Independence or Influence: Tradeoffs in Development Policy Research

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Motivation

• Trade-offs between independence and influence are rarely mentioned in the voluminous literature on policy research.

• The need for relevance is stressed, yet how relevance is best secured is mostly disregarded apart from stressing collaboration.

• But collaboration may amplify influence while reducing independence in many circumstances.
Capture

• Capture = extent to which consumers of policy research are able to distort research priorities, methods and findings:
  • Choice of problem to be researched
  • Data gathering
  • Analytical methods
  • Results concealed

• Capture is a matter of degree
  • Greater degree of capture ➔ lower likelihood that research will generate first best solutions
IFPRI’s Approach to Policy Research

• For its first 30 years after 1975 IFPRI’s research was led almost entirely from Washington

• Gradually research teams were formed to work on global research programs (often with Ethiopia as a case-study) that sought to identify IPGs

• Purpose-built networks of policy researchers and policy users provided outreach

• From 1995-2004 IFPRI’s work on Ethiopia followed this model
Ethiopian Strategy Support Program

• Initiated in 2004, the ESSP rendered IFPRI an “insider” in Ethiopia’s policy circles affecting the composition and influence of its research

• The ESSP enhanced the relevance of IFPRI’s work at the cost of partial capture by the GoE
  – *Inevitable cost of doing business in Ethiopia?*

• Comparing the design and influence of IFPRI’s work under the *ancien régime* and the ESSP illuminates the tradeoff between influence and independence (Renkow and Slade 2013)
An Ideological Divide

• For the years of our review (1995-2010), GoE maintained a Marxist-tinged political and economic ideology inimical to free markets

• State controlled marketing bodies such as cooperatives and later the ECX favoured

• Agricultural input and output markets neglected

• And Ethiopian policy makers unusually resistant to “outside advice” from independent domestic sources and the donor community
The Upshot

- Much of IFPRI’s research in Ethiopia seeks (second-best) solutions to problems created by market failures
- Another large share is directed towards the creation and operation of institutions (an indirect route to first-best solutions?)
# Outcomes, 1995-2010

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Theme</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Impact Pathway</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food security &amp; poverty</td>
<td>Productive Safety Nets Programme (2005-present)</td>
<td>Monitor and improve targeting efficiency of program operations,</td>
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<td>Ethiopian Rural Household Survey (1989-present)</td>
<td>Longest-duration household-level panel dataset in sub-Saharan Africa; IPGs generation</td>
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<td>Land management</td>
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<td>Public investment</td>
<td>Ethiopian CGE Model (2006-present)</td>
<td>Policy analysis tool (XR policy, food price inflation strategy, climate change planning, urban planning)</td>
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<td>Atlas of the Rural Economy (2006-present)</td>
<td>Spatial analysis capability</td>
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<td>Markets and trade</td>
<td>Ethiopian Commodity Exchange (2008-present)</td>
<td>Institutionalize, integrate agricultural markets</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Agricultural Transformation Agency (2010-present)</td>
<td>Institutionalize, integrate agricultural R&amp;D, input distribution, and extension systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESSP</td>
<td>Ethiopian Commodity Exchange; Ethiopian CGE Model; Atlas of the Rural Economy</td>
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Influence

Why has there been so little policy influence or welfare changes attributable to IFPRI’s research?

- Partly explained by the GoE’s ideological stance that has delayed or curtailed policy actions on agricultural input and output markets (the ECX notwithstanding) and land reform
- But other factors also at work -- the way research agenda is set, research priorities established and research results disseminated
Hard to avoid concluding that the ESSP has been at least partially captured:

- Failure to take a more determined stand on certain controversial areas of policy
  - e.g., land issues; public ownership of the ECX; agricultural markets

- These suggest ESSP’s research agenda was heavily influenced by the GoE’s anti-market bias

- Facilitated by idiosyncratic priority-setting and weak advocacy efforts
Idiosyncrasy (1)

- Facilitated by absence of formal priority setting
  - research topics determined by research interests of staff + GoE interests

- Reinforced GoE use of ESSP as a shield against donor pressure for policy reform

- Left ESSP exposed to leadership changes on both sides
Idiosyncrasy (2)

• Idiosyncrasy and partial capture have largely worked in favour of ESSP (institutional change and openness)

• Ultimately an issue of balance as intellectual independence—and its perception—is vital to IFPRI’s effectiveness over the long run
Literature is rich on the importance of advocacy, but little evidence that IFPRI or ESSP grasped this:

- Research findings not well explained
- No identified use of lobbying, advocacy coalitions
- Political economy of rural reform in Ethiopia not explored despite its acknowledged importance
- Policy makers not specifically targeted
- No strategic and instrumental advocacy plan
A Summation

• We conclude that IFPRI’s policy research in Ethiopia before and after the ESSP was relevant but had little influence on policy change

• Idiosyncrasy in the ESSP was instrumental in facilitating access, but also a two way street, increasing the degree of capture

• Capture strengthened GoE resistance to reform, reduced the prevalence of first best solutions and delayed others over what might have been

• Could these risks have been foreseen?