

Changes in Stakeholder Perceptions of the Quality of Institutional Architecture and Quality of Agriculture and Food Security Policy Processes in Zambia

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INTRODUCTION

Zambia, through her long-term development objective – the Vision 2030 – aspires to become a prosperous middle-income country by 2030. Attaining this long-term goal requires a mix of prudent and sound economic management and coordinated development planning. To actualize this vision, estimates suggest that Zambia will need to sustain an average annual economic growth rate of 10% and reduce poverty and income inequality to about 20% and 40%, respectively, by 2030 (GRZ 2006). The agriculture sector remains an important economic sector that can contribute to sustained economic growth and transformation, and poverty reduction in Zambia (GRZ 2017).

Despite efforts to make policy processes all-inclusive, stakeholders consider some government policies and interventions in the agricultural sector to be unpredictable, ad hoc, and likely to crowd out private sector investment and engagement in the sector (Martin and Chileshe 2014). More recently, Ngoma et al. (2017) found that agricultural and food security policy processes in Zambia need to be more inclusive, engage more with stakeholders, and more effectively utilize the available empirical evidence to inform policy design.

This endline policy brief is part of the efforts by the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy (FSP), with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to assess the institutional architecture and quality of policy processes for agriculture and food security in countries assisted by the Feed the Future initiative. We compare stakeholder perceptions on various agricultural and food policy processes per a 2019 endline survey to the values computed from a 2017 baseline survey. The brief focuses on the case of Zambia and examines changes between 2017 and 2019 in stakeholders' opinions and perceptions of the quality and inclusiveness of agricultural and food security policy processes, as well as the institutional setting supporting these processes.

Key Findings

- Despite sustained efforts by successive Zambia governments to implement policies that assure food and nutrition security, questions remain around policy coherence and consistency in the agricultural sector.
- This brief reports on the perceived changes in the quality and design of agriculture and food security policy processes, and on the quality of the institutional architecture supporting these processes in Zambia.
- Stakeholders in Zambia seem to perceive that policy analyses from research institutes is objective. This is important for evidence-based policy making.
- Stakeholders are also more satisfied than at baseline with the quality and content of, participation in policy design and implementation in policy processes, and the level of dialogue between government and other stakeholders.
- Stakeholder perceptions of the overall quality of agricultural and food security policies marginally declined by 0.27 points (on a scale of 0 to 3) between 2017 and 2019. This seems to suggest that stakeholders somewhat perceive a less satisfactory quality of dialogue, coordination, cooperation, and partnership between stakeholders in the agricultural sector and government for advancing policy reforms on agriculture and food security issues in Zambia.
- Stakeholder perceptions of the quality of the institutional architecture of agriculture and food policy processes in Zambia barely changed, declining just by 0.05 points on a scale of 0 to 3) between 2017 and 2019.
- These findings suggest that, among other things, there is scope for the agricultural and food security policy processes in Zambia to be more inclusive, engage more with stakeholders, and more effectively utilize the available empirical evidence to inform policy design.
- The perceived objectivity of current policy analyses in Zambia should strengthen the use of evidence to inform policy processes in the country.



DATA AND METHODS

Data were gathered from 63 out of the 123 potential respondents who were purposively sampled from the Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute (IAPRI) stakeholder database to participate in the endline FSP survey on agriculture and food security policy processes in Zambia. The selected sample represented stakeholders from government, the private sector, donor agencies, civil society, non-governmental organizations, and research or think tank organizations that are active and considered influential within the Zambian agriculture and food security policy framework. An online questionnaire with three modules (A through C) was used to collect the data. Module A captured background information on the respondent and their organization and collected information on years of service and engagement within the Zambian agriculture sector. Below we describe what was included in Modules B and C and report on the key findings from these two modules. Questions in Module B and C used Likert-scale type questions/statements covering various aspects of the policy processes and institutional architecture. Survey respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement to the statements by selecting one of the four options coded as 0 completely disagree, 1 somewhat disagree, 2 somewhat agree and 3 completely agree.

KEY FINDINGS

Perceptions of the Quality of Agriculture and Food Security Policy Processes in Zambia

Questions in Module B assessed the quality of the content and inclusiveness of agricultural and food security policy processes and examined the extent to which other stakeholders participate in policy design and implementation in Zambia. Most of the responses to the 18 questions in Module B fall between the *somewhat disagree* and *somewhat agree* categories, with a mean score of about 1.64 (on a scale of 0 to 3 points) for all questions. The overall mean score for government respondents at 1.74 is 0.11 points higher than the mean score for other (i.e., non-government) respondents. Although there was an improvement in stakeholder perceptions between 2017 and 2019, the aggregate score in 2019 is still within the *somewhat disagree* to *somewhat agree* range and there are significant variations between baseline and endline values for several of the individual questions in the module. These results, therefore, suggest that there is room to improve the level and quality of dialogue and stakeholder involvement in agriculture and food security policy processes in Zambia. A closer look at the specific questions in Module B highlights the following. (Specific question numbers are noted in parentheses.)

- The mean scores on the level of dialogue between government and other stakeholders (B1), and on

dialogue and coordination among government institutions (B2) was 1.00 (recall that a value of 1 corresponds to “somewhat disagree”). Responses across all respondent categories seem aligned in suggesting that they are somewhat dissatisfied with the level of dialogue between government and other stakeholders and on the level of coordination among government institutions on policy processes. The average indicator for B1 and B2 represents a significant drop in perceptions by 0.70 points from the baseline values.

- As was the case at baseline, respondents were critical and somewhat disagreed with the statement that the performance of the agricultural sector is assessed openly, transparently, and in a timely manner (B13).
- Unlike at baseline where stakeholders were somewhat pessimistic, stakeholders at the time of the endline survey seemed to now somewhat agree that:
 - data and information sharing are important in evidence-based assessments of policy processes (B15);
 - rigorous empirical evidence is used in policy processes (B16); and
 - capacity exists to carry out independent policy analysis on agriculture and food security issues in Zambia (B17).
- With a mean score of 2.3, stakeholders somewhat to strongly agree that agricultural policy analysis undertaken by research organizations is considered objective and not influenced by interested parties (B18). This result is important for evidence-based policy making and the average score is an improvement from the baseline report where stakeholders were somewhat pessimistic on the objectivity of policy analysis undertaken by research organizations.

Quality of Institutional Architecture for Agricultural and Food Security Policy Processes in Zambia

Module C examined the quality of institutions as well as the monitoring and implementation frameworks for agriculture and food security policy processes in Zambia. The institutions analyzed were the Agricultural Sector Working Group (ASWG) and the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture (PCA). ASWG, now called the Agricultural Sector Advisory Group (AgSAG), is composed of both public and private sector representatives and meets quarterly. AgSAG engages with other stakeholders on matters pertinent to agriculture and reports progress on the Ministry of Agriculture’s implementation of the National Agriculture Policy. PCA, now called the Committee on Agriculture, Lands and Natural Resources, is a committee of the Zambian parliament charged with the responsibility of scrutinizing

and conducting surveillance on the ministries of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Livestock, and Land and Natural Resources.

The overall mean score for the 18 questions on the quality of institutional architecture and policy monitoring in Module C is 1.81, again falling between the somewhat disagree and somewhat agree categories, but leaning more towards the latter. Overall, the results suggest that there has been marginal improvement between 2017 and 2019 in the quality and engagement of institutions to support agriculture and food security policies in Zambia. However, there are appreciable differences in the mean scores for individual questions and among the five respondent categories. For example:

- The mean score for the statement “an effective and efficient ASWG exists” is 1.67, suggesting that most of the respondents are in between the somewhat disagree and somewhat agree categories. Most respondents were inclined to somewhat agree with the perception that discussions in the ASWG are well informed on current conditions in the agricultural sector, that empirical evidence is utilized to assess policy options, and that decisions made by the ASWG are communicated back to political leadership in Zambia (C1-C4).
- Despite a somewhat positive perception of the ASWG and an improvement from the baseline score, respondents were pessimistic that government seriously considers decisions made by the ASWG and that a clear relationship exists between these decisions and agricultural policies (C5 and C6).
- Respondents were less agreeable that the PCA provides effective oversight on agricultural spending than the ASWG and that there is a clear relationship between recommendations from PCA and government policy decisions (C7 and C8).
- Similar to the baseline results, the overall perception of the respondents across all stakeholder categories is that there is neither an effective system to monitor policy implementation and results in the agricultural sector (C13), nor an effective and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system to measure progress towards agricultural development goals (C14). Respondents also disagree that resources are made available to support implementation once a policy is announced (C15). As was the case in the baseline, these three indicators (C13-C15) received the lowest ratings among the 18 statements included in Module C.
- Stakeholders interviewed perceive that donors supporting the agriculture sector in Zambia make commitments that are clear, realistic, and genuine

and seem to have an effective coordination forum that does not disrupt the flow of resources committed to the sector (C16 and C17). Stakeholders also felt that government and donors embrace transparency and debate in policy processes and decision making (C18).

Overall Quality of Agricultural and Food Security Policy Processes in Zambia

Survey responses from Module C were also used to generate baseline indices for the FSP activities in Zambia. These indices measure the overall stakeholder perceptions on the quality of agricultural and food security policies and the overall quality of the institutional architecture in the country. An average score of 1.38 for the first index is 0.27 points lower (on a scale of 0 to 3 points) than the baseline value and the difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. (This test result is however unreliable because the baseline had a small sample at n=23).

The aggregate index for the overall quality of institutional architecture barely changed, declining by just 0.05 points from the baseline value to an overall mean score of 1.54. The mean scores are fairly similar across institution types, suggesting that the overall picture on the institutional architecture is rather pessimistic.

CONCLUSION

This brief compared baseline and endline results and tracked whether, and in which direction, the quality of agricultural and food security policy processes and institutional architecture in Zambia changed over time.

The overall stakeholder satisfaction with the quality of agricultural and food security policies declined marginally by 0.27 points between baseline and endline, suggesting that stakeholders perceive a somewhat less satisfactory quality of dialogue, coordination, cooperation, and partnership between stakeholders in the agricultural sector and government for advancing policy reforms on agriculture and food security issues in Zambia in 2019 compared to 2017. Further research is warranted to understand why there is this downward trend in overall satisfaction with policy processes, even though there is a marginal improvement in the overall perceptions on the quality of policy processes between baseline and endline. Aggregate overall stakeholder satisfaction with the quality of the institutional architecture of agriculture and food policy barely changed, suggesting that stakeholders view little difference in the overall quality of the institutional architecture for agriculture and food security policy processes in 2017 versus 2019 in Zambia.

On the positive side, stakeholders now seem to perceive that policy analyses from research institutes is objective.

This is important for evidence-based policy making. Stakeholders are also more satisfied than at baseline with the quality and content of and participation in policy design and implementation in policy processes, and the level of dialogue between government and other stakeholders. However, the marginal downward trend in the overall perceptions on satisfaction with the quality of dialogue, coordination, cooperation, and partnership between stakeholders and government warrants attention.

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