

What Are The Determinants Of Agricultural Policy In Africa?

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'Pessimism around poor agricultural performance coupled with optimism about its potential and its necessity as an engine of growth and development combine to inform many of the most popular agriculture centred policy recommendations for Africa' (Oya, 2010:85). Indeed as Oya notes, literature on determinants of agricultural policy in Africa often gravitate towards two polarizing views. On the one hand, scholars like Bates and De Walle argue that agricultural policy in Africa is determined by neo-patrimonial interests. Neopatrimonialism can be defined as a hybrid regime consisting of a state like apparatus (the "neo"); and a patrimonial spoils network in which centralized elites mobilize political support by using their public position to distribute rent-seeking opportunities (Bratton & van de Walle 1994). On the other hand, scholars like Diao, DeGrassi and Oya argue that 'intended' and 'unintended' outcomes from political and socio-economic processes have shaped agricultural policy over time. As they assert, factors such as colonial history, ideology, commodity bias, urban bias, poor data and structural adjustment policies which reflect varying interests in society are in fact the determinants of agricultural policy. In drawing insights from both arguments yet negating some elements in the former, this essay argues that multiple competing interests from local and international actors shape agricultural policy in Africa. Further, it illustrates through case studies on Senegal's Agro Pastoral and Forestation Orientation Act and Kenya's Strategy for Revitalizing Agriculture policy, the importance of taking into consideration economic and political exigencies when analyzing determinants of the same.

This essay is structured into three parts: the first part highlights and analyzes the various arguments made on determinants of agricultural policy in four time periods in Africa: the colonial and post-colonial state era in the 1950s and 1960-70s, the structural adjustment period in the 1980s and contemporary period. In doing so it draws attention to the heterogeneity of initial conditions and highlights various factors in the past that continue to shape agricultural policy in the present. Indeed agricultural policy isn't entirely path dependent and as this essay shows, factors such as local agency through farmer associations and civil society inform it as well. The second part highlights the determinants of contemporary agricultural policy by analyzing Senegal's Agro Pastoral

and Forestation Orientation Act and Kenya's Strategy for Revitalizing Agriculture policy, while the final section concludes with observations based on the foregoing.

Determinants of agricultural policy in Africa in four time periods

Colonial era: the effect of colonial history on agricultural policy

As Samir Amin notes, a sensible point of departure when analyzing agricultural policies and heterogeneity of initial conditions in Africa is the different regime types created during the colonial era. These include 'Africa of the cash crop economies', 'Africa of the labour reserves' and 'Africa of the concessionary companies' (Amin, 1972). As he explains, the different regime types reflected varying economic and political interests in the colonies yet indicate similar commodity biases. 'Africa of the labour reserves' were colonies whose main economic activity included large scale European commercial farming and were characterized by large scale land appropriation and labour restrictions to facilitate settler farmers' needs. The second type, 'Africa of the concessionary companies' were characterized by large scale industrial plantations which belonged to concessionary companies. An example being the Lever's Brothers in the Congo. The third type, 'Africa of the cash crop economies' were characterized by local small holder farming channeled towards export production.

Agricultural policy was crucial to the colonial government as it played a central role in ensuring food production during the World Wars and generated the revenues necessary for colonial administration (Hart, 1982; Cooper, 2002). As such, institutions such as centralized marketing boards were created to ensure control over export production as they helped ensure revenue generation during recession periods when commodity prices had dropped (Berry, 1993). As Gardner explains, budget constraints proved quite difficult for colonial administrations thus designing institutions that ensured profit maximization were critical at that juncture (Gardner, 2012). Additionally as Cooper points out, the 'gatekeeper state' was designed to ensure that only the state regulated agricultural export and import (Cooper, 2002: 160).

Post-colonial era: the effect of state led development on agricultural policy

Following independence, newly crafted African states inherited the challenges faced by colonial administrations. Indeed, financial constraints that threatened administrative capacity and emerging threats from political stability were prevalent (Gardner, 2012; Bates, 1981:14; Hart, 1982). In the case of Ghana for example, the Asante Kingdom proved difficult to exert authority over and this posed a great challenge as majority of the cocoa producing areas were situated in areas where tensions had emerged. As Cooper notes, just like their predecessors, post-colonial governments had trouble extending their power inward; collecting taxes, except on imports and exports; and had trouble setting economic priorities and policies (Cooper, 2002: 156-161). Given that agricultural production was the main source of revenue for governments, mechanisms to ensure control over it were essential. As such just like in the colonial era, marketing boards were given authority over cocoa associations.

Protagonists of agricultural neopatrimonialism inform us of the negative effects of having central agencies as the sole determinants of agricultural production. Bates for example states that by setting and influencing market prices, governments accumulated significant funds from the agricultural sector and manipulated the marketing boards for wide scale corruption thus leaving farmers with no option but to sell their produce to the black market (Bates, 1981:12-13).

Effects of Structural Adjustment Policies on agricultural policy

Structural adjustment policies (SAPs) which were driven by international actors and more specifically international finance institutions played a crucial role in determining agricultural policy in Africa as they 'pushed back' the state to allow for market interventions. This policy bias emerged after the Berg report identified excessive state intervention and widespread corruption as major constraints hindering agricultural production and overall development. Further, allegations on urban bias emerged and these were seen as investments restricted to urban areas where "politically active" citizens lived (Bates, 1981:17). As a result of the SAPs, marketing boards were done away with and agriculture prices were no longer regulated by the state. Subsidies in goods such as pesticides and fertilizers were also done away with thus leaving farmers more exposed to global shocks in prices. As Pejout highlights, poor institutions,

marketing and storage facilities, high transport costs, constraints on investments, inadequate and declining research in agriculture, ineffective extension services and lack of finance to the agricultural sector exacerbated the situation (Pejout, 2010:251). Indeed it was not long before the detrimental effects of the SAPs on agricultural performance came to light raising the question of the suitability of neoliberal policies on agricultural production.

Oya however notes that external conditions such as market interventions and a global shock in prices though detrimental cannot explain underperformance in agriculture in its entirety. As he informs us, differences in performance following the SAPs in Ghana and Cote d' Ivoire can be explained by varying agrarian structures, agro-industrial linkages and policy regimes (Oya, 2010:93).

Debunking neo-patrimonial claims as the main determinant of agricultural policy

As DeGrassi reports, an increasing number of analysts have implicitly or explicitly assumed that the concept of neopatrimonialism can be deployed usefully to understand how sub-Saharan African governments approach agricultural development and policy reform, and consequently why the continent's aggregate agricultural productivity has grown relatively slowly (DeGrassi, 2008:107). Though scholars such as Bates and De Walle are correct in some of their claims on neopatrimonialism shaping agricultural policy in Africa, they still fall short in explaining determinants of it in its entirety. As DeGrassi informs us, there are major limitations to this argument; one, African states are not homogenous in nature as each has various internal and external processes that shape its politics and institutions. Indeed different colonial regime types shaped different means to appropriate resources thus the neopatrimonial argument misrepresents complex historical processes. Secondly, arguments on neopatrimonialism over-estimate states' capacity to buy out all their citizens. Societies in general are constituted of various interest groups contesting and bargaining for their interests. As Lonsdale states, "it is rare to meet fully rounded political actors" (Lonsdale, 2005). Rather, local agency such as farmer associations and civil society have played a central role in shaping agricultural policy.

Contemporary period: Evidence from Kenya and Senegal

Indeed various local and international actors ranging from citizens, donor organizations, civil society and farmer associations influence agricultural policy in Africa and this section interrogates when and how they do so. To begin with, Pejout informs us of how food riots and violence became more prevalent in African cities following the rapid escalation of food prices in 2008 (Pejout, 2010: 247). This resulted in political instability and drove governments to re-analyze their agricultural policy. An example of two countries that did so were Kenya and Senegal which developed the Strategy for Revitalizing Agriculture policy paper (SRA) and Agro Pastoral and Forestation Orientation Act (LOA-SP) with the aims of reinvigorating agricultural production and reversing several years of dismal performance. As Pejout explains, poor performance and lack of tangible agricultural policy could be pointed to weak ownership of policies and external constraints caused by the structural adjustment policies and the WTO and other neo-liberal trade agreements (Pejout, 2010:248). Local agency played a critical role and a multi-stakeholder approach which included farmer associations, civil society and the private sector was underscored in both policy reforms. In Senegal, 30,000 farmers lobbied and obliged the president to accept a participative development of agricultural policy. The same is true of Kenya where the Kenya National Farmers Union represented and advocated for farmers' interests (Pejout, 2010:253).

Conversely however, these policies were only successful during the initial stages and subsequent substantive reforms did not take place. In Senegal for example, the government lacked the political will to implement the legislation and instead established large scale agri-business projects which did not reflect the demands of local farmers but instead those of donor agencies (Pejout, 2010:258). A similar occurrence happened in Kenya whereby aspirations of local farmers, civil society and the private sector were sought when the bills were being prepared but changes were later made to reflect the interests of the international community (Alila and Atieno, 2006:25).

In addition as Diao and Pejout highlight, ideology has also played a role in influencing agricultural policy. Often times small scale farming is seen as unviable in light of competitive global production chains therefore hardly advocated for or supported by donor agencies and government (Diao, 2009; Pejout, 2010). Even where ministries of agriculture advocate for local farmers' needs, ministries such as those of finance and

planning have other interests. In Kenya for example, the ministry of finance was more concerned with agricultural policy that ensured foreign exchange earnings rather than farmers' interest as the SRA was being implemented (Pejout, 2010: 259).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that contrary to allegations of only neopatrimonialism determining agricultural policy in Africa, multiple factors and actors do so. It has illustrated how competing interests and exigencies between local actors and donor agencies; and those between different ministries have influenced it as shown in the case of Senegal and Kenya. Further, this essay has highlighted how heterogeneous initial conditions have influenced present day institutions thus one needs to take into consideration different levels of political and economic development when analyzing determinants of agricultural policy in Africa.

Context matters as seen through the disastrous effects of the structural adjustment policies in the 1980-90s and rather than allege that there similar determinants of agricultural policy in Africa, scholars and institutions such as the World Bank and WTO require analyzing competing economic and political realities in countries. Poor data has exacerbated the situation as 'guesstimates' often mask variations between and among countries (Oya, 2010:92). Additionally, African governments require taking ownership of their agricultural policies or this may result in persistent poverty and stagnation in agricultural production.

Word Count: 1960

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