

Governance and agriculture



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Agriculture is one of the most promising instruments for reducing poverty and securing local livelihoods. One of the critical conditions required of the agricultural sector is to ensure that good governance structures and related policies are in place at all levels. Studies have shown that agriculture-based economies around the world are to be found mostly in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. It is in these countries, however, that scores for governance are at their lowest and often negative.¹ Good governance has a number of dimensions: political stability; the rule of law; voice and accountability; effective governments; regulatory quality and control of corruption, among others.² In spite of the recommendations of the 1982 World Development Report that governments should focus on governance to improve agriculture, very little has been achieved in that regard to date.

Weak governance in agriculture led to major problems during the 1980s and 1990s when strong State interventions were undermined by structural adjustment programmes, emphasizing the role of markets.²

Lack of macroeconomic policies and unstable political situations are pre-conditions to governance problems. Policy biases, underinvestment, mis-investment and lack of capacities underpin weak governance in agriculture.^{3,4} To address these issues, it is important to focus on the following key challenges.

Invigorate the roles of the public sector, private sector and civil society with guidance and support

The time has come for the public sector to think and act differently in relation to agriculture in all countries. The private sector and its role in dealing with agricultural governance need to be strengthened. Getting market dynamics right, improving macroeconomic policies and ensuring that State policies are strengthened to compliment the needs of civil society are critical to ensuring that partnerships are stronger and more responsive to the emerging challenges of national and global agricultural scenarios. Strong political will and support are essential.

Governance reform can be approached from the demand or the supply side²

Reforms that improve accountability, transparency, voice and impact are needed to promote a sound political economy that favours good governance. It is important to understand the characteristics of agrarian communities to enable the demand-side approach to agriculture to be better addressed. Similarly, reforms to improve public sector capacity, efficiency and delivery must take into account problems affecting the performance of agriculture ministries, agencies and extension services. This focus will

enable the supply side to be more responsive.⁵ Introduction of e-governance programmes in India and ISO 9000 certification management schemes in El Salvador and Mexico, for example, improved the supply side of the equation considerably by making agricultural administration more accountable. Similarly, the involvement of non-governmental organizations in decision-making processes and the implementation of reforms have provided positive experiences to dealing with the demand side of the issue in countries such as Ethiopia and Senegal. Decentralization is seen as an effective answer to some of the questions related to better governance in agriculture.

Better implementation of "Paris" agenda on aid effectiveness

Along with national and local partners, donors also have a role to play in improving governance in agriculture. Donors need to coordinate their efforts to provide support and mainstream their aid policies to ensure that they respond to national needs than the needs of their own capitals. There is a need for replication of ideas such as the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development, TerrAfrica or the Neuchatel Initiative, which provides an informal platform for bilateral and multilateral donors to develop common views and guidelines for in-country donor coordination.

Global action for agriculture

Managing global common challenges such as climate change; regional challenges such as pandemic plant and animal diseases and invasive species; conducting research and development into 'orphan crops' that are important for national and local food security (eg. cassava) and reducing transaction costs through standards and rules all need support at the global level. In addition to reforms in national and regional level governance, reforms in the global governance of agriculture are much needed. From the United Nations reforms to changing agribusiness and increasing the influence of non-governmental organizations in setting the global agenda on governance - all will have to consider their role in ensuring that good governance structures are adopted and provided for in developing countries.⁶ Training and human resource development to address agricultural governance, as in other areas of focus, needs special attention.

Ethics, equity and justice are the three pillars to ensuring that global action for better governance makes sense at the local level in addition to making a difference to the livelihoods of millions of people in developing and least developed countries. Unless effective governance systems are put in place, reforms in agriculture and their impact on achieving food security and poverty reduction will remain ineffective.

1 Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2006 cited in World Development Report, 2008, World Bank, USA.
2 Agriculture for development policy brief, World Development Report, 2008, World Bank, USA.
3 <http://ifpblog.org/2008/04/01/toward-a-new-global-governance-system-for-agriculture-food-and-nutrition.aspx?Oeee8fe0>
4 Bachev Hrabrin, 2009 Risk governance in agriculture. MPRA Paper 7770, University Library of Munich, Germany.

5 Birner and Palaniswamy, cited in World Development Report, 2008. World Bank, United States of America.

6 Alaiian de Janvry and Elisabeth M Sadoulet, 2007. Agriculture and development: the Latin American difference, UC Berkeley, United States of America.