



Agrarian Reforms and Food Policy Process in Tajikistan

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ABSTRACT

This paper documents the food and agricultural policy process in the context of agrarian reforms in Tajikistan. It uses the case study of Tajikistan and applies a recently developed conceptual framework for understanding the drivers of policy change. It undertakes a historical review of agrarian reforms and appraises current policy challenges within the food and agricultural sector. Using specific tools to study power relations, financing, and information flows in the policy process, it maps institutional architecture and key stakeholders in the pre- and post-soviet era. Information gathered through focused group discussions, key informant interviews, and recent field research on food and agricultural policy issues is used to analyze factors that drive different stages of the policy making process. We find that understanding the political economy and policy process interface in Tajikistan is key for designing and implementing successful policy interventions. While progress has been made, agrarian reforms towards improving land tenure rights, strengthening WUAs, providing crop insurance against drought, are the necessary steps in a larger policy discussion. Ensuring the effectiveness of land reforms, building agricultural extension system, and supporting agricultural research systems are examples of some key initiatives that the government should focus on. Investments in transportation, storage, credit facilities, and markets involving private sector will speed up the reform process.

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1. Introduction

This paper analyses food policy process in the context of economic reforms that have been implemented over the past 30 years in Tajikistan. The findings presented in this paper are based on a rigorous literature review of studies focusing on the experiences of other transition economies. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: section two presents the conceptual framework which forms the basis of our analysis; section three presents the methodology; section four presents the case of Tajikistan with a historical background, institutional mapping, stakeholder mapping, and policy process analysis; section five presents the lessons learnt from Tajikistan's experience; and finally, section six presents the concluding remarks.

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2. A Conceptual framework for studying policy process in transition economies

The Sustainable Development Goals of the UN aim to achieve zero hunger and poverty globally by 2030. To improve development outcomes, it is important to understand how policy processes bring about change in societies. Specifically, we need an understanding of how policy systems develop and operate to address challenges of food and nutrition insecurity. How do some policy systems fail during transition, while others reach desired outcomes more smoothly? These are some of the questions we use as a basis to build our conceptual framework presented in this section.

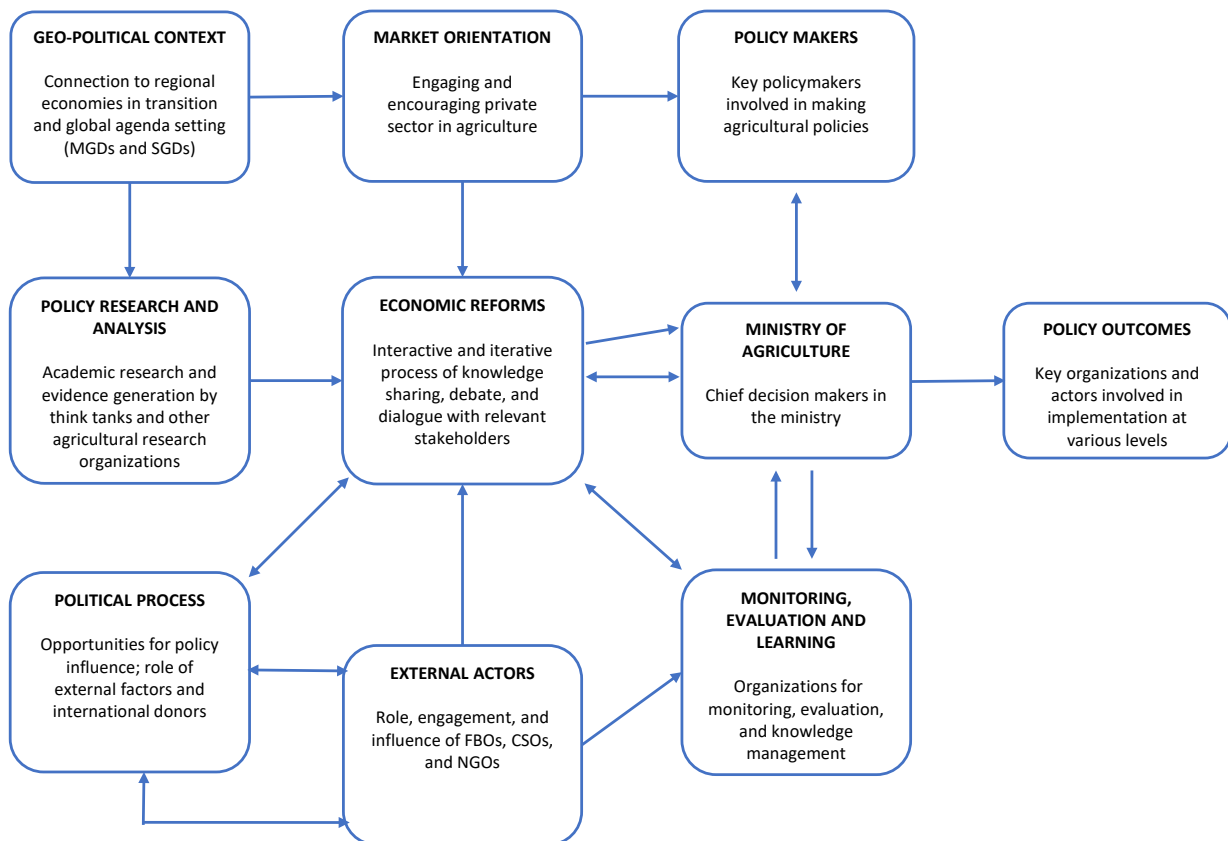
Several studies analyze policy processes and food systems. Studying policy processes in both developed and developing countries is increasingly recognized as a solid approach for improving effectiveness and efficiency in policy development and implementation (Sabatier, 2007; Watson, 2013; Meier, 1991). There are several reasons to value an understanding of how policies are made, implemented, and revised (Rausser and Swinnen, 2011; Bates and Block, 2011). Firstly, it helps us to conceptualize capacity gaps in the policy system, highlighting areas in which governments can divert their limited resources to increase policy impact. This is because the nature and speed of policy reforms depends on the capacity of individuals and organizations involved in the policy process. Secondly, policy process analysis allows us to understand issues from various perspectives, therefore improving outcomes. Thirdly, it allows us to identify areas in which evidence can be used to improve policy outcomes. Finally, increased evidence can help in reducing politicization of the policy process and making it more evidence based. The aim of studying the policy process of the food system in transition economies is to identify capacity gaps and make it more resilient. A resilient food system, in the event of a shock, can bounce back, bringing production higher than it was before the shock (Babu and Blom, 2014). The most important outcome of building a resilient food system is that it reduces the vulnerability of countries to food insecurity.

The linear model is the most simplistic for analyzing the policy process. It involves six sequential stages that move in a repetitive cycle. The six stages are: agenda setting; policy formulation; stakeholder discussions; implementation; monitoring impact; and policy revision. This top down approach to the policy process is often criticized for being too simplistic (Babu, 2013; Sabatier, 2007). Subsequently, models such as the interactive policy process model; multiple stream approach; rational choice model; and learning and diffusion model were developed to give a nuanced perspective on policy processes (Sabatier 2007; Court and Young, 2003; Ostrom, 2011). Babu (2013) argues that these models may not be suitable for developing country contexts. The author shows how a combination of elements

from each of the existing models can be used to develop a stylized framework. This paper adapts the stylized framework of Babu (2013) to fit the case of Tajikistan and transition economies in general.

In developing a framework to analyze the policy process of Tajikistan's food system, we first identify the key entities involved, how they work together, and their influence on the policy at the national, regional, and local level (Birner et. al., 2011). The figure below is a stylized framework that can be used to study the policy process of Tajikistan and other transition economies. It shows how key actors and organizations in the policy process can be identified in transition economies.

Figure 1. Stylized Framework for studying economic reforms and the food policy process in transition economies.



Source: Babu (2013)

Using this framework, we develop an understanding of Tajikistan's policy process in the food and agricultural sector. We map various key players, actors, and institutions in the policy process and identify their level of influence on agricultural policies. This will further help us in pinpointing capacity gaps and informing recommendations to fill them. Before delving into the case of Tajikistan, the next section presents the methodology used in our study.

3. Methodology

In this paper, we study Tajikistan's policy process using several qualitative research methods. Grounded in the framework presented in the previous section, we understand the linkages between various organizations, stakeholders and key actors in the policy process using a case study. Further, we use major food and agriculture policy documents to inform our analysis. This helps in understanding policy formulation, implementation processes, and the influence of key actors. Additionally, we use focus group discussions and interviews with key individuals in the agricultural policy process. While interviewing policy makers, line ministries/agencies, and other stakeholders we use semi-structured questionnaires. The questions are open-ended and cover five policy broad areas: (1) what part the policy process the organization is involved in; (2) what its existing capacity for evidence generation, policy communication, and participation is; (3) key policy issues the organization is dealing with; (4) how organizations bring issues to the policy cycle; and (5) how policy changes are undertaken in the process. We also ask interviewees about other stakeholders and how they are involved in the policy process. Finally, we ask the organization representatives to talk about changes they believe would help to speed up the policy process and then conclude the interview with any relevant follow-up questions.

We interviewed people within a range of key organizations in Tajikistan. These include government departments; research institutions and academic departments; universities; donor agencies; and special projects and programs. Apart from national level organizations and actors, we conduct one interview at the provincial government level and meet Water User Associations at the district level. In the next section, we present the case study of reforms in Tajikistan and apply the lessons learnt to other transition economies facing similar problems in their food and agricultural sector.

4. Case study of Policy process

In this section, we present the case of Tajikistan's transition to a market economy and its effects on the agricultural policy process and food system. We first take a historical view of reforms in Tajikistan to get an understanding the background. Next, applying our framework, we map the institutional architecture of the country. We use this to understand the role of key organizations working on agriculture policy. Then, we map the key stakeholders and elaborate on the role of different actors in the food system. The final sub-section presents the lessons learnt from the case.

Historical review for the economic reforms in agriculture in Tajikistan

In this subsection, we take a historical look at various agricultural reforms in the context of overall economic reform and transition. We distinguish the nature and speed of reforms before and after Tajikistan's 1997 peace agreement. Such historical analysis provides context to understand the current policies that are being implemented.

Before independence, Tajikistan was the third largest cotton producer in the former Soviet Union. The civil war between 1992 and 1997 had a major impact on cotton production. Soon after the war, the country began crop diversification, but cotton remained the dominant crop. Tajikistan's largest agricultural product after cotton is wheat. This is because of the government's focus on achieving food security. The country also produces a variety of legumes, cereals, oil seeds, vegetables and fruits. Despite an increase in agricultural production, Tajikistan still relies on imports. The main imported products are grain and flour as well as meat, sugar, rice, buckwheat, confectioneries and vegetable oil. In this regard, Tajikistan is vulnerable concerning its ability to finance its imports, including food imports. The food import bill was almost twice that of the international reserves held by the country in 1997 and was still more than 100 percent of its reserves in 2006. This puts the country in a risky position in the event of a crisis in the domestic or international food market, as witnessed in 2007-2008 and 2010-2011 when global food prices surged significantly. Since then, the situation has improved somewhat but remains vulnerable to external shocks (Akramov and Shreedhar, 2012).

Agricultural development in Tajikistan can be divided into four distinct stages. These are: growth during the Soviet era (before 1980s); stagnation (1980 - 1990); decline due to transition and civil war (1991 - 1997); and recovery (beginning 1998) (FAO, 2009). Using this classification, we divide the agricultural policy process into three distinct phases: Soviet era (Pre-1990s); Transition and civil war (1991 - 1997); and stabilization (Post 1997). We modify the phases for the agricultural policy process in acknowledgement that the major sectoral changes came after the Soviet era, with further improvements after the civil war. However, it must be noted that despite being in the stabilization phase since 1998, Tajikistan is still to reach its full agricultural potential. Figure 2 shows the evolution of the policy process across the three phases described above. We adapt the policy process maps developed by Haggblade et al. (2016) for Tajikistan's case. Figure 2a shows the pre-1990s phase in which the country was under Soviet rule. During this phase, central planning was the key approach to the agricultural policy process. The Council of Ministers allocated resources through the State Planning Committee and the Ministry of Finance. They worked under the political guidance and strategic directives of the Communist Party.

The decision process was mainly top down with authority flowing from the Ministry of Agriculture to the provincial level, district level and local government level. Figure 2b shows the transition and civil war phase from 1991 to 1997. During this phase, the communist party was replaced by the Tajik Parliament. However, policies were in practice controlled by the President’s Cabinet. While the policy process largely remained top down, new actors such as donors and other private sector players such as input suppliers started to emerge in the policy space. Further, the Ministry of Agriculture also consulted the Tajik Academy of Agricultural Sciences (TAAS) and state agricultural universities in developing programs and policies. Finally, figure 2c shows the stabilization phase. In this phase the role of donors and input suppliers increases significantly. In fact, at the local level, donors are more prominent actors

Figure 2a. Stakeholder mapping for pre-1990 food policy process in Tajikistan.

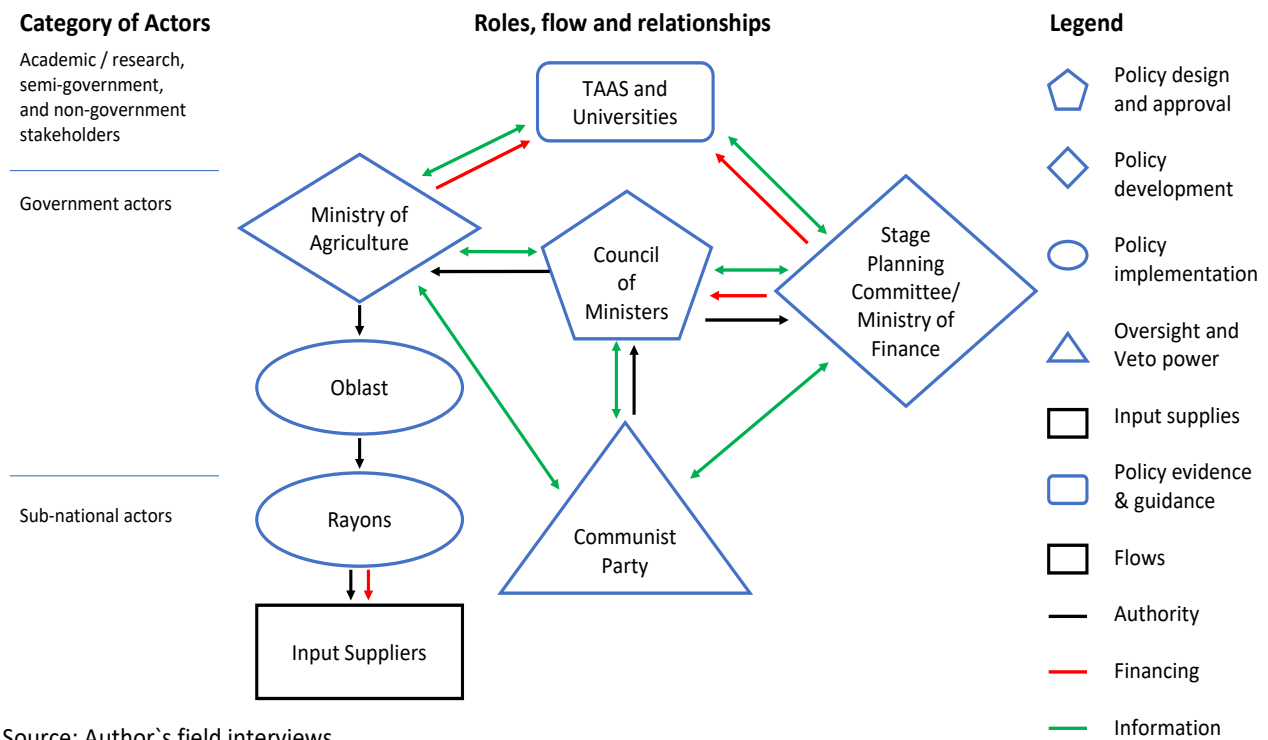


Figure 2b. Stakeholder mapping for post-1990 food policy process in Tajikistan.

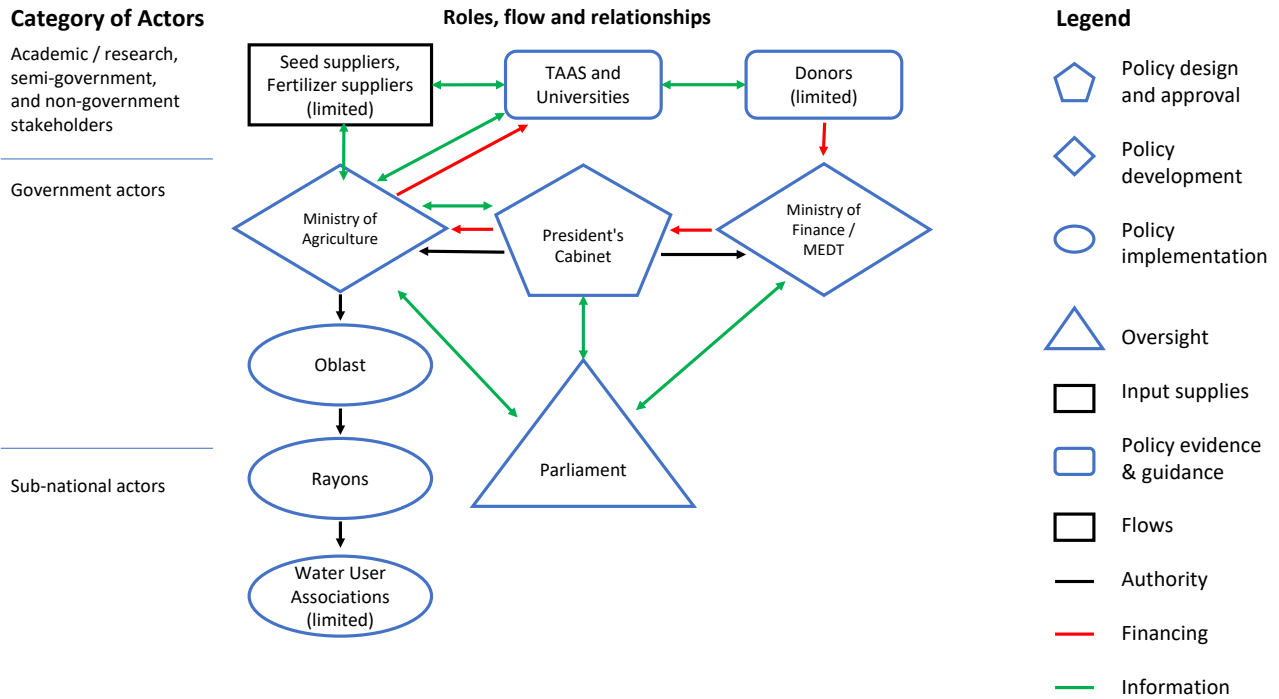
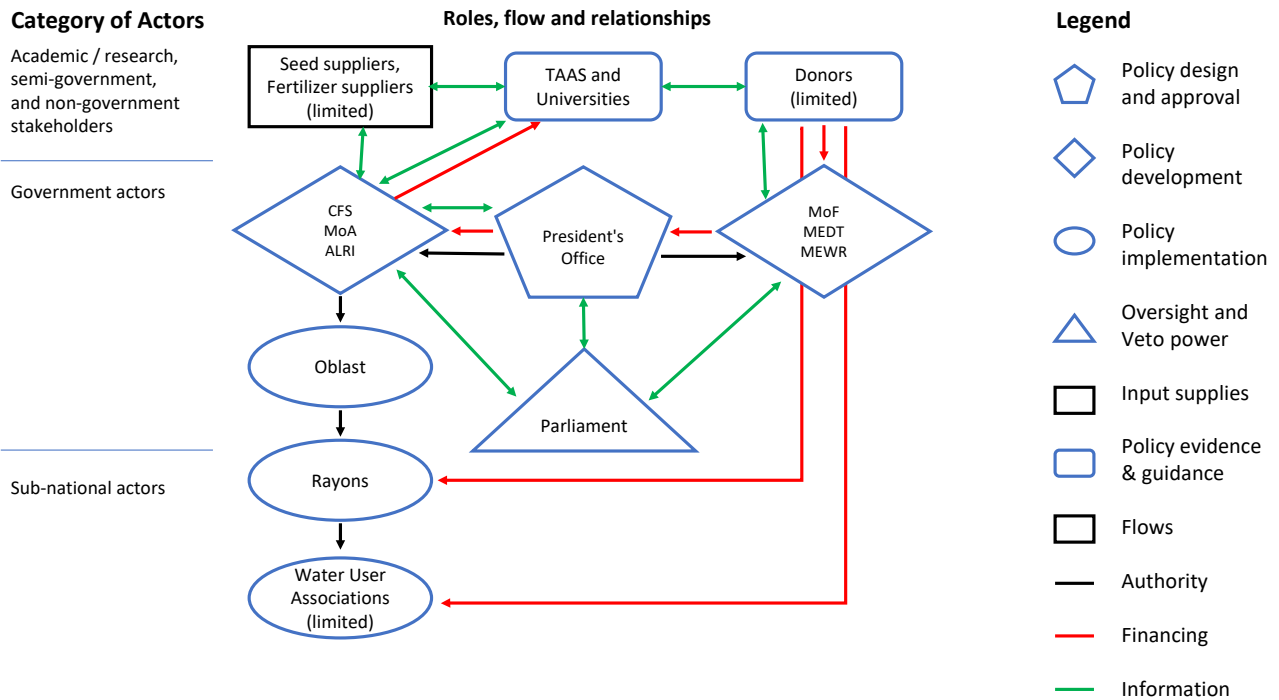


Figure 2c. Stakeholder mapping for post-1997 food policy process in Tajikistan.



than the government. This is particularly true for areas like agricultural extension and education. Further, Tajikistan also sees a more decentralized institutional structure with farm level organizations, with groups such as Water User Associations (WUAs) gaining prominence.

The decline in agricultural production during the early 1990s pushed the government to undertake land reforms which became central to the agricultural development of the country. In Tajikistan, a key constraint in increasing agricultural production is the limited availability of arable land. Despite the land shortage, a major portion of the rural population relies mainly on agriculture and labor remittances for their livelihood. While a substantial source of income in rural areas is labor remittances, increasing agricultural productivity can play a transformative role in reducing poverty and improving livelihoods for the Tajik people (IFPRI/USAID, 2019; Takeshima et al. 2020). Additionally, issues of hyperinflation, farm losses due to natural disasters, increasing farm debt, and falling real wages further plagues the agricultural sector.

The government initiated land reforms as a first step towards agricultural transformation. While the first legal act on land and farm restructuring was passed in 1992, the most impactful reforms began in 1995 with a law allocating additional land to household plots. The government also restructured traditional collective and state farms to corporate farms between 1995 and 1996 (World Bank 2012). When this effort did not have the intended effect, the government shifted focus to *dehkan* farms, which were private and family-operated farms. One unique but contentious issue in Tajikistan is that land was solely owned by the State, meaning that individuals can only own rights to use that land, and not buy or sell it as a physical property. The beginning of the land reforms saw very slow reallocation until 2007. Between 2007 and 2012, more than 55 percent of all arable land use has been privatized in the form of lease farms, joint stock companies, and *dehkan* farms (Lerman, 2012; Akramov and Shreedhar, 2012). Further, the Program for Reforming the Agricultural Sector for 2012-2020 introduced additional agricultural land tenure reforms. While the land is still the exclusive property of the state, legal entities and individuals have long-term land use rights, which allows the user to sell, donate, exchange, rent, pledge, and make other transactions with it. The owner of the land use right can also transfer it to another person in the form of inheritance or universal succession, as described by the Land Code and Civil Law (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2012; IFPRI/USAID, 2019; IFPRI, CAREC Institute, and ADB, 2019).

Currently, based on their legal status, farms in Tajikistan are generally classified into three major organizational categories: household plots (farms), individual or collective *dehkan* farms, and agricultural enterprises. Household plots and *dehkan* farms are two different types of private farms, distinguished by their commercial

orientation, size, and legal status. Household plots are generally smaller and more subsistence-oriented than dehkan (peasant) farms, although there is some overlap between the two groups. In legal terms, household plots are treated as physical entities, whereas dehkan farms must be registered as legal entities. Household plots are usually small plots of land attached to rural residences and so-called presidential land plots¹. Dehkan farms operate mainly on land obtained through land-use rights, although they can lease additional land from other users. Agricultural enterprises have two primary sources of land: land acquired from the state land and the leasing of additional land from other users (IFPRI/USAID, 2019).

In addition to land reforms, the government of Tajikistan has initiated several agricultural reforms. In 1996, the law named 'Reorganization of agricultural enterprises and entities' removed all production quotas. Similarly, subsequent reforms aimed to provide financial services to farmers and encourage the private sector in agriculture. The most recent agricultural reform was the 'Agriculture Reform Program 2012 - 2020' (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2012). The program aims to improve living standards in rural areas and food security of the country by promoting export-oriented agriculture. It builds on other strategic initiatives adopted previously, including the Millennium Development Goals; National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the Period Up To 2030 (World Bank, 2018); Poverty Reduction Strategy for the Period 2010 - 2012 (World Bank, 2017); Food Security Program for the Period 2012 - 2015 (FAO, 2015); and the Agricultural Policy of Tajikistan (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2012).

The implementation of these reforms resulted in strengthening private farming in the country and the reduction of poverty and malnutrition to some extent (IFPRI/USAID, 2019; Takeshima et al., 2020 and 2021). The latest available data shows the growing dominance of small private farming in Tajikistan. Dehkan farms and household plots accounted for over 87 percent of arable land in 2018, holding 66.5 percent and 20.6 percent, respectively. They are responsible for most of the food production in the country, including about 92 percent of grains, more than 95 percent of fruits and vegetables, and nearly all of the livestock and other animal products (Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2019). In addition, the government increased attention to inclusive agri-food value chain development. These changes in land use and farming structure led to high agricultural growth rates (6.4 percent per year) during 2010-2019 (World Bank, 2020).

Despite these efforts, several policy and institutional challenges continue to

1 According to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, from October 9, 1995, 50,000 hectares of land were allocated for household subsidiary farming (without the right to build houses and other household facilities). In 1997, another 25,000 hectares were distributed to households. These lands were later called presidential plots (IFPRI/USAID, 2019).

plague Tajikistan's agricultural sector, particularly water management and irrigation. For example, Tajikistan has developed a water strategy with the help of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). The Water Code developed with assistance of GEF in 2012, elaborates all aspects of water use, extraction, and release back into the system. Since 1990s the Tajik government has established Water User Associations (WUA) to operate, maintain, and use on-farm irrigation systems (Jumaboev et al., 2009). This decentralized user-based management system has expanded in terms of coverage but effectiveness across the country remains questionable (Balasubramanya et al., 2016).

Further, unfinished cotton sector reform, weak agrifood processing, and weak institutional capacity to detect and address inefficiencies in the sector, among other factors, constrain agricultural productivity in the country (World Bank, 2020). With this historical background of reforms in Tajikistan, we next map the institutional architecture to analyze the policy process for the food and agriculture sector of the country.

Mapping institutional architecture

With transition from a command economy to a market-oriented system, Tajikistan's institutional architecture has seen several changes since independence. We study the current institutional architecture to trace the inefficiencies in the policy system and identify major capacity gaps.

Tajikistan has a three-tier administration similar to the Soviet administration system of Oblast (provincial level); Rayon (district level); and Jamoat (lowest administrative unit at the local level)². Further, there are also Jamoat Development Committees (JDC) that help coordinate resources coming to the jamoat and ensure wide distribution across the villages under it. Apart from the formal government structure, at the village level the Makhalla is the most notable governance body. These bodies have significant informal power and, in many cases, provide a forum

² As of January 2020, there were 368 rural jamoats in Tajikistan. According to the Constitution, a jamoat is an institution of self-government in towns and villages. According to the Law on Local Self-government in Towns and Villages, jamoats are “the system of organizing public activities to address issues of local importance autonomously and at their own discretion, directly or indirectly, in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Tajikistan. Local self-governments resolve issues within their competence directly or through their representatives.” Jamoats are formed on a territorial basis and possess community property, including means of transportation, equipment, and other public or social facilities, which these governments have built, purchased, or otherwise transferred to their ownership. However, they do not have the real capacity to adequately address the needs and concerns of citizens, as they are heavily dependent on the higher levels of government in most policy issues, including taxation, service delivery, and local development.

for discussion of community issues. Large cities fall directly under the central government rather than the rayon they are located in. Tajikistan's move towards greater decentralization is underway with the government in the process of defining roles and responsibilities of institutions at various level.

The government's line agencies that provide technical assistance on policy issues are decentralized to the level of the rayon. Apart from that, the Tajik Academy of Agricultural Sciences is the apex body for agricultural research in the country. It has several specific applied science institutes, research centers and stations under it, such as the Soil Sciences and Agrochemistry Research Institute, Institute for Biosafety and Biotechnology, Livestock Research Institute, and Horticulture Research Institute. Most respondents reported during our interviews that the public research institutes are underfunded and have limited capacity to fulfill their mandate.

We study the policy process of Tajikistan by categorizing all organizations that can directly or indirectly influence agriculture into four different types, namely:

- (1) organizations that make food policies and programs,
- (2) organizations that are responsible for agricultural education and research
- (3) organizations that deal with agricultural extension and advisory services, and
- (4) research think-tanks and non-governmental organizations conducting food policy related research and analysis

The study of organizations in the categories outlined above help to highlight the agricultural sector's key institutional gaps.

Organizations that make food security policy and programs: These include organizations that design and execute Tajikistan's agricultural and food policies. Organizations such as the Committee for Food Security under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Finance, and the President's cabinet fall under this category. Given the role of food policy in maintaining adequate safety nets for the poor, stabilizing market prices, and providing emergency relief, its effectiveness and efficiency is an important concern. In Tajikistan, the President's cabinet is the fulcrum of the policy process for all sectors with oversight of the Parliament. Within the government, the Committee for Food Security is the primary coordinator of food policy. It is responsible for policies, rules, and regulations concerning sanitary and phytosanitary standards, plant quarantine and plant protection, seed production and breeding, and veterinary medicine and livestock protection. The Committee makes the policy decisions in consultation with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT), the Ministry of Finance (MoF), and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). The cabinet has the power to veto policy decisions. Most agricultural policies are developed centrally by the Policy and Planning Department of MoA, with inputs from local governments and other

ministries and agencies. Responsibility for implementation is more decentralized with line ministries, provincial and local governments. The MoA works closely with MEDT, the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources, Agency for Land Reclamation and Irrigation; and other state committees (for example, State Committee on Environmental Protection) and agencies (Agency for Land Management and Geodesy; Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan). Donors and other international organizations often help in providing policy guidance to the central government. Using their experience in other countries, these organizations provide an external perspective to food security issues. Currently, the private sector's engagement in the policy process is restricted to lobbying, but there is much more scope for their involvement in the agricultural sector of Tajikistan.

Organizations that deal with agricultural education and research: This includes the government funded agricultural research organizations and educational institutions of Tajikistan. The main actors involved in the knowledge-sharing sector are the Tajik Agrarian University and the commercial input providers (Kazbekov and Qureshi, 2011). Tajik Academy of Agricultural Sciences (TASS) is the umbrella under which the entire agricultural research effort is coordinated in Tajikistan. The agrarian universities of the government help to develop the human capacity for agricultural research and policy analysis. They enrich and support capacity development with critical knowledge and information on food and agricultural research, with an aim to make Tajikistan food secure. Estimates from the recent World Bank (2014a) assessment of higher education suggest that there are currently roughly 190,000 students enrolled in higher education (college and university levels) in Tajikistan. This means that only 5% of students in post-secondary institutions are studying agriculture. The universities face several problems, such as low quality research and teaching, low faculty morale, and poor management. However, the demand for agricultural graduates should be taken into consideration before expanding students' enrollment in higher agricultural education.

Organizations that deal with agricultural extension and advisory services: This includes major donors and international organizations that work on agricultural extension in Tajikistan. More than 100 local, national, and international NGOs are also involved in agricultural extension and advisory activities. Among donors and NGOs, some key organizations working on agricultural education and research are, U.S. Agency of International Development (USAID), German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), German Agro Action, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development, Agricultural Information Network, AgroDonish, Mercy Corps, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO),

National Association of Dekhan Farmers, Association of Agro-businesses of Tajikistan, Association of Science and Technical Intelligence of Tajikistan, SugdAgro Consulting, and Agricultural Training and Advisory Centre (ATAC). The current agricultural extension policy encourages the extension service to work with groups of all kinds, use a variety of extension methods, strengthen research-extension linkages, and foster integration across agencies. Now, in the rural areas, donors and international organizations play a more important role in agricultural research and extension than the government (Van Atta, 2009). However, despite the strong presence of international organizations in Tajikistan, they have not been collectively successful in filling the knowledge gaps in rural areas. The project coverage by most organizations is unsystematic and often of a short duration. Coordinated action is essential in making agricultural research and extension provision need-based for farmers (Shtaltovna, 2015).

In addition, few promising private sector companies, such as Neksigol Mushovir and Cooperative Sarob, provide a wide variety of services to farmers and rural households in Tajikistan. For example, “Neksigol Mushovir” developed the Agricultural Information Marketing System in Tajikistan. This integrated digital platform provides information service to farmers, wholesalers, processors, input suppliers, and other participants of the agricultural value chain. It is helping to intensify the market for agri-food products in Tajikistan by establishing business connections and providing accurate and detailed information necessary for agribusiness. Cooperative Sarob is an umbrella organization functioning as a cooperative that supports the professional development of a national network of sustainable agriculture advisory service providers. It provides theoretical and practical training and helps farmers adopt new technologies and machinery through demonstrations in the field.

Overall, lack of organizational capability is considered a significant problem in agricultural extension and advisory services. The current food policy strategies in Tajikistan do not explicitly address the need to strengthen organizational capacity and institutional reform for better provision of agricultural extension and advisory services. However, it will be important to support these organizations to achieve the needed growth in the agriculture sector.

Research on think tanks and NGOs conducting food policy related research and analysis: This category includes donors and think tanks that work specifically on agricultural research in Tajikistan. Many NGOs are currently working in Tajikistan in different sectors of development. Some of these NGOs are involved in direct sectoral development work in the field of agriculture, horticulture, poultry, and livestock. NGOs are also involved in providing improved varieties of seeds for both cereals and vegetables and are promoting commercial vegetable cultivation. In addition, analytical research centers such as Z-Analytics Group and Sharq Information-

Analytical Center provide evidence-based information for food policymaking. For example, Z-Analytics Group is a research and analytics consortium led by the LLC Tahlil and Mashvarat, working in partnership with the Center for Sociological Research Zerkalo. It uses modern hardware, software, and quality control system and has highly trained staff capable of conducting large-scale, in-depth field research on food policy and agriculture issues. Their survey data collection practices follow the professional standards and codes of the European Society for Public Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR). However, their role is not effectively integrated in the food policy making process. The Tajik government can strategically use the expertise of think tanks and NGOs to help public-sector organizations in food security policy design and implementation.

In this section, we discuss the role of key organizations in the food policy process. Assessing their role, we identify the key capacity gaps and ways through which the government can use these organizations more effectively. Substantial literature argues that organizational change and institutional reform play a vital role to meet the food security goal in the changing policy context. Robust and effective institutions play a significant role in reducing transaction costs and risks, as well as distribution of benefits, access to resources and power. However, it must be noted that there is an intimate and dynamic relationship between institutions and organizations. The institutions set the ground rules and organizations mediate, comply, enforce, manipulate, embody, and seek to influence or change them. Thus, organizational change at different levels is one of the main mechanisms to develop structures in which food insecure people can get better access to resources and services.

In general, the policy process is influenced by past practices and experiences, interest group and actors, governance and political context, development discourses, and international regimes. The new policy arises from the organizational and institutional framework as a response to emergent changes. Therefore, capacitating organizations and simultaneous institutional changes are needed in agricultural development of Tajikistan. In the next section, we discuss the role of key stakeholders in the food system of the country.

Key stakeholders in the policy process in Tajikistan

In transition economies, like most other countries, the food system has several actors and key stakeholders. Preventing future food crises depends on how policies and programs affect various stakeholders in Tajikistan. An assessment of their roles and influence in shaping policies and programs helps to understand the challenges and options in policy implementation. In this section, we analyze the role of key

stakeholders in the food system and see how each of them can help in achieving long term food security in Tajikistan.

Smallholder farmers: Most of Tajikistan's rural population is engaged in smallholder agriculture. Their role in increasing agricultural productivity and rural income often determines the poverty and food security outcomes of rural Tajik households. These resource constrained farmers are the most vulnerable section of the country. Due to inadequate knowledge, skills, and capital they have erratic production from year to year. With agriculture as their mainstay, they often fall into poverty when their crop fails. Further, the capacity of smallholders to organize themselves is low. This means that they have very little say in the policies that affect them. Although smallholder farmer associations are beginning to be organized, their penetration is very low. This group of stakeholders remains highly vulnerable to production and market failures due to their low asset base and their low capacity to mobilize individual and community resources. The government needs to make an active effort in building the capacity and resilience of smallholders. Strategic diversion of resources from NGO's and international donors to smallholders can go a long way in improving incomes and livelihoods of these farmers. Additionally, equitable extension provision, particularly to resource-poor farmers, is essential in improving their productivity and market linkages. The role of Tajik smallholders will be key in making the country food secure.

National policymakers: With responsibility for agricultural development, poverty reduction, and food security, the role of national policymakers in preventing food crises is crucial. They can exacerbate a crisis if their capacity is weak in terms of policy formulation, adoption, coordination, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. While they are answerable to the parliament on the impact of their decisions, the link between legislative and administrative branches of government is still weak in Tajikistan. This makes decision making much more centralized in the country. With weak bottom-up mechanisms for feedback on policies, the effectiveness of government efforts will remain limited. With the primary responsibility to reduce hunger and food insecurity, policymakers play a key role in the food system. Investing in capacity development of policymakers at the national, sub-national, and local level is essential for clear communication and accountability. Apart from that, improving the technical capacity of policymakers and promoting evidence-based policy making is also needed to make agricultural programs and reforms more effective.

Water User Associations (WUA): WUAs were developed to improve water management after land reforms were implemented. WUAs consist of a group of water users, usually farmers, who contribute resources (labor, machines, money) for the operation and maintenance of the irrigation system. A WUA is run by a leader who is usually directly elected by its members. Members are free to enter and exit

the organization. WUAs serve only those who pay membership fees. WUAs handle water disputes among village residents, collect water use fees, and maintain village-level irrigation infrastructure. Set up with the assistance of USAID, WUAs have emerged as a key player in Tajikistan's food and agriculture sector- particularly at the jamoat level. With field offices located all over the country, they have high outreach to farming communities. Despite community involvement, WUAs continue to be an arm of government and play a key role in meeting food security goals. Recently, however, WUAs have come under criticism by development partners for their inefficient functioning (Herrera and Post, 2014; Lee et al, 2015). Leadership and community capacity building is important for making WUAs work to their full potential. Beyond water management, WUAs can also play a major role in connecting farmers to agricultural markets, given that entrepreneurship and institutional credit facilities are limited in Tajikistan.

Private Traders: Private traders in input and output markets have an important role to play in the agricultural development of Tajikistan. The private sector in Tajikistan continues to be at the mercy of government policies for its survival. Liberalization of grain markets in the mid-1990s did help many private traders and entrepreneurs to enter food trade. However, poor development of infrastructure, low credit availability, and lack of market information imposed a major constraint on their growth. Tajikistan has a great potential to benefit from the trade of agricultural commodities. However, the government needs to make an active effort to build infrastructure around trade. This includes the establishment of markets, credit facilities, and storage facilities, to start with. Traders can play a key role in maintaining food security in the country.

Development Partners: Development partners continue to play a key role in preventing food crises in Tajikistan. As advisors and financiers of development plans and policies, they have a high level of influence over government decisions. Yet, government policies often go beyond and sometimes against their recommendations. Due to their commitment to long term food security for the people of Tajikistan, they are highly active in food security discussions. They are also free to experiment and intervene in the rural areas directly through a large presence of NGOs and Civil Society organizations. Development partners have been important for Tajikistan in its efforts to prevent famine-like conditions through food aid and distribution throughout the transition process.

NGO and Civil Society Organizations: In Tajikistan, the number of NGOs and CSOs has increased in the past decade. They are present throughout the country, particularly in rural areas. They often are the source for providing ground level information to government and international development partners. With the help of the free media, they provide a real perspective on the plight of rural communities.

Largely funded by development partners, they have freedom to experiment with new ideas to solve food security problems. Yet, their solutions are often only applicable to community specific needs. Additionally, the project specific interventions are often not in coordination with other NGOs, leading to overlap (sometimes concertation) of efforts in the same area. The government can play a major role in coordinating NGOs and strategically directing them to work on issues that make them effective collectively. That said, the importance of NGOs cannot be underestimated. They continue to play a critical role in shaping Tajikistan's poverty reduction strategies through their representatives who participate in debates and discussions at the district and national levels.

In this section, we discussed the role of various key stakeholders in the policy process. Specific to the case of Tajikistan, we show where the key capacity gaps exist. Therefore, in addition to bridging inefficiencies at the organizational and institutional level, there is a need to invest in targeted efforts towards the capacity building of key actors and stakeholders. Using observations from Tajikistan, we develop policy lessons for other transition economies in the next section.

5. Policy process lessons from Tajikistan

Transition economies take time to fully develop their policy processes and institutions. However, much can be learnt by other countries undergoing similar transitions. Tajikistan continues the Soviet style of policy making, like many other Central Asian countries. With limited research on the policy process of transition economies, this study on Tajikistan has several lessons applicable to other countries. In this section, we elaborate some of these lessons.

Firstly, there are geo-political realities that force the policy making process to remain centralized and closed. Countries in transition are often not able to overcome their historical legacy. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, countries need to form their own geo-political position. This can have a direct impact on the country's ability to liberalize effectively.

Secondly, countries in transition need to structure old institutions and gear them towards being market oriented. There is also a need to increase the entrepreneurial capacity of their population to function effectively in a market driven economy. In fact, policy process does not include just decision making. Even policies that are likely to have positive outcomes remain unimplemented due to a lack of adoption capacity at various levels.

Thirdly, over time we have found that decentralization has been helpful and party systems work at the local levels. However, for further effectiveness, there is a need to build local capacity to engage in the policy process and articulate community

needs to relevant stakeholders. Further, capacity development for implementation at local levels, such as WUAs, is also required. This means that there is a need to contextualize policy goals to local needs to ensure that implementation is successful.

Fourthly, most transition economies have a paucity of data for evidence-based decision making. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems are weak and therefore there is little subjective feedback on how the policies are implemented and what their impacts are at the local level. Building institutional infrastructure to collect regular and reliable data for monitoring and evaluation is key in ensuring the effectiveness of policies. Strengthening policy systems needs to begin with discussions on technical issues and move gradually to policy issues, therefore making policies evidence based.

Fifthly, the importance of institutional reforms must not be underestimated. Before the policy process is made more participatory, it is important to ensure that its key institutional infrastructure is in place. For instance, effective land reforms are an important first step in agrarian economies with unequal distribution of land resources. Similarly, there is a need to define the role of the private sector organizations and NGOs in the policy process of transition economies. For example, by involving them, their constraints and challenges could be addressed towards improved role they could play in their service delivery.

Finally, improving participatory decision making can go a long way in facilitating inclusive agrarian reforms. For example, despite consultation from local governments, power is concentrated at the top. There is a need to build stronger communication and feedback mechanisms from community level forums to the central government. It is also important to build the capacity of local governments to ensure that feedback from communities is articulated effectively to the government. Often, individuals and communities are constrained by collective action problems. Presence of strong advocacy groups and NGOs can play an important role in filling this gap. Similarly, tools using ICT can also help in improving two-way communication channels between citizens and the government. In the policy process, communication plays a key role in driving policy change (Resnick et al., 2015). Therefore, building policy communication capacity at all levels is an important investment that governments should undertake. Additionally, there is a need to involve other external stakeholders in the policy process more effectively. The government should aim to harness the human and organizational resources available in the country.

While issues facing other transition economies are different, much can be learnt from Tajikistan's case. This is particularly true for other Central Asian countries, which face similar issues. In the last section of this paper, we present the concluding remarks.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we study the evolution of the food policy process of Tajikistan. Based on our conceptual framework, we identify the key institutions and actors in the food policy process of the country. The collective efforts of these entities result in policy outcomes. However, it should be noted that the policy process is not always the result of simple interactions between these players. The nature and intensity of their roles and their influence depends on the political economy context, type of policy under consideration, and the level of capacity of these entities to function as credible actors in the policy process.

Using interviews, we identify their roles and understand the key capacity gaps in the system. While Tajikistan has come a long way in the transition process, there remains much to be accomplished. At the national level, there is a need for platforms that allow different stakeholders to engage in the policy process. In order to make policies more inclusive, the country needs to build effective mechanisms for gathering feedback from local institutions and communities. Water user associations, for instance, have made considerable progress since their formation, but still have a long way to go. More concrete successes are needed to convince authorities that open and inclusive dialogues at WUAs are not made political.

While limited resources constrain agricultural development in Tajikistan, a number of efforts can be prioritized to spur change. Institutional reforms, such as further improving land tenure rights, strengthening WUAs, providing crop insurance against drought, are the necessary steps in a larger policy discussion. Ensuring the effectiveness of land reforms, building agricultural extension system, and supporting agricultural research systems are examples of some key initiatives that the government can focus on. Further, there is a need to invest in physical infrastructure, especially because of the limited land resources of the country. To elaborate, Tajikistan requires more investment in transportation, storage, credit facilities, and markets. Involving the private sector and international donors in developing this physical infrastructure can go a long way. While this paper focused on the case of Tajikistan, our analysis is applicable to many other countries in transition.

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