'AGENTS WITHOUT PRINCIPALS': CONFIGURATION AND OUTCOMES OF AGENDA SETTING FOR PUBLIC AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH IN AFRICA

(Ghana and Kenya Case Studies)

George Okongo
MGSoG/UNU-MERIT
1. BACKGROUND

- Changing agricultural policy terrain/context in Africa – post-liberalization (partial or full);

- Waning government interest in agricultural research;

- New literature: systemic approaches e.g. AIS—the emphasis on interactions (and power structures for me);

- Case studies: Sugarcane sub-sector/industry in Kenya. Cocoa – Ghana
2. OBJECTIVES

1. To establish the processes and mechanisms for research agenda setting in public agricultural research institutions in Africa; and

2. To establish how the processes and mechanisms for research agenda setting affect the attainment of the objectives of public agricultural research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who chooses</th>
<th>User based steering</th>
<th>Institutional steering</th>
<th>Political Aggregation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Users (firms, citizens)</td>
<td>Scientists</td>
<td>Organized interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of decision-making</th>
<th>Decentralized</th>
<th>Decentralized</th>
<th>Centralized or decentralized (pluralist)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Incentives to choosers | User needs | Rewards for research | Group benefits and costs |
3. Analytical Framework

- Principal – Agent relationships;

- Policy Context – role of the state and private sector; interest aggregation mechanisms; power relations between actors;
4. METHODS

• Cases: Partial/full liberalization.. Export/non-export crop...otherwise similar political circumstances

• Qualitative Study
• Triangulation of sources
• Primarily KII – 67 respondents
• 2 FGDs

Analysis: Atlas.ti, Document Analysis
5. FINDINGS

1. **Theory:** Messy P-A relationships, hence the difficulty of P-A analysis in agricultural research agenda setting.

Problems of P-A relationships: uncommonality of goals, **multiplicity of principals**, alternative accountabilities

→ Differences between the two cases/countries

→ **multiplicity of principals not a problem:** except for pseudo principals (farmers in Ghana), making researchers both principals and agents
5. Findings

2. An attempt at an aggregation model in both cases, but undermined by:

2.1. Weak interest aggregation mechanisms: weak farmers’ associations and dysfunctional representation at commodity boards;

2.2. Commodity board’s failure in the role of intermediaries, despite being positioned to act as such—as funders of research and shared platforms;

2.3. CBs lack of interest in research: the policy context provides no incentives → the board’s have a power basis rather than evidence basis to direct policy
5. Findings

3. Agenda outcomes: Sugar industry--- No links –Farmers’ FGDs—old varieties
Cocoa: attribution to agenda process? ---No
4. Political imperatives: Govt focus on yields and producer prices and the pressure exerted on research institutions-→ cocoa
But no expression in research agenda terms, except for international corporation demands (e.g. certification);
The reverse-→ Sugarcane
6. WHOSE AGENDA COUNTS?

• The researchers, responding to environmental pressures in the context of unclear research aspirations and poor interaction mechanisms. They are their own principals, yet also agents;

• Researchers motivated by rewards for research, including political relevance.

• Potential for farmers (smallholder—numbers) claims on the basis of political imperatives.