The Quality of Agriculture and Food Security Policy Processes and Institutions

Insights from Malawi on measurement over time

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Context

• In Malawi, some strengthening in quality of policy processes around agriculture and food security over past decade
  • Broadening in range of stakeholders participating
  • Annual multi-stakeholder Joint Sector Reviews
  • Eight Technical Working Groups on sub-sectoral priorities

• Associated with:
  • Moderate growth in agriculture sector
  • Progress in policy reforms on paper; mixed to unclear results in the field
  • Continued significant public investment in agriculture
    • Most goes to large Farm Input Subsidy Program
  • Worrisome food security performance
New Alliance Policy Acceleration Support: Malawi (NAPAS:Malawi) project

• Policy support project to realize commitments to agricultural policy reform of government of Malawi
  • Gov’t commitments made under Malawi’s engagement in G8’s New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition
  • USAID/Malawi funded the project in 2014 as an FSP Associate Award
    • Led by MSU, with IFPRI and UP participation; ended in November 2018

• Objective of strengthening agriculture & food security policy processes
  • Support to Ministry on sector and sub-sector policy and strategy formulation
  • Two senior staff based in Ministry of Agriculture
    • Engaged in both policy research and process facilitation
Motivation for measuring quality of policy processes

• NAPAS: Malawi project monitoring indicators include two indices:
  1. On quality of the agriculture and food security policy processes
  2. On quality of institutional architecture within which those processes proceed

• Indices computed from opinion surveys of national level participants in these policy processes
  • Baseline round done in mid-2015
  • Endline round in late-2017 & early-2018
Survey questionnaire

- Same questionnaires used for both rounds – three modules
  A. Respondent information
  B. Quality of agriculture and food security policy processes – 19 qstns
  C. Quality of institutional architecture for these policy processes – 21 qstns
- All questions were statements to elicit a 4-level Likert score response
  ‘Completely disagree’ (0 – value for analysis); ‘Somewhat disagree’ (1); ‘Somewhat agree’ (2); ‘Completely agree’ (3)

Question: “Agreement with view that in policy processes on agriculture and food security issues in Malawi ….”

Assessment categories (numerical value assigned): Completely disagree (0); Somewhat disagree (1); Somewhat agree (2); Completely agree (3)

Question B1 – There is general continuous dialogue between government and stakeholders as a whole
B2 – There is continuous dialogue between government and own institution
B3 – Stakeholder perspectives in general are considered closely by government
B4 – Perspectives of own institution are considered closely by government
…
B17 – Evidence is frequently used in making policy decisions in the sector
B18 – Capacity for analysis and effectively engage with government stakeholders
B19 – Capacity exists within Malawi to conduct independent policy analyses on these issues (B19)

Question C1 – An effective Agriculture Sector Working Group (ASWG) exists
C2 – ASWG discussions are well-informed both in terms of issues under discussion and feasibility and strength of policy options being considered
C3 – ASWG makes clear decisions on policy and program design
C4 – ASWG communicates its decisions effectively to the country’s political leadership
C5 – Action is quickly taken on ASWG decisions on policy and program design
…
C17 – After a policy decision on an issue is made, appropriate resources are committed and made available for effective implementation
C18 – An effective donor coordination forum exists for the agricultural sector in Malawi
C19 – Donors supporting the agricultural sector in Malawi make realistic and genuine commitments
C20 – Donors and government value transparency and debate in decision making in the sector
Baseline sample – mid-2015

• Purposively selected from participants in national policy discussions
  • 99 people initially contacted
    • Identified using participant lists for two large national agricultural policy consultations
    • To define sampling frame, used 2013 mapping of institutional architecture of these policy processes in Malawi – by Africa-LEAD and the EAT project
  • Five sample sub-categories:
    • Government; Civil society and non-governmental organizations; Private sector; Donor agencies; and Researchers

• Administered survey online, with face-to-face follow-up with non-responders

• 86 respondents, 38 of whom were from government
Baseline results

• Plotted mean Likert response scores
  • Overall and by sub-sample

• Assessed significance of differences in scores between sub-samples
Baseline indices - NAPAS: Malawi monitoring

• Computed two indices
  • Single question response for quality of policy processes index
  • Combined several responses for quality of institutions index

• At baseline, respondents “somewhat” satisfied
  • Mean score for both indices of 1.8
    • On scale of 0.0 to 3.0
  • But more variance in assessment of quality of institutional architecture
Endline survey – late-2017, early 2018

- Used 86-member baseline analytical sample as basis for endline sample
- Replacements
  - For baseline respondents who are no longer working in sector
  - For endline, interviewed new holders of the positions previously held by those baseline respondents no longer available – 12 replacements in endline sample
- 55 persons in analytical sample for endline
- Significant sample attrition – 36% reduction
  - Compared mean baseline responses for the 43 members of baseline sample who did not participate in endline with those of the 43 who did
  - Only 3 of the 40 questions showed significant differences between the two groups – conclude that limited bias introduced due to this attrition
Endline results

• Sharp decline from 2015 in satisfaction across all groups across both indices
  • Mean score for indices:
    • Endline index of quality of policy processes: 1.0
    • Endline index of quality of institutions: 1.3
  • Statistically significant drop in satisfaction level for 31 of 40 questions
  • Differences between groups less significant than at baseline – some convergence in opinions – negatively, unfortunately
    • Government respondents still view quality as higher, on average, than do other respondents, but differences between respondent groups are not as wide as at baseline
Explaining endline results

• Unexpected result, as significant policy formulation progress between baseline and endline surveys
  • National Agriculture Policy adopted in late-2016
  • National Agricultural Investment Plan launched early-2018

• However, Malawi experienced widespread food insecurity crises over the period
  • Evident that implementation does not meet aspirations of policies and strategies emerging from the policy processes

• Added factor was transition to a new policy framework
  • Due to limited bridging resources, some breakdown in processes and in engagement of institutions involved
Are measures useful for monitoring quality of policy processes?

- Approach assumed that quality of policy processes could be assessed independently of their implementation
  - But find it very difficult to separate the two

- Closer attention to distinguishing elements of policy design from those of implementation possibly would result in a more focused assessment
  - However, any assessment of the quality of policy processes is likely of limited value if it does not also consider the quality of implementation
  - Future research on this topic should ensure that both dimensions are examined
Are measures useful? (cont.)

• As performance monitoring indicators, indices not sufficiently stable
  • Decline in the two indices between baseline and endline does not accurately reflect the quality of engagement of NAPAS: Malawi (IMHO)

• Better seen as indicators of confidence in the short to medium-term value of the policy processes
  • Context within which policies are developed and programs implemented changes
    • This context has several dynamic dimensions – food crises, leadership, political currents, etc.
    • Level of confidence in making any achievements shifts in consequence

• Similar baseline surveys done in several countries in which FSP works
  • As their endline surveys are done, will explore where common patterns are seen both across countries and across time, controlling for changing contextual factors