

Multiple Ownership as a Way out of the Twofold Ownership Dilemma

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The ownership debate in development cooperation is full of contradictions. While donors demand more “ownership” from their partner countries, they tend to get very nervous, if a partner country (like Ethiopia and South Africa) is taking ownership by designing its agricultural policies in a way which contradicts some of the donor agencies’ policy guidelines or professional beliefs. Donor agencies cannot escape from assuming a degree of ownership as they are accountable for their contributions to their taxpayers. Partly they are doing so by imposing conditionalities, thus setting a framework within which the partner country can exercise its ownership. The issue gets even more complicated, assuming that on both sides a number of stakeholders with diverging interests and opinions are involved. The paper wants to suggest a more realistic ownership concept taking the case of agricultural policies in Subsaharan Africa by addressing two specific dilemmas:

1. From a *political economy perspective*, the way ownership is used is highly influenced by parochial interests on both sides. Many African Governments follow rent-seeking strategies when dealing with ODA-funds, without functioning democratic control mechanisms in place. Many donor countries or their agents follow their own economic or political interests or they are driven by the aim of organisational self-perpetuation. The idealistic notion of “ownership” needs to be redefined, if we assume that the utilisation of ODA-funds is highly determined by struggles of interests.

2. From a *pragmatic technical perspective*, the decision about policies and strategies should be a decision about appropriate interventions, i.e. context-specific solutions. Crucial agricultural policy decisions are about issues like promoting commercial or peasant farming, subsidising a high external input agriculture or low-external input and sustainable farming practices, export-orientation or “food first” strategies. There is not one broadly agreed answer to these questions, neither on the partner countries’ nor on the donors’ side. Appropriate policies need to be based on a process of searching for context-specific solutions and related professional debates, involving local and external knowhow. Taking such processes of defining agricultural policies into account: What does the concept of “ownership” mean for these processes?

The paper aims at redefining partnership and ownership considering the interest- and context-related nature of policy formulation.