. This study will collect the empirical evidence that is employed to

construct causal inferences which thereby validates our certainty in step one; whether the expected mechanism was present in the case, and step two whether the mechanism worked as predicted, or whether there were only some components of the mechanisms that were present.

It is important to note that theory is of prioritization, which is then enhanced by rigorous empirical analysis of singles where evidence has to be collected in an accurate manner, which intends to determine whether the evidence put forward by the theorized mechanism is truly present within the case. If it turns out that there is not sufficient evidence or that it is unattainable to test whether a hypothesis is true or false, the study will not denounce the whole theory. This is due to the fact that it is too extensive to produce such a conclusion on a single case study, as the theory has already demonstrated valuable contributions in the comprehension of policy change in western democracies. However, I will be rejecting the notion that the theory can be translated into cases that are centered on conflict-affected environments.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

3.5.1 DATA COLLECTION

The collection of empirical material will be guided by the MSF, with each of the five elements of the framework requiring different set of empirical material.

The empirical material collected will mainly consist of primary documents. These documents will consist of relevant websites, documents and reports from the World Bank, ADB, USAID, UNESCO, UN, UNDP, HRW, MoHE,³ and institutions and NGOs concerning higher education at the time of Karzai Administration. The strength of including primary sources is that they present information on what different actors have discussed in a specified time frame and is therefore difficult to retract at a later period. As these strengths are available in the documents used for the analysis, it becomes plausible to detect how the policy process in of higher education transformation was and why certain alternatives were favored over others. They also provide further explanation on when it took place and what the situation in Afghanistan was like.

Solely relying on primary documentations has its downfalls. This is because the documents may not be of objective sources. In order to triangulate my data collection, this study will make use both national and international sources, to be certain valid sources are included. Another downfall that is important to highlight, is that the period right after the fall of the Taliban was marked by a fear of resurgence of the Taliban due to its unstable environment. For that reason, the lack of written accounts may be due to the participants living in an environment of instability, therefore leading to a reluctance in disclosing accurate information on

³ These actors were directly involved in the policy change process, and therefore their reports offer first-hand accounts of the higher education situation in Afghanistan.

controversial topics. Respondents exposed to potential physical threats and a jeopardization of their careers could lead to incomplete responses from the policy community. It can therefore be deduced that the closed nature of the Afghan policy environment and its lack of transparency in decision making processes, led to the anticipation of scarce information on the policy community itself (Taheryar, 2017)

For these reasons, the analysis of the different elements will also include secondary sources to provide context and clarification, such as research that deals with further explanation of higher education sector development. Secondary sources can also address the variety of actors and their attitudes considering the context and the issues in the policy process. In order to provide a clear understanding of the policy process, secondary sources will mostly include articles and books written by actors that had first-hand experience in the process. These actors include: Senior advisor for the Higher Education Project and the Ministry of Higher education of Afghanistan, Fred M. Hayward, former MoHE Mohammad S. Fayez, and Deputy Minister Babury of Academic Affairs at Afghanistan's MoHE, Osman Babury.

Furthermore, this study will take 2001 as its point of departure. The reason to start from this date, is because this research aims to examine what the trajectory of higher education system has been during the Karzai Administration. Afghanistan was in isolation before the fall of the Taliban, and doors of opportunity only opened after Taliban's defeat. At the same time, the first democratic president Ahmad Karzai was elected and the reconstruction of the country began (Langari, 2017). The reason to stop at 2010, is because by then second National higher education plan was adopted and this period is expected to provide enough documents as well as evaluations on the policy change process. For reason of a lack of time and space, this study does not deal with all the different higher education developments, but only those that were of significance for the policy outcome. The material used for each of the five elements of the theoretical framework will be more closely presented in the section 'operationalization'.

3.5.2 OPERATIONALIZATION

As stated in the previous sections, this study attempt to test whether the MS framework is sufficient in explaining the process of the policy outcome. In order to do so, the five separate elements of the theory require operationalization into measurable indicators. The objective of this section is to present the reader with information of how each of the components have been operationalized into measurable factors and what type of material has been adopted in order to examine the expectations of the theory in question.

The Problem Stream

As outlined in the theoretical framework, the problem stream focuses on why some problems capture policy-makers attention and get placed on the agenda of the government, and other do not. According to the MSF there three systematic methods that deliver information to policymakers: statistical indicators, focusing events and credible feedback on existing policies (Kingdon, 2014).

According to Cairney and Zahariadis (2016) "Indicators are devices that describe or measure social conditions" (p.14). If Kingdon (2014) is indeed right in claiming that policymakers and the public become aware of a problem through indicators, then the higher education advocates should select a few decisive indicators as a focusing point in their communication campaigns. In order to capture whether this assisted in raising awareness of the problems concerning higher education, this study will focus on the framing strategies of higher education advocates.

A minor departure of original model is the meaningful role of the international community (Hayward, 2008). Many experts have argued, that the understanding of both the need of information sharing as well as the importance of participatory processes require a change of mindset, which is not achievable in a short period of time. It is therefore expected that national actors will not have a decisive role in the policy debate, but rather have an informative role. One of the roles of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and the Afghan team members is to collect data and information, evaluate the situation of higher education and inform other international partners as well as the people of Afghanistan (MoHE, 2004).

For that reason, I will analyze development report by international agencies and organization, to determine whether these actors provided feedback on how the higher education sector was functioning. It has been assumed that the international community such as the UN, UNESCO, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), USAID and different think tanks etc., provide statistics in their reports on how higher education situation in Afghanistan is. Such report usually also provides recommendations and thoughts on how policy-makers should deal with higher education issues. The primary documents utilized from the international community are the following:

- UNESCO 2002 report: *Revitalizing education, the key to Afghanistan's future.*
- Human Right Watch 2002 report: *Repression of Women and Girls in Western Afghanistan.*
- Asian Development Bank 2003 report: *A new start for Afghanistan's education sector.*
- The World Bank 2005 report: *Technical Annex for Strengthening Higher Education Program.*

- The World Bank 2005: *National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction- The Role of Women in Afghanistan's future.*

Furthermore, as presented by Kingdon (2014), more attention is allocated to things we value and indicators that impact more people stand a higher chance of becoming public discussion. If the policy discourse is indeed driven by a focusing event, I expect this to be clearly mentioned in the primary as well as secondary documents analyzed.

The third factor that contributes to raising attention to a problem is according to the MSF feedback on existing policies. According to Dudley (2013), actors present narrative current problems to the effect of past policies. It is therefore likely that the process of feedback would require more nuance than is expected from a western democracy. As the public sphere of a western democracy encompasses a legitimate, inclusive and transparent system, that informs the public of its undertakings, we cannot expect the same from a fragmented and incomplete policy system, such as the one in a post-war setting (Von Kaltenborn-Stachau, 2008). Nevertheless, this does not mechanically indicate that feedback on the higher education situation cannot be presented in a different manner. It is more probable that feedback is presented as a reflection of recent political history, or comparison to higher education development of surrounding countries, and not per se as a direct reflection of existing policies of the government.

Alongside systemic approaches, feedback can also be formulated through informal channels (Kingdon, 2014). As argued by Fuller (2003), educated youth are crucial in challenging the status quo, as was the case during the Arab Spring. However, as the policy debate on higher education was mainly donor-driven, I do not expect them to have a significant role with regard to problem formulation.

The Political Stream

According to Kingdon (2014) the policy stream refers to a broad political dialogue, in which policymakers actually have the incentive and opportunity to turn the proposal into an actual policy. Policymakers supplement their own beliefs with their perception one three key concepts: the national mood and the feedback they receive from organized political forces and administrative or legislative turnover.

The national mood will be operationalized by exploring numerous factors that are influenced by a fragile environment and could potentially influence people perception and supports towards higher education issues within Afghanistan. These factors include: the national security problem, corruption and future prospects. If these factors indeed influence the national mood, I would expect the public to express their concerns and how this altered their attitude towards higher education reconstruction. People's perception on higher education reconstruction will be measured by a 2012 the Asian Foundation report: *A survey of the Afghan people.*

Together with the perception of the public, the national mood is also likely

to be subjective to the perceptions of the international community. As such, the analysis of the national mood will also include a 2006 report by the HRW, the 2003 ANB report (mentioned in the previous section) and the National Higher Strategic Plan I. As these documents clearly express the general attitude towards higher education and the government's competences, enables the study to measure the national mood.

The second key concept of the political stream is the support of parties and interest groups. The basic idea is, that interest group pressure, political mobilization, and the behavior of political elites build the way people in and around the government analyze the level of consensus or disagreement (Kingdon, 2014). As highlighted in the theoretical framework, in order to understand role of organized political forces in the context of conflict-affected environments, it is important to understand the concept of political will. In order to operationalize the position of organized political forces, this study will measure three interrelated concepts, namely, commitment, leadership and responsiveness (Rose & Greeley, 2006).

Commitment refers to the level of consensus including political parties or states. In the context of higher education goals, this can be either legal or political. Goals and targets, such as those associated with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations, can be a part of the political commitment. It is anticipated that the reconstruction of the higher education sector involves an increasing involvement of the international community in achieving these commitments. By 2008, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) was established by a joint effort of the Afghan government and by external donors. This national development strategy, serves as primary policy substance to reach specific MDGs. Beside political commitments, this document also included legal commitments, such as human rights, including gender equity in all sectors of Afghanistan. For that reason, when analyzing the National Higher Education Strategic Plan II, it is most likely that the political climate is positive towards reaching both political and legal commitments in the higher education sector.

Another important aspect that can play an important role in reaching consensus among different political forces, is the importance of leadership (Rose & Greeley, 2006). In many cases, national leaders or international champions can serve as the drivers of change. In an ideal situation, these two actors would work together to support to process of reform, but in the context of a post-war Afghanistan such relationship are expected to be fragmented and require efforts in the early phases of recovery (Wardak, 2004). For that reason, this study will also carefully analyze what lack of leadership resulted in, and whether this influenced the decision-making process.

Ultimately, Responsiveness entails relationship of accountability between citizens and their government and education providers. In the majority of conflict-affected settings, responsiveness is materialized when the demand is loud and expressed enough to necessitate responses from decision makers (Rose & Greeley,

2006). This long-route of accountability, is likely not to be in place in Afghanistan. I will therefore examine whether accountability measures were taken, in order to prevent citizens from taken the 'short-route' directly between communities and non-state education providers.

Next to the national mood and the influence of organized political forces, electoral turnover often leads to drastic agenda change. In the case of Afghanistan, the fall of the Taliban made room for the first democratic elections. As experience in conflict-affected countries has taught us; that even though the period of a new government can be of great difficulty, there is a moment of opportunity (Ghani & Lockhart, 2008). As cited earlier, the aftermath of war in Afghanistan has taken its toll on the political system of Afghanistan. It is therefore appropriate to assume that the national acceptance with regards to early global partnership was in place. This study will therefore unpack whether a positive political climate for higher education change was created through national and international partnership.

The Policy Stream

According to the MSF, many policy solutions go through the process of softening up in order to be taken seriously by the policy community. This process adheres three criteria such as: technical feasibility, value acceptability and efficiently of anticipated costs. The underlying assumption with this process is that actors that push for alternatives (policy entrepreneurs) present their ideas by circulating papers, publishing articles, holding hearings, presenting testimony, and drafting and pushing legislative proposals (Kingdon, 2014). In order to pin down whether alternative proposals were accepted within the policy communities due to the above mentioned three criteria, a document analysis will be implemented. This study will therefore analyze the argumentation relating to the functionality of the policy with a detailed focus on time, financial costs and efforts.

The first and the most important documents I will analyze is the National Higher Education Strategic Plan I 2004-2008 and II 2010-2014. The reason I have chosen analyze these documents, is because this study aims to determine the mechanisms that led to NHESP II. As these documents are produced by new established government, it outlines how the Afghan Government's overall higher education strategy could be enhanced. It further outlines how international agencies such as UNESCO and IIEP could support the MoHE in building planning and management capacity and the creation of national consensus on educational policy. The questions I will keep in mind when analyzing the documents in term of technical feasibility are the following:

- Whether the documents discuss that once a proposal is implemented will it achieve what it actually should achieve?
- Is the proposal worked out in detail, including potential drawbacks and what type of government actions are needed that could enable departure from the status quo?

It is expected that an alternative proposal should consist of a realistic plan on how to resolve the policy problem that is coupled with aspects of a crisis environment. Hence, it is therefore likely that the 'surviving' proposals include a comprehensive and inclusive higher education reconstruction programme that overcomes previous higher education grievances in Afghanistan.

The second focusing point, value acceptability, indicate that the policy proposal has to be in line with the ideological values held by the members of the policy community. It is here important to note, that governments in a conflict-affected environment have a less functioning policy community. Meaning, that the aftermath of war is usually coupled with fragmented ideological values that could alter the process of acceptability of proposals. It could for that reason be assumed, that the policy community has less of a significant role when it comes to states in crisis. In these environments, policymakers are at times expected to make swift and disclosed decisions, indicating that alternatives are not being considered within policy community platforms (Ackrill, Kay, Zahariadis, 2013).

It is therefore consequent to assume, that fragile governments depend extensively on the international community in regards to value acceptability of higher education. Thus, it is anticipated the selected documents to highlight how the Afghan government called for assistance of international agencies. Moreover, since value acceptability is directly related to domestic political factors in conflict-affected environments, I expect the process of softening up be to longer.

The final criteria, efficiency, refers to the idea that proposals are likely to not be considered if it is not affordable. It is foreseeable that many conflict-affected states are heavily in need of government led aid and international financial support. The term efficiency does not only relate to direct cost, but also anticipated costs (Kingdon, 2014). Meaning, that a proposal should be efficient enough to deliver sustainable results and reforms. It is therefore contemplated that the proposals that could lead to higher education reform, should at least include how the international community is financially going to assist in terms of continuity through progressive leadership and accountability. The documents are also expected to include what resources are need and how management and finance of higher education in Afghanistan be reformed.

Policy entrepreneur

According to the MSF, policy entrepreneurs are vital to link solutions to problems. In order to find out whether these policy entrepreneurs were successful in linking solutions to problems, The NHESP I and II will again be the primary documents analyzed. The documents provide some relevant information on who firstly initiated policy alternatives regarding higher education sector reform. I therefore forecast these documents to provide sufficient information on the role of the main policy entrepreneurs.

However, it is important to mention, that this element of the theory will be hardest to test. The original model is testing in a competitive policy environment

of a modern democracy; hence their role is undeniable and due to consistent documentation easier to identify (Nicolai, 2009). Although actors may acknowledge the need for higher education sector change, meaningful local ownership is a key asset (Milton, 2018). In other words, their advocacy need clarity of intent, otherwise cannot be proved as a true policy entrepreneur. As a consequence, supporting higher education in a fragile context is possible to take great resourcefulness and personal courage.

A final point to consider, is that lack of trust in the Afghan system is expected to reduce the chance of local actors to make commitments or take risks (Babury & Hayward, 2014). At the same time, the reconstruction of higher education is a complex process and thus requires technical assistance of external agencies (Milton, 2018). Therefore, the role of policy entrepreneurs in this study will be measured by advocacies that entail sustainable partnership between national and external agencies, together with the investment in meaningful local ownership.

Window of opportunity

A powerful change in policy will most likely happen when problems, policy proposals and political streams follow through from one another in an unambiguous package. It is important to acknowledge that windows can in fact be unpredictable. To add, a window could potentially open because the government recognizes the significance of a certain problem that unquestionably needs addressing. The government therefore reaches for an alternative solution when feeling pressured by a specific problem. Finally, the government present ideas that could potentially solve a problem.

As it is already known that the higher education sector in Afghanistan has gone through a transformation despite the structural constraints mentioned in the previous sections, we do expect that the above mentioned independent streams join at integral periods of time, as the MSF predicts. If there is no evidence of the other streams, a policy window will not open according to the MSF.

Therefore, the opening of the window will be operationalized by providing an in-depth examination in order to get a better idea of whether a window opens due to the pressure of a new problem, or due to a shift in the political stream a political, such as a change in office, a political turnover or a shift in political opinion. Nevertheless, although a window can open in a predictable or random way, policy entrepreneurs are expected to be ready to seize the moment, since windows usually stay open for a short period of time.

If it appears that a policy window opens without the evidence of the three streams, then this would indicate a departure of the original notion of the policy windows. This would also suggest that the role of policy entrepreneurs is crucial to keep higher education reconstruction on the political agenda for it to ultimately result in the desired policy outcome.

4 Findings

The aim of this chapter is to examine the structural elements of Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) by applying it to the policy change process of higher education in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban (2001). The MSF determines that adequate policy change is possible when the problem, policy and political stream are joined to create a 'window of opportunity'. This chapter will assess the three independent streams through mapping of events. Such an approach is important in order to develop evidence surrounding both the actors and processes that were critical for the development of the National Higher Education Strategic plan II in 2009.

4.1 THE PROBLEM STREAM

This section aims to present a narrative of findings describing the problem stream. Referring back to the theory, when analyzing the problem stream, one needs to focus on the three main elements, that shape the policy debate- *indicators, feedback and focusing events* (Kingdon, 2014). Decades of war and civil unrest has led to the collapse of the entire higher education system. The fall of the Taliban regime has raised difficult questions for the government. Especially, on how the Afghan government will move forward, given an empty shell that now represents the higher education system (Romanowski, et al. 2007).

From issues facing the higher education sector in post-war Afghanistan, indicators and feedback have been clearly used as a means in the policy discourse. Indicators and feedback cannot operate entirely alone, an acknowledgement of these two elements is necessary in order to move forward with the advocacy process. As the theory predicts, higher education advocates select a few decisive indicators as a key constituent in their communication strategies. Evidently, due to Afghanistan's political situation, the policy debate was highly dominated by donor-driven policy making. As a result, the policy debate was influenced by policy prioritization of these actors and how 'they' framed higher education issues at hand, and not a particular focusing event.

Before moving on to the explanation of the awareness-raising activities, this study will briefly discuss how *the public sphere* was donor driven and required a shift in policy stance, to open doors for renewed attention to the higher education sector of Afghanistan. Next, this section will focus on how indicators have been used by different higher education advocates in order to raise awareness of the critical issues the sub-sector was facing, in the earlier stages of the transitioning government. This section will also explain how feedback has further stimulated the debate, and how the need for higher education reconstruction gained momentum in the policy debate.

4.1.1 THE PUBLIC SPHERE OF DONOR DRIVEN POLICY MAKING

It is first essential to understand, that the government of Afghanistan was aware that higher education is crucial for economic and social benefits. The conditions and importance of higher education has recurrently been mentioned in many policy documents, such as the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and the Afghan Millennium Development Goals (AMDGs). In 2002 former President, Hamid Karzai, expressed his concerns on multiple occasions (UNESCO, 2002; Denney & Wild, 2012). Karzai was of the view that Afghanistan was in need of a basic and feasible vision in all of its sectors. However, as many fragile environments, the Presidency in Afghanistan does not have an independent policy voice.⁴ This consequently did not allow for the president to have an influential role in the policy debate on higher education (Denney & Wild, 2012). Rahela Sidiqi former UN Habitat senior Social Development Advisor maintains, that there were several civil society organizations and intellectuals that were actively involved in raising awareness about the concerns relating to poor quality of higher education and the lack of well-trained teachers. Nevertheless, their communication strategies were not always organized. In addition, publication and the use of internet was limited for their concerns to reach policy and practitioner's attention (Sidiqi, personal communication, 2018).

In July 2002, an Academy for Educational Development organized a conference to create a platform and frame the policy debate concerning higher education issues after the removal of the Taliban regime. Besides NGOs and potential funders, there were several officials of the new government present, including the new minister of higher education, Dr. Sharif Fayez. During this conference, former Minister Dr. Fayez articulated his concerns by emphasizing on how he found the system and the staff in total disarray. Nonetheless, the donor community made it obvious that higher education was not highly prioritized on their agenda (Fayez, 2012).

Considering this, Afghanistan's higher education sector was clearly in need of organized support to place higher education reconstruction on the political agenda. A closer look on this matter reveals, that the higher education sector has generally been a long-neglected one in post-war recovery initiatives. A review of the World Bank education sector illustrates that the tertiary sector only received 14 percent of the bank's total education lending (Buckland, 2005). This typically reflects the situation in Afghanistan, with a high donor dependence. This means, that in such a context, the international communities' voice becomes increasingly important. As most funders placed greater priority on basic education, the direction of the policy debate was accordingly steered. 'In reference to Ghani and Lockhart (2008): "neglect of Afghan higher education post-2001 – was in part

⁴ 'An independent political voice includes: "framing the policy debate; focusing the voices that currently drown out critical policy issues requiring Presidential attention; initiating, formulating, developing, and/or synthesizing cross-cutting policies; managing policy records; and organizing Presidential policy advisers" (Denney & Wild, 2012, p. 26)'.

driven by the UN and the World Bank warning the Afghan government against investment in higher education in favor of primary education—lay behind the failure to revitalize the sector (p.142).’ This effect was also visible in the Media reports, that continued to present the narrative of a stable Kabul, which in turn isolated the Afghan higher education situation from the rest of the world (Hayward, 2015).

4.1.2 INDICATORS

As was mentioned, the policy debate of the higher education sector was predominantly driven, by the usage of indicators to provide a measurement of conditions of higher education in Afghanistan. Because of dependence of the Afghan government on the International community, the higher education sector received little attention until around five years into the rebuilding phase (Daxner & Shrade, 2013). It became apparent that the higher education challenges could not be solved with piecemeal changes. The magnitude and breadth of the problem seemed overwhelming, and attention could no longer be redirected elsewhere. Economic reconstruction, population change, globalization and rapid growth in knowledge, are pressing forces that will affect Afghan society in the coming decades (Hayward, 2015). Higher education advocates had to remain flexible, as policymakers over and under respond to issues over time. It was therefore up to these advocates to frame the higher education system as ‘inefficient’ and the pressing and critical need for an ‘efficient’ system.

The World Bank has been one of the key players in the overall education policy debate. A few years into the transitioning phase, the World Bank signaled a shift in its policy stance, with a renewed attention to higher education. Their campaigning through the use of periodic assessments and regular consultations with the minister opened a new avenue for supporting higher education (Hayward, 2015). Daxner (2009) explains that organizations such as Human Rights Watch, scholars and think tanks at times can act directly by publicizing and creating awareness among policy-makers. They are also known to have played an active role in the problem formulation of higher education in Afghanistan. The following section will provide explicit examples of the most influential indicators used in advocacy campaigns that led to the heightening of the policy debate.

4.1.2.1 DECLINING HUMAN CAPITAL

Both the World Bank and USAID repeatedly framed the importance of higher education in terms of it being crucial to the future of a transitioning country. The World Bank report evaluated by Salimi (2003) in collaboration with USAID details: “In today’s world of rapid societal changes, knowledge-driven economies, and increasing global integration, higher education can make the difference between a dynamic economy and a marginalized one” (Salimi, 2003, p.1). The World Bank further argues that higher education is the highest pillar of education, and therefore sets quality standards for the overall education sector. In order to

incorporate this notion, the World Bank organized a report in 2005 called: *Technical Annex for Strengthening Higher Education Program Afghanistan*. This report was meant to push the government to place higher education within the overall development agenda of the country. It further calls on policymakers to seek for significant opportunities as soon as possible. The World Bank statistics of the year 2000 illustrate, that the emigration rate of skilled individuals is 23 percent, which is high, given the fact that the share of higher educated people is already low (World Bank, 2005). The organization underlines that issue of declining human capital is another alarming indicator that Afghan policymakers have to address, to prevent any further damage to human resource development. Research by Tierney (2005) reported similar findings. He concluded that Afghanistan lost 20,000 of its experts and academics through death and displacement.

The overall aim of the World Bank was to make governments grasp that the findings of the World Bank together with other research organizations, present sufficient proof that no post-war country can join the ranks of developing countries, without high-quality higher education systems (World Bank, 2005).

4.1.2.2 GROWTH IN THE DEMAND FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Many experts and NGOs also raised their concerns about the expanding enrollment of university students. The education system has thus far been struggling to cope with the increasing demand, and in return created a major bottleneck. This distress was communicated through several reports and articles. One of such reports was produced by The United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA, 2005). It was estimated that in 2002-2003, around 23 percent of the population (30.6 million) was between the ages of 10 and 19, and this is still expanding (Ibrahimi, 2014). Considering such a high percentage of youth exists within the Afghani population, the higher education sector is a need that can no longer be ignored by policy-makers. As a further illustration of this argument, Rose and Greeley (2006) reason, that if the government does not respond to the increasing demand, especially at the university level, this can be converted to grievances and a source of conflict risk.⁵

Another report was presented by: the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Afghanistan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACA), the World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), the European Community, the USAID, and UNESCO. This report was published in April 2003 to provide policymakers with facts, statistics and advice in developing policies and strategies for educational recovery and reconstruction (ADB, 2003).

In addition, the statistics from the academic year beginning in March 2002, indicate that around 20,000 students applied for admission to universities.

⁵ Frustrations and little faith in the system has occasionally led to successful Taliban recruitment of high school drop-outs.

Nevertheless, given the post- Taliban situation of the universities, less than one third of these applications are likely to be admitted. The ADB (2003) report further highlights that the government no clear established policy that deals with the demand of higher education. As a result, the magnitude of the problem will increase if the government does not redevelop this sub-sector. The statistics provided by the MoHE in 2005 confirmed this expectation and show that the demand for higher education almost doubled in the following years (Milton, 2018).

4.1.2.3 A SIGNIFICANT DECLINING SHARE OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND NO OPPORTUNITIES

The ADB report (2003) also framed the reconstruction of the higher education as an important issue of equity, in terms of gender and access. This report shed light on the severity of the issue, by presenting the most informed statistics assembled by UNESCO. This report explains that as a result of the Taliban regime, higher education provision was limited. This result is particularly for women (as they were not allowed to be educated) and students of rural areas. Moreover, this report further urges policymakers to develop policies that are necessary to attract women back into universities, as the group only brings together 19 percent of the total higher education participation - much lower than the 40 percent enrollment in 1990 (ADB, 2003). The statistics show the extreme difference of the female-male ratio, and how female students are decreasing in higher levels of education.

Correspondingly, the Human Right Watch (HRW) and the World Bank (2005 report: *The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*) also contributed to raising awareness on the role of women. The HRW report is a systematic effort by playing an intermediary role in bridging the voices and concerns a broad cross-section of stakeholders. In one of the reported interviews a higher education official expressed: "Now, most girls don't try to go to faculties where there is no chance of work. Before, there were many girls studying to be civil engineers and there were government jobs available." Denying women and girls the opportunity to use their studies in effect makes a mockery of the right to education". (HRW,2002, p. 43) This report clearly aims to show that equity is not just a matter of higher education access, but also long-term opportunities after graduation. Moreover, the HRW also urged the Karzai administration to publicly announce through radio, print, and other media outlets, their support of women and girls and the importance of equality, especially in higher education.

4.1.3 FEEDBACK

According to the MSF, policymakers can also learn about problems through feedback on existing policies. As explained earlier, the Afghan higher education sector did not have established policies yet. Therefore, advocates for change had to use other ways to present that Afghanistan is considered to be lagging behind

when it comes to higher education policies. Higher education advocates continuously compare and rank the government's efforts in meeting their reconstruction goals. Many experts and NGOs state that the current higher education system is a disappointment in the Afghan government's perspective. Before the war, the Afghan higher education system was promising and thriving. UNESCO estimates that the enrollment in 1990 was more than 24,000, with women making up one third of the student body.

One of the most significant feedback efforts was initiated by Sara Amiryar and Fred Heyward in 2003. They conducted a focusing group with many stakeholders, including people from different backgrounds and professions. The focus group generally recognized that the higher education sector was of low standards and quality education was to be found elsewhere. The Afghan government has to work really fast and hard to catch up to the global standards (Hayward, 2015).

Feedback was also provided by the World Bank. They reported an assessment in which countries comparable to Afghanistan in terms geographical location were analyzed. The results indicated that only three countries that are in close proximity have lower gross enrollment rates. Countries closest to Afghanistan in terms of capita per income, such a Guinea, Rwanda and Togo, have higher gross enrollment rates (World Bank EdStats). Almost all higher education systems are far ahead of that in Afghanistan, and the Afghan government soon acknowledged that they had to act fast (Hayward, 2015).

In sum, the findings of the problem stream denote that the Afghan post-war higher education sector had no shortage of indicators. Yet, the consequences of war have proven to have profound implications for the functioning of the government in general. This led to a long neglect of higher education in the earlier stages of the country's rebuilding phase, due to many other pressing urgencies. Consequently, policy-making became donor-driven, and as the donor community directed their priority to basic education, the policy debate was accordingly steered. However, the Afghan government and policymakers were continuously confronted with facts and recommendations, through awareness-raising activities. By the selection of a few significant indicators in their activities, (declining human capital, growth in the demand for higher education, and declining share of women participation in higher education), these advocates generated renewed attention to higher education. In addition, feedback on the higher education system, raised awareness that without quality education students would not have the required training to succeed and compete with the rest of the world. As a result, the issue moved up to a higher level on the policy agenda, and the problems at hand were at the right stage of the process for feasible solution to be presented.

4.2 THE POLITICS STREAM

This section will provide an overview of how conflict-affected politics stream influenced the higher education policy change process. It begins by assessing the national mood towards higher education. As outlined in the theory section, the national mood in a post-war setting, is most likely to be influenced by typical post-conflict environmental factors, that influence the public as well as policymaker's ability to turn a proposal into an actual policy. The section on *the national mood* will offer an explanation on how despite conflict environmental factors which are expected to have a negative effect on the national mood, in fact helped facilitate an overall positive attitude towards higher education change. This will be followed by an analysis of impacts on the higher education sector, in terms of external *political forces and administrative turnover*. This intends to illustrate how political currents generated a political climate, which is more receptive to higher education policy change.

4.2.1 THE NATIONAL MOOD

It is of significance to keep in mind, that the national mood in Afghanistan was influenced by the public as well as the international community. Policymakers were confronted by: on the one hand the rising demand of the people and the views of the international community that highly dominate the policy-making process.

With post- conflict environmental factors in mind, Afghanistan has retained many of the spillover effects that confronted the government with myriad challenges (Habib, 2013). First of all, high levels of insecurity and violence broke down the sense of community and many other characteristics that made the academic life so powerful (Babury & Hayward, 2014). The Taliban was well aware that a well-informed society would challenge their regime. Throughout their rule, higher education institutions have been attacked on several occasions (Babury & Hayward, 2014). According to an HRW report, the casualty rate has been evidently high for the international community. In 2005 alone 1600 people died from attacks, and a large share were humanitarian workers (HRW, 2006) Consequently, the atmosphere of the campuses was distorted from that of a safe haven, to one of fear, not just for the Afghan people, but also the international community (Milton, 2018).

Second of all, Afghanistan is constantly ranked near the bottom of the Corruption Perception Index. This is a major blockage when it affects the policy level. With high level of corruption, many donors shied away from projects, because they were of the view that their efforts would be a wastage. The basic idea is that stakeholders can never be sure that the amount they grant, is actually being allocated for what it was meant (Milton, 2018).

These above-mentioned factors have produced a significant loss of trust in the institutional capacity in many conflict-affected countries, in which the national mood creates a negative political climate for change. However, the findings of the

case under analysis illustrate that a loss in trust can lead to two outcomes, either a negative or positive attitude. Factors such as corruption and the national security problem have proven to have an effect on the policy change process in the higher education sector of Afghanistan, but in the end helped to mobilize attitudes in support of change to escape the status quo (Coburn, 2015).

For that reason, this study believes that referring to it as positive would depict a more suitable image of the national mood. The positive public attitude towards higher education can be attributed to Afghanistan's rich heritage of academic excellence. The fall of the Taliban started with very high hopes in the state's capacity to rebuild the higher education system. As expressed by a 12th grade boy in Herat, students recognized the vulnerabilities of the sector such as security, stability and the economy. Hence, it was widespread that the key to success and change is to be found in education. Another student adds, "If education is not valued, encouraged, and enhanced, the country will be [once again] the center for terrorism and drug trafficking" (Hayward, 2008, p.7).

Besides that, the combination of the Taliban's highly restricted ideologies towards education and the international interventions, lead to the highest demand for education in Afghan history (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007). The fact that the Afghan population consists of a large share of young people, the possibility for reaching a significantly large group was strongly acknowledged (Tierney, 2011). It was widely perceived among the people that the government was faced with many challenges, but they also comprehended that the Afghan government had to start from scratch to rebuild the sector. The 2012 Survey of the Afghan people found that 75 percent of the respondents were positive about the Karzai Administration (the Asian Foundation, 2012). An interview conducted by Hayward (2008) with students from Kunduz perfectly demonstrates this notion:

If a child was born 25 years ago, today the only things he or she knows is about war—how to use a gun and how to kill." People were eager for something else. An 11th- grade student in Kunduz put it this way, "We are thirsty for education." Another commented, "The need for education is greater than the need for food. Without education there is not the possibility or opportunity that we can enter the modern world or be part of the international community (p.6).

According to an Asian Development Bank report (2003), the public's commitment to education is a crucial force for the building of the sub-sector. This positive attitude was especially noticeable when despite the total lack of resources, thousands of students and teachers congregated before schools and universities were officially opened. Furthermore, this positive stance toward the policy domain was also constructed by a handful people of the MoHE and a few professionals of the donor community (NHESP, 2004). While the rest of the international community was skeptical in the beginning, their view also changed as more problems reached the surface when the demand for higher education was rising

remarkably. The international community expressed in several events that challenges such as corruption and future prospects can be tackled by investing in human capital. Change comes from a variety of sources, but the most significant ones come within. The Afghan people need to understand the system and develop strong leadership roles, in order to have a functioning system in the first place (Hayward, 2008).

4.2.2 ORGANIZED POLITICAL FORCES

Another element that determines policy-maker's responsiveness to policy solutions, is that of organized political forces. The basic idea is that policymakers carefully study the degree of support for higher education reconstruction in the policy community, before a policy change can be considered appropriate. As discussed in the theory chapter, in order to simplify how political support for the higher education change was constructed, the following part will unpack three interrelated concepts that shape political behavior, mobilization and pressure. The first concept offers an explanation on how *legal and political commitments* facilitates a level of consensus among the higher education goals and stakeholders. The second concept relates to *the importance of leadership* and how weak leadership positions in Afghanistan challenged the policy change process. The final concept concisely describes how *low levels of responsiveness* of the government can result in higher education institutions taking the short route of accountability between communities and non-state education providers.

4.2.2.1 LEGAL AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT

Organized political forces should include a high level of commitment for it to challenge the status quo in post-war countries (Pauline & Greeley, 2006). When contemplating higher education goals, commitments are usually classified as either legal or political or a combination of both. It is important to understand that Afghanistan constitutes a centralized state system, in which institutions have coincided alongside a fragmented society since rethinking about state-building began there (Johnson & van Kalmthout, 2006). There was no legal nor political commitment at place, that could possibly generate consensus on higher education goals. As explained earlier, the policy domain of higher education remained neglected for decades. There was no common view on how state education should be re-designed, in terms of religion and the role of ideology. The Afghan government was in critical need of assistance from the International community, because of their financial resources and guidance to escape the current state (Karlsson & Mansory, 2014).

Nevertheless, the post-Taliban phase allowed for an expanding discussion of new bilateral commitments, that reflects the desire to advance human capacities

and enlarge social opportunities (Hayward, 2015). Since 2001 Bon Agreement⁶, Afghanistan has adopted a new constitution and held its first democratic elections. In this time frame, Afghanistan established local governments. This has been an important step to encourage participation of the public in social, economic and political activities (Lister, 2007).

Moreover, as a follow up of the Bon Agreement in 2001, Afghanistan adopted the MDGs development strategy in 2004. Such a commitment was an extra push for the international and national community to pursue policies that safeguard every individual's rights, freedom, equality a basic standard of living, and freedom from hunger and violence (UN, 2017). Without such a political/legal platform, policymakers would not have been able to consider new approaches to higher education. This study will not go deeply into all of the different legal and political commitments the country pledged to higher education. However, the study will simply demonstrate that it was and is influencing all discourses on the relationship between interveners and intervened.

Of course, much more was needed to rebuild the 'non-existent' higher education system, but these bilateral agreements depicted continuous commitment from both national and international actors. This commitment was mostly directed to making higher education equally accessible to all, on the basis of individual capacity, and not gender or background. This led to impacted policymakers and practitioners in the field to work on bringing forward the importance of equality and equity in the culture of the higher education system (Taheryar, 2017).

4.2.2.2 LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Another important aspect that can enable strong political forces, can be attributed to the role of leadership. Political and informal leadership positions often play a critical role in higher education reforms. Afghanistan was emerging from war, which makes the state capacity practically weak. During the first period of the transitional government, the old traditions of centralized authority became more dominant. This created many obstacles to genuine ownership, which is required for leadership positions in the form of national control and persuasion of higher education policies (Babury & Hayward, 2014).

There are a number of explanations how leadership and political interference in higher education- for both individual institutions and the system as a whole is limited. Firstly, due to the centralized form of the government, those on the top play of the government determine the agenda. The MoHE is the primary leading body that has autonomy over the higher education system whilst also

⁶ Afghanistan developed a roadmap, targets and schedules for the reconstruction of the country through the Bon Agreement; which were directed at key institutions and the preservation of human rights (Human rights watch report, 2002)

functioning as a vital component in the policy making process (MoHE, 2018). At the same time, they often fail to reflect upon the limitations their authority has and at times that they did understand, they chose to see themselves as exceptions (Hayward, 2015).

So, what does that mean for leadership positions? This notion was unpacked into two different effects. On the one hand, besides a weighty shortage in qualified personnel, the small percentage of lower-level leaders were afraid to make decisions. As a result, higher-level officials became overburdened and potentially imperious. On the other hand, some lower level actors did not see the point to advocate for change. An example of this is demonstrated by public higher education institutes which do not have the incentive to create change neither to make decisions independently. In this essence the general idea is that lower level actors could only present recommendations, but whether these recommendations are being considered depends on top-level preferences. These decisions were usually ad hoc and included factors that are knowledgeable and easy to manage (Taheryar, 2017). Moreover, due to bureaucratic hurdles of a hierarchical society, every effort takes a considerable amount of time. According to Hayward (2015) even a simple procedure like getting a transcript can take several days or even a week.

Secondly, Afghanistan has not been documented for having experience in planning. This resulted in somewhat negative feedback by government officials and national stakeholders such as: “we have never done this before, why should we do this? there is no funding, so why bother? Why will it be different this time? Where do we start when everything needs fixing?” (Hayward, 2008, p. 8). This demonstrates, that in contrast to basic education, higher education is a more complex system, that requires a greater level of external financial resources, technical expertise and high-level management (Rose and Greeley, 2006).

4.2.2.3 RESPONSIVENESS

Responsiveness in western democracies usually go through the long-route of accountability, which results in responses from governmental decision makers. The same cannot be said for the policy change process of higher education in Afghanistan. Lack of resources in the rebuilding period of Afghanistan put a greater emphasis on institutional partnerships with the private sector, involving marketing efforts to magnetize donations, gifts and grants (McNerney, 2009). This determines, that the bureaucratic structure in Afghanistan did not allow for a long route of accountability to respond to the demands of the lower-level stakeholders. This indicates, that higher education institutions were at times required to take the short-route of accountability with non-state education providers, because they had to work their way around the bureaucratic challenges of a heavy centralized system.

4.2.3 ADMINISTRATIVE TURN OVER AND GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

According to the MSF, electoral turnovers often lead to drastic shifts in government's agendas. This notion explains how the fall of the Taliban in 2001, naturally encouraged a new period of collaborations and influenced the political agenda. This was clearly evident, because the national acceptance to partnership with the international community was there in the early phases of the transitioning government. The first partnership started early in 2002, between the MoE and IIEP education specialist (NHESP I, 2004). This partnership was built on mutual trust and respect and has proven to have laid the grounds for strategic planning. It also helped develop national vision capacities, on how to move forward, which was followed by a wider range of national and international negotiations and projects (Sigsgaard, 2011).

Karlsson and Mansory (2007) state in their UNHCR monitoring report, that this period had little opposition of contrasting groups, such as the Taliban regime that still controlled large parts of Afghanistan. However, although they still wanted the education system to be re-Islamized, neither of their plans reach the implementation stage, because their priority was directed towards insurgency. This played in favor of the community and private education. In this period, higher education institution (HEI) were developing partnerships with western governments, of which the negotiations started in early 2002. This partnership entailed workshops, exchange programs and external partner universities. According to the AUA communication office report, the US-Afghan higher education institutions partnerships had thus far remained at the highest levels (Tobenkin, 2014).

Much of the higher education achievements can be attributed to the 'game changer' in May 2005. Afghanistan's Strengthening Higher Education Program (SHEP) has been the largest higher education partnership scheme in conflict affect settings to date (Suhrke, et al. 2008). This project includes primary funding from the World Bank, and less funding from non-bank sources. A large share of the \$40 million funding was already fixed in 2005. The objective of this project was to provide additional assistance in capacity building of the Ministry of Higher education and that of the five provincial universities, including Kabul University (SHEP, 2005).

Taken together, the political currents of Afghanistan illustrated that the aftermath of war posed many challenges to the higher education system. The absence of planning in Afghanistan in the period before 2003 led to the creation of a major void that existed due to years of conflict, such as weak leadership and inadequate responsiveness of the government due to a heavy centralized system. However, the fall of the Taliban opened a new era of partnership and commitments between international and national higher education stakeholders. The public was receptive to change, and many advocates were resilient to make this happen.

4.3 THE POLICY STREAM

It is clear that the higher education sector experienced a break down in the earlier recovery stages of the country. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge the newly established government was facing, is how it was going to rebuild a devastated higher education system, including focus goals and priorities (NHESP I, 2004). The policy stream refers to a soup of ideas that are floating around, primarily in communities of experts. These experts debate on a number of policy solutions and try to decide which one is better in terms of *technical feasibility, value acceptability and efficiency of anticipated costs*. The findings of the case under analysis illustrate the process for viable solutions required a solid case for resources, in order for it to move to the next phase. For that reason, two higher strategic plans were formulated during the Karzai Administration, of which only the second one survived. The following paragraphs dig deeper into *the softening up process* and offer an explanation on why the first strategic plan failed and the second one got accepted in terms of MSF's criteria and how this led to a longer softening up process.

4.3.1 THE FIRST NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN

The process of higher education reconstruction began in 2002, where the first steps were taken to get the system running effectively again. The first Minister of Higher Education, Dr Fayez, explained that the system was allocated \$6 million for the time frame of 2002-2003. This amount was meant to aid the MoHE to launch their first pilot project in meeting higher education goals. However, Dr Fayez soon realized that this received amount would not be sufficient, especially given the fact that the state capacity to govern the system was already at its minimum (Fayez, 2012). The question of funding usually does not have easy answers in the beginning. At times, the answers are "we do not know", which easily has the effect of discouraging participants in the policy change process (Hayward, 2008). In order to avoid this from happening, the minister soon visited all major donors and agencies only to be almost uniformly told that the sub-sector was not a priority, with the exception of bilateral funding from Germany (Milton, 2018).

With this in mind, as per the request of President Hamid Karzai, UNESCO's International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP) fielded a project identification mission in May 2002. During a two-week mission in September, a team of IIEP experts initiated the project in collaboration with a group of officials from the MoHE. The aim of this two-week mission was to: "(i) to collect data; (ii) to diagnose the current status of higher education; and (iii) to make informed recommendations on a comprehensive set of political choices for restructuring and rebuilding of the whole higher education system" (NHESP I, 2004, p. 13). The mission found that the higher education sector still has a long way ahead and called for massive long-term assistance (NHESP I, 2004).

As Afghanistan has no experience in higher education planning, Dr Fayez,

asked IIEP for additional workshops on strategic management. He further proposed exploring the different possibilities for the preparation of a Higher education Strategic Plan. According to Hayward (2008) the second step of the planning process was to agree on a series of questions, namely:

- What is the current situation of Higher Education and how would we like it to be?
- What needs to be done to get to that state?
- How could this be executed in the most efficient way?
- How long is this expected to take?
- How much would it cost?
- What are realistic targets?

The initial section of the newly created drafted strategic plan outlines that overriding challenges of the higher education system, is that it did not yet reach a consensus level on higher education policy. Is also referred to as the value acceptability criterion of the MSF. The plan addressed a number of issues related to: the institutional structure, its governance structure, admission and student policies, management of academic staff, quality improvement of teaching and learning, physical facilities. The main challenge was to improve international donor support and the identification of the priorities of this sub-sector (NHESP I, 2004).

The second part of the draft provides MoHE with well-presented solutions for the challenges highlighted in the first part. As this document's purpose was to provide choices, it was up to the MoHE to make the decisions based on: value acceptability, regarding the agreement within the policy network, technical feasibility in terms of tasks and activities, time frame, and most importantly efficiency of anticipated costs.

Concerning value acceptability, the document emphasized on the identification of the complementary contributions. In addition to that, the document also requests the central authorities to be responsive with a strong steering capacity. Stakeholders involved in the development of the strategic plan believed that the issue of fragmentation can only be solved, if a realistic plan is based on professional analysis and broad participation of different actors in the interest of the Afghan society (NHESP I, 2004).

Referring to the efficiency of anticipated cost, the document recommends that the system should also allow for the inclusivity of a small share of private contributions, alongside efficient management of yearly allocations and global funding. At the time the report was published, the higher education budget was decided by the Ministry of Finance (MoF), based on a request prepared by the MoHE. This means, that institutions do not have the authority to modify approved expenditures to their specific needs, which is necessary to solve the issue of bureaucratic barriers of a centralized system (NHESP I, 2004).

Nevertheless, although the first initiative was an important stepping stone in the process of policy change, the strategic plan was never translated into action

plan. Milton (2018) argues that the reason why the plan never reached the implementation stage was not because of its technical feasibility. The plan may have offered an ideal response to the challenges of re-establishing authority and the decentralization process of the system. Rather, the new Minister of Higher Education opposed the plan, as he was not convinced by the draft's approach in terms of value acceptability. In other words, he did not believe that the reform initiatives were capable to bridge the conflicting visions held by the central government, the MoHE, and higher education institutions and entrenched a highly centralized higher education system.

In contrast, according to Hayward (2008) the reason why the plan did not reach the implementation stage, was not solely due to a lack of agreement, but because the plan had to make a solid case for its resources. The bottom line is, that it all comes down to the fact that no change is possible when the minimum needed to start will cost more than is likely to be available. The first plan did not receive additional funding and was therefore was not able to justify the costs to realize change (Barbury & Hayward, 2014).

This shows, that the draft strategic plan was only able to match one criteria, namely technical feasibility. The draft strategic plan would have a greater possibility of survival when matching the three criteria but failed to reach consensus on the goals and most importantly to make a solid case for the required resources.

4.3.2 THE SECOND NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN

The failure of the first strategic plan determined that dependence on the generosity of multi and bilateral funding to rebuild the higher education sector can be a 'game breaker' in the process of softening up. Although the new funding source of the SHEP program (as outlined in the politics stream) gave a more hopeful starting point, the MoHE realized that given the failure of the first strategic plan, that much more attention to detail was needed to reach the implementation stage. Five years after the first draft in early 2009, a small steering community was fabricated in the office of the Deputy Minister for Academic Affairs under the leadership of Deputy Minister Babury with the support of Higher education Minister Dadfar. The process of preparing the second strategic plan started off by evaluating the earlier strategic plan with the assistance of experts in planning⁷, the World Bank and UNESCO. With an exception of the new funding sources from the World Bank, the sector was still confronted with a general resistance to change and lack of interest from most donors. Nevertheless, this did not discourage Deputy Minister Babury and a variety of stakeholders. Together with the input of a few donors and NGOs,

⁷ These included Fred. M. Hayward, who worked with former Minister Fayeze and worked on several strategic plans in conflict-affected settings - and Prof. Jairman Reddy brought in by UNESCO who has relevant experience in the South African Higher education Strategic Plan

the steering committee began to frame and outline the strategic plan (Barbury & Hayward, 2014).

The next step was the prioritization of goals. Under the guidance of Santwana Dasgupta of Higher Education Project (HEP)⁸, a number of working groups were designed. HEP was actively involved throughout the whole process, but most importantly, prioritizing the countries needs with regards to higher education (NHESP II, 2009). After several efforts and coordination Dr. Reddy and Joel Reyes were able to roughly outline the new ideas for a draft. The two major goals of the new plan were a reflection of the most pressing needs, quality improvement and increasing access (NHESP II, 2009). The plan focused on 10 major areas:

- Major investment in faculty development
- Curriculum improvement and upgrading
- Infrastructure development
- Expanding graduate programs
- Faculty research enhancement
- Improving governance for Higher Education (greater decentralization of financial and administrative authority to the institutions)
- Improved admission process (equity of access regardless of gender)
- Provide support for the private provision of higher education
- Establishment of Higher education Management Information System (HEMIS) and a National Research and Education Network (NREN)

The first draft of the strategic plan was reviewed by the steering Committee and multiple stakeholders. The draft received numerous critiques, especially with regards to the South African influence of Dr. Reddy and new emphasis on gender equity. The policy community was of the view that, Dr. Reddy's draft was too influenced by the South African situation and therefore failed to depict the realities in Afghanistan. Stakeholders also expressed their concern on the proposals on gender equity. The policy community could not agree on the solution presented in terms of gender equity. There were some that believed the plan did not yet find a realistic approach to how gender issues should be addressed. Meaning, a very ambitious approach would not be technically feasible, while a long-term approach would fail to address the pressing needs of nation building (Babury & Hayward, 2014).

After a long process of consultations and discussions, it was decided to reconsider the major sections and present an improved draft plan that is technically more feasible to the context of Afghanistan. This time Dr. Fred Hayward was also brought in by HEP, and together with Deputy Minister Babury, a new draft of the strategic plan was completed in August 2009. The revised draft

⁸ In 2005-2006 USAID established HEP in collaboration with MOHE, Academy for Education Development, Indiana University, and the University of Massachusetts. For more content on this visit the HEP USAID Website.

put forward new ideas and approaches vis-à-vis gender equity. In addition, faculty development and improved governance was recommended. As a result, the plan had to remove many of the additions on gender, with an exemption of the most persistent needs.

In November 2009, the second plan did not yet match the criterion of value acceptability. The policy community could finally agree on the new versions and proposals presented in the draft (Barbury & Hayward, 2014). Finally, after another revision, on the third of December 2009, *the National Higher Education Strategic plan: 2010-2014* was launched at a ceremony at Kabul university (NHESP II, 2009). According to Babury and Hayward (2014) in contrast to the previous version, NHESP II was well received. This was mostly visible though the positive feedback from most faculty member, the MoE, NGOs, universities, foreign government and many other observers.

Thus, this demonstrates that the policy solutions presented in the second strategic plan finally went through the motion of softening up, as it offered a feasible plan and a higher consensus level. However, the remaining challenge was to obtain the \$564 million in funding that was required to comprehend policy change. Through SHEP II, the World Bank was the first funding to deliver \$20 million. Clearly, this was only a small fraction of what was needed for the implementation budget. The MoHE therefore attended several meetings with donor organizations to attract more funding. Despite the odds to success and many disappointments, NATO came forward with an additional \$13 million for internet development of institutions. Somewhat later on, another \$8 million was provided by USAID; \$27 million through the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF); plus \$2.1 million delivered by the President's Office for Faculty and development. All the funding combined added up to a total of approximately \$111 million. As this is only 20 percent of the requested budget, other funding efforts continued. Ultimately, the funding efforts led to a promise of \$236 million from the Kabul donor group, which was approved by the MoF, making up 42 percent of the anticipated costs (Barbury, 2014).

The findings of the policy stream demonstrate that higher education stakeholders were faced a great deal of challenges. This was evident in the long process of softening up, whereby the starting point of strategic planning produced negative results. The strategic plan has been revised and two versions have been materialized. Each of these efforts have merit, but as the system is practically an empty shell, a lot more effort was required to push it on the decision agenda. The first strategic plan (2004) could not reach the implementation stage, as it did not match the three criteria that is required for a greater probability of survival. The policy community could not agree on the type of system that had to be established (value acceptability) and failed to obtain the necessary budget for the strategic plan to generate policy change (efficiency of costs). This proves that the disposition for policy change was there, but much more effort was required to carefully developed so that the objectives and mechanisms for implementation were well understood by the policy community. In contrast to previous made efforts, the second strategic plan (2009) was well received. The second plan finally went through the softening up process and higher

education reconstruction became a part of the policy agenda. By now, the probability of change was exceedingly enlarged. However, the remaining challenge was to obtain the requested amount to successfully implement the strategic plan (efficiency of costs). Due to advocacy efforts of higher education stakeholder, the plan was able to obtain a large amount of the anticipated costs. It was now up to policy entrepreneurs to match the remaining criterion, by achieving the anticipated efficiency of costs, and take it the plan to the implementation stage.

4.4 POLICY WINDOWS, POLICY ENTREPRENEURS, AND THE COUPLING OF STREAMS

4.4.1 WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

An opening in the window of opportunity can occur in various manners, in either the problem or politics stream. As the description of the problem stream demonstrated, critical issues surrounding higher education did not reach the policy agenda until at least a couple years into the transitioning government's placement. This was because Afghanistan's policy-making was highly donor-driven. The donor community placed greater priority on basic education, and therefore higher education was largely neglected in the policy debate. For that reason, the chances of a policy window opening under such a condition is significantly low and less striking. However, as discussed in the theory chapter, problem recognition is an important part of the policy process. This stage was reached in early 2005 by the aid of communication campaigning of higher education advocates and feedback on the higher education situation.

The Politics stream demonstrates, that sudden changes such as that in Afghanistan as a result of the fall of the Taliban, immediately created new windows of opportunity for higher education advocates. This period fostered rethinking about higher education and the values it represents, as the Taliban's regime left the MoHE as an empty shell in 2001 (Nicolai, 2009). In addition to the fact that Afghanistan is a relatively poor country, it also requires time to recover from decades of war. Policy making is thus mechanically highly dependent on external financial resources to realize any policy change. In addition to that, as the country was still at a formation stage, there was no strong national leadership position that is necessary to rebuild the sector. In other words, the government needs a roadmap, a strategy, or guide to escape the current state (NHESP I, 2004). Therefore, the window remained closed for at least three years and required consistent and significant external support to open. It can therefore be argued that the policy window opened due to a positive political climate, that was produced by the support of the donor community in terms of commitments, partnership and financial support. Although all the prior political forces should not be undervalued, the change maker can be attributed to the SHEP partnership with the World Bank in May 2005. This project was the final missing piece in the policy puzzle. This project enabled the World Bank to convince policymakers to work

together and take a leap of faith, despite all the challenges confronting the policy process. This partnership offered additional assistance in capacity building and an enormous amount of funding. As a result, higher education gained policy saliency, and the problems at hand were at the right stage of the process for feasible solutions to be presented to facilitate policy change.

4.4.2 POLICY ENTREPRENEURS

With all points in consideration, we see that the problem was recognized, and favorable political currents generated an opportunity and the incentive for policymakers to link policy solutions to higher education problems. This window administered an opportunity for what Kingdon (2014) categorizes as “policy entrepreneurs” to invest their resources, time, energy, reputation and money in the hope for positive changes in the higher education system. Such windows usually open for a relatively short period of time. As Weible and Cairney (2017) describe it, it all comes down to luck and timing. This is exactly what higher education policy entrepreneurs in Afghanistan acknowledged, as the previous efforts did not reach the implementation stage. Policy entrepreneurs’ role in the case under analysis consist of, keeping higher education reconstruction high on the policy agenda and successfully linking solutions to problems.

Policy entrepreneur efforts started in the early stage of the transitioning government. As the findings of the policy stream illustrate the first advocacy effort started in 2002. The MoHE under leadership of Dr. Fayez together with UNESCO’s IIEP. Together these actors invested their time, expertise and money to establish viable solutions to facilitate higher education reconstruction. Not surprisingly, this first strategic draft approach did not reach the implementation stage. This flow of the streams was disrupted as Howlett, et al. (2015) call it “slow evaporation”. To put it differently, Afghanistan had to essentially start from scratch, and therefore the softening up process became longer, and accordingly there were no viable solutions by 2005 to become linked to problems. First of all, there was a lack of agreement (value acceptability). Second of all, there was no sufficient funding that is required to produce policy change (efficiency of costs).

This means, that great effort by policy entrepreneurs was required to keep higher education reconstruction on the government agenda. Since the first strategic plan, the plan has been refined and several versions have emerged. Given the failure of the prior efforts, higher education advocates realized that much more was needed to reach the desirable consensus level. As a result of many negotiations and recommendations, the second draft strategic plan was completed in August 2009. This plan was produced by a larger group of higher education stakeholders. This assembly of policy entrepreneurs include: Deputy minister Babury, experts in planning Hayward and Dr. Reddy, the World Bank and UNESCO’s IIEP. Due to the remarkable efforts and commitments of these policy entrepreneurs the process of policy change was able to move forward, even under the most difficult

circumstances. Their advocacy was able to link realistic proposals to higher education problems together with greater preference and more funding to key higher education problems. Higher education issues finally went through the process of softening up and it was generally agreed that Afghanistan cannot build its economy and all other sectors, without a high-quality education system (Hayward, 2015).

4.4.3 THE COUPLING OF STREAMS

By now, due to the opening of the policy window together with policy entrepreneurial activities, the probability of policy change was highly increased. Higher education reconstruction became a part of the policy agenda, which in turn generated policy-making steps. However, the remaining challenge was to obtain the requested \$562 million that was necessitated to implement successful higher education reforms as outlined in the NHESP II (2009) (efficiency of anticipated costs).

By 2009 the plan received \$236 million, making up around 42 percent of the requested volume. Despite the limited funding, Deputy Minister Babury reasons that more problems were reaching the surface and pressing needs cannot be put on hold any longer. Under his leadership, work began to implement the plan in a number of areas, with the budget of \$2 million per institution (Hayward, 2008). Particularly those areas that required little funding. At the same time, the legal framework for higher education was also modified, to put a major emphasis on merit in recruiting personnel and promotions, and rules governing private higher education. Redefined rules about ethics, faculty and student management, the encouragement of research and publications (Hayward, 2015). While not all the major areas could immediately be executed, the overall strategic plan did offer solutions to the most pressing and needy issues. Moreover, at the policy level, UNESCO maintains its assistance in capacity development for the higher education through IIEP, in partnership with UNESCO Kabul office (UNESCO, 2010). By the end of 2009, the policy window was seized, the Strategic plan 2010-2014 is now linked to the National Development Strategy (ANDS) as one of the eight pillars. For the first time in history, Afghanistan has a higher education policy domain that reflects visions, goals and targets of the MoHE for the future of the country (NHESP II, 2009). Hayward (2015) further debates that those involved in the process did not immediately realize to what the extent the system has made progress:

When we began to look back on what had happened over the previous four years and were able to recognize the magnitude of the transformation. There were not just a few minor changes, but changes that were pervasive and deep in ways that fundamentally altered major values and structures, cutting across key areas of higher education from the curriculum to quality

assurance to enshrining merit to making progress in the direction of gender equity. Major values were changed, the beginning of a new community vision was formed, and the importance of free expression to the success of the process was recognized— the kind of freedom that produces development and vice versa (Kindle location, 5041).

This shows that the coupling of the independent streams together with the opening of a policy window, determined the likelihood of a major higher education reform in Afghanistan. In this logic, solutions became joined to problems, and both of them are joined to a favorable surrounding political environment. See figure 2 below for a comprehensive overview of the findings.

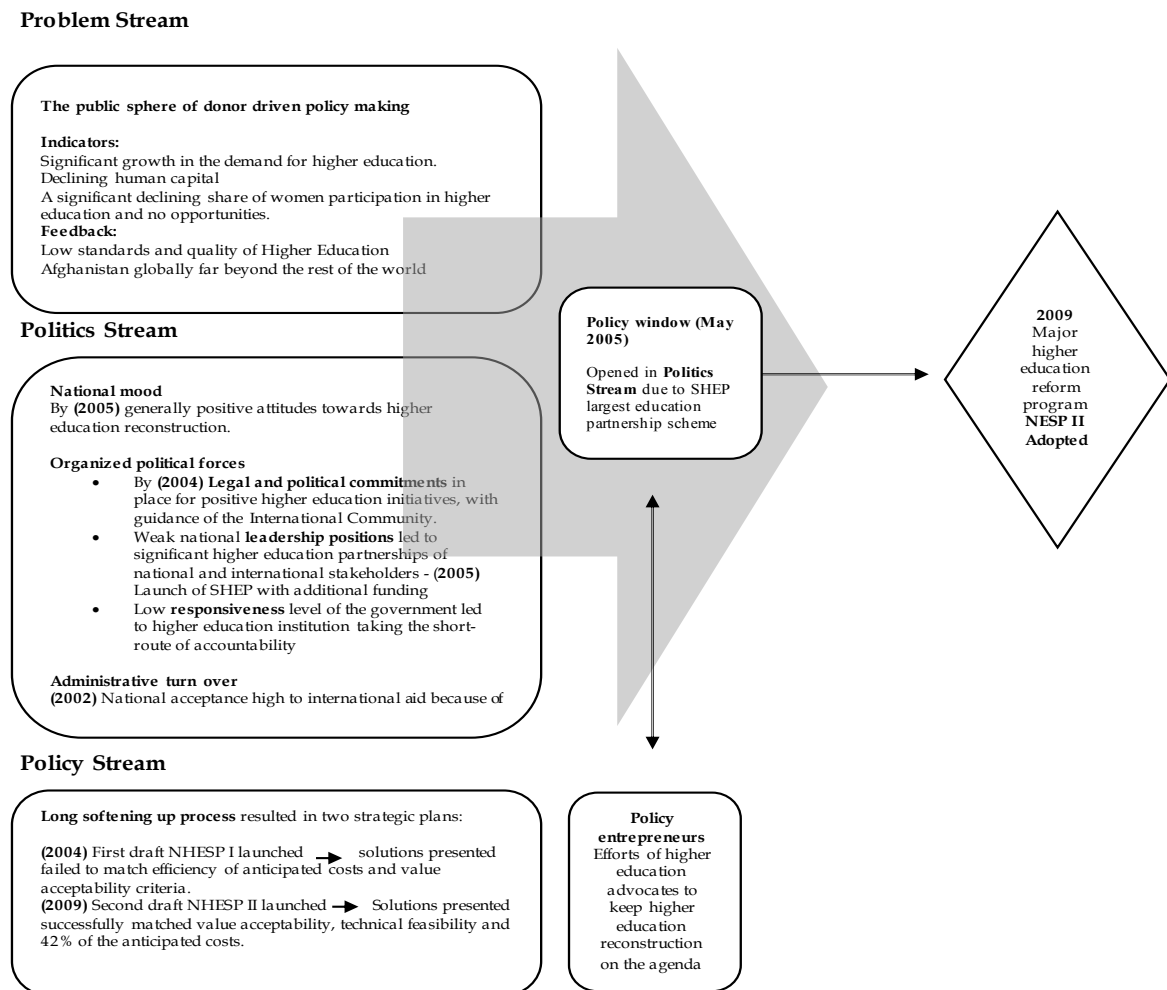


Figure 2 application of the findings to Multiple Stream Analysis

5 Discussion & Conclusion

This study examined to what extent can the MSF explain the policy change in the higher education sector in Afghanistan, during the Karzai Administration. By conducting a theory-driven comparative within-case analysis, this study was able to identify and examine the five elements of the MSF and determine the causal mechanisms of the policy outcome. Because the original approach of the MSF is derived from a conventional United States reference, this study also unpacked and further optimized each element of the model and examined the model's applicability to conflict-affected settings. Moreover, this chapter presents a discussion in terms of limitations and contributions. This is followed by the conclusion, in which the research question will be answered.

5.2 DISCUSSION

The findings of the analysis evidently demonstrate that the MSF offers a helpful guide to resolve puzzles of Afghanistan's policy processes and policy making. Nevertheless, applying the MSF in a new context taught us a couple of lessons. The main challenge was to customize and translate this approach as suitable as possible to a fragile context. The original model was designed to examine the US policymaking context, of which the actors and processes are well understood. The same does not apply for a post-war country like Afghanistan, as the country had to rebuild its whole system from scratch and was left with a heavily centralized structure. This means that the process of policy change became increasingly more complex than the one we recognize in western democracies. The MSF does indeed provide useful links between situations and the wider perspective of the policy process. Yet, it remains limited in its ability to fully particularize this relation outside the context of western democracies. This idea has led to a number of limitations and departures of Kingdon's conceptualization of the MSF's elements, namely: (1) feedback, (2) the role of policy entrepreneurs, (3) interdependence of the streams (4) policy window, and (5) the coupling of streams.

First of all, a minor departure from the original description of the problem stream has been the function of feedback. According to the original explanation of the MSF, policymakers can also learn about problems through feedback on existing policies. This notion fails to provide a complete picture of how policymakers learn about problems through feedback. Post-war governments usually require rebuilding large parts of their society including policy systems. The higher education sector in Afghanistan did not have a policy domain to reflect upon, and by following the logic of the MSF, this indicates that there was no feedback provided. Yet, the findings of the study show that feedback had played an important role in raising awareness that the higher education system was of low

standards in comparison to the rest of the world. This made the government of Afghanistan acknowledge that they had to work fast to prevent further damage.

Second of all, with regards to policy entrepreneurs, this case study found that in contrast to MSF's original explanation of policy entrepreneurs, no national policy entrepreneurs alone would ever be enough to generate policy reform. This relates to the fact, that there were no strong national leadership positions that could independently move the policy process forward. The findings of the analysis clearly demonstrate this idea. The change-making policy entrepreneurs' activities have been of global partnership between higher education stakeholders. From this it can be concluded that the role of policy entrepreneurs was of complementary nature. To further clarify, policy entrepreneurship activities in this case study can therefore be classified as an assembly of higher education advocates that balance each other's shortcomings by expertise, skills, and resources. Another interesting finding is that due to Afghanistan's high dependency on external resources, those with 'money' have mainly shaped the political discourse, the political climate and dominated the softening up process.

Moreover, this study also found that the role of policy entrepreneurs was placed in bureaucratic positions. For example, Deputy Minister Babury was simultaneously highly involved in entrepreneurial activities and in taking the NHESP II to the implementation stage. Thus, if policy entrepreneurs can be involved outside the high formal decision-making positions as well as the formal machinery of policy-making, then one could argue that the conceptualization of policy entrepreneurs is stretched. This also means that by primarily relying on MSF's conceptualization of policy entrepreneurs, it would allow for a limitation of our understanding of policy entrepreneurs in Afghanistan. For that reason, this study would propose to understand the role of a policy entrepreneur as a set of behaviors in the policy process, rather than rigid traits of a specific function.

Another important limitation of the MSF is the uncertainty over whether the individual streams are actually independent of one and another. Zahariadis (2007), however, stated the idea of independent is simply a tool to identify the origins of the individual streams, and not beforehand statements. However, given the unstable indefinite nature of reality in post-war countries, this is rather hard to ensure. The study found a lot of spillover effects, which in turn made it challenging to translate the findings into the right streams. For example, Kingdon's original approach argues that the opening of a window is either the politics or problem stream, and therefore independent to the developments in the policy stream. Instead, the findings clearly illustrate that the policy streams are a combination of policy efforts, policy analysis and the relative context of policy discourse. Within the stream, higher education policy entrepreneurs mediated the emergence of policy ideas and attempted to increase the responsiveness of policymakers to their proposed ideas. Awareness raising through framing strategies was therefore viable in both the problem stream and policy stream, which is explained by the notion of softening up. Ideas generally take time to get accepted within the policy

community. However, given the fact that higher education was of low priority, more efforts were needed to get it on a higher level of the policy agenda. The findings show, that even under strong efforts of policy entrepreneurs to reform the higher education system, these effects remained remarkably poor, until the formation of the SHEP partnership. This makes the salience of the issues surrounding higher education dependent on the political currents, awareness raising activities, as well as the evaluation of efforts of alternatives. This evidently makes the streams interdependent. Conversely, by approaching the policy process with different streams in mind, allows for efficient examinable categories, at least to an extent that the policy decision are highly influences by the movements of the singular streams.

This brings us to another limitation, namely, the policy window. In the logic of the MSF a window opens when the problem, policy and politics stream join and are fully integrated. However, a policy window opened for higher education policy change, without the convergence all the three streams. As already stressed, there was not yet a policy domain for higher education. The findings of the policy stream indicate that, as the policy domain of higher education was an empty shell, higher education reconstruction took a considerable amount of time to be accepted within the policy community in comparison to western democracies. Western democracies usually have established policies to reflect upon. This means that the idea of softening up does not refer to a transformation of a whole system, but rather alterations within an established system. This offers an explanation to why the softening up process took longer in a post-war country like Afghanistan. As outlined in the description of the two strategic plans, the first step was to make to get the system running effectively and agree on visions and goals of the sector. This required the agreement on a number of broad questions, which all include a lot of effort, expertise, time and resources. The first strategic plan failed to adhere to the three criteria that are essential for viable solutions. As a result, the policy process did not yet reach the right stage to provide viable solutions by the time the problem was recognized and the political climate was favorable. The SHEP partnership did most of the heavy lifting in attracting the much-needed attention from governmental officials. This important external political force in the politics stream was decisive enough to promote the problem into the policy agenda and open the policy window successfully. Due to the absence of concrete, effective and feasible alternatives in the policy stream, the reform initiatives could still not be forced on to the decision agenda until a couple years later.

The final departure relates to how the streams are coupled. As explained by the MSF, a surviving alternative has to meet three criteria. From solutions introduced by stakeholders involved in the process of strategic planning of higher education, not all areas could provide appropriate replies to the problems at hand. The challenge was to reach consensus on the policy goals and justify the cost in order for the plan to reach the next stages of the policy process. The results show that by designing the strategic plan with a larger group of stakeholders and lessons

learned from previous made efforts, an agreement is more likely to be reached with an end result of a more feasible plan. Still, because of the increased dependence on financial donor support, justifying the cost of the plan remained a particular challenge. Following the predictions of the MSF, insufficient funding to justify the costs of the plan, would mechanically rule out a policy solution. Yet, the magnitude of higher education issues seemed overwhelming and without a policy domain to provide answers to issues surrounding higher education this effect would worsen. As such, the MoHE realized that they could not wait any longer to make change happen. By the effort of Deputy Minister Babury, the window was seized and change was materialized, without obtaining the full amount of the requested budget. This suggests that solutions can be accepted without them adhering to all the three criteria for survival of a proposal. However, it is important to keep in mind, that not the whole plan could immediately be implemented, but only the solutions that required immediate action.

5.3 CONCLUSION

This brings us to answering: *to what extent can the MSF explain the policy change in the higher education sector in Afghanistan, during Karzai Administration.* The main objective of this thesis has been to determine whether the model can be empirically validated in post-war settings. Despite the above-mentioned departures and limitations from the original MSF conceptualization of the constituent elements, from the research that has been carried out there is sufficient prove that the MSF provides universal concepts that are generally useful for understanding the pre-decision process of the NHESP II. A complex policy making process with a wide array of actors involved the necessity of a general theory that can simplify this complexity. The MSF contributes greatly to this particular challenge in its capacity to complement other approaches, specifically approaches that involve accounts related to the causal logic of institutional variables. By further optimizing the MSF to a post-war context, it was easier to clarify the lens's causal drivers and logics.

By applying the MSF to analyze the case, this study acquired valuable perspectives that other theories of policy change to do not account for. As stated in the theory chapter, the MSF is built on two different approaches, namely, both rational and comprehensive decision-making and incrementalism. By tracing the origins of the initiatives of the policy change process, it allows understanding of how policy change differs from case to case. This offers a complete picture of the policy process, which explains that the higher education policy change process is constituted both by stability and change and not one or the other alone. In addition, that, by applying Kingdon's approach to a conflict-affected setting, it reveals interesting similarities and differentiations in the policy change process, which in turn offers insightful viewpoints and lessons.

Furthermore, by assuming that actors are not always *comprehensive rational* in their final decisions, it becomes easier to understand how context and time influence policy outcomes, regardless of the context. This effect was also evident

in the policy process of the NHESP II. In contrast, to western democracies, policymaker's decisions were therefore highly influenced by the decisions of the international community, rather than autonomous the management of policy tasks. The case under analysis displays that Afghanistan had many urgencies to deal with but was faced with *limited time* and funding. Policymakers were as a result forced to make choices in the face of *uncertainty*. As outlined earlier, policy makers choices to place problems on the policy agenda were highly influenced by issues that received the required funding and trust, which are considerations beyond their control.

The specific focus on policy entrepreneurs in the analysis provided a detailed discussion on how changes in preferences and strategies of the main actors can result in major changes at critical moments. The findings of this analysis illustrate that framing strategies to generate demand for its solution led to a shift in policy stance, which create vital moments where chances for policy change are attainable.

Furthermore, alongside sudden changes that were created by the fall the Taliban, the MSF also explained how unpredictability in politics result in incremental steps in the policy change process. the MSF analysis helped identify how bureaucratic structures of a centralized system in Afghanistan determined the trajectories of the pre-decision process. This study found that the prioritization of policies can be a problematic investment in post-war settings. This is in line with MSF explanation that due to *competition for attention* only a few problems reach the top of the policy agenda. Especially, considering the fact that Afghanistan had to deal with many pressing reconstructions needs, but had limited resources to respond to all of them. The case study illustrates that the investment and prioritization in one policy domain (basic education), comes at the expense of the other (higher education). A tension between the need for long-term and sustainable policy plans and short-term solutions, resulted in an incremental approach to higher education reconstruction in comparison to basic education. This shows that by competing for policy attention can be at the expense of other policy domains.

Besides that, it also explains how the highly centralized political system of Afghanistan can slow down the overall policy change process. The findings show that the policy process in Afghanistan indeed consists of an *imperfect selection process*. As mentioned in the policy stream, those at the top level of the government determine the policy agenda, and therefore reaching a desirable consensus level on policy goals has proven to be one of the major challenges. Hence, applying the MSF approach to the case of Afghanistan, casts a new light on the concept of softening up. Although this takes longer in post-war countries than in the conventional US explanation, it does additionally support Kingdon's notion that an idea's time has to come, in order for it to generate policy change. In other words, what he specified as key to a policy idea is not where the idea is originated from, but what allowed for it to take-off and develop.

6 Future Research & recommendations

6.1 FUTURE RESEARCH

The aim of this study has been to explore the policy change process of higher education in Afghanistan, through the lens of the MSF. Another objective is to explore what this suggests for fragile states in a conflict-affected setting in general. Modifying the MSF to a conflict-affected setting made it easier to translate the constituent elements of the theory. As pointed out earlier, the MSF has not yet been studied in conflict-affected settings. Therefore, the findings of this analysis are a modest contribution to how the process of policy change happens in a context among the least fertile ground for change. This study further shows that post-war settings have many commonalities that have a significant effect on the policy change process. The most noteworthy commonality is the role of the international community. In contrast to western democracies, much of the policy process is determined by their views and efforts. Moreover, national security problems and corruption have weighty consequences on the political climate. However, this did not result in a negative political climate for the policy change process in the higher education sector of Afghanistan. This makes Afghanistan somewhat unique to other post-war settings, due to its rich history in education. In addition, although the higher education sector in Afghanistan has been of low priority, it is therefore yet to be determined how the dynamics of the policy change process change in these settings when applied to a case of high priority, such as basic education.

Considering this, continued research will be needed to further optimize and improve the MSF in post-war setting. This will be required in order for research to be in sync with national situations, before obtaining a definitive answer. Hence, this study proposes future studies to focus on typical post-war cases and thereby put the theory modifications presented in this study to further test.

6.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Lessons learned from Afghan's higher education policy change process indicate that there is still a lot of work to be done. As mentioned throughout this research, both the higher education sector faces many weaknesses including, corruption inadequacies, lack of funding, technical limitations and the weaknesses of a centralized government. Therefore, given the fact Afghanistan was and still is in a rebuilding phase, the value of the international community's contribution needs to be formally recognized, in order for a smoother policy process to materialize. A more functional integration of roles in terms of both actors (national and international) could in fact aid in the success of a particular policy.

This indicates that transparency in the policy process is therefore of utmost importance if the Afghan government wants to avoid rigid policy systems, which if in place would prevent the inclusion of a variety of stakeholders. The study has demonstrated that lack of transparency discouraged higher education at times stakeholders to take part in advocacy activities. The research conducted shows that making the case for more funding to be allocated to higher education has proven to be problematic. The findings of the study suggest that making a case for funding requires well-prepared data and justification and trust from the international community as well as national stakeholders, which was usually not acquirable in Afghanistan. Therefore, as a practical recommendation this study suggests that it is important for policymakers and stakeholders in the policy process to be transparent and deliver documentation of their undertakings. Strict routines that track relevant spending on the domain need to be maintained in order for trust to solidify a global partnership. This will in turn require major efforts from national policy-makers themselves, and most likely pro-longed guidance on how such a process should be applied from the international community itself.

Secondly, one of the key points highlighted in Afghanistan's context, is that when governments have to start from scratch, reaching the desired consensus level is a challenge, but not impossible. The analysis determines that the disposition for policy change was present in previous stages, however much more effort was required in order to develop objectives and mechanisms for implementation that were comprehensive to the policy community. Thus, another policy recommendation this study would like to suggest is that the goals and new rules for higher education should be carefully developed. It is not realistic in such a context to aim for immediate changes. The implementation of an entire strategic plan has proven to be problematic at times, as it requires a great deal of political will and commitment to goals and most importantly resources. Hard work, commitment, discussions and considerations are for that reason critical, so that the policy community generally understands, agrees and put in place sustainable policies for higher education. If policy makers want to realize significant change in the short run, this study would recommend to focus on a small number of objectives. Real progress has proven to require focused action, which is not an easy task. It is important to keep in mind, that focused action, may potentially distract from other problems which require attention.

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