

## **AN INTERVENTIONAL APPROACH TO THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF HEALTH SECTOR REFORMS**

### **A COMMITMENT-ACTION-RESULT (CAR) FRAMEWORK**

#### **I.0 BACKGROUND**

Political Economy Analysis (PEA) is an analytical approach used to understand how political, institutional, and stakeholder dynamics shape policy choices, reform processes, and implementation outcomes. In the health sector, reforms are rarely driven by technical evidence alone; they are deeply influenced by power relations, incentives, interests, and broader political and economic contexts.

PEA helps unpack who holds power, whose interests are served, how decisions are made, and why reforms succeed or fail in practice. By systematically analysing these dynamics, PEA supports reform design that is politically feasible, contextually grounded, and more likely to be implemented and sustained. However, while PEA is widely used to diagnose reform challenges and explain policy emergence, many existing approaches place less emphasis on how political commitment translates into concrete action and measurable results over time, particularly in complex health systems.

#### **2.0 EXISTING PEA FRAMEWORKS AND GAPS**

Several well-established PEA frameworks have informed policy and health sector analysis:

- Campos and Reich framework: emphasizes stakeholder interests, power, and reform coalitions.<sup>1</sup>
- Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework: which explains how problems, policies, and politics converge to open policy windows for reform.<sup>2</sup>
- Shiffman's framework: which focuses on agenda-setting, political priority, actor power, ideas, and context.<sup>3</sup>
- Problem-driven PEA
- Applied political economy analysis

These frameworks have made important contributions by explaining why reforms gain political attention, how coalitions form, and when policy change becomes possible. However, common gaps remain:

- Fragmented analytical pathways: Frameworks are often applied in isolation and do not clearly define a pathway from political commitment through action to results.

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<sup>1</sup> Campos PA, Reich MR. Political analysis for health policy implementation. *Heal Syst Reform*. 2019;5(3):224–35. doi:10.1080/23288604.2019.1625251.

<sup>2</sup> Kingdon J., *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 1984 Boston, MA Little Brown

<sup>3</sup> Shiffman J, Smith S., Generation of political priority for global health initiatives: a framework and case study of maternal mortality, *The Lancet*, 2007.

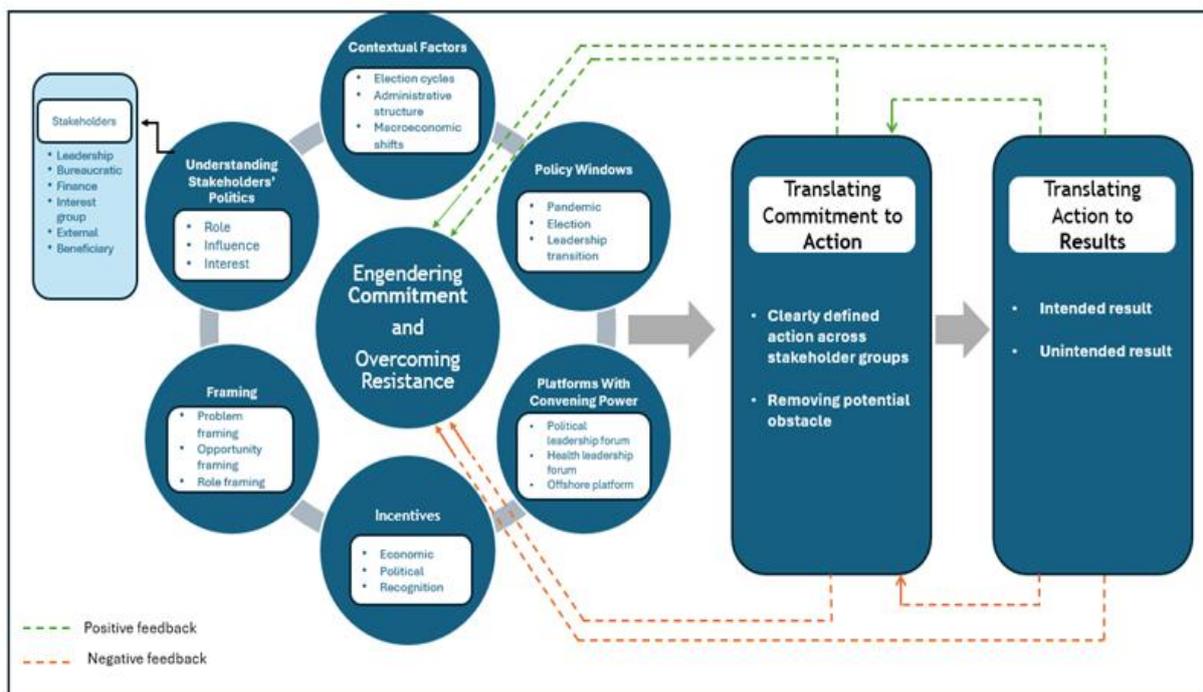
- Limited focus on implementation: Many frameworks emphasize agenda-setting and commitment but pay less attention to how commitment is translated into sustained action, including possible challenges in executing expected action and how to ensure synergy among the actions of different stakeholders
- Weak linkage to results: Existing approaches often stop short of systematically analysing intended and unintended reform outcomes.
- Insufficient treatment of iteration and feedback: The dynamic, non-linear nature of reforms and how results reshape political incentives over time is not always explicit.

### 3.0 OVERVIEW OF THE COMMITMENT–ACTION–RESULT (CAR) FRAMEWORK

The Commitment–Action–Result (CAR) Framework (Figure 1) provides a structured and integrated approach to analysing the political economy of health reforms. It explicitly traces the pathway through which political commitment is generated, how that commitment is translated into concrete actions, and how those actions ultimately produce results, both intended and unintended. The framework recognises that health reforms are not linear processes but are shaped by stakeholder politics, contextual dynamics, and feedback loops that can reinforce or undermine reform trajectories over time.

The CAR Framework was developed to address key gaps in existing political economy analysis approaches by extending them in three important ways. First, it places action and results at the centre of political economy analysis, moving beyond agenda-setting and commitment alone. Second, it synthesises insights from multiple PEA traditions into a single, coherent analytical pathway. Third, it explicitly treats reform as an iterative process, incorporating feedback loops through which results influence future incentives, political commitment, and actions.

Figure 1: The Commitment–Action–Result (CAR) Analytical and Action Framework



## 4.0 COMPONENTS OF THE CAR FRAMEWORK

The framework is organised into three interlinked analytical components (or buckets) as follows:

1. Engendering political consensus, commitment, and overcoming resistance
2. Translating commitment to action
3. Translating actions into results (intended and unintended)

### 1. Engendering Political Commitment and Overcoming Resistance

This first bucket focuses on understanding why and when political actors support or resist reform, and how reform coalitions are built or weakened. At the core of this bucket is the recognition that political commitment does not emerge automatically from technical evidence; it is actively shaped by stakeholder interests, power relations, incentives, and context.

#### a. Stakeholder Analysis and Stakeholder Politics

The framework begins with a systematic analysis of stakeholders, organized into six broad stakeholder groups (as reflected in the framework). For each stakeholder group, the analysis considers:

- Normative role: The role the stakeholder is formally expected to play.
- Actual role: How the stakeholder behaves in practice.
- Interests: What the stakeholder stands to gain or lose from the reform.
- Influence: The stakeholder's ability to shape decisions, block reforms, or accelerate implementation.

#### b. Drivers of Commitment: Incentives, Platforms, and Framing

Three key drivers help translate stakeholder interests and contextual opportunities into political commitment:

- Framing: How the reform is presented and communicated, whether as a solution to a pressing problem, an opportunity for political gain, or a risk to be mitigated. Problem framing, opportunity framing, and reframing are critical for reducing resistance and expanding support.
- Incentives:
  - Economic incentives (e.g., access to funding, fiscal relief).
  - Political incentives (e.g., electoral gains).
  - Recognition and reputational incentives.
- c. **Convening Platforms**: Formal and informal spaces where actors interact, such as political leadership forums, health sector coordination platforms, or offshore/global platforms. These platforms enable coalition-building, negotiation, and alignment across actors.
- d. **Policy Windows**: The framework explicitly incorporates the concept of policy windows, periods when reform becomes politically feasible due to shifts in context or attention. Examples include:

- Public health emergencies (e.g., pandemics)
- Economic crises
- Leadership transitions or changes in government priorities

Policy windows can temporarily lower resistance, realign interests, or elevate reform issues on the political agenda.

**e. *Contextual Factors:*** Political commitment is shaped by broader contextual factors that are often outside the control of reform designers but critically influence reform feasibility. These include:

- Election cycles: which may heighten political sensitivity to visible reforms or discourage long-term investments.
- Administrative and governance structures: which affect coordination, accountability, and decision-making authority.
- Macroeconomic conditions: such as fiscal stress or economic growth, which influence available policy space.

These contextual factors can either constrain or create opportunities for reform and often interact with stakeholder incentives.

#### **f. *Engendering Commitment and Managing Resistance***

At the center of the first bucket is the process of engendering political commitment while overcoming resistance. This involves:

- Aligning reform objectives with stakeholder incentives
- Strategically framing reforms to resonate with political and social priorities
- Using platforms to build coalitions and broker compromises
- Leveraging policy windows and contextual shifts

## **2. Translating Commitment to Action**

The second bucket focuses on what happens after commitment is expressed. Political commitment alone is insufficient; it must be translated into concrete actions by relevant stakeholders.

**a. *Defining Stakeholder-Specific Actions:*** This stage examines who does what, identifying specific actions taken by different stakeholder groups to advance the reform. These actions may include:

- Policy reforms: New laws, regulations, strategies, or formal policy decisions.
- System reforms: Changes in governance arrangements, institutional roles, financing mechanisms, or accountability structures.
- Input reforms: Allocation of financial resources, human resources, infrastructure, and technology.

**b. *Removing Obstacles to Implementation:*** A critical part of translating commitment into action is identifying and addressing implementation bottlenecks, such as:

- Bureaucratic resistance
- Capacity constraints
- Misaligned incentives
- Weak coordination mechanisms.

### 3. Translating Action to Results (Intended and Unintended)

The third bucket captures the results of reform actions, recognizing that reforms often produce a mix of outcomes, which may be intended or unintended.

#### a. *Intended Results*

These are the outcomes the reform explicitly seeks to achieve, such as:

- Improved service coverage and utilization
- Enhanced financial protection
- Stronger system performance or governance.
- Improved health outcomes

#### b. *Unintended Results*

The framework explicitly incorporates unintended and indirect consequences, which may include:

- Distributional effects that benefit or disadvantage certain groups
- New forms of resistance or elite capture
- Spillover effects on other sectors or policy areas.

Recognizing unintended outcomes is essential for understanding the full political and system-level impact of reforms.

## 5.0 FEEDBACK LOOPS AND DYNAMICS OVER TIME

The dotted arrows in the framework represent feedback mechanisms:

- **Positive feedback loops:** reinforce political commitment and sustain reform momentum. For example, early successes that strengthen stakeholder support or generate political rewards.
- **Negative feedback loops:** undermine commitment such as implementation failures, public backlash, or fiscal stress that increase resistance.

These feedback loops emphasize that political economy dynamics are iterative, not linear. Results influence future stakeholder incentives, framing strategies, and political commitment, shaping the next cycle of reform.

## 6.0 APPLICATION OF THE CAR FRAMEWORK

The CAR framework is designed as a practical analytical tool that can be applied at different stages of the reform cycle.

- Diagnose political commitment and resistance, using stakeholder analysis, incentives, framing, and context.
- Identify concrete actions required by specific actors to move reforms forward.
- Assess intended and unintended results, linking them directly to earlier political and implementation dynamics.
- Use feedback loops to adapt strategy, recognizing that results influence future incentives, commitment, and reform trajectories.
- A tool for a politically savvy reforms applicable for analysis, design, implementation, iterative adaptation and evaluation