



POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AGRICULTURAL POLICY IN AFRICA

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Policy processes: from words to action

The task of making closing remarks to a very wide-ranging conference was a difficult one, but a panel including **Kojo Amanor**, **Per Pinstруп Andersen**, **Ruth Oniang'o** and **Lindiwe Sibanda**, and chaired by **Colin Poulton**, succeeded in reflecting on the highlights and suggesting areas of further enquiry.

Kojo Amanor remarked how academic thinking had moved since the 1990s – when “everywhere works except Africa” was a familiar refrain – to frameworks which allowed better analysis of policy processes and the actors within them. Some questions for further exploration were the role of European actors and value chains; interactions between small and large scale farming; and the linkages between infrastructure, social inclusion and energy investments.

For **Per Pinstруп Andersen**, a strength of the conference was that it did not try to develop an agricultural policy for the whole of Africa, like many other events. Recognising diversity across countries and contexts, and picking out what works, is crucial. The task of making land deals work better for the poor is made difficult by a lack of transparency and accurate information. Public and private investments are not an either/or choice: often, government funding needs to be mobilised to create the conditions for the private sector to invest.

Ruth Oniang'o outlined some topics which deserved further development: gender, in particular the challenges and abuses faced by women, who make up the majority of smallholder farmers; the links in political economy between poverty, nutrition and livelihoods; and the mentoring and support of young people. She also noted

that large organisations such as FAO have become much more willing to engage with civil society over recent decades. On international assistance, she urged donors to look at more long-term partnerships and for solutions to come from within Africa itself.

Finally, **Lindiwe Sibanda** remarked that the time was right to discuss politics – but that action was needed too. Engagement of policy makers was needed, perhaps taking experiences from countries to regional communities, as well as looking at ways to hold politicians and others to account.

Other comments included:

- Why does implementation fail, even when good policies exist?
- How can we bring quantitative and qualitative research together?
- Bring more people with hands-on experience (Permanent Secretaries, etc) to such gatherings in future
- How to enable better collaboration between research, civil society and policy-makers
- Allow better sharing of data – perhaps through platforms like websites.

Civil society: people like us?

The role of civil society in enhancing agricultural policy processes in terms of formulation and implementation was discussed on day three drawing on lessons across countries on the success and challenges facing civil society organisations while engaging in political processes.

This brought up the questions as to who constitute the civil society and how can they participate meaningfully in agricultural political processes, especially when they are viewed by most government as threats to leadership, pushing donor agendas. This high level of distrust has been used to intimidate civil society organisations making it very difficult for them to engage with policymakers.

Lack of information, limited resources and a multiplicity of actors with different voices are also some of the challenges that the civil society face in their attempt to influence policy. Issues were also raised about their credibility and transparency.

However, there were specific examples of where civil society has been proactive and succeeded in engaging

with policymakers to improve agricultural policies, as was the case with Brazil where the civil society played a major role in creating the family farm policies.

But for civil society organisations (CSOs) to be successful in engaging in agricultural policies in Africa, they need to ‘get out of their comfort and must invest more in connecting to other players in this process’, according to **Arilson Favareto**. Greater successes would be achieved if civil society organisations involve NGOs, farmer organisations and social movements to create a bigger space for engaging in policy processes.

There was also a call for transparency and accountability on the part of civil society organisations, and the need for CSOs to be realistic about long term sustainable change.

Unpacking land deals

The contentious issue of large-scale foreign land investments in Africa was explored in two sessions.

In the morning, members of the OSSREA network (**Patience Mutopo, Mangasini Katundu and Roberts Muriisa**) provided research findings from so-called land grabs in Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Uganda. A clear message emerged that many recent cases of land acquisition are not foreign but domestic, often involving private individuals with good connections to land-related authorities. Nevertheless, foreign investment is going on, sometimes facilitated by national governments through bilateral investment partnerships and endorsed by village leaders. The presenter from Tanzania reported land being sold as cheaply as Tsh 50,000 (USD 30) per acre.

Among the most dramatic outcomes have been forcible evictions with inadequate compensation. The presenters spoke of other negative impacts such as local people losing access to water and abandoning cultivation plots for fear of takeover by investors. Attendees discussed ways to avoid such poor deals in future, such as clearer tenure rights. One attendee suggested that in many cases what was going on was simple “land robbing”, which requires not new land policies but a cleaner law. Another attendee wondered whether initiatives such as principles for responsible investment in agriculture were relevant, since there appears to be plenty of existing legislation that is not adhered to. Politicians were faulted in all three presentations, for being too accommodating to foreign investors, failing to provide good governance and suppressing activism on this issue. “Doing research on land in Uganda is life-threatening,” said the Ugandan presenter.

In the other session, **Emmanuelle Sulle** located large-scale land deals in Tanzania within the Kilimo Kwanza (‘agriculture first’) policy strategy, which aims at increasing productivity through the private sector. He discussed two recent developments in the Kilimo Kwanza context: the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor for Tanzania (SAGCOT) and an attempt by US-based company AgriSol to acquire hundreds of thousands of hectares for production. The AgriSol deal, “crafted in Tanzania by local elites”, is a more typical foreign ‘land



grab’, but Sulle said SAGCOT is also planning very large land allocations to investors. Further, the Kilimo Kwanza emphasis on foreign agribusiness threatens Tanzanian processing companies. “They are trying to eliminate the local indigenous private companies and bring in the big multinationals,” said one delegate.

Presentations on Malawi and Mozambique also highlighted the role of domestic governments in facilitating foreign investments. **Gaynor Paradza** emphasized the range of political authorities in the Mozambican political economy, from chiefs to provincial authorities to national leaders. She described research in Manica Province, the site of a sugarcane boom.

In Malawi, the desire of the President to extend gains from subsidised fertiliser programme led to the “Green Belt Initiative”, argued **Blessings Chinsinga**. This identifies land for large-scale farmers and foreign investors to use for irrigated production. The squeeze on farmland, added to the poverty trap of low maize productivity, means that “the Malawian smallholder farmer is in double jeopardy,” according to Chinsinga.

Joseph Yaro of Ghana argued that transnational land deals have become part of the process of change in Africa. There is an assumption that Africa has great potential but needs better agrarian structures. This opens the way to policies such as that of the Ghanaian government to attract FDI for export-driven agricultural modernisation. Yaro presented findings from research into three large-scale investments – two plantations and an outgrower scheme – and discussed their contribution to agrarian change in Ghana.

Wrapping up the session, **Ruth Hall** provided insight on South African commercial interests that are expanding operations into the rest of Africa. She stressed that this development has not been driven by South African agricultural policy, but rather private agribusinesses and political initiatives such as bilateral treaties and development corridors. For example, commercial farmers moving to Congo to produce sugar, but since Congo has no existing commercial farming models, the government is having to develop new policies, which respond to the needs of the farmers: an example of how land deals can influence agricultural policy, rather than the other way around.