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“Exploring opportunities ...
for managing natural resources and a better life for all”

Bridging the gap between agri-food policy and science in Kenya

JOSEPH KARUGIA¹, MICHAEL KEENAN², GRACE NJOROGE¹, CLEMENS BREISINGER², LEONARD KIRUI³, RICHARD NDEGWA⁴, JOYCE MARU³

¹*International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Policies, Institutions and Livelihoods, Kenya*

²*International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Kenya*

³*International Potato Centre (CIP), Kenya*

⁴*Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, Research, Kenya*

Abstract

Research-based evidence is not always put to full use by policymakers. The question of why this is the case has often been addressed conceptually with sparse efforts to collect real-world data from actors. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the science-policy interface (SPI) in Kenya using key informant interviews with Kenyan policy makers, researchers, and private sector actors. Several recommendations emerge on how Kenya can boost research impact by optimising existing institutions, structures, and resources. Aligning policies across ministries and utilising existing efforts like the “Presidential Economic Transformation Secretariat” can promote coherence and streamline research efforts. Initiatives like the “National Agricultural Research Systems Policy” for research coordination and “Global Open Data for Agriculture and Nutrition” for data can be leveraged to streamline collaboration. Public consultations, workshops, and conferences remain important mechanisms for researchers to engage policymakers and stakeholders throughout the policy cycle, from agenda setting to evaluation. In addition, closed-door meetings are crucial for policymakers navigating sensitive issues. These targeted sessions with experts offer a safe space for confidential information exchange and unfiltered advice. Building technical capacity in ministries and training researchers for policy engagement can further support effective policy formulation and implementation. A collaborative research agenda is also recommended. This requires government, private sector, and researchers to clearly communicate needs and priorities. Ideally, the government should take the lead in funding research to ensure it directly addresses policy needs. In the short term, however, collaboration between governments, researchers, and donors remains crucial to bridge the gap. Ideally, such funding is flexible to allow for addressing emerging issues and allow for timely responses. To incentivize more engagement, universities and research institutes should value policy work more and allocate funds to support researchers in engaging with policymakers. For improving the SPI at the national and county level, investing in data infrastructure is also critical, implying better farmer data collection, storage, and dissemination systems, along with creation of easily accessible data repositories. Clear data sharing protocols are needed between government, researchers, and the private sector.

Keywords: Kenya, key informant interviews, policymakers, qualitative data