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South-South Cooperation between Africa and South American Emerging Countries: The Case of Agriculture and Rural Development

by Frédéric Goulet and Eric Sabourin¹

The recent dialogues organized between Brazil, Argentina and international organisations are representative of the rapidly expanding scale of cooperation with African countries around agriculture, food security and rural development.² Are the intentions, initiatives and institutions the same in Brazil and Argentina? This article will qualitatively assess the main areas of convergence and divergence between the approaches employed by these two countries, and underline the debates that these models of cooperation open up in terms of public-private relations and multiple models of agricultural development.

Rhetoric and related institutional frameworks

Both Brazil and Argentina have developed South-South cooperation initiatives based on similar values, rhetoric and justifications, largely differentiating themselves from 'traditional' actors. Among the issues noted are their lack of a colonial past with possible target countries, a demand-driven context for cooperation and a directed response to clearly articulated partner interests.

Horizontality, without any kind of domination or hidden interest, is the key word in the discourses on South-South cooperation.

The institutional structure is also quite similar, with initiatives being managed principally in both countries by an agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Agencia Brasileira de Cooperação (ABC) in Brazil and the Fondo Argentino de Cooperación Horizontal (FO-AR) in Argentina are the lead actors in this new form of development cooperation. Unlike its Southern counterpart, the ABC coordinates foreign aid to Brazil as well as Brazilian cooperation support to foreign countries. For its part, the FO-AR is only dedicated to the second part of the mission (FO-AR, 2010) i.e. technical/ development cooperation with other countries of the South.

In both countries, requests for cooperation from third countries are received through embassies and then transmitted to the ABC or FO-AR. The two agencies then centralise requests and transmit them to national 'execution' agencies, in charge of actual implementation. In the agricultural sector, the actors are, in both cases, national agricultural research centres: the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa) and the Argentinean National Agricultural Research Institute (INTA).

Horizontality, without any kind of domination or hidden interest, is the key word in the discourses on South-South cooperation.

Biotechnology, no-till methods and adapted planting equipment are at the heart of the demand for cooperation by African countries. Brazilian and Argentinean cooperation has been more cost-effective than that of traditional donors.

1. Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement (CIRAD) [International Cooperation Centre for Agricultural Research for Development], Montpellier (France)

Dual Agricultural Models in Brazil and Argentina – Hope for Africa?

- f The first is an agribusiness model, based on the production of commodities and diffusion of (bio) technology.
- f The second is a smallholder or family farming model, based on public support and adapted technologies.

African countries are equally interested in both models, to simultaneously develop industrial supply chains that are able to attract foreign investors, and local food systems adapted to smallholder conditions. In the case of the latter, successful experiences such as the Brazilian *Mais Alimentos* or *Bolsa Familia* are being adapted to Africa at the request of local stakeholders. Similarly, the Argentinean *Pro-Huerta* programme is also being adapted; developed initially through triangular cooperation in Haiti, it is attracting the interest of countries such as Mozambique and Angola.

Emerging practice and themes in cooperation on agriculture

The dominant characteristic of both cooperation systems is that they provide mainly technical cooperation. Brazil and Argentina do not offer financial cooperation, as China does—for example, through gifts or preferential loans. Their main mechanism deployed has been to send experts for well-targeted short missions. More recently, Embrapa has started posting staff in recipient countries such as Senegal and Mozambique. Embrapa also works through official representation offices abroad (it opened its African office in Ghana in 2005).

While Embrapa enjoys many advantages through such arrangements, including a great deal of flexibility, its research mandate means it has a marginal interest and autonomy in technical cooperation on extension. Yet the ABC requests Embrapa to mostly work on extension, and pays it to do so. For its part, INTA does not face such limitations, as the institution integrates both research and extension in its approach. In that sense, it has more autonomy from the FO-AR in defining a global technical cooperation strategy than Embrapa has from the ABC.

In terms of concrete activities, the Brazilian model of agricultural South-South cooperation is more active than the Argentinean one, especially in Africa.

According to internal reports, the ABC implemented agricultural 'activities' in 30 African countries in 2010, with a special focus on Portuguese-speaking countries (ABC, 2010). Although its work covers many areas, cooperation focused mainly on 'technology transfer' in areas such as biofuels, vegetable and animal genetics, irrigation, cropping systems and vegetable and fruit production or transformation.

While the short missions of Brazilian experts to Africa or African professionals to Brazil are the most common tool, the permanent presence of Embrapa staff in countries such as Senegal and Mozambique allows the agency to partner with local institutions on long-term experiments—for example to adapt Brazilian rice varieties to local conditions.

The biggest projects—for example, *ProSavanna* or *ProAlimentar* in Mozambique—are conceptualised and executed through triangular cooperation with industrialized countries such as Japan or the USA.

The African activities of INTA are more modest, as Africa is still an emerging field of activity compared to the South-South cooperation conducted by Argentina in Latin America. Over the last five years INTA has established a cooperation memorandum with South Africa, Kenya,

Zambia, Algeria and Morocco and signed a letter of intent with Egypt, giving coherence to older cooperation agreements—just as Brazil has done over the past decade. The scope of action is wide, covering topics such as biotechnology, cropping systems, biofuel, post-harvest technologies, cattle technology, soil sciences, precision agriculture, vegetable seeds etc.

New dynamics: dual agricultural and public-private arrangements

Brazil and Argentina are keen to expand their international influence, and African countries are eager to benefit from these South American success stories in agriculture and food security policies. But these successes—and the foreign interests they generate—are linked to two different models of agricultural development which operate in both countries. With respect to the agribusiness model focused on commodity production, countries in Southern Africa are particularly interested in the South American experience in soybean production. Southern African countries have emerged in the last few years as a leading destination for foreign investment in soybean production, second only to South America.

2. In May 2010, Brazilian authorities held a three-day meeting in Brasilia entitled '*Dialogo Brasil- África sobre segurança alimentar, Combate a Fome e Desenvolvimento rural*' ['Brazil-Africa Dialogue on Food Security. Fighting Hunger and Rural Development'] with representatives from several African countries and international organisations such as the African Union, NEPAD, African Development Bank, FAO, WFP and The World Bank. In April 2011, Argentina held a four-day meeting in Buenos Aires and Tucuman entitled '*África Sub-Saharian Countries – Argentina: Innovación y desarrollo en la producción de agroalimentos*' ['Africa sub-Saharan Countries and Argentina: Innovation and Development in the Production of Food Crops'] with representatives from 13 African countries and international organisations.

Biotechnology, no-till methods based on soil management and adapted planting equipment are then at the heart of the demand for cooperation by African countries. Brazilian and Argentinean cooperation has been able to respond more cost-effectively than traditional donors such as the USA and Europe, and at a higher quality than Chinese manufacturing. South American firms in these areas are gaining market share in Africa, both in the large arable crops sectors such as soybean and in the smallholder farming sectors. Some programmes such as the Brazilian *Mais Alimentos Africa* in Zimbabwe or cooperation agreements between INTA and South African companies have the explicit function of transferring national technology and exporting products of the national industry. South-South cooperation and commercial interests can then be tightly linked, since South-South cooperation is similar to but still distinct from 'traditional' cooperation.

Above all, the duality in the agricultural development models promoted through South-South cooperation by Brazil and Argentina are themselves a source for strong debate and even controversy, particularly regarding their direct and indirect impacts on food security, social inclusion or environmental quality. Are then Brazil and Argentina transferring not only their technology and know-how but also inherent socio-technical challenges and possible polarising effects?

This question serves as a stimulating point of departure for broader discussions and research around the development impact of South-South cooperation itself, particularly for social scientists working on cooperation and technological innovation.

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2. See, for example, <<http://www.embrapa.br/imprensa/noticias/2010/janeiro/2a-semana/prosavanas-contara-com-tecnologias-da-embrapa-hortalicas/>>.

3. See, for example, <<http://www.estadao.com.br/noticias/nacional,embrapa-vai-produzir-alimento-na-africa-diz-lula,61765,0.htm>>.

4. 'Diálogo Brasil-África em Segurança Alimentar, Combate à Fome e Desenvolvimento Rural' [Brazil-Africa Dialogue on Food Security, Fighting Hunger and Rural Development] was held in May 2010 in Brasília (ABC, 2010).

