

Price as a political construct: institutionalization trajectories and valorization of agroecology in Kenya



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Introduction

Prices are not just the result of the economic laws of supply and demand, they also reflect political constructivism. From a State perspective, prices are a fundamental component of political constructivism, that is, producing and defending principles of justice and legitimacy (Rawls, 2009). Recent institutional reforms have led to a mixed record in terms of public policies favorable to agroecology. An official recognition of environmental rights and of the role of the public in the formulation of policies goes in the direction of legitimizing agroecological initiatives. However, the concrete action of the government is still very much oriented towards conventional agriculture in a country where the informal economy accounted for 83 percent of total employment in 2019 (KFE, 2021).

Mat & Methods

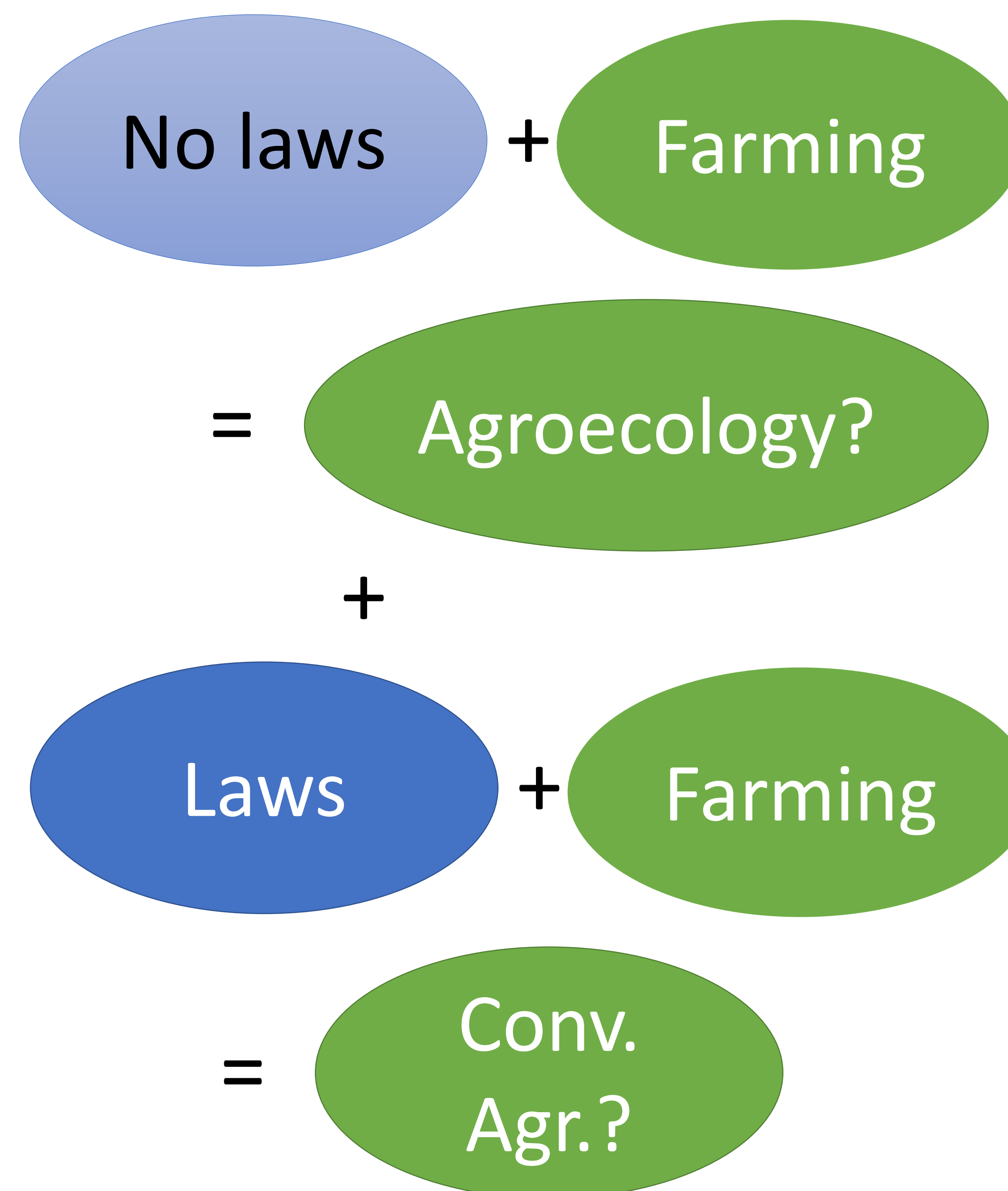
We conducted a desk review of the main pieces of legislation in the agricultural sector in Kenya. We also identified the distribution of competences in the agricultural field between the different public agents in Kenya, and to identify the key actors in the negotiations and action on agroecology issues.

The still prevalent dominance of conventional agriculture

The new Constitution recognized the conservation of environment and as a priority for the national government. In the Bill of Rights constituting the first part of the Constitution (article 69 of the Constitution).

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In the case of agroecology, the definition of the public problem and the initiation of the agenda-setting mainly come from organized groups financed by international actors. These organized groups are principally: the KOAN ; Bio Vision Trust Africa (Bvat) ; Participatory Ecological Land Use Management Kenyan (PELUM Kenya) ; and, to a lesser extent, the Organic Consumer Alliance and the Biodiversity and Biosafety Association of Kenya.



First things first: Investments attractiveness before credit access

The main challenges faced by the actors during the lobbying process were motivating the Ministry of Agriculture staff.

Maybe the reason why it failed is the competition from multinationals for conventional agriculture, and the collusion with people in the research and in the Ministry of Agriculture. According to our interviews, the Permanent Secretary in charge is leaning toward multinational. A member of the Organic Consumer Association confessed: *“But we are not struggling against politicians we are struggling against the agrochemical companies”* (Sany, 2019). This confession illustrates the struggle between different economic and political models: market versus State intervention, and the informal versus the formal sector. They will be illustrated with the examples of the price and credit policies hereafter.

In a market economy, as stated by (Freidrich Hayek, 1945): *“Fundamentally, in a system in which the knowledge of the relevant facts is dispersed among many people, prices can act to co-ordinate the separate actions of different people in the same way as subjective values help the individual to co-ordinate the parts of his plan.”* This is particularly true for informal economies where the lack of regulations and law enforcement favors ultra-liberalism, which may not be an ideal form of economics. Patronage, on the other hand, promotes an unfair distribution of wealth, which not be an ideal form of politics. Prices crystalize the antagonism between market and political failures and the formal and informal sector.

Conclusions and perspectives

Prices crystalize the antagonism between market and political failures and the formal and informal sector. Agroecology and organic farming can be the symptoms of the market and the State coexistence, or put differently, market or State failures. Agroecology will probably take off when agroecology *becomes* conventional agriculture, i.e., when agroecology moves from the informal sector to the formal sector, with a compliance with laws and regulations.



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