



# Brazil–Africa Technical Co-operation: Structure, Achievements and Challenges

Ana Cristina Alves<sup>1</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- By extending its outreach far beyond its capacity, the ABC has proved that it has a critical role to play in Brazil's foreign policy. As such, Brasilia would benefit from a stronger ABC with more autonomy, its own staff and a budget more in line with the size of Brazil's economy.
- For internal legitimisation purposes, Brazil's technical assistance would benefit from greater information dissemination and from consultations with civil society. Promoting the participation of domestic NGOs in its projects abroad would foster mutual trust and bring about useful synergies.
- Installing a monitoring-and-evaluation mechanism to assess the impact of Brazil's technical co-operation impact would not only foster meaningful efficiency gains but would also reinforce its credibility abroad.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increasingly, Brazil is regarded both within and outside of Africa as a reliable development partner. In addition to the advantage of a greater cultural and linguistic proximity, significant geographical affinities give Brazil an edge over its competitors, especially in agricultural co-operation where it promises more efficient solutions based on tested programmes implemented in similar areas in Brazil.

The policy brief offers an overview of Brazil's technical co-operation with Africa, analysing the way it is structured, its major achievements so far and the challenges it faces at present. Such challenges include signs of institutional overstretch and contradictions. The sustainability of Brazil's current pace of engagement depends on its capacity to adjust its structures and to ensure coherence between its normative rhetoric and the practices of its agents on the continent.

## INTRODUCTION

Brazil's credentials as a co-operation partner are rooted in its domestic success story as a country that achieved democracy and became a rising economy while simultaneously narrowing the inequality gap and lifting millions out of poverty. Brazil, however, is still an aid-recipient country, and its history as a co-operation provider is relatively recent.

The sharing of Brazil's developmental experience with other developing countries was refined and boosted during the second mandate of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2006–10), not only as a development co-operation tool but also as a strategic instrument to further its foreign-policy agenda, particularly in strengthening ties with the global South.

According to a 2010 study, the cumulative value of Brazilian development co-operation resources reached BRL 3.2 billion (\$1.6 billion) in 2009, an increase of nearly 50% from 2005. The bulk of these resources were contributions to

international organisations, regional banks and peacekeeping operations (76%); scholarships for foreign students (10%), mostly from Latin America and Portuguese-speaking countries; humanitarian aid (5%), mostly to Latin America and Africa; and technical co-operation (9%), with Africa as a major beneficiary.<sup>2</sup>

### THE ABC AND TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION

The main modality of Brazil–Africa co-operation is technical assistance, which is administered by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (Agência Brasileira de Cooperação or, the ABC). The ABC was established officially in 1987 under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the aim of managing and co-ordinating aid that Brazil received from bilateral and multilateral partners. When Brazil started providing assistance within the South–South platform in the early 1990s, the ABC assumed the role of co-ordinating this too. Brazil's outgoing co-operation steadily increased in the following years, becoming the ABC's largest portfolio under President Lula.

### THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Brazil's technical co-operation through the ABC is rooted strongly in South–South solidarity principles and in its own development experience, which is grounded on democratisation, economic growth and the equal distribution of wealth. According to official Brazilian narrative,<sup>3</sup> its technical assistance subscribes to the following set of principles: demand driven, knowledge transfer, capacity building, use of local labour, project design based on local specificities, no conditionalities, and respect for sovereignty. Brazil's approach differs from traditional donors in not simply providing aid but rather developing a partnership of mutual benefit and peer learning, with the ultimate goal of its assistance being to plant the seeds for autonomous development. Brazil's co-operation is based largely on the deployment of its own development solutions, which find a fertile terrain in Africa owing to the many similarities in terms of structural conditions and challenges: 'for each African problem, there is a Brazilian solution'.

### HOW THE ABC OPERATES

As a department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ABC receives a relatively small annual financial allocation (\$30–40 million).<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, the impact of the ABC's technical co-operation extends far beyond its budget, mostly thanks to human and financial resources covered by other ministries and agencies in the implementation of projects. Owing to its financial limitations, and unlike China for instance, ABC assistance does not involve hard infrastructure such as schools and hospitals. Instead it is rooted in skills development, strengthening of institutional capacity and sharing of best practices developed by the Brazilian government. The main focus of its assistance is on health, agriculture (tropical agriculture and biofuels), education and social policies, with new areas being introduced gradually (including the environment, tourism and human rights).

The Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial (SENAI), the national service for industrial learning, plays a central role in skills development. Capacity building is conducted mostly in the receiving countries, such as the current proposed establishment of learning centres in Angola, Zambia, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. Public health co-operation programmes are developed in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (Fiocruz), mostly in the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other tropical diseases, technological transfer and medication production. Assistance in the agriculture field is provided in association with the Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária (Embrapa), predominantly in tropical agriculture; and Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV), mostly in biofuels. Co-operation in social development focuses on fostering the state's role in promoting social development and fighting inequalities through the adaptation of Brazil's own successful programmes – such as those involving family grants, school grants, literacy and the eradication of hunger – in receiving countries.

Although the ABC provides most of its assistance bilaterally, trilateral co-operation is becoming an increasingly important technical co-operation modality. Trilateral co-operation projects stem from Brazil's experience as a recipient country, and aim to give continuity to this valuable legacy. Therefore,

most traditional donors that collaborate with Brazil to pursue co-operation projects in other developing states have previously engaged in technical co-operation in Brazil. In general, Brazil provides the expertise and technology, while the developed country injects the necessary funding to run the project. This arrangement allows Brazil to stretch its technical co-operation beyond its financial capacity still further.

In terms of volume, Japan remains Brazil's main 'trilateral partner', followed by the US and Germany. Agreements have been signed for this purpose with other developed partners (Italy, Spain), including countries with no co-operation record in Brazil (Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark). Some developing countries have also approached Brazil in recent years (Egypt, Thailand, Chile, Colombia) with the purpose of forming trilateral partnerships, although nothing has been implemented yet. In addition, Brazil has trilateral projects running with multilateral organisations (such as the UNDP, WTO, UNESCO and the FAO), articulating South–South co-operation with programmes bound to multilateral mandates. There is a nascent trend of setting up trilateral projects with subnational entities as well (such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Mozambique's ProSavana project).<sup>5</sup>

### FLAGSHIP PROJECTS IN AFRICA

Since 2011 Africa has received about 50% of Brazil's development aid.<sup>6</sup> Owing to historic and cultural ties, Portuguese-speaking countries are the largest recipients of Brazilian technical co-operation in Africa, with Mozambique currently the major recipient.<sup>7</sup> However, Brazil has also begun to extend its technical assistance to other parts of Africa, and to date has a presence in 36 countries across the continent.

In recent years the ABC has ventured beyond intermittent assignments (skills and institutional capacity development) into projects of a more structural nature, aimed at creating a permanent base for capacitation, research and development, and envisaging a broader social and economic impact. Some of these projects have become Brazil's flagship co-operation projects in Africa.

The most well known is undoubtedly the ProSavana project in Mozambique, which aims at

transplanting Brazilian technology and expertise (Embrapa and the FGV) to foster agriculture development in the Nacala Corridor. This is a trilateral partnership with Japan that stems from a successful co-operation venture in the 1970s, which transformed Brazil's unproductive Cerrado (with geo-climatic conditions similar to the northern Mozambique savannah) into the country's grain basket. The project is based on three pillars: strengthening Mozambican agricultural scientific research; formulating an integrated master plan for agriculture development; and consolidating technology transfer and rural extension based on the concept of family farming. ProSavana, which has a timeline of 10–20 years, aims to improve food security in the region and foster the competitiveness of the rural sector in terms of increased productivity in family farming and the generation of exportable surpluses. The project was agreed to in 2010 and is in the early stages of implementation. If successful, the idea is to replicate it in other countries with similar conditions.

To date Brazil's highest profile project in the health sector has been an antiretroviral factory, also in Mozambique. Valued at \$23 million, the project involves the provision of equipment, technology transfer, capacity building and certification. It was developed by Fiocruz, with the Vale Foundation covering 80% of the factory rehabilitation cost (\$4.5 million). The aim is to produce antiretrovirals to supply the Mozambican and neighbouring markets. The establishment of the factory, promised by President Lula in his visit to Mozambique in 2003, has taken many years, mostly owing to certification problems with the WHO.<sup>8</sup> The factory was handed over to Mozambican authorities and began operations in August 2012, but has since been plagued by various operational problems on the Mozambican side.

Another flagship project is the so-called 'Cotton-4', which aims to develop the productivity and quality of cotton production in Mali, Benin, Chad and Burkina Faso, based on Brazil's cotton sector 'revolution' in the 1990s. The project, which stems from the support of these countries for Brazil regarding its cotton dispute with the US in the WTO, started in 2009 and is executed by Embrapa. It has involved the establishment of an agriculture research centre and a demonstration centre based in Mali, where varieties of seeds are tested and adapted to

suit local conditions. Skills and technology transfer have been critical components. The experimental phase of the project is to be completed in 2013, following which it will be handed over to local authorities for large-scale implementation.

Embrapa is also in the process of developing other smaller agriculture projects. These include cocoa cultivation in Cameroon and the Republic of Congo; rice in Senegal; and biofuels in Ghana, Sudan, Senegal and Nigeria (and in Angola and Mozambique led by Odebrecht and Petrobras).

### CHALLENGES AHEAD

Lula's enthusiasm, and support from other internal and external financial resources have contributed to the success of Brazil's technical co-operation in Africa, and have given substance to its normative discourse rooted in South–South co-operation. Brazil's achievements in a short period of time have greatly enhanced its prestige in the region.

However, the rapid expansion of its commitments has resulted in operational challenges at the domestic level. First, the multiplication of projects in such a short period of time has created capacity overstretch (both human and financial)<sup>9</sup> and institutional overlapping. This prevents synergies, undermines evaluation of costs and benefits and leads to ad-hoc projects that present long-term planning challenges. Second, Brazil still lacks a co-operation law (currently in discussion, but progressing very slowly) necessary to clarify the authority line, legitimise the use of public funds, and to regulate the funding of co-operation projects. Third, there is increasing pressure to include Brazilian civil society in its technical co-operation with Africa to make the process more democratic and transparent, as these funds originate from taxpayers in a country that still faces deep economic and social challenges. Fourth, the ownership of the recipient country is in some cases questionable (flow is unidirectional), which represents a direct threat to Brazil's credentials as a South–South partner in the future. Lastly, Brazil lacks a monitoring-and-evaluation mechanism to assess

the true impact of its co-operation,<sup>10</sup> which is critical to correct inefficiencies, avoid resource wastage, and to ensure the expected results. This is key for gaining full domestic legitimacy as well as credibility abroad.

As Brazil's engagement with Africa deepens, it is likely that more friction among the various agents and actors as well as between norms and practices will surface. Reflecting her reputation as a technocrat, Dilma Rousseff seems aware of the challenges, as Brazil is currently in the process of readjusting the existing institutional structure. It is not necessarily a downsizing of Brazil–Africa relations. Dilma's three trips to Africa in the first half of 2013 indicate that the commitment remains as strong as ever. Yet the question remains whether Brazil will manage to uphold its South–South solidarity principles while expanding its co-operation and economic footprint on the continent.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Ana Cristina Alves (PhD) is senior researcher for the SAIIA Global Powers in Africa programme.
- 2 Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (Institute of Applied Economic Research) & ABC, *Cooperação Brasileira para o Desenvolvimento Internacional: 2005–2009*. Brasília: Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada and Agência Brasileira de Cooperação, 2010.
- 3 Brazil, MRE (Ministry of External Relations), <http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/temas/cooperacao-tecnica> (Portuguese website).
- 4 Personal interview, ABC Directorate, Brasília, 17 May 2012.
- 5 Personal interview, ABC – Trilateral Cooperation, Brasília, 15 May 2012.
- 6 Brazil, MRE, *op. cit.*
- 7 Personal interview, ABC Bilateral Cooperation, Brasília, 15 May 2012.
- 8 Personal interview, ABC office, Maputo, 16 February 2012.
- 9 Esteves P, 'The BRICS and the Reshaping of International Development Policy', public lecture, Jan Smuts House, SAIIA, Johannesburg, 19 March 2013.
- 10 Personal interview, University of Brasília, International Relations, Department for African studies, Brasília, 17 May 2012.

The Global Powers and Africa Programme is funded by the Department for International Development, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Danish International Development Agency. SAIIA gratefully acknowledges this support.

© SAIIA 2013 All rights reserved. Opinions expressed are the responsibility of the individual authors and not of SAIIA.