



Reforming Agrifood System Subsidies: Synthesis of Political Economy Findings from Fish, Fertilizer, and Animal Inputs

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I. Introduction

Subsidies are price distortions aimed at shifting incentives to generate a desired behavioral response. Agrifood system input subsidies aim to reduce the cost of components—such as fertilizer, fuel, animal feeds, vessels, and machinery—needed by farmers, fisherfolk, ranchers, and pastoralists to improve productivity. Such subsidies may occur in multiple forms, including vouchers that enable beneficiaries to receive a discount, a direct reduction in input retail prices borne by the state or distributors, or through tax reductions and exemptions. The cost of agricultural subsidies, inclusive of fertilizer subsidies, are estimated at USD 635 billion a year (Damania et al. 2023) while fisheries subsidies, including for fuel, fisheries management, and non-fuel tax exemptions, are estimated to total approximately USD 35 billion (Sumaila et al. 2019). While they can support poorer constituencies in the agrifood system who could not otherwise afford such inputs, subsidies can be prone to corruption and leakage to elites, generate negative environmental externalities, and place undue pressure on public sector finances (Amaglobeli, Benson, and Mogue 2024; Damania et al. 2023; Jayne et al. 2018). In addition, they can generate distributional conflicts among different constituencies—both within countries and across countries—and these conflicts can undermine program implementation as well as hinder needed reforms.

A broad body of literature therefore suggests that the prospects for subsidy reform hinge on political economy factors (Bellmann 2019; OECD 2021; FAO, UNDP, UNEP 2021; Vos, Martin, and Resnick 2023). However, the term “political economy” encompasses a wide range of actors, interests, and institutional dynamics, and greater specificity is therefore needed to identify reform strategies that are tailored to particular country contexts and subsidy policy arenas. To better understand the breadth of political economy factors that may impact agrifood system input subsidy reform efforts, this brief synthesizes the findings from three in-depth analyses. Schutter and Bonilla Anariba (2025) provide insights on international political economy by focusing on the landmark Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS) by the World Trade Organization (WTO), which was adopted in 2022 and came into force in 2025. Chugh and Resnick (2025) focus on fertilizer subsidies and examine 38 cases of reform efforts spanning 15 countries between 1991-2025 to determine what national political economy factors impacted reform trajectories. Njehu and Ouma (2025) draw on secondary and primary data collected in key livestock keeping counties in Kenya to offer insights about the various sets of factors that shape community buy-in and policy implementation for a bundle of animal input subsidy interventions, including subsidized vaccines, livestock insurance, and artificial insemination.

Looking at these distinct areas of agrifood system subsidies, at different scales (global, cross-national, and in-country), enhances external validity of the common interests, ideas, and institutions that promote or derail subsidy reforms. The following sections summarize findings from each separate study. We then highlight key areas of similarity and difference across the political economy factors associated with each subsidy area to help inform efforts to make input subsidies more sustainable and effective at meeting their stated policy objectives.

II. The WTO and the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement

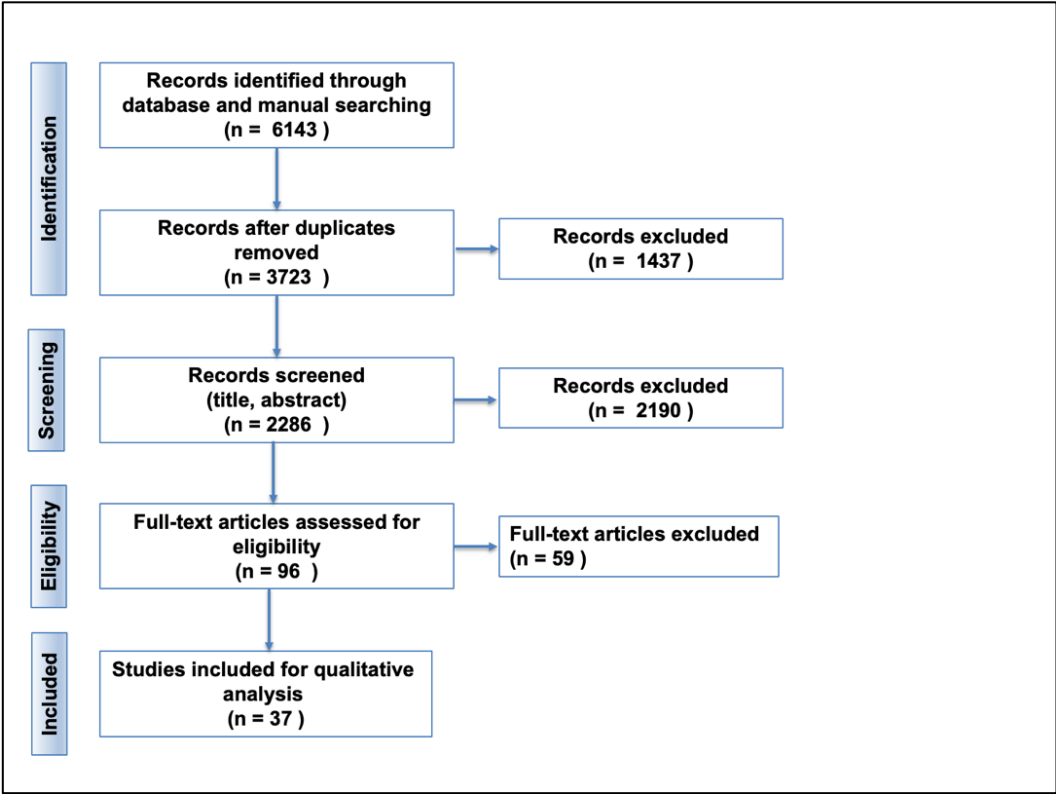
The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS) represents a landmark in global ocean and multilateral fisheries governance because it is the first WTO agreement to explicitly integrate trade, environmental sustainability, and development objectives (Yu and Liu 2024). Negotiated over two decades by WTO Member States, the agreement was adopted in 2022 to address harmful fisheries subsidies that contribute to overfishing and the skewed distribution of subsidies disproportionately allocated to large-scale industrial fishers rather than their small-scale counterparts (Schuhbauer et al. 2020). The agreement consists of a first tranche ('Fish One') covering subsidies to Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and stocks that are overfished, whilst negotiations continue on a second tranche ('Fish Two'), intended to cover capacity-enhancing subsidies that are likely to contribute to overfishing and overcapacity (which includes distant water fishing) (Auld, del Savio, and Feris 2025; Lennan and Switzer 2023). Only Fish One entered into force in 2025, and it marked the first time the WTO addresses a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target, namely SDG 14.6. Negotiations for Fish Two are ongoing, with a deadline for agreement by 2029; if agreement on Fish Two does not happen, Fish One will lapse.

Methodology

Given its scope, potential, and precarity, the AFS presents a unique opportunity to understand the political economy dynamics of global subsidy reform negotiation processes. Consequently, Schutter and Bonilla Anariba (2025) conducted a scoping review of academic and grey literature on the WTO fisheries negotiations, focusing on discussions of political economy dynamics. A literature search was done using *Publish or Perish*, which combines Google Scholar and Scopus data sources. To address the Publish or Perish 1,000 records limit and capture relevant work that does not explicitly use the term 'political economy', parallel searches were conducted, covering various political economy elements such as institutions, negotiation dynamics, interests, power, framing and discourse. The results of all

searches were combined, and duplicates were removed. Records were then screened against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria (topical relevance, conceptual focus, global coverage) to identify studies suitable for full-text review (Figure 1). The final sample included 37 papers, from which 511 coded excerpts were analyzed. The coding followed a typology emphasizing three dimensions of political economy: actors & interests; institutions & rules; knowledge, framing & discourse.

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of study selection.



Source: Schutter and Bonilla (2025)

Key findings

The political economy analysis found that the fisheries subsidies negotiations were shaped not by a single set of enabling or blocking factors, but by the interaction of domestic distributional concerns and the dynamics of the international bargaining process. Some political economy factors facilitated agreement on specific and narrowly defined rules and sanctions whilst others constrained the scope, ambition and pace of the reform process. The eventual outcome was a partial agreement as an incremental ‘early harvest’, which reflects these interacting dynamics.

Actors & interests: distributional elements at the core of negotiations

The negotiations involved a diverse group of actors, whose preferences were shaped by domestic political economy considerations. Key actors included industrial fishing interests in major subsidizing states, small-scale and artisanal fishing communities, environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and government agencies responsible for fisheries, trade, and development. Large subsidizing nations such as Japan and Korea, with extensive industrial fishing and distant-water fleets, consistently opposed broad and unconditional subsidy bans. Their positions reflected concern over fleet competitiveness, employment, and economic viability of a capital-intensive fishing industry (Chen, 2010). India, whilst subsidizing at lower levels in absolute terms, strongly advocated for extensive Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) provisions, framing subsidy reform through a development and livelihoods lens, with a focus on small-scale fishers and food security (Campling & Havice 2013).

These positions were in contrast with those of coalitions such as Friends of Fish, which at various times included nations such as the United States, New Zealand and Norway (Lennan and Switzer 2023). This group pushed for strong and enforceable rules and obligations (known as disciplines) on harmful subsidies, motivated by sustainability concerns, domestic fisheries regimes already aligned with stricter subsidy controls, and a desire to level the international playing field. Environmental NGOs such as Oceana and WWF played a considerable agenda-setting role by framing fisheries subsidies reform as a win for trade, environmental sustainability, and development. Whilst influential in shaping discourse and legitimizing reform, these NGOs had limited leverage over the negotiation outcomes.

The divergent interests, rather than blocking the possibility of any agreement, shaped the terms under which partial agreement became possible. Actors were willing to accept disciplines on limited and uneven costs, such as IUU-related subsidies, but resisted measures that would require deeper redistribution of economic benefits and costs.

Institutions & rules: enabling agreement through narrowing scope

Institutional factors within the WTO both enabled and constrained the negotiations. On the one hand, the WTO provided a unique forum with the authority to discipline subsidies and link fisheries governance to trade rules. Aligning the negotiations to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.6, which explicitly calls for the elimination of harmful fisheries subsidies, created an external normative pressure (Bai & Wu 2024; Tipping & Irschlinger

2020). This normative pressure helped sustain political momentum, given broad existing agreement on the SDGs.

However, at the same time, some institutional characteristics of the WTO complicated the process. The need to reach an agreement through consensus amplified the influence of major subsidizing countries and made ambitious reform difficult. A barrier to change was the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism. Whilst in theory this mechanism could contribute to effective enforcement of disciplines, in practice the current dispute settlement process is ill-suited for environmental issues that do not have direct trade implications in the short run, especially given the potential negative political effects for developing countries that have access agreements with key subsidizing countries (Auld, del Savio, and Feris 2025).

A further challenge is an overlap in mandates between organizations such as the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), which created uncertainty throughout the process, on jurisdiction, data collection, provision and maintenance, and crucially the relationship between subsidies, disciplines and fisheries management.

These institutional constraints contributed to the strategy of scope limitation in the negotiations for AFS. By focusing Fish One on IUU fishing and overfished stocks (areas with relatively established scientific consensus and clearer links to sustainability), the negotiations could progress, but contentious issues related to overcapacity and distant-water fishing became deferred for later.

Knowledge, framing & discourse: legitimacy that lacks resolution

The production of knowledge and discursive framings played a critical role in legitimizing the negotiations for AFS, although knowledge and data were insufficient on their own for resolving underlying conflicts. Scientific evidence documenting declining fish stocks, the scale of fisheries subsidies and their ecological impacts did provide a strong empirical basis for reform (Cisneros-Montemayor & Sumaila 2019). Additionally, international concepts and initiatives such as SDG 14.6 and the UN Ocean Conferences shifted the framing of fisheries subsidies from a narrow issue to a broader intergovernmental sustainability and governance challenge.

However, despite scientific consensus and widely invoked sustainability discourse, technical challenges around data gaps and disagreements over subsidy classifications hindered the operationalization of scientific knowledge within the WTO context. So, although

sustainability framing helped to build broad rhetorical support, it did not eliminate material disputes over who should bear the costs of reform or how responsibilities should be differentiated between least-developed, developing, and developed countries.

Political economy tensions in fisheries subsidies reform: incrementalism as an outcome

The interaction of the political economy factors discussed above resulted in a negotiated outcome that is heavily characterized by incrementalism, leaving the agreement vulnerable to lapsing. The adoption of Fish One as an ‘early harvest’ allowed WTO Member States to demonstrate progress towards SDG14.6 whilst postponing decisions on the most politically sensitive subsidies. The inclusion of a sunset clause, requiring continued negotiations for Fish Two for the agreement to remain in force, institutionalized this compromise.

Additional mechanisms, such as SDT provisions, a Fish Fund for technical assistance, and proposals for (alternative) enforcement mechanisms such as port state measures, were designed to manage distributional tensions. However, these tensions have not been resolved. As such, the AFS should be understood as a structured approach to accommodating competing interests within the constraints of multilateral governance rather than offering a wholesale resolution of political economy conflicts.

III. Cross-country experiences with Fertilizer Subsidies

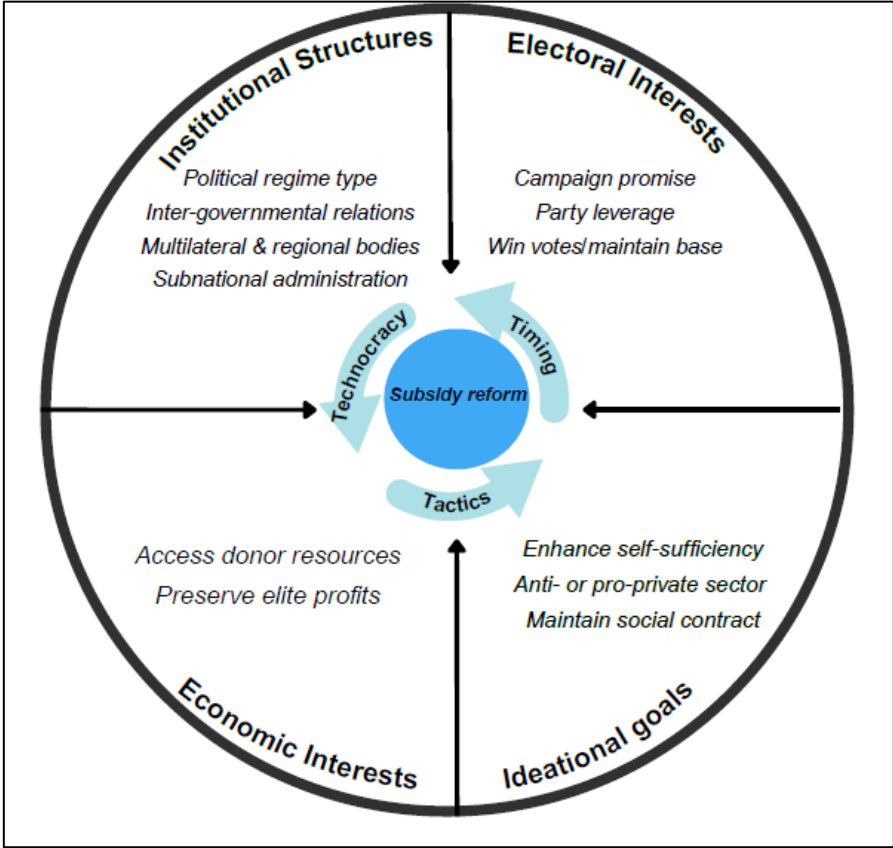
In contrast to Schutter and Bonilla Anariba’s (2025) analysis of negotiations around a major policy reform at the global level, there have been many failed and successful efforts at national fertilizer subsidy reforms. Although political economy factors impact reform trajectories, there is often a lack of specificity about which factors in particular. There is even less understanding of whether these factors may vary according to when they are first introduced versus when governments attempt to redesign, scale back, or repurpose long-standing programs.

Methodology

The study by Chugh and Resnick (2025) therefore examines which specific political economy factors help or hinder fertilizer subsidy reforms and how the importance of these factors varies across different stages of the fertilizer subsidy policy cycle. To do so, the study employs a multi-step literature review and case selection approach to identify and analyze

fertilizer subsidy policy reforms, drawing on peer-reviewed literature published between 2000 and 2025 and including English, French, and Spanish sources. Cases were included only where at least one peer-reviewed study provided substantive analysis of the political economy or enabling environment surrounding the reform process. A reform is defined as a substantive change in the status quo of a country’s fertilizer policy, including the introduction of a subsidy program, a major redesign of an existing subsidy (such as changes in targeting, delivery mechanisms, or private sector participation), or the termination of subsidies. Using this method, the study identified 38 reform episodes across 15 countries and applied a structured coding approach grounded in political economy theory and policy process scholarship (see Figure 2). The reform episodes were coded according to whether they were influenced by four political economy dimensions (electoral factors, economic incentives, ideational goals, and institutional structures) and three policy process dynamics (timing, tactics, and technocratic motivations).

Figure 2: Integrative Framework on Political Economy of Subsidy Policy Reform



Source: Chugh and Resnick (2025). See paper for more details about the framework’s components.

Key findings

Across the 38 reform cases, 32 were considered successful and among those, 11 were cases of introducing subsidies, 18 represented cases of redesign, and 3 were episodes of phasing out fertilizer subsidies. Electoral, ideational, institutional, and technocratic factors each appeared in more than 40 percent of the successful cases while timing was critical to more than 81 percent of successful cases. The influence of these factors, however, varied by stage of the subsidy program.

Ideational and institutional factors are especially prominent during the introduction of fertilizer subsidies, reflecting the importance of policy beliefs and governance structures in shaping initial adoption (Vos, Martin, and Resnick 2023; Hall and Taylor 1996). Institutional dynamics also feature strongly in subsidy phase-out, particularly due to the influence of multilateral institutions (e.g. World Bank and IMF) and regional organizations (Rausser and Swinnen 2011). By contrast, technocratic factors, such as concerns about efficiency, leakage, and targeting, are most influential during redesign efforts, often prompted by emergent implementation challenges with existing subsidy programs. Electoral incentives are salient during both introduction and redesign phases, consistent with political business cycle arguments (Nordhaus 1975; Klomp and De Haan 2013), but are referenced less frequently in subsidy removal, given the political risks typically associated with eliminating highly visible benefits. In countries as diverse as Malawi, Nepal, and Ghana, coalitions of farmers, fertilizer importers, and civil society groups pushed for either the introduction or the redesign of subsidy programs.

On the other hand, several factors commonly assumed to be influential in the policy process literature played a more limited role than expected. For example, tactics such as farmer protests and the use of framing and narratives rarely emerge as decisive motivators or barriers to reform, despite their prominence in broader policy change theories (e.g. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Similarly, technological innovations such as electronic vouchers and point-of-sale devices are less frequently cited as triggers for reform than political shocks, electoral cycles, and windows of opportunity. These findings suggest that broader political timing and context outweigh specific tactical or technological instruments in shaping reform trajectories.

The findings carry important implications for current efforts to repurpose fertilizer subsidies. First, they underscore the centrality of timing: reforms are more likely to advance when aligned with electoral cycles or external shocks that create openings for change (Kingdon 1995; Resnick et al. 2018). Second, while research and evidence can inform

redesign, five of the six failed reform cases occurred despite the existence of strong analytical work. In these cases, evidence was overridden by political vetoes (e.g., Malawi 2008; Indonesia 2003), elite resistance (Zambia 2013), the absence of political champions (Nigeria 2006), or intervening shocks that displaced reform momentum (Rwanda 2022). This suggests that researchers and reform advocates are unlikely to gain traction by focusing solely on technical shortcomings or efficiency gains. Instead, evidence-based proposals must be framed in ways that align with policymakers' electoral incentives, institutional constraints, and broader development priorities. Overall, the analysis reinforces that political economy dynamics are not merely constraints on reform but can be strategically leveraged to advance sustainability, nutrition, and fiscal objectives when their interaction with policy processes is well understood.

IV. Kenya's expansion of animal input subsidies

While Chugh and Resnick's (2025) study provides cross-country context on one type of subsidy, fertilizer, Njehu and Ouma (2025) offer more nuanced in-country analysis of the livestock input subsidies landscape in Kenya and the political economy factors that facilitate or hinder progress towards growth transformation of the livestock sector. The livestock sector contributes significantly to Kenya's economic growth, accounting for about 12% of the overall GDP, 40-42% of agricultural GDP, and supporting over 10 million people (Bahta et al. 2023). The country's population trend, which is projected to double by 2050 (FAO 2019), places a heavy demand on the livestock sector to feed the growing human population. This calls for growth transformation of the livestock sector but doing so involves both opportunities and challenges.

The associated challenges include feeding, animal health, breeding and market development and are linked to access barriers, high cost and low quality of inputs. Since 2002, successive Kenyan governments have focused on an agricultural and economic transformation agenda to improve agricultural productivity and generate higher value-added outputs for enhanced food security, income growth and employment. For the livestock sector, this has been implemented through various strategies and introduction of input subsidies at the national and county levels to address input access and cost barriers especially for smallholder farmers and pastoralists. The implementation of the devolved system of government based on Kenya's 2010 Constitution empowered county governments to design their own subsidy programs, leading to the expansion in livestock input subsidies beyond national level efforts.

Methodology

In order to identify the political economy factors relevant to livestock subsidies, two approaches were used. First, a desk review of available literature on Kenya's livestock input subsidies over the last decade was conducted. The literature covered journal articles, project documents, and donors' and other stakeholder reports. The review yielded information on several programs and initiatives that have integrated livestock inputs to support farmers in crops and livestock value chains. These include efforts on livestock vaccination (Kenya National Livestock Vaccination Program), livestock insurance (DRIVE program), and artificial insemination (county integrated development plans) (Table 1). Second, to fill information gaps and capture expert insights about these three programs, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development's livestock department, and from three county governments (Nyandarua, Kajiado, and Kirinyaga counties).

Table 1: Programs that integrated livestock input subsidies

Program Name	Year	Goal	Geographical focus	Coverage	Subsidy components
Kenya National Livestock Vaccination Program (part of the government's Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda)	2025-2027	Boost the livestock sector income by controlling transboundary diseases particularly Foot and Mouth Disease and Peste des Petits Ruminants (also known as goat plague) to meet international trade standards of the products to enable exports	National	Dairy cattle producing counties and those in arid and semi-arid lands	PPR vaccination of small ruminants Foot and Mouth vaccination of cattle and small ruminants Vaccination delivery through e-voucher (Mazo e-voucher system) Digital livestock registration for tracking & traceability
National Agricultural Value Chain Development Program (NAVCDP)	2022-2027	Transforming smallholder farmers across Kenya – improve cattle genetics, milk production and boost farmer income	National	33 Counties where the target value chains are located	Artificial Insemination (AI) – 50-70% subsidy rate Fodder and feed formulation equipment Tax waivers on imported feed ingredients
De-Risking, Inclusion and Value Enhancement of Pastoral Economies (DRIVE) project – Regional based implemented in 4 Horn of Africa countries - Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti	2022-2027	Build resilience to climatic shocks, and facilitate trade through access to financial services and improving the functioning of livestock value chains	County	8+ counties where livestock production is concentrated	Integrated drought management mechanisms -livestock insurance premium subsidy at a rate of 80% and financial services package

Source: Njehu and Ouma (2025)

Key findings

Kenya National Livestock Vaccination Program

This program was launched in 2025 under the Kenya Kwanza government's Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA).¹ It targets all dairy and small ruminant farmers in 45 counties and aims to vaccinate 22mn cattle and 50mn sheep and goats with free, government-funded, locally produced vaccines from the Kenya veterinary vaccines production institute (KEVEVAPI). Outreach to farmers was to be conducted by cooperatives, ward administration and county teams. The vaccination subsidy is supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and builds on interventions by the World Bank that support the government's current BETA. By the end of 2025, approximately 8 million animals had been vaccinated.

The program has received support for its economic potential but also significant resistance from farmers and political opposition leaders because it has been championed by the government political leadership. Public distrust from past government efforts and politicization led to confusion about the program's intentions. Specifically, initial misinformation about the program on social media and by opposition leaders, claiming it was promoted by foreign donors to limit methane production from the animals, generated farmer resistance despite the program's goal to control Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and goat plague (PPR) and to enhance market access (Muia and Mwai 2025). The program also stalled due to lack of funding and paralysis in logistics like vaccinator payments and transportation. This was largely due to insufficient financial outlays and a lack of clear implementation protocols. The program has recently transitioned from a free initiative to a subsidized cost-sharing model to create a sustainable system. The program campaign has also shifted from political leaders to technocrats in the livestock departments in the counties.

De-Risking, Inclusion and Value Enhancement of Pastoral Economies (DRIVE)

Kenya has experienced four extreme droughts in ten years. This has not only led to death of livestock, but also loss of livelihood and food insecurity, particularly in the Arid and Semi-Arid areas (ASALs). Affected communities take time to regain footing after the massive asset loss and have relied on emergency relief from the government during these periods. In 2015, the government of Kenya launched a 5-year Livestock Insurance Program (KLIP) to protect the pastoralist communities in 21 ASAL counties against climatic shocks. The government paid full insurance premiums for 5 tropical livestock units (TLUs) for the vulnerable households in the community. The beneficiaries received cash payment when

¹ BETA is a framework designed to accelerate economic turnaround and inclusive growth by focusing on grassroots-driven development and value chain enhancement

there was forage scarcity based on vegetation index from the insurance companies, and about 100,000 people benefited.

DRIVE is a successor to KLIP and part of the Horn of Africa (HoA) Initiative, a self-governing coalition of willing stakeholders in the regional development of the HoA covering Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. It builds on the lessons from KLIP and aims to enhance pastoralists' access to financial services for drought risk mitigation and facilitate trade in the HoA. It is supported by the World Bank and implemented in Kenya through a public-private partnership with the State Department of Livestock Development (national and sub-national levels), a COMESA preferential trade area (PTA) reinsurance company (ZEP-RE) and private partners including local insurers, banks and microfinance institutions. The outcomes of DRIVE include strengthened local infrastructure, and fostered trust in the pastoralist value chains. Pastoralists who have procured livestock insurance for 3 TLUs and above have benefited from a one-off enrolment saving bonus (KSh 6,000 per beneficiary). Since its launch, the program has issued livestock insurance premiums to more than 100,000 households in 12 counties and crowded-in 1 Billion Kenyan shillings of private sector finances by derisking the livestock value chains (State Department of Livestock Development 2024).

Coalitions such as the HoA Initiative and the Kenya Pastoralist Parliamentary Group are useful in driving the agenda and priorities of the pastoralist interest groups in the region and mobilizing donor funding and private investments to address the challenges and opportunities. For Kenya, its implementation has been rolled out at both the national and county levels of government. Counties are crucial platforms for implementation of DRIVE by integrating the goals into County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs). However, there is lack of clarity on the specific roles of national and county governments that has led to duplication of efforts and may result in inefficient use of resources that could otherwise be leveraged to cover more pastoralist beneficiaries.

Artificial insemination

Artificial insemination (AI) is used to improve animal breeds and enhance productivity, but producers face significant constraints. Based on the key informant interviews, these constraints include high cost and limited availability of AI services, inadequate infrastructure, and transportation. Public participation processes are used to determine the livestock sector's priority interventions at subnational level and are documented in the CIDPs. Subsidized AI services are funded through the county budget or through national agricultural programs. The national government, through the Kenya Animal Genetic Resources Centre, also supports these efforts by providing quality semen. The AI services are delivered using cooperative models through private inseminators. A digital firm (Digi Cow) has been

contracted to digitalize AI services to aid farmers in managing cow reproduction through short message alerts received at critical period post insemination. Some counties have already recorded successes; in Kirinyaga county, for instance, 3800 farmers have benefitted from subsidized AI.

Many of the counties, however, struggle to sustain AI subsidy programs due to inadequate financing, partly due to delays in county funding disbursements because of national revenue shortfalls or slow processing. There are also reported cases of market distortions, displacing private AI service providers. In some cases, such programs have been used by county governors or other officials to enhance their political image and aspirations, build support among rural constituents, and demonstrate tangible development results.

V. Discussion

Across all three studies, there were several points of convergence and divergence. Specifically, intra-party competition and electoral cycles have been less relevant for the AFS but play notable, albeit variable, roles for fertilizer and livestock subsidy reforms. Electoral cycles have been strongly associated with the expansion of fertilizer subsidies since these are popular on the campaign trail, and AI programs have allowed county governors to build their political image. Yet, for livestock vaccinations, the association of such a program with the ruling party and misinformation raised skepticism among targeted communities about the program's intentions. These findings are largely in line with political economy literature showing how visible, discrete handouts are politically popular (Golden and Min 2013) while the success of health interventions, especially vaccinations, are contingent on the public's trust in government authorities and institutions (Goldenberg 2021).

In addition, coalitions were pivotal but with different outcomes. For multi-level negotiations, such as the AFS, coalitions of different interest groups required a longer set of negotiations to find some areas of common ground. By contrast, for national level policies such as livestock and fertilizer subsidies, coalitions of different interest groups were largely aligned on similar objectives, requiring fewer compromises. In Kenya, the pastoralist parliamentary group and the stakeholders in the HOA initiative were aligned on tackling the risks of drought, leading to support for livestock insurance. Across several countries, like-minded groups wanted to either roll out or refine fertilizer subsidies to deal with either declining demand (e.g. fertilizer importers), to support smallholder incomes (e.g. peasant farmers, civil society groups), or reduce wastage (e.g. media, donors).

There were also some key areas of convergence across the cases, including the role of institutional factors. Global institutions, such as the WTO for fisheries and multilateral and

regional organizations (e.g. World Bank, AfDB) for fertilizer and animal subsidies, were important stimulators of reforms because of either their convening authority or financial clout. At the same time, institutional coordination poses important challenges for subsidy reform implementation. For instance, the WTO's emphasis on consensus and the dispute settlement mechanism made negotiations slower. In Kenya, counties play an important role in livestock policy, and this necessitates stronger coordination in budget disbursement and administrative processes between the national and subnational governments as well as a clear articulation of roles and use of performance management indicators.

Moreover, all of the analyzed subsidy arenas show that there is often more attention to the initial roll-out of programs and gaining consensus on policy design than to longer-term implementation. Leveraging research and involving technocrats can help balance the political impulses embedded in some subsidy initiatives. In a time of growing misinformation, the cases also demonstrated that evidence and research still play a very important role. Indeed, research revealed the detrimental environmental consequences of non-action in the case of fisheries subsidies, played a pivotal role for most cases of fertilizer subsidy re-design, and revealed the benefits of bundling solutions for livestock through DRIVE rather than focusing on livestock insurance alone. At the same time, all three studies show that political economy factors mediate the application of knowledge and evidence. Digital innovations may not drive reforms, but they may hold potential for improved implementation over time. The Kenya livestock studies show that such innovations hold the potential to enhance trust and transparency, especially since biometric registration of beneficiaries and animals allows for accountability and monitoring.

VI. Conclusion

Overall, the three studies highlight that subsidy reforms involve strong trade-offs over time, between short-term costs and long-term benefits, and between environmental goals on the one hand and trade, poverty reduction, or agricultural productivity objectives on the other. Yet, through savvy policy design, the uptake of research, involvement of technocrats, alliances among like-minded coalitions, and use of digital technologies, reforms are possible—even if they are incrementalist or imperfect at the outset.

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