Future Agricultures

Policy Brief

Agriculture Policy Processes in Kenya

The success of Kenya's Strategy for Revitalising Agriculture (SRA), discussed in the Future Agricultures briefing Agricultural Policy in Kenya, depends critically on policy processes, structures and actors affecting agricultural policy in Kenya. This briefing examines the impact of each of these factors on Kenyan agricultural policy-making, both historically and in the present. It situates the various policy-making, 'nodes' within the SRA framework and considers whether or not these structures and processes are sufficient for implementation of the SRA.

What shapes the policy environment?

Policy processes historically

On the whole, the policy-shaping environment in the agricultural sector has not been pro-poor and few incentives have existed for the Kenyan political elite to listen to the poor. Historically, the agricultural policy environment has been shaped by:

- The influence of the patrimonial State. Kenya's political system concentrates power in the Presidency.
- The relationship between ethnicity and agricultural practices. Policy formulation processes have tended to be biased in favour of particular ethnic groups, whilst penalising others, for example through the selective allocation of trade licenses.
- Economic rent and patronage. Rent in the agricultural sector is created by artificial shortages through licensing and restrictions applied to the production and marketing of agricultural commodities, inputs and services.
- Political economy of agriculture and dominance of donor assistance priorities. Post independence, agricultural policy was demand-driven responding to local stakeholders needs. Subsequent policy was supply driven and significantly influenced by donors from the mid 1970's, peaking with the introduction of Structural Adjustment and Integrated Rural Development Programmes. This was followed by the 'donor-do-nothing' phase of early 1990s to the 1994 Agricultural Sector Investment Program (ASIP).

- Absence of evidence-based policy research.

Lessons learned from past agricultural policy formulation

Despite the failure of past agricultural policy initiatives to bring about agricultural development and poverty reduction, a number of lessons for donors can be drawn from past experience, particularly the importance of:

- Cultivating local ownership and commitment to policy reforms within government and the wider community.
- Local factors such as political economy, crucial for successful implementation of proposed policy reforms.
- Identifying and establishing access to key decision makers influential in policy formulation.
- Fully costing policy proposals and establishing methods to integrate the proposals into the budgetary process.
- Appreciating capacity gaps in civil service and the necessity of introducing a phased approach to complex policy issues.

Policy processes today

There are a number of actors in decision making affecting agricultural policy. Their roles are related to their control of development resources:

Government: Role has evolved, with now an increased focus on the contribution of other actors and participation, especially with the 2002 District Focus for Rural Development (DFRD) strategy.

Donors: Reforms were sometimes linked to donor conditionalities. Donors also initiate and influence policy decisions by matching funding through government budgetary frameworks, or financing projects/ programmes serving donor interests.

Civil service and Kenyan technocrats/bureaucrats: Technocrats have often analysed economic problems and proposed solutions in terms of policies - like sessional papers, development plans and commission reports.

Interest groups around key policy-making nodes: These include the Presidency, ethnic groups, civil society organisations, academics and consultants.

Emerging agricultural policy formulation processes

Indications suggest the policy process is becoming more systematic, transparent and inclusive. A greater role for various stakeholders and a voice for parliamentarians, the private sector, civil society and the poor are emerging. The consultative ways in which the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) in 2000 and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP 2001-04) evolved is evidence of this. However, this has not been the case with the SRA.

Policy-making structures embodied in the SRA

The SRA is a 10-year agricultural policy framework to be implemented under the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework budgetary process, structured around three-year rolling plans. At the national level the framework for the SRA encompasses a yearly national forum of stakeholders in the agricultural sector, organised by lead ministries.

There is also an Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee (ICC) of ministries which provide services for the agricultural sector, such as the Ministry of Roads and Public Works. The committee includes private sector representatives, reflecting the emphasis of the SRA on private sector-led growth in agriculture.

The lead ministries - the Ministry of Agriculture, Land, Community Development and Local Government - form the Technical Inter-

Photograph: John Omiti

Kenyan farmers voting on commercialisation policy options.

ministerial Committee (TIC) which acts as the secretariat to ICC. Technical inputs necessary to achieve SRA will be brought in at this level.

The SRA recognises only two roles for government: to provide a limited range of goods and services and to carry out a small range of regulatory functions that cannot be enforced by private self-regulation and industry code of conduct.

Structures and processes to implement SRA

The SRA's reform agenda is ambitious. It is implementable, but will require more resources, collaboration with other sectors in the form of sector wide approaches (SWAPs) and efficient structures. It is important for the supporting sectors to consider the agricultural sector when formulating their agendas. However SRA faces a number of difficulties:

1. The lack of stakeholder ownership of the proposed reforms, due to the speed with which the policy was brought out. This has serious implications for resource-allocation to implement proposed policy reforms.
2. Lack of capacity to carry out such a massive reform initiative and lack of provision within the policy document itself.
3. Lack of a monitoring and evaluation framework built into policy framework.
4. Failure to build in to the policy framework the ongoing public expenditure reforms that favour devolution of public expenditures to the districts and local authorities.
5. Neglect of co-operative movements and societies that manage the production and/or marketing within the policy framework and process.
6. Failure to consider adequately on-going reforms in trading partner countries and competition from countries selling similar products in the same markets.

The policy environment has changed fundamentally over time.

Emerging strengths are: increasing transparency and room for debate; increasing voice, clear strategic path; formalised policy formulation process; improved budgetary process; increased capacity for policy analysis; and reduced opportunities for rent creation.

Remaining weaknesses include: inadequate policy analysis capacity in ministries; lack of reliable and recent data; weaknesses in the budgetary process; problems of inter-ministerial co-ordination, personality driven processes, vested interests and confused paradigms and policy narratives.

Opportunities exist to improve the policy process and include donor co-ordination and support, strengthening voices and creating local ownership of and commitment to policy and budgetary processes. But two threats exist in the policy process in the agricultural sector: the fragile NARC Government coalition and the unrealistic targets set out in the SRA.

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