



Private sector participation in agricultural policymaking in Kenya



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Overview

Agriculture represents 33% of Kenya's total GDP, and it contributes an additional 27% to the GDP through linkages to other sectors such as manufacturing, distribution, and services. Further, the sector is the means of livelihood for most of the country's rural population. Kenya has 8.6 million farmers - representing approximately 4.5 million households even if there are only 350,000 formal jobs in the sector (GoK, 2019) - that are responsible for as much as 60% of agricultural production. In February 2019, Kenya published the Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS), the most recent national policy devoted to agriculture.

The urgency to develop a new strategy for the sector was raised by the end of 2016, followed by consultations with different stakeholders that took place between 2017 and 2019. The sector got even more attention when President Uhuru Kenyatta announced the Big Four Agenda in December 2018, which was an accelerated five-year development plan to fast track the realization of Vision 2030. With four main 'pillars,' the Big Four agenda acknowledges that the agricultural sector is the backbone of Kenya's economy and sets it as one of its main priorities - that is, as one of the pillars - to achieve food and nutritional security in the country.

The study informing this research contributes to an analysis of the 'corporate food regime' (McMichael, 2009) and how national and other private players influence agricultural policymaking processes that that haven't paid enough attention to the role of the private sector and the productionist narrative in agricultural policies. A productionist narrative is defined as a focus on the need to increase agricultural output, disconsidering or giving less importance to other dimensions of food and nutritional security such as accessibility, utilization and stability.

Key Messages

- There is often an assumption that transnational companies have a dominant power to influence national policymaking. However, as seen in the Kenyan Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS), there is a diversity of private actors that are able to participate and intervene in the process, from smallholder farmers to national business and international consultancy firms.
- Besides the influence of the private sector, what impacts national policies for agricultural transformation is the dominant productivist narrative supported by the different stakeholders. The dominance of one specific narrative (industrial agriculture) can be a strong factor of socio-technical lock-in, preventing actual transformation and the emergence of sustainable alternatives such as agroecology.
- Policymaking can become depoliticized if key political arbitrages between different options or pathways for agricultural transformation are presented as purely technical issues and delegated to technical experts. Moreover, good governance practices, such as inclusive participation and evidence-based policymaking, are tools that can be used to reinforce certain worldviews and political priorities.

Key Recommendation

- Creation of a social participation mechanism that allows for the right of participation in the conception, construction, execution, and monitoring of the national policies which would in fact further the aims of Article 10 of the Kenya Constitution on public participation.

The study argues that the linkage between the 'productionist' narrative and the analysis of how it is put forward by the private sector - through specific levers - in national agricultural development policies is lacking and aims at bridging this gap. It does so by analyzing Kenya's ASTGS and the mechanisms and settings of this specific public policy debate, along with assessing which dynamics have implications in the framing of the policy in a certain manner while excluding other alternative views

Results

The results and recommendations outlined here are drawn from data collected between June and August 2018 through 41 semi-structured interviews that took place in different spaces but mainly at the offices of the representatives of the different organizations and stakeholders in Nairobi - both from the public and private sectors - or in the case of farmers, at their farms or farming demonstration sites in Kajiado and Nakuru counties. Moreover, the research used a mixed-method approach that combined both the analytical and reconstructive approaches in order to categorize and differentiate the stakeholders. First, it used card sorting as a methodology that allowed for stakeholders to elicit their own perceptions of the (other) stakeholders. Then, building on their average perception, the research applied an influence-interest matrix.

Key Insights

There is a diversity of actors within the private sector that influence policymaking, not only transnational companies

The literature in the fields of the political economy of food systems and on the global governance of food and nutritional security often highlights that transnational companies have a dominant power to influence agricultural national policymaking. This research analyzed farmers, farmer organizations, cooperatives, SMEs, and large international corporations which are defined here as private sector. During the iterative process of the interviews, it became clear that a new kind of private actor had to be added and differentiated due to its crucial role in the development of the ASTGS: consulting firms. McKinsey was hired in January 2018 by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) to work on the draft of the agricultural strategy and the consultancy firm was able to make decisions that are highly political such as the definition of criteria for performance assessments which influence the choice of agricultural models. Although McKinsey worked closely with the Kenyan government and that the quantitative and qualitative expertise provided was adapted to focus on what would produce agricultural transformation in Kenya, the consultancy firm seems to

apply a standardized approach with mechanisms taken out of a single toolbox and to influence policy choices. One example is the case for the "14 Timeless Tests of Agricultural Transformation" to determine the starting point for agricultural transformation, as well as of the other 'standardized' ways of measuring 'Readiness for agricultural transformation' or the 'core elements' to deliver a successful rural transformation as proposed by its Center for Agricultural Transformation. Moreover, it seems that solutions provided in the final strategy related to some of the most controversial issues had favorable outcomes for the private sector, both national and international and not necessarily the 70% smallholder farmers who dominate agriculture in Kenya. They will have an important role to play in the implementation of the e-voucher subsidies, the private storage of the food reserves and, especially, in the 'unlocking' of fifty new large scale private farms.

Agricultural transformation is understood through a productivist narrative and is supported by different stakeholders

This research analyzed the interests and views of agricultural transformation of each subgroup (national private sector, international private sector, public sector, development partners, consultancy firms, farmers) to understand potential similarities and divergences on how they understood 'agricultural transformation'. It is possible to conclude that the interpretation of the challenges and of the vision of agricultural transformation between national and international private actors mainly coincided, and was aligned with the productionist narrative. This view was also supported by the government and development partners, while smallholder farmers were the actors that brought a different perspective. Beyond seeking to have access to mechanization and inputs to be able to produce more, they pointed out the need to increase their resilience due to climate change and to manage soil quality, for example. Overall, there was a convergence of views of agricultural transformation making a strong case for the productionist narrative and for industrial agriculture, which can be a strong factor of socio-technical lock-in, preventing actual transformation and the emergence of sustainable alternatives such as agroecology.

Policymaking can become depoliticized if political arbitrages for agricultural transformation are delegated to technical experts, such as international consultancies

During the research, some policymaking trends that might lead to depoliticized debate were highlighted by the interviewed stakeholders. Although they might not be unique to the Kenyan policymaking process, they allow understanding the conditions in which the debate of the ASTGS took place. First, McKinsey, and its contractor AGRA, were central actors that supported MoALF&I during the final stages of prioritizing and choosing the policy activities (see above). The second important element was the creation of an independent delivery mechanism, the Agricultural Transformation Office (ATO), which is a governmental body placed as a central actor in the implementation of the ASTGS, as well as a fundamental player to mediate inter-

ministerial relations. The formulation of this unit represents a shift in the public policy forum, as well as exemplifies the depoliticization of arenas as policy negotiations are moved to this new independent space. Besides, the notions of democratic participatory consultations, evidence-based decision-making, the New Public Management agenda, as well as the presence of economic models that are crafted and diffused by international organizations such as the World Bank and the African Union (CAADP), are practices that are seen as unavoidable when it comes to good governance and are part of a broader framework that influence the process as well as the content of the ASTGS. These cannot be understood as neutral practices as they have an influence on how stakeholders were engaged and ideas were put forth and monitoring of the national policies which would in fact further the aims of Article 10 of the Kenya Constitution on public participation. One successful example of such a mechanism is the Consea (National Council for Food and Nutritional Security) in Brazil that existed until January 2019 and that monitored the country's policies related to food security. The Council was composed of two-thirds of civil society representatives and one-third of government debated, circulated, and were chosen or excluded from the agricultural transformation agenda in Kenya.

Recommendations

This study attempted to contribute to the fields of the corporate food regime and of public policy analysis by providing insights on the role of private actors in agricultural national public policymaking. The case of the ASTGS has confirmed the trend of the depoliticization of important political debates, nevertheless, it has shown that it is not only transnational corporations that have a productionist view of agricultural transformation. The lack of a political debate of transformation pathways, in addition to the dominant productionist paradigm advanced by various stakeholders hampers the emergence of alternatives. Therefore, the key recommendation from this research is the creation of a social participation mechanism that allows for the right of participation in the conception, construction, execution, and¹ monitoring of the national policies which would in fact further the aims of Article 10 of the Kenya Constitution on public participation. One successful example of such a mechanism is the Consea (National Council for Food and Nutritional Security) in Brazil that existed until January 2019 and that monitored the country's policies related to food security. The Council was composed of two-thirds of civil society representatives and one-third of government representatives, and it was a space for mobilization, articulation, and discussion between different actors. The diversity of the actors of this forum made it possible to be a scientific, professional, and public policy forum making a bridge between the public space and the public policy space. Forums are the places where ideas are produced, mobilized, discussed and translated into public policy proposals. They are spaces for the confrontation of different interpretations of the world, alternative visions of a given field or sector and the public policy recipes to be applied to it. (Fouilleux and Jobert, 2017).

The Consea also expanded the possibilities of practical and discursive articulation between the strengthening of family agriculture, the right to healthy and adequate food, and agroecology. (Niederle et al., 2019) Such social participation mechanisms allow for political exchanges and the emergence of ideas coming from civil society (notably actors and organizations working closely with farmers and sustainable agriculture), that are, then, able to reach institutional spaces and policy arenas and to have an impact in the conception and implementation of public policies. (Schmitt and Grisa, 2013).

References and Further Reading

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