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Enhancing Policy-Relevant Research in Ghana's Agricultural Research and Development System: Leveraging the Agricultural Development Partners and Agricultural Sector Working Groups

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The policy brief questions how research informs policy decisions linked to the agricultural sector in Ghana. It takes the example of the agricultural research and development system of actors working with value chain and labour approaches. Results are based on focus groups, interviews and social network analyses. They show that influential actors in the system are donors,

research centres, and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, and that there is little exchange of information between research actors and policymakers. We recommend reactivating the agricultural sector working group and strengthening the participation of national and international research actors by co-structuring a research agenda.

INTRODUCTION

How does research inform policy decisions on the agricultural sector in Ghana? An analysis of actors working with value chain and labour approaches.

The agri-food system remains the main provider of jobs in sub-Saharan Africa, yet it grapples with numerous challenges in creating sustainable jobs. In 2016, approximately USD 47 billion was invested globally in agricultural research and development (ARD). This research aims to advise policymakers on the best options to support inclusive transformations within the agricultural sector. However, there exists a disconnect between research and policy entities, with certain research findings going unnoticed while policymakers may be seeking viable policy options.

The objective of this policy brief is to highlight the relationship between research entities and policymaking organisations in Ghana. With the example of the ARD system involving value chain and labor approaches, it emphasizes how research and policy decisions can be more effectively linked. It identifies the various actors within Ghana's ARD system, analyses their interconnections, and discusses how research and policymaking could better interact.

THE RESEARCH

The agricultural research and development system in Ghana: a network of different actors
Policymakers grapple with addressing development challenges such as poverty or food insecurity, often termed "wicked problems" due to their complexity, or elusive causes. The interactions between the actors in the agricultural research and development



(ARD) system must help in addressing these issues by developing disruptive innovations and implementing adequate public policies.

The agricultural research and development (ARD) system comprises actors engaged in activities linked to the agricultural sector and aimed at achieving development goals. These actors are both local and international, encompass public, private, or associative entities, which carry out various activities such as funding, research, development, advocacy, or education. Notably, this system includes policymaking and policy implementation bodies, NGOs and local associations, international and local research centres, and multilateral donors and cooperation agencies. These different actors are connected through funding and information exchanges.

This policy brief focuses on the ARD system of actors addressing issues of value chain and labour. A value chain approach considers the integrated range of actors and their activities that contribute to supplying a product to a final consumer. A labour approach looks at the ability of people to work to produce goods or services for others or themselves, whether that generates income or not for the worker. The ARD systems of actors working with value chain and labor approaches is a subpart of the whole ARD system.

A method integrating focus groups, semi directed interviews and social network analyses

Data about the actors of the system and their connections was collected and analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods. Initially, a focus group discussion brought together representatives from the ministries, research centres, NGO, and civil society. This session facilitated the identification of 78 actors in the Ghanaian agricultural research and development (ARD) system. We selected the ones for whom value chain and labour approaches were significant in their activities and successfully interviewed 42 of them. During these interviews, we discussed the main characteristics of the actors (for instance their mandates), their activities, and their links with other actors. Each respondent was particularly asked to describe the most important activities related to agricultural value chains and jobs,

the collaborators on these activities, and the nature of their connections (funding and information sharing). Interviews were conducted in 2023 and the activities considered are the ones implemented between 2009 and 2027. Additionally, social network analysis was conducted to characterize patterns of relations among individuals or organisations within the system. The influence of each actor within the system was gauged by the number of connections, represented by the size and the centrality of the actor in the network charts (see figure 1). Finally, the results were discussed and validated during two presentations to actors of the ARD system.

FINDINGS

Influential actors are donors, research centres and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture

Figure 1 illustrates the network of the ARD by highlighting connections between actors based on funding and information exchanges. The network analysis reveals three types of influential actors: funders, research actors, and to a lesser extent, development actors.

The main actors are donors: the system falls apart if they are taken off. The main donors are bilateral (USAID, GIZ, and Global Affairs Canada), multilateral (the European Union, the FAO, the IFAD, the World Bank) or are private-led foundations (AGRA and the Bill and Melinda Gate Foundation). Some research actors are also important in connecting subparts of the network. For instance, centres of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) such as STEPRI and SARI, and the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at University of Ghana, facilitate connections between NGOs, international organizations, educational bodies and advocacy actors within the system.

During the referenced period, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), which implemented the Ghana Strategy Support Program, emerged the most important CGIAR center. However, this center has recently reduced its activity in the country due to limited funds.

Development actors include public bodies,

NGOs or local associations. Influential NGOs in the network include World Vision, Oxfam, ACIDI-Voca, Send Ghana, and MEDA with many being funded by USAID. The main public organization involved is the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA). Advocacy actors seem to have limited influence due to funding constraints.

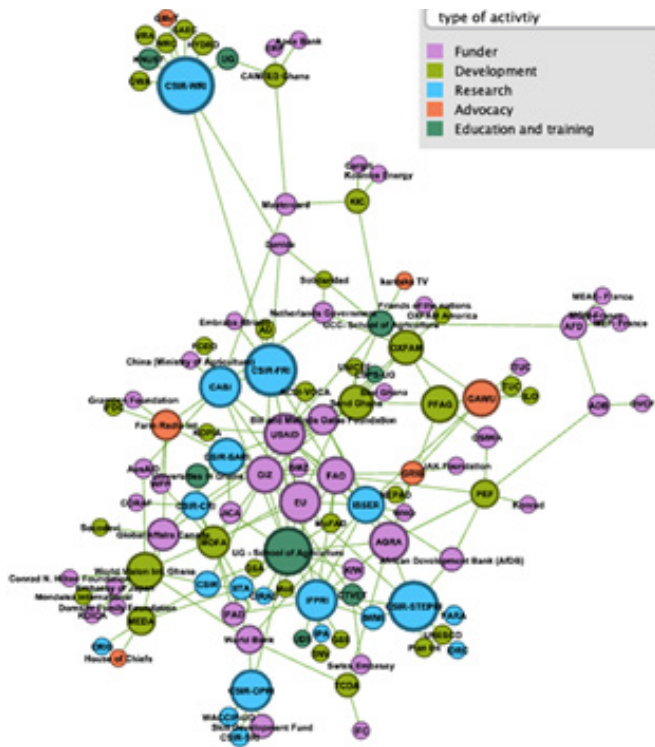


Figure 1: Network of actors per field of activities for funding and information flows

Actors within the agricultural research and development system are connected through funding relationships, but they exchange little policy relevant information

Figure 2 shows the connections between actors solely in terms of information exchange. It includes fewer actors and connections compared to figure 1 because of limited flow of information between them. Predominantly, information exchanges occur among research actors, associations, and advocacy actors. Public bodies particularly the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, have minimal connections with other actors. This finding is particularly pertinent within the network of actors implementing value chain and labor activities.

Organizations like CSIR-STEPRI, ISSER and IFPRI are mandated to contribute to policy decisions, however, they have reported limited connections with public bodies. Previously, USAID funded activities through IFPRI, but

this arrangement has changed, resulting in decreased sharing of scientific information for policy recommendations. Furthermore, there is limited coordination between different ministries, occasionally resulting in competition for operational resources.



Figure 2: Network of actors categorized by types of activities for information flows only

RECOMMENDATIONS

How can we promote policy-relevant research? Leveraging agricultural development partners and agricultural sector working groups

Policy-relevant research plays an important role in addressing development issues of interest to policy makers, considering the institutional contexts within which policy decisions are made. Research is instrumental in swiftly identifying development priorities, supporting decision-making and policy instrument design, and monitoring and evaluating their implementation. Effective policy-relevant research relies on regular interactions, allowing recommendations to be tailored to institutional and funding capacities.

In Ghana, two platforms exist that bring together different actors within the ARD systems. The Agricultural Development Partners group gathers international and foreign organizations including major development banks, cooperation agencies, private foundations, international development organizations, and embassies.

The group aims to ensure a minimum level of coordination regarding development aid. Coordinated by Policy Link Ghana and funded by USAID, the group holds monthly meetings to discuss development activities and target specific issues and areas of action.

The Agricultural Development Partners group is a subpart of the Agricultural Sector Working Group, which serves as an inclusive platform for all stakeholders. Led by the MoFA, this platform encompasses organizations from the public sector, civil society, and national research organizations. It hosts different thematic groups, such as those focused on food insecurity or mechanization, intended to facilitate research discussions for policy. However, since early 2023, the group has ceased operations, impeding participatory coordination of activities of public, donor and research actors.

The following recommendations aim to improve the linkage between research and policy actors platforms outlined above:

- **Enhance Participation:** Strengthen the participation of national and international research actors in the agricultural development partner group and the agricultural sector working group. This should include CSIR centers and other policy-oriented research institutions like ISSER within the Agricultural Development Partners group.
- **Revitalize the Agricultural Sector Working Group:** Restart meetings of the Agricultural Sector Working Group to facilitate policy discussions with various stakeholders. MoFA could appeal to development partners to allocate funds to reinstate this platform and ensure regular meetings. A designated coordinator should oversee the meetings, with different organizations leading discussions on topics of interest to MoFA and other participants.
- **Structure Research Agenda:** Develop a structured research agenda in collaboration with platform actors. Policymakers and working groups within the agricultural sector working group can identify issues

that require attention from national and international research. Research organizations can also propose topics for consideration, engaging with trade unions and civil society organizations where relevant.

- **Efficient Communication of Research Findings:** Research findings should be presented in an efficient manner by adapting messages to the targeted audience and the policy arenas. Results should undergo peer-evaluation before being presented on the platforms. Monthly meetings could include concise presentations of research results, and a newsletter should be disseminated to all members.
- **Diverse Representation:** Representatives of the agricultural sector working group attending the meetings should be from both political and technical levels. This ensures that discussions on the platforms are reported at various organizational levels.
- **Monitor Information Flow Improvement:** Establish mechanisms to monitor the improvement of information flows within the platforms over time, and assess the extent to which research recommendations contribute to policy debates.

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