

Disambiguating Maize Policy Failure in Kenya, 2013 – 2024: A Political Economy Perspective

Odhiambo Alphonse Kasera¹, Phennie Morghan Osure², Bruno Charles Oloo³, Owili Mathews Odhiambo⁴, Francis Odhiambo Salu⁵, Hemolike Omondi Oguna⁶

¹Adjunct Lecturer of International Relations and Political Science, School of Development and Strategic Studies (SDSS), Maseno University and Rongo University, Kenya; and an Independent Research Consultant.

²Associate Consultant, Vision Africa Consulting Ltd.

^{3,4,5,6}Undergraduate Student of International Relations, School of Development and Strategic Studies (SDSS), Maseno University.

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a political economy analysis of recent maize policies and programs in Kenya. It examines the persistent adoption of ineffective maize policies by the governments despite evident policy failures, which necessitate reconceptualization, reform or even termination. The research is based on desk review and policy content analysis, utilizing an interpretive methodology to present arguments and draw conclusions. Drawing on Bates' (1981) political economy framework, the analysis unveils the political-economic dynamics shaping maize policies; concentrating on Uhuruto regime (2013-2022) and the radical policies implemented by current President Ruto during his first two years in office (2022-2024). Through four key analytical categories drawn from Bates conclusions, the paper interprets how the political contexts surrounding maize policy implementation hinder the achievement of maize food security. While existing research predominantly favors an ecological-economic-technical perspective, the study employs a political economy perspective to contextualize and explain the political motivations underpinning recent maize policy choices and the resulting persistent policy failures in Kenya. The study concludes that all maize-related decision-making and policy implementation are driven by political motivations aimed at maintaining the status quo of powerful political elites and their clients in key state-owned maize agencies. This provides their security, political survival through control of the hungry peasant masses and rent-seeking commercial maize enterprises dominating the market of agricultural factor of productions such as fertilizer dealers or companies. Study evidence shows that such a scenario is likely to continue stymying the transformation of Kenya from a food-and-feed-import-dependent country to a food-secure nation and a net food export country which it was before it experienced liberalization of agriculture. Political economy analysis thus provides a toolkit to situate the root of the country's current maize challenges. The findings underscore the necessity of fundamental political transformation to facilitate effective maize policy outcomes. The empirical and theoretical recommendations provided in the paper shows how such a transformation may be attained.

Keywords: Kenya, maize policy, political economy, peasant masses, policy failure.

INTRODUCTION

The need for sustainable policy interventions on maize and related public policy issues, though majorly an African problem, is not only African. Domesticated about 9000 years ago, maize (*Zea mays*) is, at present the leading cereal in terms of production volume[1]. Scientific projections even show it will be the most traded crop worldwide in the coming decade (Erenstein *et al.*, 2022). This speaks to the global significance of maize as a feed and food crop. Food and Agricultural Organization [FAO] (2021) further shows that maize is currently cultivated on some 200 million (M) ha and is the second leading global staple cereal (37%) coming only after rice (42%). The crop is a versatile multi-purpose crop, serving as a major feed globally, but most importantly as a staple food crop in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America (Abate *et al.*, 2015; Assefa *et al.*, 2019). Despite this global significance of maize, the present crisis of climate change and its impacts on maize production is greater especially peasant masses (see e.g., Jones & Yosef, 2015). Coupled with ever-increasing global population; which further put pressure on available stock, production, trade, consumption and research and development (R&D) of maize; it is crystal clear that sustainable price and non-price interventions will, above all, depend on properly designed and meticulously executed evidence-based public policies. Such policies must be characterized by clear participatory/farmer-oriented monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for maize policies and programs. But this requires that the policy makers retreat from a focus on political survival and implement maize policies that have long transformative impact in terms of establishing food security (Bates, 1981).

While maize production globally has increased (Erenstein *et al.*, 2022), maize situation in low and-middle income countries (LMICs), especially those in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) exhibit a reverse trend in terms of production, trade, and R&D. For example, while a third of the land under maize farming is in LMICs, these countries only produce 15% of global maize with a markedly lower yield of 2.7 tons/ha. Comparatively speaking, therefore, upper-middle-income countries (UPICs) and High-Income Countries (HICs) lead both in productivity and trade of global maize. The United States of America [USA] (361 M tons/ha) and China (259 M tons/pa) dominate the maize production – together producing over half of the global maize production (54.5%, TE2019). Globally, eight countries – USA, China, Brazil, Argentina, Ukraine, Indonesia, India, and Mexico – produce over 25 M t pa each, and together account for 881 M t or three-quarters of the global maize production (77.4%) (Erenstein *et al.*, 2022).

Kenyan maize situation mirrors that of many other LMICs, especially the poor SSA countries. Introduced in Kenya by the Portuguese in the 16th century, maize has overtaken all indigenous foods as the single most important food and a critical source of farm income for many in Kenya (Tarus, 2019). A discussion of maize policies and the attendant politics cannot fail to mention that most analysts trace the current maize challenges to the so-called liberalization of agriculture beginning around the 1980s. Hence up to the early 1990s, Kenya, most analysts assert, was a net exporter of maize (Paulton & Kanyinga, 2013; Tarus, 2019). The trend has tremendously changed, and as of 2017, the maize deficit stood at 15.8 million bags; only 37 million bags were produced against a requirement of 52.8 million bags; Kenya is now a net importer of maize (Kilimo News, July 2022). At the time of writing this paper, the media, experts, and the state herself have accepted that maize is one of the crises facing the country (The Standard, March 2023; Owino & Waweru, 2023; Mulupi, 2022). Moreover, as global average production increases, Kenya's has been on a downward trend. The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO, 2018) argues that annual production reduced from 40 million bags in 2013 to 35.8 million bags in 2017. As shown from the analysis by the Kenya Bureau of Statistics (2017, cited in Kasera, 2023, p. 162) below, maize has been experiencing a sharper decrease compared to other cereals: beans, sorghum, and millet.

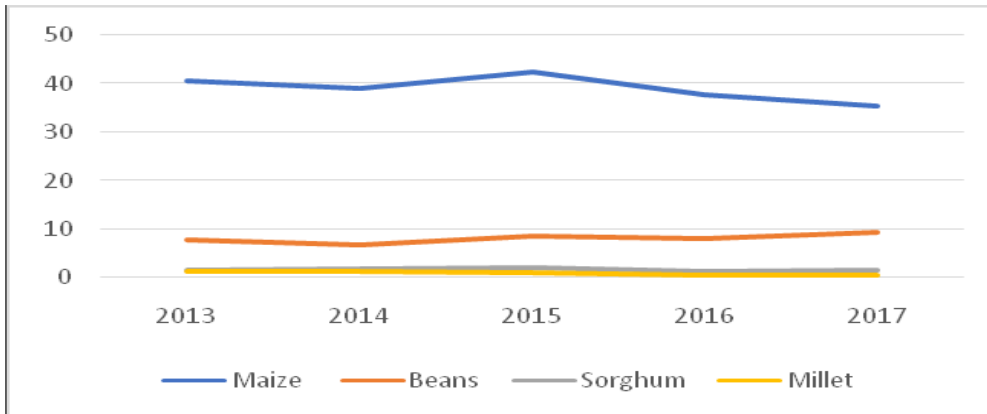


Figure 1: Estimated Production of Selected Agricultural Commodities

Source: KNBS (2017, cited in Kasera, 2023, p. 162).

A more challenging development for public policy students is the fact that while this seems to be the situation as it is, the leadership of the country, in the past and current regimes have not taken the issue of maize seriously. On this note, several studies have shown that beginning the time of market liberalization of the maize market in the 1980s, nothing has changed to improve the production, consumption, and distribution of maize in Kenya (Future Agricultures, 2009; Aringa & Jayne, 2010; Paulton & Kanyinga, 2013; Otieno, 2019; Magut *et al.*, 2022). The question that begs an answer in the face of this maize situation is: what factors have sustained Kenya's unresponsive policy interventions aimed at – by the matter of rhetoric and policy content- sustainable maize food security? The literature that attempts to answer this question falls into two main categories: those that see the answer lying in ecological and technical factors, that is to say, factors such as soil, climate, seed certification, ability of peasant masses to use green maize revolution or smart technologies, crop system diversification, among others (Abate *et al.*, 2015; Assefa, 2019; Bunde, 2019; FAO, 2018; Maison *et al.*, 2016; Mulupi *et al.*, 2019; Silver *et al.*, 2022). A second, a second yet rare approach in the literature attempts to unpack the root causes of perpetual maize insufficiency in Kenya (Bates, 1981; Alila & Otieno, 2005; Paulton & Kanyinga, 2013). This approach examines the place of politics in the allocation of values related to maize policy. Professor Bates notes that this approach is largely at the suggestion stage and has not been very friendly to many enquirers as politics by its very nature is complex to decipher, compared for example to explore the relationship between economic and ecological variables (Bates, 1981). This study is grounded on the thesis that politics is at the core of every social intervention and maize policy is not an exemption. Following this logic, and borrowing from the interpretation of extant data and recent occurrences in Kenya, this study puts the argument that policies around maize production, distribution, consumption, marketing, etc., are made and implemented within a political context; consequently, heavily influenced by politics calculations of the politicians through their agents – the policymakers.

The arguments in the paper are organized into five main sections. This introduction has ushered the global dimensions of maize, highlighted the contradictions between the global trends and Africa's (narrowing down to Kenya's) trends, and presented the research problem. The second section reviews relevant literature to set the tone for political economy analysis; the third section highlights the political economy conceptual framework that was used and guided the discussion and presentation of findings. The fourth section presents the methodology of the study while the final section constitutes the findings and showcases the state of maize policies in Kenya. Section five conducts an interpretation of the findings by tying it all together while section six will contain the concluding remarks. Four major policy recommendations will then be presented in section seven, followed finally by a comprehensive list of the works used to make this paper and listed in the references section.

REVIEW OF EXTANT LITERATURE

There are two major groups of literature diagnosing the problem of insufficient production of maize in Kenya (and other developing countries by extension). On one hand there is a non-critical ecological-technological-economic perspective emphasizing the traditional reasons for food insecurity in SSA. On the other hand, is a critical political-economy perspective that argues that agricultural (read maize) policies succeed or fail depending on the political-economic dynamics that underpin decision-making and policy implementation. A majority of literature fall under the former, and consequently this section will draw insights from the political economy perspective to explain maize policy failure in Kenya. But before that is undertaken, the present section delves into the first category – the group of inquiry that Bates (1981) dubs physical and biological perspective, highlighting its major features and concluding by the gaps, which the root cause perspective/political economy analysis fills. The review is analytically done through the lens of characterizing the major features of this literature. The political-economy perspective is presented in the next section when the framework of analysis adopted by this paper is presented. The result of our literature analysis reveals five main characteristics. This section identifies these and mentions the questions that remain unanswered, as a way to usher in the need for a political economy perspective.

First, they are the majority of extant studies on the issue of maize and treat the issue of subsidy as the key independent variable to ensuring sufficient maize production in African sub-Saharan countries, especially those that have recorded a negative trend in maize production like Kenya. Out of all the publications used in this study, only five could be categorized as ‘root causes’ in their objective, with the rest falling under the first category. This is an important point to note because as this study revealed, suggestions from these (see e.g., Mulupi, 2019; Walime, 2014; Bunde, 2019) inquiries have been taken up by the governments not only to improve policies through reforms but also to redesign maize projects and programs (Abate *et al.*, 2015; Bunde, 2019; Erentein *et al.*, 2022; Smale, Byerlee & Jayne, 2013; Owino & Waweru, 2023). For example, an over-studied aspect of the maize problem in Africa is the issue of maize fertilizer subsidies (Smale & Jayne, 2003; Silver *et al.*, 2022; Owino & Waweru, 2023; Otieno, 2019); Muranga County Government, 2022; Mulupi, 2019; Masion *et al.*, 2016; Magut *et al.*, 2022; Komarek *et al.*, 2018; Kangethe, 2011; Ayiecko, Nelson & Charles, 2013; Tarus, 2019).

Secondly, this category of literature makes one common policy recommendation: that governments should invest in subsidies or what is increasingly metamorphosing into the so-called ‘smart input subsidies’ (Maison *et al.*, 2022) to improve maize production in rural areas as a key means to attaining sufficient production of the same. Governments, including Kenya have not been deaf to these pleas. If a public policy is what a government chooses to do or not to do (Dye, 1972), then the Kenyan government has it as the core of its public policy on food and nutrition security to subsidize maize in different ways. The Kenyan Government for example has made it a common intervention to subsidize maize production and consumption both at the input and output levels (The Standard Newspaper, June 2022; The Standard Newspaper, March 2023). Moreover, both at the national and county levels, the country has laid out policy guidelines to facilitate this intervention.^[2] The question that requires an answer is why despite continued subsidy-based policy failure, the Kenyan government seems not to have learnt any lessons and improved the process to attain maize food security. It is in attempting to seek an answer to this question that this paper agrees with Bates (1981) that the root cause lies in the politics of maize policies in Kenya. The study therefore draws on examples from the regime of the fourth president often referred to as Uhuruto regime (signifying the names of the then president Uhuro Kenyatta and the the deputy president – no president, William Ruto) and the first two years of the current regime, the Ruto government (2022 – 2024) especially concentrating on the radical policies that the later case study has since implemented. These cases are used to make sense of the theoretical assertions drawn from Bates (1981).

A third characteristic of this category of research constitutes works that have examined the maize situation in Kenya from the angle of ecological factors such as ‘poor agronomic practices, low coverage of extension services and affordability of appropriate technologies like fertilizers and hybrid seeds, low-value addition, adverse climate changes leading to frequent and intense droughts, floods, re-emergence of diseases and pests’ (Walime, 2014, p. vi). These studies contend that the problem of perpetually insufficient maize stock in Kenya can be explained by the various ecological-technological factors and hence an important and cross-cutting policy recommendation is that targeted support for areas with the capacity to produce and extra-support to areas naturally non-endowed for maize production should be thought out by the government, including recommendations to sophisticate maize production through certified seeds, machine utility among others (*Ibid*). However, despite the Government of Kenya (GoK) responding to these recommendations since the liberalization of agriculture was ushered in the 1980s, the state remains less bad. Maize production is on a downward trend (figure 1 above), and ecological determinants of the production of maize have only worsened even amidst public policies that should cushion naturally disadvantaged areas such as Arid and Semi-Arid Regions (ASAL) (Paulton & Kanyinga, 2013). Perhaps putting the ecological factors into the political context where such interventions are made and implemented gives the study a better framework to understand reasons for policy failure and to advice for areas for policy learning. Moreover, why is Israel an almost fully desert country food secure than Kenya which is under better ecological conditions? Is it ecology or a matter of political leadership? In the findings section, this paper argues to justify this claim; that the starting point to revolutionizing maize policies is dealing with political limitations to genuine, pro-peasant policy-making and maize market policy implementation.

The fourth characteristic of the ecological-technological inquiries into Africa’s (read Kenya’s) maize problem is a pro-technology argument that proceeds like this, rural agriculture must be transformed technologically if sufficient food is to be produced for both rural and urban populations. The smallholder peasant masses should be targeted as a priority; technology should be made accessible, cheap, and easy to use by them and governments should therefore make necessary interventions in the maize market to attain these (Silver *et al.* 2022; Smale & Jayne, 2003; Bunde, 2019; GoK, 2012; GoK, 2013; GoK, 2023). In this regard, the government has taken it seriously to implement what Vision 2030 calls a knowledge-driven economy. In the maize sub-sector, this has manifested itself in the form of certified seeds, a move toward biotechnology, agricultural extension expansion, and a cross-cutting element – the need and justification of technology transfer^[3]. Yet studies exhibiting this characteristic are yet to answer a fundamental question why is the move toward sophisticating agriculture (and maize in particular) slow in gaining momentum in Kenya (like in many other countries – see Silver *et al.*, 2022 for an exposition of the Zambian scenario)? Why are the gaps in the utility of technology so wide especially between smallholder and large-scale/market-based maize producers (Paulton & Kanyinga, 2013; Silver *et al.*, 2022)? Why must governments push for (or not) this move despite structural gaps that require that certain first steps are undertaken beforehand (who is gaining and who is losing in this move)? The answers to these questions lie in political analysis of the contexts of the making and implementation of these policies. This avenue helps to try to put up a logical argument for why the policies why brought to existence in the first place, and secondly why they were implemented as they did; consequently, informing the politically sensitive analyst of the possible factors for policy failure and success.

The final characteristic of the ecological-technological-economic or the non-political category of literature on the problem of maize production is that it analyzes the situation from an economic market forces approach (Argwings-Kodhek, Mukumbu & Monke, 1992; Jayne *et al.*, 2001; Ayiecko, Nelson & Charles, 2013; Aringa & Jayne, 2009; Aringa & Jayne, 2010). Bates (1981) argues that these agricultural economists emphasize that the problem of maize in SSA is first and foremost state intervention into the maize market; pointing to the ‘ineptness of public policy decision makers’ (p. 4). On the other hand, some political analysts have rebutted such agri-economists by pointing to the various cases of market failure in the agricultural

sector maize sub-sector, for example in the entire post-agricultural liberalization in Kenya (Argwings-Kodhek, Mukumbu & Monke, 1992; Tarus, 2019). To clearly understand why maize markets have failed, and to make sense of why the state justifies its intervention – the political motivations thereof, neither can a purely political nor economic analysis suffice. A political-economic analysis is required. Using the Batesian framework (outlined below), this paper aims to contribute to the extant literature by bridging this gap.

THE BATESIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY FRAMEWORK

Professor Robert Bates is to this study the most diagnostic scholar of the true causes for Africa's unresponsive policies toward agricultural transformation and attainment of food security. In his 1981 masterpiece, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The Political Basis of Agricultural Policies*, he sets a powerful stage for future 'root causes' inquirers by identifying key issues that political economy analysis of Africa's agricultural doom cannot escape to employ. His conceptual framework is based on the fact that most African countries have similar policies (in many respects), yet the root causes of Africa's agricultural woes are traced to these very public policies. He argues that these policies are shown to be counter-productive, elitist, and anti-peasant (p. ii).

Through *States and Markets in Tropical Africa* Bates rationale for a political economy approach to understanding the state of tropical Africa's agriculture is critical because Africa's agricultural development is marked with paradoxes; far visible of which is the fact that while most Africans live in rural areas and derive their incomes from farming, African governments continue to follow policies adverse to the interests of this majority, even more, the economies of most African countries are based on agriculture looked as a share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and remain agrarian to a greater extent, yet many African countries cannot produce food sufficient for their populations, and continue to be food beggars, year in year out (*Ibid*).

Bates (1981) asserts that a 'root causes' approach goes beyond the common approach to understanding problems bedeviling Africa's agriculture as presented by the ecological-technological-economic literature. In critiquing the common approach to making sense of the tropical African agricultural problems, he asserts that analyses proposed largely by agricultural economists, pure agriculturalists, and technologists – including increasingly smart agricultural technologists such as synthetic biologists and genetically modified organisms (GMO) proponents, have rationalized the market as the key player [4], bad ecological conditions, [5] and the lack of necessary technologies as the key perpetrators of the obtaining continued food insecurity in Africa. The market is seen here as the best avenue for sustained agricultural production as it can appropriate resources and solve ecological and technological challenges efficiently and effectively. State intervention is seen as the cause of failure, not a solution. Such assertions, to Bates, are incomplete in their analyses because they don't go to the source of the problem. To him, the state and the market in Africa are entwined, and secondly, everything in a country is first and foremost the role of the government. In this context, to understand the genesis of the problems facing Africa, the question to investigate is: "why should reasonable men adopt public policies that have harmful consequences for the societies they govern? In other words, what are the social purposes that lead policy-makers to intervene in agricultural markets?" (Bates, 1981, p. 3). Or put simply, why do Kenyan Governments continue to make and implement maize policies that have been tested to fail and cannot deliver a maize food/feed secure Kenya? Who gains and who loses from this dysfunctionality? Bates provides us with insights into understanding the losers and gainers in this maize political market. The Batesian political economy model can be summarized into five main propositions.

1. To understand the root causes of Africa's agricultural situation, one has to diagnose how state policies influence the operations of the rural peasant masses who are located in three different yet interdependent markets – the market for agricultural commodities from which they accrue their

revenue; the market for factors of production – to which they must pay to produce; and finally market for consumer goods – goods which they require for survival and which are produced in the industrial-urban set-ups.

2. Agricultural policy is conceived as governmental interventions that affect the incomes of rural peasant masses by influencing the prices they confront in the major markets.
3. That government intervention is a purposeful behavior undertaken to achieve certain social objectives. One such social objective for African countries is to shift their economies from agrarian to industrial/modern economies. This objective is key to understanding and contextualizing agricultural policy interventions in Africa in the three major markets above, especially as regards those that transfer resources from rural to urban, and agriculture to industry.
4. To undertake agricultural policy intervention in the three major markets, African governments have a host of policy instruments to employ. These instruments, however, must be put into context in terms of the extent to which they fit within public purpose as well as the extent to which they are animated by the personal motives of the politicians.
5. Bates framework also proceeds on the understanding that public purpose interventions by governments in Africa are not the only way to understand Africa's policy interventions in agriculture. He is categorical that "more personal motives animate public choices. Governments want to stay in power, they must appease powerful interests. And people turn to political action to secure special advantages – rewards they are unable to secure by competing in the market" (p. 3). Actually, to Bates, all policy interventions in the agricultural markets are underpinned by political interests. This is the most important proportion for the analysis undertaken in this paper. The paper argues that the policies concerning maize implemented by Kenyan governments are underpinned by political calculations rather than the need to transform Kenya into a maize food-secured country.

This paper applies this framework to make sense of Kenya's agricultural policies concerned with maize production and marketing (generally production, consumption, and distribution). These perspectives are in my understanding very relevant to understanding the root causes of Kenya's perpetual state of insufficient maize stock. Why has the state pursued such failed policies to intervene in the maize markets, despite these policies failing to increase maize production, streamline its distribution and marketing, and ensure sustainable consumption? To apply this framework, the paper tests the relevance of four core conclusions by Bates (1981) in his studies of political economy of agricultural policies in tropical Africa, to the Kenyan maize situation. These conclusions include:

1. The agricultural market is a theater for the struggle between the state and the peasantry
2. Interventions in the agricultural market are based on political calculations by the political elites rather than the food needs of the citizens
3. Agricultural interventions continue to take a project-based approach because this is a politically viable policy option relative to price-based policies
4. The so-called subsidy for production has less impact on promoting food production incentives but remains the common policy option for governments due to its political attractiveness

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on desk review and policy content analysis. The documents include journal articles, government policy documents, and media newspapers and media discussions retrievable on YouTube, and Facebook platforms. Scholarly materials were gathered using the Google Scholar tool. The process involved keying in keywords related to the subject, namely: Kenya, Sub-Saharan Africa, political economy, maize, food security, and maize policy, and then downloading all the downloadable works. An important source of non-Google Scholar tool data was the mainstream TV (especially Citizen TV) YouTube channels of previous discussions and reporting on the issues of maize policy in Kenya. Added to these were Newspaper

articles from local dailies.

The design employed in this study is qualitative-interpretive design. This technique is utilized because it emphasizes understanding the social (which includes political) context, perspectives, and complexities of policy issues through several methods including document analysis. Its value lies in providing rich, nuanced insights into the diverse perspectives, motivations, and impacts of policies, and can aid in more informed decision-making and effective policy implementation in the area of maize discourses (Yanow, 2017; Songklin, Jedaman & Posing, 2021). Brewer & Peter (1983) argue that interpretive research fits best in a document analysis-based study because it gives the researcher the leeway to interpret text, compare text, and in the process create new information through transcending existing perspectives. This advantage was exploited in the review of the literature and the deciphering of findings and making of discussions of findings in this paper. The next section presents the findings and discussions; attempting a brief and generic categorization of maize policies, which include government programs affecting the maize market, and interpreting their political underpinnings based on the Batesian framework.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study are divided into three parts. Part one discusses the nature of maize policies in Kenya and sets the stage for applying Bates' (1981) model to understand why these policies have manifested in the ways that they have. Section 5.3 applies the Batesian model to disentangle how political calculations define types of maize policies, and why these maize policies not targeted at the Kenyan agrarian population but to the benefit of the political class, continue to be adopted instead of being re-conceptualized or terminated to allow for reforms.

The Nature of Maize Policies in Kenya

To begin, it is imperative to outline the mental framework within which the concept of maize policy is operationalized in this paper. Maize policy is used to refer to both policy documents related to the subject of maize as well as governmental policy interventions (through formal programs or presidential orders). Hence a maize policy does not have to be pegged on a duly (through parliament) endorsed policy but can be a reactive program to meet urgent maize demands. An important argument underpinning this paper is whether in a formally existing document or not, governmental interventions in Kenya have been justified as pegged on the provisions of development programs, old or new. This conception is informed further by Bates' (1981) notion that any governmental intervention on an agricultural issue in a 'Third World Country' must be put in the context of the peasant rural peasant masses who are the majority to be affected by the governmental interventions into the agricultural (herein, maize) markets.

Having made this clear. It is important to understand the nature of maize policies in Kenya. Based on the literature analyzed in this paper, maize policies exist in two major forms: general or sector-wide policies and specific/substantive policies. General policies are broader in scope and are targeted at the agricultural sector. Within the general policies, several issues maybe outlined, though not substantively. This typology of policies is often longer-term, 5-10 years in scope. An example of this type of policy is the Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS), 2019 – 2024 (GoK, 2019). Within this strategy (general policy guidelines) several policies are embedded. For example, among the so-called 'nine flagships' within the ASTGS, anchor 1, flagship 2 aims to (spells out the policy that): Shift nationwide subsidies focus to register 1.4 million high-need farming households and empower them to access a range of inputs from multiple providers through e-vouchers' (GoK, 2019, p. 4). Hence this general policy framework provides and as in deed provided different government regimes with the ground to rationalize the issue of subsidy programs.

Another example of a general policy is the Agricultural Policy 2021 which addresses all the issues of

agriculture including all subsectors (crops, fisheries, livestock, research, biotechnology, etc.); legal frameworks and agriculture in national development plans (NDPs), challenges and several policy statements on each of the issues. A more comprehensive policy guideline on agriculture is outlined in Vision 2020. “The Vision 2030 flagship projects during the implementation of Medium Term Plan III (MTP III) of Vision 2030 are: the Fertilizer Subsidy Programme; Agricultural Mechanization Programme; Food and Nutrition Security Programme; Livestock Production Programme; Value Chain Support Program; Youth and Women Empowerment in Modern Agriculture Programme; Agricultural Insurance Programme; Research and Capacity Building Programme: Crop Diversification Programme; Coastal Disease Free Zone Programme and; the Strategic Food Reserve programme among others” (GoK, 2019, p. 9). Hence general policies, whether they come in the form of regulatory policies or strategies or development plans cover several issues related to maize. It can be argued that these policies are the source of many actions/interventions made in the maize markets by the governments in Kenya.

Specific or substantive maize policies are conceived in this paper as those policies that handle specific issues related to maize politics in Kenya. The analysis of worked used in this study reveal three sets not completely separate sets of policy typologies, namely: policies that influence prices of agricultural products or marketing policies, policies that influence the cost of factors of production or in-put and consumption subsidy policies, and finally the policies that influence the prices of consumer goods produced. These typologies coincide with Bates (1981) three types of markets; namely – the market for agricultural products, the market for factors of production, and the market for consumer goods produced in the urban-industrial settings. Policies that fit into these sub-categorizations do not exclusively fit in one and not another.

Marketing policies of maize have changed over-time. Before liberalization in 1988, when prices of maize were left to the hands of the market forces of demand and supply, the National Cereals and Produce Board controlled maize prices through such strategies as inter-district trade in maize, by constricting maize sales within the same district and buying off the surplus. The surplus buying was to control the price of maize by stabilizing it. Over time, private marketing has taken over the role of NCPB and most maize are priced at the market-determined prices (Jayne, Myers & Njoro, 2008; Kangethe, 2011; Argwings-Kodhek, Mukumbu & Monke, 1992; Owino & Waweru, 2023)). Moreover, the NCPB has turned into an ineffective tool, presenting the private maize sector to take advantage and exploit the gaps. The losers, however, have been the smallholder, peasant maize farmers in the rural settings.

Trading policies have likewise changed over time. Jayne, Myers & Njoro (2008) assert that:

In order to support domestic maize prices, the government has imposed variable tariffs on maize imports, both at the port of Mombasa (to restrict imports from the world market) and at border crossings along the Ugandan and Tanzanian borders. Evidence indicates that the costs of maize production in eastern Uganda is typically lower than in most areas of Kenya (p. 314).

However, while Kenya continues to control trade in maize through the borders, especially today the so-called Cess policy implemented by the Counties through County Revenue Collection Policies (CRCP) (GoK, 2019b), enforcement of control is still very ineffective and illegal maize continue to pass through the border points through illicit cross-border trade. Jayne, Myers & Njoro (2008) assert that:

However, since the border is relatively porous unrecorded cross-border trade occurred regularly, and it is alleged that the NCPB support price policy encouraged maize imports from Uganda at the same time that official trade policy attempted to suppress it. Illegal cross-border trade is impeded somewhat by transaction costs, including bribery payments to police, extra handling charges associated with offloading maize at the border, smuggling it across, and on-loading maize onto trucks on the Kenya side (p. 314-5).

The most common policy intervention by Kenyan Government into the maize market is through input and

consumption subsidies. Input subsidies often come in the form fertilizers (Alila & Atieno, 2006; Aringa & Jayne, 2009; Ayiecko, Nelson & Charles, 2013; Magut et al., 2022; Masion et al., 2016). Research into the issue of fertilizer subsidy as a result is extensive and going back to over two decades (Argwings-Kodhek, Mukumbu & Monke, 1992; Poulton & Kanyinga, 2013; Tarus, 2019). Part of literature have particularly examined the relationship between the fertilizer subsidy policy and the volumes of production at the County Government level, either through the lens of county-specific farm-input subsidy policy or specific programs (Walime, 2014) or through the lens of the national subsidy policy provisions (which as has been highlighted is spread across several general policies) (Magut et al., 2022). On the other hand, maize consumption subsidy policies are not very common type in Kenya but have been implemented, anyway. The salient recent example is former president Uhuru Kenyatta's 8 billion worth subsidy implemented in the run-up to the August 2022 general elections (Kilimo News, 25th July 2022).

The final typology of substantive policies on maize is the maize-specific technology policies. These delve into the specific issue of how technology can be harnessed to improve maize yields and help the country attain maize food security. Application of technology in the specific sector of maize is a common policy statement explicit or implicit in a number of policies directly concerned with agricultural development and transformation or indirectly. For example, the Kenya Vision 2030 recognizes the role of technology thus:

The Vision recognizes the role of science, technology and innovation (ST&I) in a modern economy, in which new knowledge plays a central role in boosting wealth creation, social welfare and international competitiveness (GoK, 2012, 21).

The defunct Big Four Agenda of former president Uhuru Kenya, particularly identifies the issue of technology as an enabler to the achievement of his 100% food and nutrition policy by 2022. The Agenda calls on the then government to 'utilize relevant technologies to increase maize production from 40 million bags annually to 67 million bags by 2022' (Kasera, 2023, p. 162). Provisions on the need to apply technology on maize, like other crops, can be traced from several other general policies including Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS), Agriculture Policy, Seed-related policies and so on.

An explicit technology policy that applies to maize is the Biotechnology Development Policy of 2009 and its Act, the Biosafety Act of 2006. These pieces of policies are the driving frameworks for maize seeds modification which began in 2001 and has been a born of heated politics in this Kenya (Kingiri & Hall, 2012). The recent lifting of the 2011 GMO ban immediately the President William Samoei Ruto came into power, appears a good gesture to implementing this policy to many observers (ISAAA Africentre, 2023).

In the face of such a robust policy environment guiding maize production in Kenya, a disturbing question is since the 1990s, the production has been sustained at low levels, and insufficient for local consumption leaving the country in a state of perpetual importation of maize from the international market, which includes from her neighboring countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo DRC), and Malawi. Scholars who operate within ecological-economic category have answered this question by avoiding the political element (already presented in section 4.1). The next section of this paper makes the argument that this continued downward turn that is a mismatch between policies formulated and implemented and the policy outcomes, is a result of the political contexts such policies are formulated and implemented. This is a trajectory not taken by the numerous non-root cause inquiries.

POLITICAL-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF MAIZE POLICIES IN KENYA

This section assesses the extent of applicability of Bate's (1981) political economy analysis framework whose key argument is that to understand the root causes of the ever-worsening agricultural food insecurity in Africa an analyst must examine the content of agricultural policies with a view to understand "the ways in

which policies are designed to secure advantages for particular interests, to appease powerful political forces and to enhance the capacity of political regimes to remain in power” (p. 5 – 6). It achieves this assessment by tying the previous sections all together and extending the arguments therein in an interpretive approach. It answers the question raised in the introduction: why has Kenya become a perpetual maize food beggar? By putting into test the Batesian model (presented in section 2) by conducting a political-economic analysis of Kenya’s maize policies (presented in section 3.2). In undertaking this task, this section makes an attempt to fill the niches in extant literature identified in section 3.1. Five important studies on the “root-causes” category of literature inquiring into the nature and causes of Africa’s agricultural woes are used to make this discussion. Of particular significance across this paper, especially in this section is the work of Robert Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa*. To apply analytic themes and areas for secondary materials, information now in the public domain (media or governmental) has been used in this section (as in others) to discuss these issues within the Kenyan context. This section is organized around four major areas where the state and market interact in the agricultural market- for this particular paper, the maize market. These areas are identified or implied by Bates (1981) in his seminal piece. Let us now turn into a discussion of each of these analytic areas.

The maize policy discourse reflects the struggle between the state and the peasantry within the market.

One primary theme Bates (1981) addresses in his book is the nature of the agricultural market in Africa. He provides a rather very gloomy nature and asserts that “in Africa, the market is the setting for the struggle between the state and the peasant. In this context, state intervention in the agricultural markets is aimed at ‘manipulating’ the rural producers and to ‘restructure the patterns of advantage’. On their part, the rural producers use the market as a defense against the state that has failed to lay out the needed environment for their thriving (p. 6). This diagnosis is correct to Kenya (as for many other sub-Saharan countries), and applies to the issue of maize policies formulated and programs implemented in the country. For example, immediately upon assuming office, President Ruto’s administration has been in a tag of war with peasant maize farmers. The state on her part blamed the farmers for hoarding maize and on this basis rationalized her maize importation policy to fill the gaps, which according to the interpretation of the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Franklin Mithika Linturi and the Minister of Trade Mr. Moses Kuria, was as caused by the hoarding. Mr. Mithika Linturi for example is quoted as saying: “sell your maize before we import duty-free maize because you will not be able to sell as the market will be flooded with cheap maize and rice”. The President reinforced this understanding and said:

“We told you farmers that you should release your maize and now the grace period is over. We are going to import 4 million bags of maize into the country from this month of March going forward.” (Citizen TV Kenya, March 2023).

The peasant maize farmers on the other hand disputed these claims, arguing for example that government was taking advantage of them and that the NCPB had terribly failed to buy the surplus maize and leading to low prices of maize which did not make economic sense to sell at owing to the high costs of production they had incurred. These claims marry well with the findings of Poulton & Kanginga (2013) who argued that the NCPB had been rendered ‘toothless dog’ by the very politicians who appointed at will their clients to play the strategic leadership roles at it. Therefore, to the scholars, the state should take responsibility to cushion peasant masses by first and foremost mainstreaming the operations of the NCPB to ensure stability of maize prices at all times. Narrating his experiences to a TV reporter, one farmer from Transzoia, stated that:

We used to use two bags of fertilizers for one acre of land. But now, the prices of fertilizers have shot so high we can only use one. If I add all the cost of production, I would rather let the maize rot than to sell at the current 5000 shillings a 90kg bag currently sells at. The government does not understand this at all (Citizen TV YouTube, December, 2022).

Let us use the most recent example under this current regime of President William Ruto to further illustrate. The recent fertilizer subsidy scandal (Citizen TV Kenya, May, 2024; Ronny TV, April, 2024), where powerful forces including allegedly Cabinet Secretary for Agriculture, Mr. Mithika Linturi, supplied fake fertilizers to vulnerable peasant masses, underscores the persistent adoption of unresponsive maize policies by the Kenyan government. This case, which involved the key sectors concerned with agricultural section including Ministry of Agriculture, National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB) and the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) among others, in the procurement and certification of fraudulent fertilizer, exemplifies how political motivations driven by the need to maintain the status quo of powerful political elites overshadow effective policy-making and implementation. Despite the scandal reaching parliament as an impeachment motion, the implicated cabinet secretary was cleared by the political class, highlighting the systemic corruption and lack of accountability within the political economy framework.

In the context of this study, this finding illustrates the political-economic dynamics that sits at the base of stagnant growth and development in the maize sub-sector. It confirms that it is not technological issues such as fertilizers that hinder maize production, distribution and consumption, but rather the illicit politics perpetuated by disinterested politicians which hinder the effective maize policy formulation and implementation. Drawing on Bates' (1981) political economy framework, the analysis reveals how political contexts shape maize policies, leading to persistent policy failures. The fertilizer scandal, which resulted in no legal action against those involved, reinforces the argument that maize-related decision-making is permeated by the need to control the hungry masses and benefit rent-seeking commercial enterprises controlling agricultural factors of production as the so-called SBL which was given the tender to supply the fertilizer (fraudulently of cause) that turned fake (Ronny TV, April, 2024), at the expense of achieving food security in Kenya. This case like the others already presented above provides a database from which to situate the root causes of the country's maize policy challenges and underscores the need for fundamental political transformation to achieve effective policy outcomes.

Bates is therefore right that the maize market is nothing other than a place for a duel between the politician and the peasant farmer. When this argument is expanded to understand the interests that underpin the quick move import the maize rather than listen to the peasant masses' cries and cushioning them against the potential loss they would incur is the importation continued, Bates becomes clearer. First, based on information now in the public domain, the government's intention for importing maize was never to see price reduce. While at Suswa launching water projects, the President declared that maize (about two months ago, November and December 2023) was selling at 170 and would sell at 150 in the next two weeks thanks to importation move (Citizen TV, May, 2023). The same president, accepted one month later, that maize prices were still at 200 Kenya Shillings (Kenya News Media, May 2023). The question is what was the motive behind the import? For the latest subsidy by President Ruto, it is too early to have a conclusive answer but it is clear that the 'policy pushers' (Kindon, 2003) were actually pursuing interests not for the larger society but their own. Two main points suffice for this assertion. First, procurement procedures of which specific companies were contracted to undertake the process remains unclear. Secondly the government, even though the head of the state himself had expressed confusion and double-speak on how the process was undertaken and what impacts it had in terms of cushioning Kenyans against the ever increasing cost of their staple most food – maize, now selling between 200 – 230 Kenyan Shillings (Citizen TV, July 2023).

Markets are instruments for political control used to generate support for political elites

A second analytic avenue for understanding the state market interaction in agricultural sector and why the manner of this interaction continues to perpetuate food insecurity is by situating the state's role into a

political-economic analysis weighing scale. After assessing the interaction between markets and states in tropical Africa and the influence of the same on agricultural policies, Bates (1981) concludes that “agricultural markets are instruments for political control. Government intervention in markets generate political resources and these resources are then used to generate organized support for the political elites and policies they propound (p. 7). This assertion is true for Kenya’s agricultural discourses, but even make a better diagnosis of the maize market domain. Let us interpret two maize consumption subsidy interventions in the recent past in Kenya. In the run-up to the August 2022 general elections in Kenya, President Uhuru Kenyatta implemented a whopping 8 billion maize subsidy program. The maize subsidy intervention was meant to infuse a situation of excess supply of maize and consequently reduce cost of maize in the market. This program met its goal and just a month before elections, maize was selling at 100 – 130 Kenyan Shillings (Citizen TY You-Tube, July, 2023). As Kenyans put the elections behind them, a month later, to be specific, the subsidy was accidentally removed by the then outgoing president Kenyatta and Kenyans had to get back to buying 2kg of maize at 200 – 250 Kenyan shillings. The negligible or unsustainable impact of this policy intervention can be best explained by taking cognizance of the political context under which policy makers made the decision and moved ahead to implement it. Two important points can be made here as follows.

First, President Uhuru had become Mr. Raila Odinga’s ally through the now famous handshake in 2018 (Ngumo & Omoke, 2021). Since then, he began to beat the trumpet for his now new brother, praising him publicly as the best successor. Additionally, towards the elections, nation-wide polls still showed that the race was cut-and-throat (Star Newspaper, 11th July 2022). It is logical to say that Uhuru thought a timely intervention to swing votes towards his ally, and from his now then openly declared foe, Mr. Ruto, was through undertaking the subsidy. A second point, and related to the first, is the fact that soon after all signs showed that Ruto would be declared the president, the production was halted without any alternatives implemented. This move to halt it, appears to me as political calculation to hand-over a government with highly expectant people to the new administration; a move that sort of, political aimed to destabilize the new administration that hitherto – during campaigns, had promised Kenyans heavens. Both Sitko *et al.* (2017) and Chinsinga (2010) corroborate this discussions and further agree with Bates that the agricultural market is a tool for control the poor for political maneuver. They do this by providing three main reasons why governments in East and Southern Africa implement maize policies that are unsustainable. These are highlighted below and corroborated with other findings.

To begin with, governments in Africa are not interested in continuity of programs but their own survival. Poulton & Kanyinga (2013) corroborate this argument when they show that Kenyan governments have pursued different strategies to revitalize agriculture but negative variables related to politics of underdevelopment have all impeded project continuity even in cases where previous governments had put into place innovative programs to revitalize agriculture. The examples of the programs implemented by president Mwai Kibaki under the First Medium Term Pan (MTP) of the Kenya Vision 2030. New governments, they assert, come in with new people detached from the spirit of transformation started by previous governments, and do all they can to recreate projects, and assign or reassign projects leads. Secondly, and related to the first point, is the argument put forth by Sikto *et al.* (2017) and corroborated by Poulton & Kanyinga (2013) that maize policies have not had an impact in East and Southern Africa because mainly of client-patron relationships. The political leadership is, in this framework, disinterested in project success, as much as it is interested in rewarding the clients who for the case of case are the elections funders, who become elected into top government decision -making positions. It is small wonder therefore that the face of a new government in Kenya is usually the same thing to the politicians and businessmen who were around the presidential contender during campaigns. In such a framework the president can do very less to control mismanagement and create an environment where maize policies can have the needed impact.

Project-based policies have failed to increase maize supply but it remains a common, politically superior policy option for governments in Kenya

Governments in Africa prefer project-based policies to price-based policies to increase food supplies, yet such policies are the more efficient ways to meet this public purpose Bates (1981, p. 5). This is because the political incentive for this preferred approach is higher than the alternative. Yan (2015) defines a project-based market competition environment as one whereby contractors routinely bid for contracts under specific project awarding systems, and variations are accompanied by the unique scope of individual projects before the final goods or services are delivered (p. 2). Price-based policies on the other hand are economic policies imposed by governments that set minimums (floors) and maximums (ceilings) for the prices of goods and services to make them more affordable for consumers (Investopedia, 2023). In the domain of maize, this assertion is not further from the situation as it is in Kenya. The example of subsidy policies and programs in Kenya can be employed to make the make here. Both President Kenyatta and Ruto have resorted to project-based policies to increase the supply of maize. Under President Uhuru Kenya, contracts were signed with milling companies such as Trident Millers, and Capwell Industries, among others. These industries were to implement the maize price rationing that saw the price of 2kg maize reduce from 210 to 100 across the country. Under President Ruto, a contracting approach has also been used to implement the 4 million bags maize import policy. While the contracting has not been publicized, likely for political reasons (Business Daily, June 2023), it is clear that a price-based policy has not been adopted by the current government as was with the immediate previous government. The reasons why is this a politically attractive policy decision can be explained as follows.

To begin with an analyst undertaking a political economy analysis can see from the vantage point of the outcomes of the policies that they were ill-intentioned. President Uhuru's was cut short soon as it was that his ally, Raila Odinga had lost. It is reported that 617 million Kenyan Shillings cannot be accounted for out of the 8 billion cost of the subsidy program. Still on president Uhuru's, reports available to the public domain show that at the time of its sudden end, 2.57 billion was still owed to the millers (Capital News, 21st Feb 2023). On to President Ruto, the same ill-intentions can be discerned. The project was conducted in a manner that was against the wishes of the local peasant masses, has not been made public in terms of tendering, and other than populist roadside politicking by key policy-makers in government, has not had any impact in terms of reducing the cost of maize at least up to the time of writing this paper.

Sitko et al. (2017) in their analysis of political economy of maize policies in East and Southern Africa, help us to make sense of why despite these open policy failure of project-based policies into the maize sector Kenyan governments continue to engage see it as the best alternative. Sitko et al. (2017) finds that in Kenya, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, that "relative preferences for output market subsidies, input market subsidies, trade restrictions, or non-interventionist approaches reflect the interplay of interest group lobbying, patronage networks, and ethnic and regional political affiliations". In Kenya, the rush to implement a maize importation policy by president Ruto and Uhuru before them appears to be underpinned both the presidents' quest to score on their campaign promises (make the cost of living bearable – for Ruto) and to woo the public to vote of an ally (Uhuru); but also to respond to group – lobbyists, private investors' and interests of political clients who would stand to gain from the corrupt nature of such contracting to supply insufficient item – maize. While these are assertions subject to empirical inquiry, really why a policy meant to fail must continue to be implemented by a government composed of clients and ethnically-recruited public servants suffice to us to make these interpretations.

Political Attractiveness of Subsidizing Firm Inputs versus Increasing Food Prices in Kenya

Bates (1981) analysis of Tropical African government's agricultural policies makes the four hypothesis or conclusion that policy failures in Africa are because policy makers concerned prefer politically Attractive

policies of subsidizing firm inputs as opposed to increasing food prices in Kenya, which is the best sustainable way to ensure food security in the maize sub-sector. He asserts that to strengthen the incentives of food production, governments may have two major alternatives. Increase the prices of farm products, or subsidize the costs of farm inputs like fertilizers. The latter alternative has 'superior political attractions' and governments in Africa prefer it (p. 5). Poulton & Kanyinga (2013) illustrate this conclusion in their analysis of the politics of revitalizing agriculture in Kenya. They argue that from the first government of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta through to Uhuru Kenyatta's Kenya has pursued this type of policy without any tangible impacts. The argument they make is that is governments in Kenya by their very nature cannot risk choosing to increase the price of farm products because the political incentive with such policies are negligible. The point is this; the ethnic-based politics in Kenya means that intervening in the market requires a calculation of who will gain and whether the person to gain can legitimize the government in terms of bringing the support of his/her clan men, or can keep the government in power. Increasing prices of farm products means putting money directly into the pockets of the poor peasants growing maize in the rural areas. The poor have no voice and influence and are only subject to be manipulated, finds Bates (1981), hence resources are only to be redirected from them to the political class and the clients of political patrons.

Subsidizing farm inputs like fertilizers gives the political class an opportunity to reward their clients, who if anything will be the contractors (through proxies) supplying this input. This is in turn to increase government legitimacy and increase the chances of winning the next elections by keeping the alliances together (Bates, 1981; Sitko *et al.*, 2017; Jayne, Myers & Njoro, 2008; Poulton & Kanyinga, 2013). These assertions manifest very practically in Kenya. About four months ago, President Ruto launched a 12 billion fertilizer project, which later was announced to sell at 3500, almost half the normal cost of a standard fertilizer. Media reports on public (including farmers') perception, show, about 5 months later that there is neither a cheap fertilizer in the market nor the fertilizer of the required content. Why was it rushed? Why it was not based on empirical analysis of the soil requirements and the capacities and needs of the peasant farmers? It is because, politically speaking, governments in Kenya are interested not in the peasant (or hustler as the new language in Kenya suggests), but in survival and securing next elections. The policy pushers or key personnel closer to the powers that be must push for opportunistic input subsidy programs because they stand to gain. Leaders, presidents on the other hand find such policies not easy to reject because the political environment demands calculation and expediency. The sufferer is the peasant farmer, growing maize for subsistence, and trying to sell part of it to acquire consumer goods produced in the urban settings. Indeed empirical inquiries into the impact of fertilizer (largely used for growing maize – the staple food) show that the results of this policy is negligible as the fertilizer so-called cheap fertilizer is inaccessible to the rural farmer, is unevenly, corruptly, and ethnically distributed to the peasant masses among other challenges (Ayieko, Nelson, Charles, 2013; Bunde, 2019; Mulupi, 2019; Walime, 2014; Magut *et al.*, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

Maize policies in Kenya, like those in most other African states, have failed to achieve their goals. Mainstream research often attributes this policy failure to technical, economic (markets), biological and ecological components of maize farming and marketing, such as soil quality, climate, and technology uptake (e.g., certified seeds). Additionally, process factors like stage-based challenges are also considered. However, this study argues and interprets recent evidence that show that maize policies fail to deliver sustainable production, distribution, and consumption primarily due to the political context with which such policies are formulated and implemented. The way these policies are formulated and implemented is inherently structured to result in to planned failure resulting into a loss for the majority peasant farmers and gain to the minority ruling political class and their clients occupying the politically appointed offices such as the Ministries and maize market regulation entries such as NCPB in Kenya.

This study has put into perspective this constant failure. Bates (1981) and a few other studies that have adopted a political economy approach to study the subject in Kenyan context and her neighbors (Sitko *et al.*, 2017; Chinsinga *et al.*, 2010; Poulton & Kanyinga, 2013; Alila & Atieno, 2006) have been used to test a model of state-market interaction that explains policy failure in the maize markets following the understanding that “the ways in which policies are designed to secure advantages for particular interests, to appease powerful political forces and to enhance the capacity of political regimes to remain in power” (Bates, 1981, p. 5 – 6). Four key arguments have been tested in this study and the interpretive analysis has found these assertions analytically correct to the Kenyan situation. These four points can be restated as follows: i) Kenyan governments have turned the maize market into nothing less than a theatre to struggle with the smallholder farmers despite this struggle being responsible for the continued underproduction and unstable maize prices. ii) Many interventions in the maize market are politically timely in order for the government to gain political capital. Maize being a staple food, the political class have mastered the trick of this timely intervention to marshal public support. iii) Kenyan governments continue to pursue project-based policies and not price-based policies because this opens doors to maintain the patron-client relationships that would be eroded by pricing policies, which though the best as this would shift resources to the peasantry, have less political superiority. iv) Kenyan subsidy trend is that which prioritizes farm input as opposed to increasing prices of products. This policy option is taken not because it is better, but because it provides an avenue manipulation of the poor hence political safety as the politicians have the say of who receives and where in what quality and quantity.

Overall, this paper has shown that to understand why maize policies fail and why these failed policies remain constantly best options for new governments, broadly speaking, to understand the root causes of the erosion of public order and the entrenchment of private aggrandizement, one must adopt a political framework that appreciates states role in the Batesian tri-markets, namely: market of farm products, market of factors of production/farm input, and the market of consumer goods from which the poor rural majority peasant masses have to spend their meagre agricultural earning to eke a living.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing revelations and interpretations, three recommendations can be made. These can be categorized into empirical and theoretical findings.

a) Empirical Recommendations

1. Strengthening Market Institutions and Transparency

Honest and sincere political will is requisite to enhance the transparency and accountability of key institutions involved in the maize market, such as the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB), Kenya Bureau of Standards and the Ministry of Agriculture. To mitigate the manipulation and corruption that hinders effective policy implementation, transparent operations and oversight mechanisms need to be established. This includes clear procurement processes, public access to information, and stringent auditing of subsidized programs to ensure they reach intended beneficiaries.

2. Empowering Peasant Farmers through Market Reforms

Implement reforms that directly empower peasant farmers without the need to go through political officers or bureaucratic chokepoints that serve nothing but political interests. Such may include establishing farmer-run farmer cooperatives, providing direct subsidies to peasant farmers, and improving access to markets. The current policy landscape often leaves smallholder farmers at a disadvantage due to political manipulation and market inefficiencies. By strengthening farmer cooperatives and providing direct financial

support, peasant farmers can gain more bargaining power and better withstand market pressures, leading to improved production and food security.

3. Promoting Price-Based Policies over Input Subsidies

Shift from predominantly project-based policies to more sustainable price-based policies that ensure fair and stable prices for maize. Project-based policies have shown limited long-term impact due to political motivations and corruption. Price-based policies, such as minimum price guarantees for maize, can offer more consistent support to peasant masses, reduce market volatility, and encourage sustainable production practices.

b) Theoretical Recommendations

1. Integrating Political Economy Analysis into Agricultural Policy Design

Agricultural policies should be designed and evaluated using a political economy framework to account for the influence of political interests and power dynamics. Understanding the political motivations and power structures that shape policy decisions can lead to more realistic and effective policy interventions. For Kenya's complex case, this approach can help identify potential barriers to policy success and strategies to navigate them.

2. Developing Inclusive Policy Formulation Processes

Ensure that policy formulation processes are inclusive, involving stakeholders from all levels, particularly smallholder farmers, civil society organizations, and local governments. Policies that are developed with input from a broad range of stakeholders are more likely to address the actual needs and challenges faced by those on the ground. This inclusivity can also build broader support for policies, reducing the risk of implementation failures due to lack of buy-in or resistance from key groups.

3. Fostering Long-Term Policy Continuity and Stability

Establish mechanisms for ensuring the continuity and stability of agricultural (read maize) policies across political administrations. Frequent changes in policy direction due to political transitions disrupt the effectiveness and sustainability of agricultural programs. At the same time, continued implementation of tested and failed policies only perpetuate status quo politics without record change in the empowerment of peasant farmers. Long-term policy continuity can be fostered through legislative frameworks that protect key agricultural policies from abrupt changes, thus promoting stable and sustained agricultural development. On the other hand, failed policies can be reformed or completely overhauled in the face of since evidence from the research community to the political class.

Lastly, there is need for formation of a stronger policy research community in Kenya. An Independent Association of Public Policy Analysis (IAPPA) when forged can go a long way in influencing Kenyan governments and reduce the extent of impact of illicit politics on policy outcomes. IAPPA should serve to bridge the policy-research gap, creating an interface between politicians (policy makers) and evidence community in the area of agriculture. A powerful IAPPA would also create a formidable force to push for utility of evidence in the formulation and implementation of maize policies as well as agricultural policies generally.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Mr. Kasera conceptualized, researched and wrote up the first version of this article. Initially written for a

Masters Seminar paper for the Course, *DPP 810: Leadership and Public Policy*, Mr. Kasera transformed the initial paper into a journal article. All the other co-authors – Mrs. Phennie Osure, Mr. Bruno Charles, Mr. Owili, Mr. Salu, and Mr. Hemolike added value to the original article by undertaking editorial and formatting as well as logical flow improvements based on journal editors and reviewers comments.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare no conflict of interest during the process of writing and producing the manuscript.

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AUTHORS

Odhiambo Alphonse Kasera, holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in International Relations (First Class Honors), Masters of Arts Degree in International Relations (Distinction); Masters in Research and Public Policy (MRPP) (Distinction – awaiting Graduation) all from Maseno University. He currently pursues his PhD in International Relations at School of Development and Strategic Studies (SDSS) Maseno University. Mr. Kasera has been an adjunct lecturer of Community Development, Political Science and International Relations same Department from 2019. Mr. Kasera wrote and presented the first Draft of this paper during the 9th Seminar for the Masters Course Unit *DPP 810: Leadership and Public Policy*, after which it was improved with editorial and type-setting contributions from his academic and research mentees, Mrs. Phennie Osure, Mr. Charles Bruno, Mr. Mathews Owili, Mr. Hemolike Oguna, and Mr. Salu Francis.

Phennie Morghan Osure, holds a Diploma in Community Development and over 7 years in research administration, Qualitative iN. She has served an Associate Consultant at Vision Africa Consulting for over 7 years

Bruno Charles Oloo Mr. Charles currently pursues Bachelor of Arts in International Relations and Diplomacy at Maseno University. He has his first degree in Bachelor of Arts in Commerce.

Owili Mathews Odhiambo is an undergraduate student of International Relations at the School of Development and Strategic Studies (SDSS), Maseno University. He serves as Partnership coordinator in Peace Corps, at the US. Embassy, Kenya. He also holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Education

Francis Odhiambo Salu holds a Diploma in Journalism and Mass Media (Maseno University); a Diploma

in ICT (African Institute of Technology); currently pursues a BA in International Relations, SDSS, Maseno University. Mr. Salu serves as the policy and partnerships officer at the Bridge International Foundation – Kenya.

Hemolike Omondi Oguna is currently an undergraduate student in the BA of International Relations at SDSS Maseno University. He had studied BSc. In Mechanical Engineering from Kenya's JKUAT University; and Diploma in Community Development from Trans-African University College.

FOOTNOTES

[1] By 2019 about 1 billion metric tons were produced (see, e.g. García-Lara & Serna-Saldivar, 2019).

[2] Mulupi (2019) examines a fertilizer policy program of the Kakamega County and finds no increase in productivity. Murang'a County government has a firm input subsidy policy. Walime (2014) established that the fertilizer subsidy had no any positive relationship with productivity of maize in Bugoma, a key maize producing zone in Kenya. Bunde (2019) makes similar assertions when through his empirical study finds that the farm input (fertilizer) program was marred with structural challenges hindering the attainment of its transformative agenda as publicized by the political class. These further make a root-causes analysis paramount. The political motives underpinning not just subsidies for maize but also other programs and policies by the Government.

[3] This is an international relations dimension as this involves Kenya's relations with the owners of technology – foreign individuals and/or countries; further complicating the political analysis of the who, why and what.

[4] Namely that tropical African countries are where they are because their governments have not withdrawn their hand to let market forces appropriate resources in the agriculture sector.

[5] Namely unpredictable weather/climate, varying ecological capacities, e.g., some areas experience drought others do not hence this explain why agricultural policy failure is acceptable.