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Politics gets in way of effective government, finds UCT researcher

Recent research by a doctoral student at the University of Cape Town has found that politics plays an integral role in the formation and delivery of government policy in developing countries.

Andile Metfula's PhD thesis, "The interplay between policy network actors and information and communication technology policies in a developing country context," asserts that the composition, relationships, alliances, power structures, norms and bureaucracies in policy networks affect not just the policy-making process but also the policies that result from them.

Public policies are a responsibility of the government of the day. Governments, with the help of non-governmental actors, formulate policies on behalf of the masses. Policy actors, however, often have interests that do not align with the aspirations of the masses. Most often the interests of policy actors insinuate their way into the final policy which will in turn affect real-life development initiatives.

Metfula's thesis shows that policy-making processes are mainly dominated by political agendas. Conformists are mainly recruited into policy networks to speed up policy processes. Often policy processes are not given ample time and are under pressure of international deadlines. There is also pressure from international actors who normally provide funding and expertise for some policy exercises. On the part of governments, lack of preparation for policy exercises is evident. Finally, resulting policies, which are largely inspired by technocentric thinking, conceptualise development as a form of modernism and economic advancement.

Metfula has a BSc in Mathematics and Computer Science from the University of Swaziland and an MSc in Computer Science from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He joined UCT as a PhD student in the Department of Information Systems in 2011. Together with his supervisor, Professor Wallace Chigona, he has worked on a number of journal and conference articles.

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