

August 14th, 2006

**26th International Conference of Agricultural Economists
Mini-Symposium on Strengthening the Linkages Between Policy Research and
Policy Practice in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Description

The importance of agricultural development to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty by half by 2015 is widely recognized in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), where the majority of the population earns a living from agriculture. Similarly, the importance of a “conducive” policy environment for agricultural development is regularly acknowledged by governments and donors. Yet few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have yet succeeded in building and sustaining adequate human capacity for policy analysis, and the capacity that exists is often frustrated by communication gaps between policy analysts, policy decision makers, and the wide variety of agricultural sector stakeholders.

The purpose of this mini-symposium is to understand better the reasons for weakness in the linkages between agricultural policy research and analysis and policy practice, identify what needs to be done to overcome weaknesses identified, and define better the roles of different actors in strengthening the policy formulation process in SSA countries. Specific objectives of the mini-symposium are threefold:

- 1) To assess the current status and challenges of applied agricultural policy research at national and regional levels;
- 2) To present, using a political economy framework, examples of key ongoing agricultural policy debates in SSA, and identify the policy capacity gaps that emerge; and
- 3) To identify implications for capacity-building initiatives.

Sub-Saharan Africa is a logical priority geographic focus of the mini-symposium because of the high incidence and depth of rural poverty, the potential for improvement in the agricultural policy environment, and the limited human and organizational resources available at present. Experiences from other regions and countries are clearly relevant and will be brought to bear during the discussion phase of each session.

The mini-symposium will involve two sessions of 1 hour 45 minutes each. The first session will provide an overview of policy capacity building challenges in SSA and, to stimulate discussion by participants, present recent case studies of policy debates surrounding export crop sectors and interlocking credit and output market arrangements. The second session will inform participant discussion with brief presentations on policy debates on current domestic food staple production and marketing in Southern and Eastern Africa. Both sets of policy issues are highly relevant and controversial, involve national and regional level analysis and debate, and highlight strengths and weaknesses in policy capacity.

Mini-Symposium Program

DAY 1

1. Welcome and introduction to the mini-symposium: Duncan Boughton, Food Security Group, Michigan State University

Theme 1: Current status and challenges of applied policy research using the example of current policy debates on export crop sectors and interlocking credit and output market arrangements

The purpose of the first day is to lay out the challenges facing agricultural policy analysts and policy makers at national and regional levels in SSA, identify key gaps in the policy chain, and provide some concrete examples of organizational mechanisms that are seeking to bridge the gaps. The purpose will be accomplished through one overview presentation and two country-level case studies of policy reform in export crop subsectors, followed by a detailed discussion amongst symposium participants.

Presentation 1: [Lessons Learned in Strengthening the Influence of Research on the Policy Process in International Development](#) (speaker: Steve Wiggins, Research Fellow, Overseas Development Institute, UK)

Presentation 2: [Resolving policy trade-offs and conflicts in Mozambique's emerging tobacco sector](#) (speaker: Rui Benfica, Poverty Economist, World Bank, Mozambique)

Presentation 3: [Recent policy reform experience in the cotton sectors of Eastern and Southern Africa](#) (speaker: Colin Poulton, Research Fellow, Center for Environmental Policy, Imperial College at Wye, University of London, UK)

Open discussion on Day 1 Presentations: Panel and Symposium Participants (40 mins.)
Moderator: James Nyoro, Director, Tegemeo Institute, Egerton University, Kenya

DAY 2

Review of Day 1 and introduction to Day 2. Duncan Boughton, Food Security Group, Michigan State University

Theme 2: Current status and challenges of applied policy research using the example of domestic food staple production and marketing policy debates in Southern and Eastern Africa

The second day will build on capacity building issues for policy analysis in SSA identified during Day 1 by examining experience in food staple input and output marketing policy debates. The high level of political sensitivity of food policy, accentuated by rapid urbanization in many SSA countries, gives rise to additional challenges that national and regional policy analysts need to address.

Presentation 1: [Agricultural policy in Kenya: case of maize policy](#) (speaker: James Nyoro, Director, Tegemeo Institute, Egerton University, Kenya)

Presentation 2: [The case of rationalization and harmonization of seed policies, laws, rules and procedures](#) (speaker: Isaac Minde, Senior Economist, ICRISAT, Zimbabwe)

Presentation 3: [Reflections of a conflicted economist. How can we be useful to society?](#) (speaker: Thom Jayne, Food Security Group, Michigan State University)

Open discussion on Day 2 Presentations: Panel and Symposium Participants (40 mins.)
Moderator: Steve Wiggins, Overseas Development Institute, UK

Closing remarks and thanks. Duncan Boughton, Food Security Group, Michigan State University