

A didactic understanding of agricultural policies

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Abstract

The difficulty to define the concept of "public policies" is reinforced when it comes to apprehending its sectoral variations like agricultural policies. This synthetic notion of "agricultural development policies" expression is thus built to make explicit the public policies applied to the agricultural sector. It is then important to firstly specify the concepts of "public policies", "development" and "agricultural sector" in order to better understand what "an agricultural policy" is. This is the content of this paper which mobilizes a constructivist and pragmatic approach for an effective response to the question of what is an agricultural policy?

Keywords: Public policies, agricultural sector development, agricultural policies, didactic understanding

Introduction

Widely used in socio-political discourse and media debates, the quintessence of "public policies" remains difficult to pin down.

Three approaches are generally used in understanding public policies. These include legal, systemic, and sequential approaches (Nice, 2014).

The legal approach is one that emphasizes the actors and normative processes of public policies, in particular the key actors (and their roles) among which the "state" remains the main or the most relevant. The systemic approach highlights missions, mechanics, processes and resources of public policies (Lasswell, 1936). For its part, the sequential approach or "Stages approach" takes into account both the processes and actors of public policies while emphasizing the sequences of actions that result from them (Jacquot, 2010, pp. 82-90).

Without favouring one in a specific way in our definitional approach, the elements of each of these approaches are called upon in support of this explanatory analysis of agricultural policies.

The concept of agricultural policies is a synthesis of the "public policies for agricultural development" notion. This notion is thus built to make explicit that of public policies applied to the agricultural sector development. As such, it is important to first operationalize the concept of "public policies" and then specify those of "development" and "agricultural sector" in order to better explain and present what "an agricultural policy" is. This is the interest of this study which proposes to answer effectively the question of what is an

agricultural policy? Its purpose is to offer a didactic understanding (Delacôte, 1996) of public policies concept in order to better apprehend that of agricultural policies on the basis of a constructivist and pragmatic analysis integrating legal, sociological and systemic approaches of public policies.

Operationalization of the concept of public policies

It is relevant to present a public policy first as a political phenomenon and/or a social and institutional construction focused on the "State actor".

Public policy as a political phenomenon managed by State actors

The notion of public policies as scrutinized by Laurie Boussaquet (2017), reveals that they derive from the English word "Policy" which refers to public action. According to Frederick Varone (2018), this historiography underlines that public policies focus on the results of public actions and not on power struggles ("politics") or on the institutional architecture of a political system (the polity) which nevertheless constitute explanatory elements.

The discipline of political analysis in the United States in the 1950s presents or captures public policies in terms of "who gets what, when and how?" (Lasswell, 1936).

In other words, the direction, objective or substance of a public policy and its results clearly depend on who is in power, his political program and/or the rules of the political game (Varone, 2018).

Such apprehension aimed to position public policies in their social dynamics in terms of both competition, opportunities, possibilities and constraints between social actors (States, individuals, and other social actors (NGOs, lobbies, entrepreneurs, etc.) in the definition and conduct of public affairs.

Building on this definition and emphasizing the centrality or pre-eminence of State in the management of public affairs, Thomas. R. Dye (1976) points out that public policy is "anything a government decides to do or not to do". This blurs both the substance and contours or boundaries of public affairs insofar as this hypothesis underlines that non-decisions or silence of governments are comparable to concrete decisions.

This USA or Anglo-Saxon apprehension of identifying or assimilating non-decisions to concrete decisions will be barely audible in France and Switzerland, whose dominant conception considers public policies as translation of the substantial dimension of the State.

Public policies express, in other words, what State does, how it does it, why it does it and with whom or through whom it does it (Varone, 2018).

It is in consideration of their variability or fluidity in space and time that Thoenig and Meny (1989, p.11) propose an operational definition which emphasizes that "a public policy takes the form of a governmental program in a state sector or a geographical area".

Widely adopted in the French-speaking countries, this definition highlights a repository made up of:

- A sequence of several activities, measures or decisions (Larrue, 2000, p.21).
- A presence or intervention of one or more public or governmental authorities or "actors from the political and administrative system" (Ibid.).
- The reality of outputs or concrete measures unlike the American tradition which, with Robert Dye, considers non-decisions by public authorities as part of public policies.
- A panel of several stakeholders made up of both target groups, in particular all natural or legal persons directly targeted or involved by / in the measures of a policy, and people affected or indirectly targeted. This second group is made up of all the actors positively and / or negatively affected by the measures of a public policy (Ibid.).
- The (more or less) authoritarian nature of the measures taken in regard to the legitimacy recognized to public authorities and the diversity of means of action recognized to these actors from the political administrative system as sole master of a legitimate use of coercion (Weber, 1919).
- A sectoral and / or territorial dimension of measures concerned to identify, ascertain, define and assess in a factual manner the existence of a public policy.

This operational definition is relevant to simplify the understanding of what a public policy is. However, it remains insufficient in view of the didactic aims of this paper.

It is therefore necessary to resort to much more epistemological or intellectualist considerations of what a public policy is, to highlight the processual prism that is useful or essential to its proper understanding.

A public policy as a social and institutional construction or: a decision-making phenomenon and an intellectual process

A public policy is here understood as: “a process by which a government reacts to a situation, an opportunity, a problem or a crisis” (Turjon & Savard, 2012). This apprehension obliges the highlighting of a double argument to make it explicit.

It is question to present public policies as a decision-making occurrence punctuated by organizational and institutional sub-dimensions before to highlight their acceptance in terms of intellectual trend.

Capture a public policy as a decision-making phenomenon comes from a functionalist perspective which, with Lascoumes and Le Galès (2012, p.34), considers them as an attempt to act or influence on a domain of society initiated by public authorities through a course in five sequences that are not necessarily mechanical or linear (Muller, 1990, p33).

These five stages or action sequences enunciated by Harold Dwight Lasswell and elaborated on by Charles O. Jones (Jones, 1970; Laswell, 1956) are as follows:

- The stage of emergence or capture of social demands expressed by social actors.

This stage refers to the process of adjustment or adaptation, reformulation or transformation according to time and circumstances.

- The planning/or scheduling phase considered as that of problems filtering by key actors of the political and administrative system (Larrue, p.32). Factors and resources (environment, ideologies, human, financial, institutional, etc.) influencing public policies are assessed at this level.

- The (policy) formulation stage which consists of the design or development of strategic options and priority action plans or programs applicable by public authorities, as the most relevant and effective response possible to the social demands expressed/or captured.

- The implementing stage or that of concrete application of options defined or adopted. It thus consists of mobilization and use of more or less complex institutional, regulatory and ideological tools essential to the effective and efficient application of the options chosen/or retained.

- The evaluation stage, which is a critical and cyclical sequence in the development, monitoring, assessment and / or adjustment of the application of public policy measures.

There are usually three types of assessment in consideration of their intervention timing. Before the development of an action program, we speak of “evaluation ex ante”. In progress or at the implementation time of a political program, we speak of a “Mid-Term Evaluation”. Once the program is concluded, it is the “final” and/or “ex post” evaluation that is all about.

The evaluation sequence is thus highlighted in the assessment, review and / or optimization of the other four (04) others. This is why Pierre Muller indicates that “the sequential

representation of public policies must not be used mechanically” (Larrue, 2000, p.33), but rather be used judiciously and / or “circularly” within a analysis of public policies.

In this perspective, organizational and institutional sub-dimension according to Jobert and Muller (1987, p.51) highlights the idea that a public policy is the mobilization of a set of organizational, financial, administrative, legal, human, procedures, ethics, power relations and resources (...). This consideration underlines three essential elements: actors, resources and interactions (or power relations). So, Pierre Muller (1990, p.24) specifies that a public policy is a process of interactions between organized actors, first and foremost those from the political and administrative system.

Public policy is subsequently presented as a set of concrete processes in which various actors in society are engaged especially both public authorities (leaders, elected officials) and various other social actors (individuals, private company, NGOs and civil society, etc.).

This acceptance suggests that the substance and effectiveness of a public policy necessarily depend on the description, reconstitution and interpretation of the main institutional and ideological frameworks acting in its production and implementation. It express their intellectual dimension.

As an intellectual phenomenon, public policies are defined in terms of a framework for interpreting the world. That makes a public policy a process through which are developed the representations that a society gives itself to understand and act on reality as it is perceived" (Ibid.). A public policy appears in this sense as a device for conditioning action through models of references or social representations of the ideal envisaged (Jobert & Muller, 1987, p.47). This allows its assimilation to a coding system that Jobert and Muller (Ibid.) allow to decipher around three dimensions, namely:

- A cognitive dimension which reflects the ability of public policies to provide elements of interpretation and development of a sector of activity or of society.
- A normative dimension which derives from their aptitude and capacity to promote values to be respected in the management of the company or of a sector.
- An instrumental dimension that articulates the principles and/or the direction of action.

A decryption of agricultural policies concept: for a simple and easy understanding

The above analyzes highlight that a public policy is both an intellectual process and a concrete social process (Jobert & Muller, 1987, p.51). As an intellectual process, a public policy is first

of all a social representation of the system on which actors want to act. And as a concrete social process, a public policy is a set of organizational, financial, administrative, legal, human means, procedures, techniques, power relations (Ibid.).

The concept of agricultural policy is thus presented as a sectoral variation of public policies. It describes an allocation of agricultural sector development objectives to public policies. Thus, its in-depth and didactic understanding recommends highlighting and enlightening upstream the notions of “agricultural sector” and “agricultural development”.

The concept of agricultural sector

The notion of system in the above definition suggests that public policies cover both a multitude of fields and degrees of application. This allows to distinguish on the one hand global policies that are supposed to manage a large social or societal scale, and sectoral policies developed or applicable to a specific sector of social or economic activities including those in agriculture or the agricultural sector.

The notion of sector is supported by Bruno Jobert and Pierre Muller as a set of social roles structured in a generally professional operating logic (Ibid.). Thus, from a didactic, normative and pragmatic perspective, a “sector” translates the division of public affairs into targets and object of public policies (Bourgeois, 2015, p.44).

Thereby, from an agro-socioeconomic point of view, the notion of agricultural sector reflects the grouping and management of activities and actors of plant and pastoral production as or within a sphere of social and economic activities of a locality or a state with a view to their contribution to the food, well-being and creation of the wealth for peoples (FAO, 2002). Taken in the broad sense, this sector includes plant and pastoral activities. But in the narrow sense, only or strictly agricultural activities are taken into account, as the FAO has specified (Norton, 2005, p.5). This restrictive perception is that in force in Cameroon.

Applied to the agricultural sector, public policies are reclassified to focus on their main objective of transforming the sector. We then speak of agricultural development policies (Ibid.). It is therefore relevant and opportune to first shed light on the key concept of “agricultural development” before explaining that of agricultural policies.

The concept of agricultural development

This concept condenses the expression of development applied to the agricultural sector. This fundamental consideration suggests a separate clarification of the notion of development in

order to better assimilate its evocation in the agricultural context.

Development is one of the most use words in socio-political discourses.

Literally, its meaning designates a breakthrough, a transforming action and / or the result of this action (Larousse, 2010).

Development therefore has a multidimensional character and embraces several aspects. There are thus anthropological, socio-economic and / or agronomic considerations of development, etc.

Development thus refers to "one of social change forms" (De Sardan, 1995, p.8) that the understanding is only effective through a necessary recourse to the context, actors, actions and interactions between these four variables. It is then possible and effective to speak of economic, social, political, cultural development, or agricultural development, etc.

From this socio-anthropological understanding, "development" sums up to all the social processes induced by proactive operations to transform a social environment, businesses through institutions or actors outside this environment, but seeking to modify this environment and based on an attempt to graft resources and / or techniques and / or knowledge" (De Sardan (1995, p.7).

Under the socio-economic prism, this notion expresses a technical and structural dynamic of wealth creation leading to an increase in the living standard of inhabitants of a geographical area at a given period (Diabate, 2012). In this way, "Development" refers to progress, however, distinguishing itself from the simple economic growth (a process of increasing the level of wealth) stemming from development, but constituting only one of its aspects.

From this socio-economic perspective, its assessment mobilizes several indicators including the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the Human Development Index (HDI), the Gross National Product (GNP), or even the Gross National Happiness (Gadrey & Al., 2007).

For the socio-agronomic approach, "development" is understood from that of the agrarian system (Cochet, 2019) as a general process of transformation of agriculture, registered over time, and whose elements, causes and mechanisms can be both endogenous and the result of various exogenous contributions, enrichments or innovations" (Ibid.).

This understanding is adopted and operationalized by Marcel Mazoyer through his assimilation of agricultural development into a set of positive transformations of the agrarian system (Cochet, 2007). This assimilation is taken up and relayed by the Senegalese Amadou Ndiaye who explains the agrarian system as a set of agronomic (elements of production),

socio-political, economic and legal considerations governing the practice and performance of the agricultural sector (Ndiaye , 2012, pp. 64-65).

This system is essentially made up of two sub-systems namely: the production sub-system made up of agro-ecological elements or variables (land, climates) and techniques (tools and training, etc.), (Dufumier, 2007, p.36). And the agricultural sector governance sub-system structured by socio-political, economic and legal elements of organization, management and remuneration of agricultural activities (Cochet, 2007).

Agricultural development can therefore be summed up as a general process of sustainable transformation of subsystems of production and governance of the agricultural sector.

This definition is an agro-socioeconomic and political cocktail making it possible to identify the modalities and reality of transformations in the sector considered.

Agricultural policy “object” or the agricultural policies in substance

This perspective, which has been described above, deciphers agricultural policy as a sectoral policy, the object of which is to substantialize the relationship between the sector considered and society as a whole (Dupuy & Al, 2007).

In consideration of the necessary two-dimensional understanding of a public policy both as an intellectual process and a concrete social process (Muller & Jobert, 1987), current research adopts the definition proposed by Vincent Ribier (2008) who affirms that an agricultural policy is a set of regulatory measures, structural devices, financial and human resources interdependent, implemented by the public authorities to contribute to the progress of the agricultural sector.

The decoding or declination of agricultural policies as a sectoral policy whose object is to substantialize the relationship between the sector considered and society as a whole (Dupuy & Al, 2007) and the necessary two-dimensional understanding of a public policy to both as a process and a concrete social process (Muller & Jobert, 1987) conducted above now sheds light on the clear and precise identification of what can be an agricultural policy.

We therefore use the definition proposed by Vincent Ribier (2008) to affirm that an agricultural policy is a set of regulatory measures, structural and logistics devices, interdependent financial and human resources, implemented by public authorities to contribute to the progress of the sector agricultural.

This definition brings together the legal, systemic and sequential approaches of public policies aforementioned (Nice, 2014) and highlights all the resources (strategic, financial, logistical, technological, informational, human, etc.) mobilized or invested by States or public

authorities in order to supervise or stimulate the development and / or the positive transformation of agricultural sector.

Regulatory measures in this definition refer to all conventions, laws, decisions and contracts taken by public authorities in the agricultural field. Structural arrangements, for their part, indicate both the institutional and contextual organization and the coordination/supervision or management mechanisms of the agricultural sector. The interdependent financial and human resources essentially refer to budgetary, intellectual and technical resources deployed by the public authorities to contribute to the progress of the agricultural sector.

This definition makes it possible to effectively grasp the management of agricultural and rural development as a whole. It takes into account the agro-ecological dimensions (factors and production activities) as well as the socio-political, economic and legal dimensions of agricultural development.

Conclusion

The above didactic analysis allows to visualize and highlight the relevant constitutive and process elements of public policies in general and agricultural policies specifically.

It emphasizes the multifunctionality of agricultural activities which highlights all the considerations (sociological, agronomic, ecological, demographic, political, economic and legal) which cover agricultural activities and the diversity of issues, actors, institutions and interactions they mobilize, organize or provoke.

Agricultural policies thus correspond to a social and institutional construction which makes it appropriate to determine all of its contours, its determinants, identifiers and stakeholders, which is summed up by the concept of "repository".

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