

Brazil and Africa: Productive technical cooperation



Lia Valls Pereira

In 2008 the Brazilian government launched the Productive Development Policy (PDP), which recognized the importance of integration with Africa as well as Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2009 the government detailed goals and initiatives for Africa. The goal is to increase Africa's share in Brazil's total exports by 5%. The 20 strategies to do so relate to finance and investment promotion, foreign trade, and cooperation and knowledge transfer.

Technical cooperation is an instrument that developed countries have always used in their relations with developing countries. Among other complaints, it has been criticized regularly as merely a way of ensuring a market for exports and imposing technology standards. However, when countries lack resources and knowledge, well-designed technical cooperation can facilitate their development.

In June 2010 a seminar sponsored by the Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI) discussed the technical cooperation

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of Brazil and China in Africa. It was clear that Brazilian cooperation would be different not only from that of both China and developed countries. For one thing, it is not associated with immediate economic interests.

The ABC

The Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) was established in 1987. Since 1996 it has been part of the General Secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE), though other ministries and government agencies are involved in technical cooperation. The Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ, which does biomedical research and development) and the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) also carry out cooperation agreements with African and Latin American countries.

The ABC does not transfer grants or loans to other countries. Instead, it organizes and supports teams of Brazilian technicians and sends them to work on local projects. Instead of designing programs for countries, it responds to requests from embassies and Brazilian and foreign government agencies.

Projects start with exploratory missions that visit a site and exchange experiences with local communities, so they do not simply replicate the Brazilian experience. Brazil has the flexibility to adapt its instruments for local governments to use autonomously. Brazil is now working with four agricultural infrastructure projects in Africa and with worker training programs led by the National Service of Industrial Learning (SENAI). In 2009 Africa received 50% of ABC funds, followed by South America (23%) and Central America and the Caribbean (12%). The funds are spent primarily on travel and lodging for Brazilian experts.

The importance Brazil attaches to cooperation is illustrated by the rise in the number of ABC projects from 19 in 2004 to 413 in 2009. ABC also cooperates with other agencies, such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the German Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit and the British Department for International Development.

The ABC does not address inter-regional cooperation, which is handled by other units of the MRE. Its Department of Regional Mechanisms monitors two agreements that involve African countries: the India, Brazil, and South Africa Forum (IBSA) and the South America and Africa Summit (ASA).

IBSA has a cooperation fund, to which each member country contributes US$1 million a year. The objective is cooperation on projects that can be replicated and sustained by communities in recipient countries, disseminating best practices to combat hunger and poverty that countries can incorporate into their own policies.

The South-South Unit of the United Nations Development Program in New York manages the IBSA fund. Proposed projects are submitted by less

developed countries through the Brazilian, Indian, and South African governments. Among countries benefiting are Haiti, Guinea-Bissau, Burundi, Cape Verde, Palestine, Cambodia, and Laos.

The ASA has not worked so well. It requires the 12 South American countries to coordinate with 54 African countries. Brazil coordinates for South America, Nigeria for Africa, but in practice, the African Union leads, with its agenda reflected in the projects submitted.

Other initiatives

The 2009 PDP specified the following goals:

- strengthening systems of weights and measures in Africa, with the support of both ABC and Brazil's National Institute of Metrology, Standardization and Industrial Quality;
- transferring institutional technology to promote industrial skill development (Brazil's National Institute of Industrial Property, PTO);
- promoting the creation of African entities to support small businesses (Brazil's Agency for Support to Entrepreneurship and Small Business Owners and the ABC);
- promoting technical, scientific, and innovation cooperation (Brazil's Ministry of Science and Technology);
- transferring knowledge in urban development (Brazil's Federal Savings and Loans and the ABC);
- partnering Brazil's Agricultural Research Corporation with African institutions;
- building a pharmaceutical plant in Mozambique (FIOCRUZ); and
- reinforcing the IBSA dialogue.

Besides the PDP's plan there are other initiatives. FIOCRUZ began its cooperation activities in the 1990s in the Portuguese-speaking African countries, sending instructors to help disseminate recommendations on public health. In 2005 it expanded its activities to infrastructure projects. The objective is to provide institutional capacity for each country to create its own public health governance and build its systems. A school of public health was established in Angola and national institutes of public health in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. In 2008 FIOCRUZ opened an African cooperation office in Maputo, Mozambique.

Development cooperation is facilitated when challenges are similar in African countries and Brazil in such areas as health, agriculture, and poverty reduction.

Brazil's Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger (MDS) provides technical assistance on cash transfer programs for poor families, food security and nutrition, social assistance, program evaluation, and information management. Its programs are based on MDS programs carried out in Brazil.

Altruism?

China's cooperation is more centrally planned and coordinated and is guided by the country's strategic plans. Its cooperation has strategic and economic ramifications; for instance, it may construct stadiums and buildings for African governments at no cost. Brazil operates in areas

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that are less directly related to economic interests, but the fact that the ABC is part of the PDP makes it clear that coordination is an economic policy tool for Brazil.

Diplomat Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães summarized the guidelines of Brazilian cooperation in Africa when he was Chief Minister of the Strategic Affairs Secretariat of Brazil. Cultural and historical ties unite Brazil and Africa, and because Brazil has political interests related to South-South coalitions in multilateral agencies, alliances with African countries are even more welcome. Economic interests are clear in the promotion of investments in Africa by Brazilian corporations. Development cooperation is facilitated when African countries and Brazil have similar challenges in areas like health, agriculture, and poverty reduction. The importance of Africa in Brazilian foreign policy can be measured by the number of embassies there: 16 countries in 2002; 35 in 2010. According to Ambassador Guimarães, "Embassies are only opened in countries where there are mutual political and commercial interests."

Benefits and costs

How much does Brazilian technical cooperation cost? No funds are transferred directly, but there are staff, travel, and equipment costs. The absence of a strategic plan is one of the concerns of Brazilian experts who made presentations at the June CEBRI seminar.

Monitoring projects through the Information System for International Agreements could provide useful information for assessing future programs. The MRE and the Institute of Applied Economic Research have therefore initiated a survey on cooperation activities undertaken by various agencies.

The increasing demand for cooperation will require formation of a network of managers and experts. With resources limited, it is necessary to have a cooperation plan on which to set priorities. Without a central plan, agencies try to preserve their autonomy and use their performance models to reflect their own priorities. This raises a risk of fragmentation of initiatives that would affect continuity, consistency, and ability to evaluate results.

Brazil cannot ignore the potential of the African market. Africa's share of Brazilian exports peaked at 5.7% in 2009 but fell to 4.6% (January-November 2010). Political instability and conflict were in the past widespread throughout sub-Saharan Africa, but African countries rich in natural resources have shown high growth rates since this century began, and the outlook is hopeful. For 2011 the International Monetary Fund predicts growth for natural-resources-rich countries of 6.4% and for resource-poor countries of 5%.

But the Brazilian technical cooperation agenda cannot be evaluated only by potential economic gains. Sending national experts and designing technical assistance programs in other countries is an experience that brings new knowledge not only for Africans but also for Brazilians.