

**'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

### 3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK - *A typology of systemic priority-setting. Source: Joseph Stewart (1995)*

	User based - steering	Institutional - steering	Political - Aggregation
Who chooses	Users (firms, citizens)	Scientists	Organized interests
Level of decision-making	Decentralized	Decentralized	Centralized or decentralized (pluralist)
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.