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The Neglected Governance Challenges of Agricultural Mechanisation in Africa – Insights from Ghana

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Abstract

After decades of neglect, agricultural mechanisation is back on the agricultural development agenda in Africa. Taking the mechanisation efforts of Ghana as an example, this paper analyses the governance challenges involved in government and private sector efforts to promote mechanisation in smallholder-based farming systems. In Ghana, the government has been importing tractors for individual farmers at subsidised prices as well as setting up Agricultural Mechanisation Service Centres in almost all districts. The paper aims to analyse the governance challenges associated with such mechanisation strategies. Applying the agricultural innovation system approach, this paper develops a framework for identifying institutional bottlenecks and governance challenges related to mechanisation. A combination of qualitative empirical methods, including the Net-Map technique (a participatory mapping tool), was used to apply the framework. The evidence collected shows that mechanisation is constrained by missing institutions that would be required to ensure adequate training of tractor operators and technicians to service the tractors. Apart from such deficits in skill development, lack of access to credit and access to spare parts were major constraints. In addition, exchange rate fluctuations and impeding custom practices hindered a stronger private sector involvement in mechanisation. Government imports of tractors and machinery were found to be influenced by political interest and elite capture.

Some of these problems already led to the failures of past state-led mechanisation efforts in the 1950s and 1960s. The findings suggest that instead of focusing on the supply of subsidised machinery, the government could be more effective by strengthening the agricultural innovation systems for agricultural machinery to support emerging private sector initiatives.

Keywords: Africa, agricultural innovation system, agricultural mechanisation, governance challenges, smallholder farming