

# Brazil–Africa Agricultural Cooperation Encounters: Drivers, Narratives and Imaginaries of Africa and Development

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**Abstract** Brazilian development cooperation is increasingly in the spotlight. Africa is a major destination and agriculture tops the list of priority fields on intervention, with Embrapa leading cooperation projects. But patterns of cooperation in Africa are changing as other public, private and civil society actors enter the realm of cooperation and bring along contrasting narratives and experiences of agricultural development. This article maps the evolving nature of Brazilian development cooperation in agriculture and discusses emerging features of the Brazil–Africa encounter, considering knowledge framings, policy narratives, imaginaries and the motivations driving a diversity of technical and political actors.

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## 1 Introduction

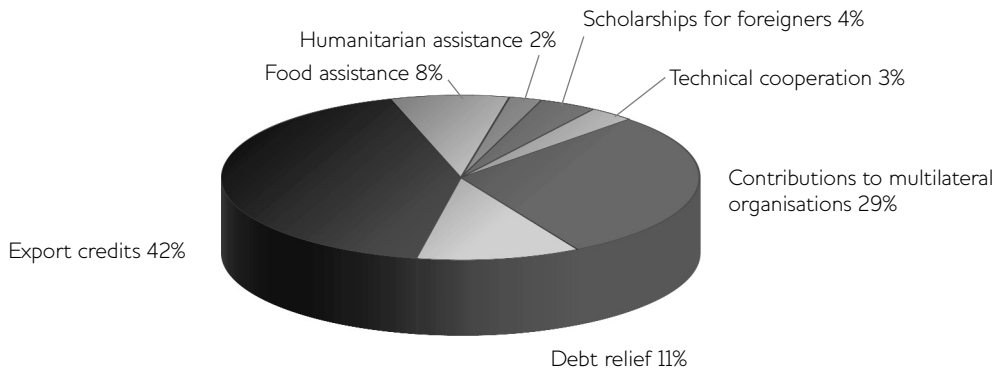
Brazilian development cooperation is increasingly in the spotlight. Its portfolio is relatively small compared to other ‘rising powers’ – 2010 estimates of Brazilian cooperation vary between US\$0.4 and 1.2 billion,<sup>1</sup> which puts it below Chinese cooperation estimated at around US\$1.4 billion in 2009 (Brautigam 2009: 168). Yet, Brazil is a source of world-leading expertise across a range of areas of great relevance to developing countries’ development processes – most notably agricultural research, health and social protection – and increasingly a reference for many African countries, especially those with historical and cultural affinities with this South American giant. The Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa) and the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) are internationally renowned institutions for research on tropical agriculture and health, respectively. Bolsa Família is the world’s largest conditional cash transfer programme and has played a central role in moving millions of Brazilians out of extreme poverty (Vaitsman and Paes de Sousa 2007).

Foreign policy has been a major driver of Brazilian cooperation and former President Lula da Silva was the engine behind the dynamism noticeable during recent years. His policy

expanded the focus of cooperation beyond its traditional focus on Latin America and on Lusophone African countries, in what has been interpreted as a strategy of autonomy (*vis-à-vis* US hegemony) through diversification of diplomatic and economic relations (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2007). Africa had a prominent position in Lula’s ‘presidential diplomacy’, justified by reference to a frequently articulated sense of moral duty as well as to the continent’s commercial potential and geopolitical significance as a southern ally (Matos 2011).<sup>2</sup> Geopolitical alliances are particularly relevant in the realm of the UN, with the significant increase of diplomatic missions to Africa under Lula being viewed as a key part of a strategy to gather support for Brazil’s bid for a permanent UN Security Council seat (Malamud 2011).

The trend over the first couple of years of the administration of President Dilma Rousseff, who succeeded Lula in 2011, has been one of apparent continuity and emphasis on fulfilment of previous commitments. However, new refinements are being added to the approach. Reflecting the new president’s decision to emphasise meeting Brazil’s domestic development challenges ahead of assuming new global responsibilities, this approach is increasingly ‘focusing on the search for new

Figure 1 Brazilian development cooperation by modality (including debt relief and export credits), 2005–09



Source ABC (2011: 13).

markets for national investment and exports, particularly for higher added value products, and the mobilization of international capacities aiming at strengthening innovation in Brazil' (Costa Leite 2013: 7).

Within the federal government, budget cuts have forced a pause in the previously breakneck pace of expansion of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC),<sup>3</sup> and there has been a marked reduction in the intensity of presidential forays into what became known under the Lula government as 'solidarity diplomacy'. This has resulted in a slowdown in the rate at which key agencies like Embrapa receive new demands triggered by presidential visits or other diplomatic offensives (such as the effort to secure the post of FAO Director-General for Lula's former advisor José Graziano da Silva).

This article is based on interviews in Brazil as well as the discussions at an international seminar in Brasília, gathering together leading policymakers, academics and practitioners.<sup>4</sup> After this introduction, the article provides an overview of Brazilian development cooperation and its Africa and agricultural foci. The agricultural cooperation framework is analysed against the backdrop of Brazil's domestic agricultural governance dynamics. Emerging features of the Brazil–Africa encounter are discussed and its fluid and contested contours are highlighted.

## 2 Brazilian development cooperation

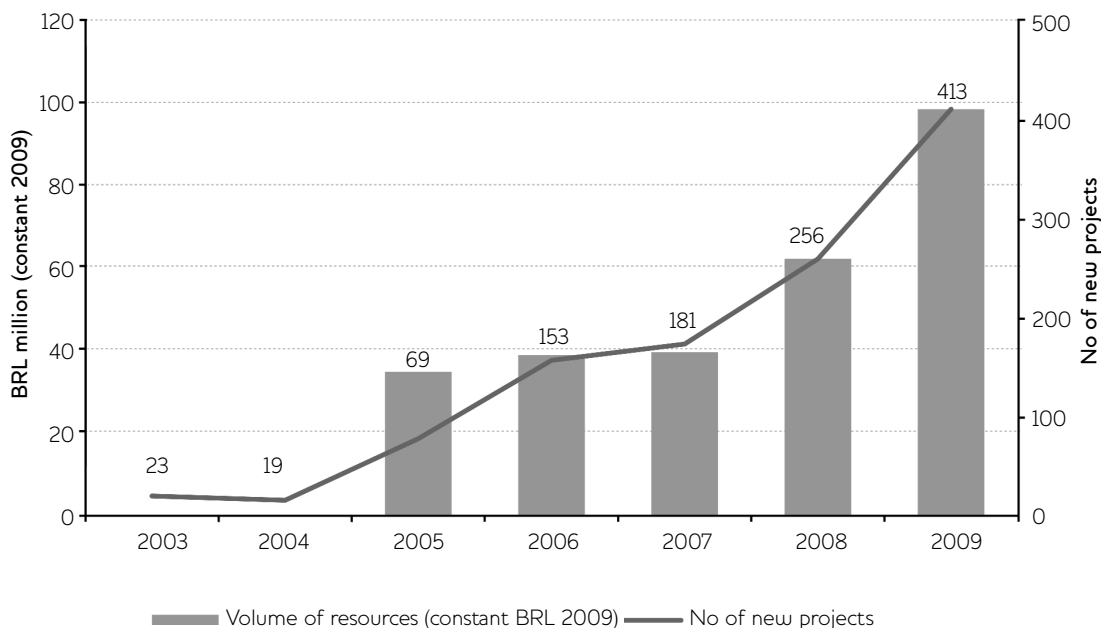
Brazil states that its development cooperation is guided by principles of joint diplomacy based on

solidarity, no interference in domestic issues of partner countries, demand-driven action, acknowledgement of local experience, no imposition of conditions, and no association with commercial interests (ABC 2011: 3). These principles are claimed to distinguish Brazilian cooperation from traditional forms of cooperation, particularly by reflecting a horizontal relationship between southern countries. Brazil rejects being labelled as a 'donor', a term it associates with the perceived vertical nature of North–South cooperation. Instead, it prefers to portray its cooperation as a mutually beneficial relationship between partners. The claimed benefits are not only economic or diplomatic, as Brazil's technical and scientific cooperation initiatives have long deployed a discourse of 'mutual learning'.<sup>5</sup>

As a provider of development knowledge, Brazil claims the advantage of having expertise and technologies that fit the needs of developing countries, due to greater proximity (*vis-à-vis* Northern donors) in terms of economic and institutional development, culture and language (in the case of some African countries) and agro-climatic conditions, which are particularly relevant for cooperation in tropical agriculture. As the former director of ABC, Minister Marco Farani, put it:

Because of similarities in social and economic realities and challenges to be faced in many areas, partner countries can absorb knowledge resulting from exchanging experiences with Brazil, which are more easily adapted and applied to real cases if compared to

Figure 2 Brazilian technical cooperation, annual budget and new projects, 2003–09



Source IPEA and ABC (2010) and correspondence with ABC.

traditional solutions offered by traditional partners... Affinities of historical, ethnical, cultural, linguistic and economic nature – as well as shared heritage and aspirations – favour the expansion and realization of south–south cooperation and contribute to its success (ABC 2010a: 97).

Brazil also emphasises that it can offer its own tested solutions to development problems, rather than ideas of what may work (Cabral *et al.* 2013). Delivering appropriate ‘solutions’ to key development challenges that draw on Brazil’s own experience is seen both as a moral obligation in South–South relations and as a factor underpinning the country’s political legitimacy in Africa. In an interview given shortly after Lula took office, Presidential advisor Marco Aurélio Garcia, one of the most influential foreign policy thinkers in Lula’s Workers’ Party (PT), stressed that ‘Brazil’s political weight in global politics can come from its ethical and moral presence in Africa; through the sharing of solutions.’<sup>6</sup>

Technical cooperation is the most visible modality of the country’s cooperation portfolio and the one most explicitly used as a tool of diplomatic affairs. Technical cooperation consists of the transfer and

adaptation of expertise, skills and technology mainly through training courses, workshops, consultancies, exchange programmes, and, occasionally, the donation of equipment. Brazilian technical cooperation is notable for drawing mostly on civil servants with direct experience of implementing the programmes whose transfer is being attempted, rather than consultants or other specialists from outside government. This means that the full cost (including the opportunity cost of staff time lost to the ministries and other agencies providing the specialists) is difficult to account for. Brazil also provides scholarships for foreigners to study in Brazil; it assists countries facing emergencies (Haiti is the largest beneficiary of Brazilian humanitarian assistance); it makes contributions to international and regional multilateral institutions working in development, such as several UN agencies or the Inter-American Development Bank; it grants debt relief to highly indebted poor countries and it is increasingly offering export credits on concessional terms to countries in Latin America and Africa (Cabral 2011).

A 2010 survey estimates that in 2009 Brazil’s development cooperation programme totalled US\$362 million, approximately 0.02 per cent of GNI (IPEA and ABC 2010). This calculation

excludes, however, modalities such as debt relief, export credits and food aid. Additional ABC estimates indicate that export credits are the largest cooperation modality, representing 42 per cent of the overall portfolio during 2005–09. These typically consist of loans on concessional terms provided to other countries to finance the acquisition of Brazilian goods and services and hence promote Brazilian exports (Cabral 2011). If this and other modalities (debt relief and food aid) are added in, the proportion of technical cooperation is a mere 3 per cent (see Figure 1).

However, technical cooperation, a key instrument of Brazilian diplomacy, has been expanding rapidly over recent years (see Figure 2).

There has also been a notable rise of trilateral (or triangular) cooperation arrangements, whereby cooperation is provided by Brazil alongside another donor (typically a traditional donor) to a beneficiary country. Japan, Germany, the USA and several UN agencies are amongst the main partners (on the provider side) of Brazil in trilateral cooperation. For Brazil, this allows its cooperation activities in third countries to be scaled up, complementing its technical cooperation inputs with other financial resources. Also legal and bureaucratic obstacles that face Brazilian government agencies working overseas can be overcome; for example, by allowing procurement to be handled by the international partner. At the same time, triangular cooperation also offers a route for maintaining strategic links with traditional donors at a time when Brazil is making the transition from aid recipient to provider (Cabral and Weinstock 2010).

### **2.1 The institutional setting and coordination challenges**

There are a great number of institutions – governmental and non-governmental – directly involved in the implementation of technical cooperation projects, raising considerable coordination challenges. ABC is mandated with a coordination role, and its capacity has been greatly boosted over recent years – its budget increased threefold between 2008 and 2010.<sup>7</sup> However, ABC occupies a relatively low-grade position in the government hierarchy. As a department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE), it is a ‘virtual’ agency, with no financial autonomy or significant political clout. It has therefore limited space to set the cooperation

agenda, plan ahead or act strategically in deploying its financial and human resources. The direction of cooperation is largely determined by MRE and specialised institutions, such as Embrapa for cooperation in agriculture, often in response to promises made to African countries during periods of ‘presidential diplomacy’ (see Section 3). ABC’s coordination role takes shape at the implementation level, organising the protocol and logistics for missions of Brazilian experts to the field.

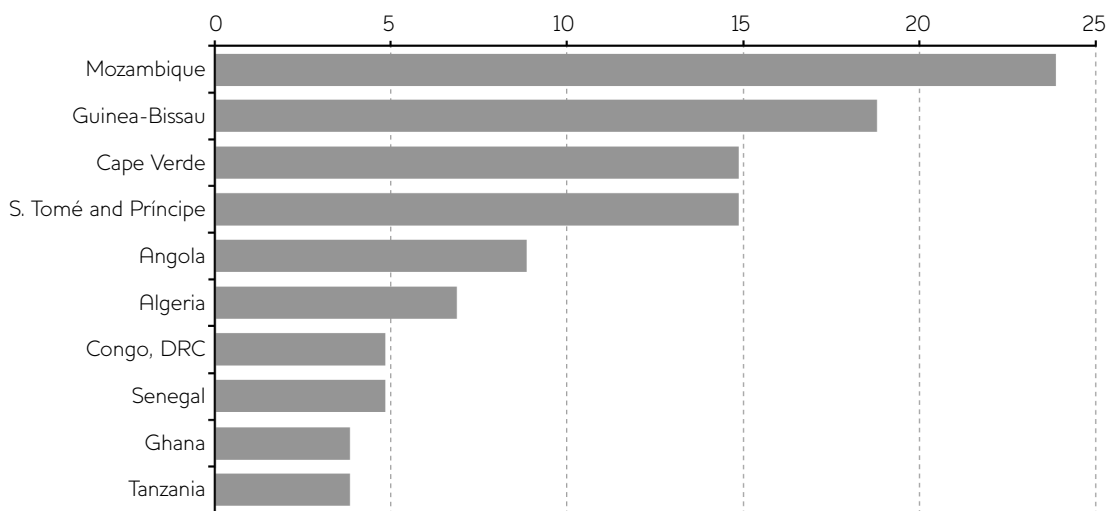
Another factor constraining ABC’s coordination function is the obsolete legal framework for Brazilian cooperation which limits the ability to operate abroad. Embrapa and Fiocruz are probably the only Brazilian cooperation actors, with the exception of the foreign office, which have the legitimacy to establish a presence overseas, although in the case of Embrapa, the creation of an international branch – Embrapa International – recently attracted significant internal criticism, which contributed to the resignation of the head of the agency in October 2012.<sup>8</sup> Yet, *ad hoc* solutions have been developed by ABC to circumvent these bottlenecks. For example, it has relied on UN agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to deploy resources abroad and it has recently appointed a Maputo-based representative with specific responsibility for coordinating Brazilian agricultural cooperation in Mozambique, although there is insufficient institutional support for the new role (Chichava *et al.* 2013).

Finally, ABC’s mandate is restricted to technical cooperation, which represents only a fraction of Brazil’s development cooperation activities abroad. Responsibilities for other modalities of cooperation, such as debt relief, concessional lending and emergency relief, spread across several institutions including the MRE, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Development, Industry and Commerce, the Chamber of Commerce (CAMEX) and the External Credit Assessment Committee (Cabral 2011).

## **3 Brazil in Africa**

Africa featured prominently in Lula’s ‘presidential diplomacy’. The former president often spoke passionately about Brazil’s affinities with the continent and his country’s moral and fraternal duty to support Africa’s renaissance.

Figure 3 Top ten beneficiaries of Brazilian technical cooperation in Africa, 2011



Source ABC (2011).

During Lula's administration (2003–10), presidential visits to the continent reached record levels and the number of Brazilian embassies across Africa more than doubled (MRE 2011). Economic relations also intensified, with a considerable rise in trade and private investment in the mining, construction and oil sectors (CINDES 2011).

During the first two years of her mandate, President Dilma Rousseff paid her first visit to the continent (touring Angola, Mozambique and South Africa – a selection that reflects Brazil's list of primary investment destinations as much as the country's cooperation agenda) and created Grupo África, an inter-ministerial group, with private sector representatives, focusing on Brazil's relations with Africa. Dilma's rhetoric seems less emotional and more pragmatic than Lula's, with an explicit emphasis on commercial and investment opportunities for Brazilian enterprises, although also urging them to leave a 'legacy' to Africans through the transfer of technology, training and social programmes.<sup>9</sup>

The role of MRE has been changing under Dilma's administration. The major emphasis placed by Lula in the diversification of international partnerships and enhancement of Brazil's projection as a global actor has given way to a more selective orientation that privileges the economic agenda, thus bringing diplomacy closer to Brazilian companies operating abroad

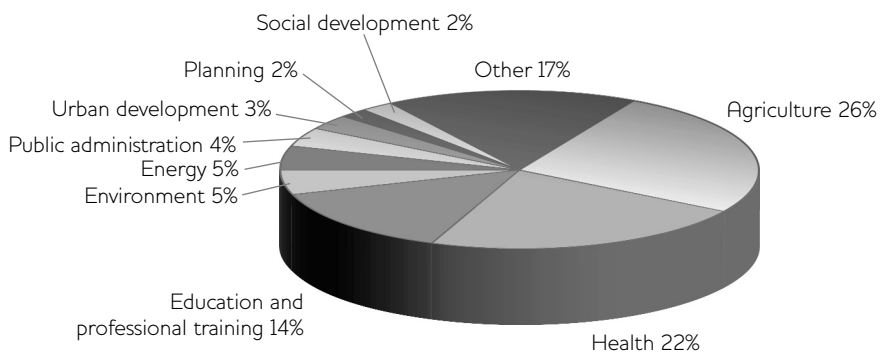
(particularly those in the mining, construction, agriculture and oil sectors, in the case of Africa). A decline in the political rhetoric and foreign policy activism towards Africa seems noticeable: President Dilma's trips to Africa have so far been more restrained than her predecessor, and arguably mainly motivated by an economic agenda.<sup>10</sup>

Reflecting the country's diplomatic and economic motivations, Brazilian cooperation spread steadily across the continent, with technical cooperation projects at either design or implementation stage in at least 38 countries (ABC 2011). In 2010, Africa accounted for the largest regional increase in spending, having absorbed 57 per cent of Brazil's overall technical cooperation budget, though this share is expected to decline in the next two years.

The five Portuguese-speaking African countries<sup>11</sup> still remain Brazil's main technical cooperation partners, with Mozambique being the single largest beneficiary (see Figure 3). In 2010 these accounted for 74 per cent of resources spent in technical cooperation in Africa (Cabral and Weinstock 2010). Yet, Brazil's portfolio of partners is being diversified, mirroring the spreading of the diplomatic network and deepening of economic relations across the continent.

Alongside technical cooperation, other modalities are being increasingly drawn on for South–South cooperation with Africa. Debt relief

Figure 4 Brazilian technical cooperation by sector supported in Africa, 2003–10



Source ABC (2011).

has either been granted or is in the process of being granted to several African countries, clearing the way for additional lending to be made available by the Brazilian banking system (Cabral 2011). Some of these loans are concessional and focused on development objectives, such as a new credit facility to support African farmers in buying agricultural machinery for productivity gains and food security. Others are primarily motivated by commercial objectives, such as most lending provided by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) to countries like Angola, Nigeria and South Africa. BNDES is a key ally and resource for major Brazilian corporations such as Vale (mining) and Odebrecht (construction and agri-business), which are active in many African countries (Barka 2011).

### 3.1 A focus on agriculture

Agriculture tops the list of Brazilian technical cooperation sectors. Between 2003 and 2010, it accounted for 26 per cent of the country's technical cooperation portfolio in Africa (see Figure 4).

There are more than 20 Brazilian institutions involved in technical cooperation in agriculture in Africa, covering a wide range of issues, and with very different conceptual and ideological perspectives (Cabral and Shankland 2013). This reflects the diverse stances of different Brazilian institutions, ranging from those committed to technical modernisation and agri-business and those interested in 'family farming', agrarian reform and agroecology. This plurality inevitably brings with it contradictions and tensions at the centre of the cooperation effort.

Embrapa, the research corporation, is by far the most prominent institution involved. But as Embrapa's capacity to respond to burgeoning demand from developing countries is being stretched to the limit, it has looked for partnerships with or given way to other agricultural research institutions, including universities like the Federal University of Viçosa, as well as subnational agencies managed by Brazilian state governments (ABC 2010b). As the topics in the agriculture cooperation portfolio with Africa diversify, so do the range of Brazilian players involved. In particular, the MDA's presence in the portfolio is expanding, carrying with it the focus on 'family farming', food security and agrarian reform, sometimes contrasting starkly with other efforts.

Despite the prominence of Lusophone countries in the agriculture cooperation portfolio, technical cooperation in agriculture has been expanding considerably across the continent. An event hosted by President Lula da Silva back in 2010 – *Diálogo Brasil–África*<sup>12</sup> – played an important part in promoting Brazil as a source of cutting-edge expertise on tropical agriculture for Africa (ABC 2010a). In his opening speech, President Lula emphasised the crucial role played by Embrapa's research and development in Brazilian agriculture, namely in transforming the supposedly barren *Cerrado*, the central Brazilian savannah belt, and noted opportunities for transferring this experience into Africa as 'the African savannah has the same productive characteristics as the Brazilian *Cerrado*'.<sup>13</sup> He also singled out two particular agricultural programmes, which the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) and other institutions have

been implementing in Brazil: the More Food programme and the Food Acquisition programme.

The More Food Africa programme aims to increase agricultural productivity and food security in Africa by improving access to technology. This MDA-led programme adapts a similar programme implemented in Brazil, since 2008, as part of the National Programme for Strengthening Family Farming (PRONAF). It consists of a credit facility to support the acquisition of farm machinery and equipment supplied by Brazilian manufacturers, which have been intensively involved with the design of the programme, including in negotiations over pricing. It is directed at 'family farming' (or the rather different African equivalent), with lending complemented by specialised technical assistance. A total of US\$640 million was approved by CAMEX for implementation of this programme in Africa in 2011–12. Credit lines have already been negotiated with Ghana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Senegal and Kenya. Lula noted that '[Brazil] has the capacity to create in Africa the same credit policies on offer for Brazilian farmers' and added that he would like to extend the same credit line to countries 'wanting to modernize their agriculture'.<sup>14</sup>

With regard to the Food Acquisition programme, Lula emphasised that the programme has both strengthened family farming and helped developing regional markets (by ensuring 30 per cent of food procured for school feeding programmes are sourced locally), and announced the intention to implement ten similar pilot projects across Africa.<sup>15</sup> A sum of US\$2.4 million has already been committed to take the programme to five African countries: Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger and Senegal. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) are partners of what has become a trilateral cooperation programme.

### **3.2 Embrapa: the face of Brazilian cooperation in agriculture**

Embrapa is often seen as the face of Brazilian cooperation in agriculture. It is a research corporation that was established in 1973 to promote technological development in agriculture and particularly to support the development of the *Cerrado*, the vast tropical savannah of over 200 million hectares spreading

across the central regions of Brazil, whose significant agricultural potential it helped to unlock (Martha Junior and Ferreira Filho 2012; Hosono and Hongo 2012).

Embrapa has grown into a massive organisation, with a network of 47 specialised research and service provision units distributed throughout the country and specialised in products (maize and sorghum, soybean, etc.), ecological zones (*Cerrado*, semi-arid, etc.) and themes (environment, satellite monitoring, etc.) (Martha Junior and Ferreira Filho 2012). With an impressive research capacity (8,200 employees including 2,600 researchers, 50 per cent of whom have a PhD), Embrapa is today a world reference in tropical agriculture research and technology. Having played a key role in the 'miracle of the *cerrado*' (*The Economist* 2010b) it is set to take this experience into Africa.

Embrapa dominates the portfolio of cooperation projects as the source of expertise for agriculture-related issues, particularly in areas such as strengthening developing countries' research capacity and adapting Brazilian technology to these countries' agro-ecological conditions (ABC 2010b). It has its own international cooperation division, responsible for managing and coordinating technical cooperation initiatives. This unit has about 50 staff distributed across three sub-divisions: technical cooperation, 'structural projects' (see Section 3.4) and scientific cooperation. The latter is not concerned with cooperation for international development, but rather scientific exchanges (mostly with European and US institutions) with the aim of strengthening Brazil's cutting-edge scientific research.

Embrapa draws on several of its specialised research and service provision units for development cooperation in particular topics. Units whose presence seem most recurrent in technical cooperation projects include: Embrapa Horticultures, Embrapa *Cerrados*, Embrapa Tropical Agroindustry, Embrapa Meat Livestock and Embrapa Dairy Livestock.<sup>16</sup> But the range is increasing. In a single new project in one country – ProSavana in Mozambique – there are as many as 16 Embrapa units involved.<sup>17</sup>

Training courses for researchers and practitioners from partner countries are also an

important component of Embrapa's contribution to development cooperation. One-off courses are giving way to a more structured and strategic training programme coordinated by the recently established Centre for Strategic Studies and Training on Tropical Agriculture (CECAT). This includes training not only on technical agriculture subjects – from no-till planting to post-harvest – but also on agricultural economics, sociology, policy and institutions.

Embrapa's footprint in Africa has expanded over recent years, with a vigorous push from President Lula, who was enthusiastic about the research corporation's potential contribution to Africa's development. In 2006, Embrapa opened an office in Accra, Ghana, with the aim of facilitating engagement with African institutions on technical cooperation matters, although the operation was downgraded in 2011 and now focuses solely on Ghana projects. Embrapa's presence is now being strengthened elsewhere – particularly in Mozambique, where a growing portfolio of bilateral and trilateral cooperation initiatives includes the most ambitious of 'structural projects', centred on collaboration with Mozambique's national agricultural research institution (Chichava *et al.* 2013).

### **3.3 Brazil's agricultural development policy: contradiction or complementarity?**

Since the late 1990s, Brazil has had two federal government ministries with responsibility for developing the country's agriculture. The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply (MAPA) describes itself as the 'ministry for agri-business'. It advocates domestically for the interests of large-scale commercial farmers, and externally for a favourable trade regime for Brazilian agricultural commodity exports. It oversees Embrapa and a number of other key government agencies, including CONAB, the agency responsible for managing the national food reserves. MAPA has been instrumental in the promotion of the concept of 'agri-business' as a discursive frame for drawing together the interests of groups pursuing different capital-intensive forms of commercial agriculture, from ranching to rice-growing, in defence of a supportive policy framework for their activities (Sawyer 2009). It is supported in this by a powerful cross-party caucus within Congress, the *bancada ruralista*. One of its leading members, Senator Kátia Abreu, heads the Agriculture and

Livestock Confederation of Brazil (CNA), and has herself been actively engaged in promoting the expansion of Brazilian agri-business to Africa.

MDA describes itself as the 'ministry for family farming'. It oversees the land reform agency (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária, INCRA), leads on the national 'Citizenship Territories' strategy for delivering integrated rural and social development in Brazil's poorest regions, and runs a number of programmes designed to ensure the provision of technical support and credit for 'family farmers', under the umbrella of PRONAF. PRONAF was established back in the 1990s, before the creation of MDA, as the main policy framework for supporting family farming. The programme was initially geared towards small farms with intermediary or high levels of capital. But the mobilisation of rural social movements around the programme has gradually pushed it towards supporting the smallest and most disadvantaged farmers' groups, including women farmers (Favareto 2006). Today, the family farming policy domain is structured around different organisations representing distinct social groupings within the broad family farm category. Landless rural workers are represented by the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST), which influences INCRA and agrarian reform policies. Poor farmers are represented by workers' unions such as the National Federation of Workers in Family Farming (FETRAF) and, especially, the National Agricultural Workers' Federation (CONTAG), that in turn influence parts of MDA. Finally, the wealthiest and relatively more capitalised family farmers are closer to organisations such as the CNA, through which they channel their demands for cutting-edge technology and access to high-value markets.

The penetration of the two different ministries by distinct and often mutually antagonistic social and political forces has, in simplified terms, translated into a 'two-headed' polarised structure and within Brazil entrenched political divisions have prevented the emergence of a policy framework directed at supporting the very significant contingent of producers who bridge the worlds of 'agri-business' and 'family farming'. The key questions arising are whether such a polarised structure is reflected in development cooperation projects and what implications this may have for beneficiary countries.



Other government institutions with a strong presence are the Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Enterprises (EMATER), providers of agricultural extension services at the state level, and the National Rural Learning Service (SENAR), a parastatal linked to the CNA that specialises in rural technical training. Some of these institutions have their own international cooperation units.

Besides governmental institutions, some NGOs and social movement organisations are being brought into the Brazilian cooperation framework, and the General Secretariat of the Presidency has played an active role in engaging these actors in official cooperation arrangements. A project aiming to recover and preserve native seeds in Mozambique and South Africa, *Implantação de Bancos Comunitários de Sementes Crioulas em Áreas de Agricultura Familiar*, draws on the experience of two Brazilian social movement organisations in the field, the Women Farmers' Movement and the Popular Peasant Movement, alongside the Brazilian Institute for Economic and Social Analysis (IBASE), a well-respected social policy analysis and advocacy NGO. This initiative aims to connect Brazilian rural civil society and farmers' organisations with their equivalents in Africa, building on links already established through networks such as *Via Campesina*. The engagement of the General Secretariat of the Presidency reflects the extension into international development cooperation of a particular Brazilian dynamic of state 'institutional hosting' of social movements that has intensified since the Workers' Party (PT) arrived in national office in 2002. This form of support involves the creation of institutionalised spaces for dialogue with even the most radical of movements, such as the MST, linked to the channelling of resources to movement leaders and allies and the incorporation into government policy of movement discourses and practices by sympathisers positioned inside the state (Cornwall *et al.* 2008).

### **3.4 Policy incoherence or demand-driven flexibility?**

Despite all this activity and the multiple institutions involved, there is no explicitly formulated policy for Brazilian cooperation in agriculture. Beyond the general guiding principles, there is no official line on what the policy objectives and approach are for

cooperation in agriculture – or indeed any other sector or theme. The common justification for this gap is the 'demand-driven' and 'non-interference' attributes of cooperation, which are claimed to require entering cooperation agreements without pre-set agendas. The 'no-policy' policy could be interpreted, however, as the result of institutional segmentation of cooperation in general and, for the agriculture sector in particular, the fragmented nature of Brazil's agricultural governance.

The fragmentation of the institutional map reflects to some extent the nature of Brazilian technical cooperation. Despite over 20 institutions being actively involved in agriculture cooperation, there is virtually no institutional direction or coordination on the content of interventions, as ABC's role is essentially confined to operational coordination, and MRE is concerned with higher-level diplomatic issues. What emerges is a cooperation framework that lacks a unified or coherent policy direction and in practice is shaped by the agendas, experiences and indeed imaginaries of the various institutions and individuals, from presidential visions to the practices of those delivering technical cooperation on the ground. The unstructured institutional basis for engagement allows for diversity to emerge, and change to occur, often in an *ad hoc* fashion.

In recent years, changes in the nature of Brazilian cooperation have indeed been taking place, reflecting the increasing size of operations as well as accumulation of expertise. On the one hand, one-off small-scale technical cooperation projects are progressively giving way to larger projects, with a longer time horizon, focused on strengthening capacities of local institutions and with more explicit concern for impact and sustainability. Such projects are referred to as 'structural projects' (ABC 2011). Cotton 4 was the first of this kind.

The nature of technical cooperation is also expanding beyond simpler forms of assistance (such as training, study visits and workshops) by gradually focusing on the adaptation of successful Brazilian policies to the African context. This was already happening in other sectors, an example being *Bolsa Família*. In agriculture, the 2010 *Diálogo Brasil-África* event marked the beginning of this shift and introduced the

adaptation of Brazilian agricultural policies into the technical cooperation portfolio. Examples of this include the More Food Africa and Food Acquisition programmes.

Furthermore, new modalities of cooperation are also being introduced alongside technical cooperation, as illustrated by More Food Africa, which combines conventional technical assistance in agriculture with a credit facility directed to African farmers. Such a modality blending approach may be a reflection of the mixed motivations behind Brazilian cooperation, which appears to be increasingly showing signs of mingling solidarity-driven and business-driven agendas.

Finally, triangular cooperation is adding scale and visibility to Brazilian technical cooperation projects. ProSavana, currently the largest project in the agriculture portfolio, is the product of a trilateral cooperation agreement between Brazil, Japan and Mozambique. The Food Acquisition programme is another example of a trilateral partnership, between Brazil, the FAO, the WFP and five African countries. The USA is also a key partner in trilateral agricultural cooperation, particularly in Mozambique.

#### **4 Emerging features of the Brazil–Africa encounter**

What then are the emerging features of the Brazil–Africa encounter, as framed by these development cooperation efforts? What are the political drivers, what are the narratives and social imaginaries being deployed, and what are the impacts and consequences on the ground? Five themes emerge.

##### **4.1 The confluence of altruistic and self-interested motivations**

Development cooperation in Brazil is explicitly an instrument of foreign policy (Costa Vaz and Inoue 2007) and, therefore, the expression of geopolitical strategies that are bound to include a range of self-interested objectives (Lima and Hirst 2006). This is hardly different to any other country with an international development programme, although the degree to which countries are forthright about the link between charity and self-interest is somewhat variable. Brazil claims, however, that its cooperation approach is guided by the principle of ‘solidarity diplomacy’, which brings together elements of

altruism (supporting those in need) and reciprocity (forging mutually beneficial partnerships) in a horizontal relationship between southern peers. The combination of altruistic and self-interested drives in Brazilian cooperation mirrors competing perspectives within Brazil with regard to international relations and the balance between those perspectives is likely to be changing as Lula’s emphatic ‘solidarity diplomacy’ is giving way to Rousseff’s more business-oriented approach.

The narrative of solidarity fits well with the roots and mandate of the lead party of the ruling coalition – the PT – whose foreign policy intellectuals were instrumental in giving initial impetus to Lula’s policy of reaching out to Africa. It also fits with objectives concerning geopolitics and the quest for support, particularly from non-OECD countries, for greater clout in global politics and the governance of international bodies in particular. The pragmatic impulse responds to the drive of a growing economy like Brazil to secure access to raw materials, markets and profitable deals for its burgeoning businesses. Africa, with its generous resource endowments and relative political openness to engagement by a rising power with no apparent colonial baggage, represents an increasingly attractive destination for Brazilian traders and investors.

Such multiple motives are evident in agricultural cooperation where, on the one hand, there is an agenda focused on assisting countries that are seeking to achieve food sovereignty and to strengthen their smallholder agriculture (often promoted by PT-affiliated government officials with links to Brazilian social movements and their international networks, such as *Via Campesina*) and, on the other hand, commercial interests which are shaping the nature of assistance. More Food Africa is an example of confluence of both motivations. The programme aims to address productivity and food insecurity constraints, including in newly resettled agricultural land in Zimbabwe that has been marginalised by traditional donors (Mukwereza 2013). But the programme is also serving the interests of Brazilian industry, being seen as an ‘industrial policy’ designed to ensure a ‘steadily increasing demand’ for the Brazilian farm machinery sector (Patriota and Pierri 2013: 28). ProSavana is another example of convergence of interests in that alongside the technical

cooperation component, focused on strengthening research and extension, the programme is also helping to steer private investment from Brazil (and Japan) into Mozambique's Nacala Corridor via the recently launched Nacala Fund (Chichava *et al.* 2013).

These contradictions bring tensions. Thus the discourse of ideological solidarity that animates the MDA's More Food Africa programme may be challenged by the reality of directing tied aid and the need to ensure that loans are repaid. The narrative of purely technical engagement that Embrapa has sustained in ProSavana will become harder to maintain once large numbers of Brazilian investors start arriving in the Nacala Corridor. The outcome of contestations over which motivations should be given precedence will inevitably reflect the relative power and influence of the different groups – whether diplomats, activists or investors – who have aligned themselves with them. This, in turn, will reflect wider political economy dynamics within Brazil as this historically inward-looking country adjusts to the broadening and deepening of its global engagements.

#### **4.2 Narratives of agricultural development: dichotomy or pluralism?**

Brazil's cooperation policy for the sector is what emerges from the sum of the various initiatives, programmes and projects being carried out by a range of institutions and people, generally guided by a broadly defined code of conduct. As discussed, contrasting narratives on agriculture development emerge, reflecting competing visions of development. In particular, there is a tension between a model of agricultural development prioritising smallholder production systems and a model driven essentially by capital-intensive and large-scale commercial farming interests. Thus, the cooperation programme spearheaded by MDA is tightly associated with the former model, whereas most (though by no means all) of Embrapa's cooperation activities tend to be associated with the latter.

Such competing visions mirror Brazil's complex agrarian political economy. Whether they are a sign of a 'Gramscian struggle for hegemony'<sup>18</sup> or of a 'pluralistic model'<sup>19</sup> is a matter of interpretation. The former perspective seems to highlight the dichotomy and inconsistencies between two conceptually and ideologically

opposing models of development, reflected in agricultural policy at the national and international levels. The latter emphasises a pragmatic division of labour that has arguably allowed for the development of complementary policies supporting both family farming and agribusiness. It also emphasises the positive diversity of Brazil's agricultural landscape, where 'small, medium and large farmers work together in an environment conducive to innovation'.<sup>20</sup> In the words of President Lula: 'Here in Brazil the government has to finance both agribusiness and family agriculture and we are proud to do this because we understand the importance both sectors have in Brazilian economy.'<sup>21</sup>

#### **4.3 Knowledge exchange: first-hand experience and the limits of the technocratic approach**

One distinctive attribute of Brazilian technical cooperation is the direct deployment of expertise without intermediaries. Brazilian institutions (governmental or not) typically make use of their own staff to transfer into partner countries the knowledge and policies with which they have been experimenting within Brazil. Brazilian 'development workers' have first-hand experience with the issues on which development cooperation projects focus. For example, in an ongoing food security research project in Mozambique, called ProAlimentos, researchers from specialist Embrapa centres in Brazil are working directly in the field with researchers from the Mozambican Agrarian Research Institute testing suitable horticulture varieties for the Maputo greenbelt (Chichava *et al.* 2013). Likewise, staff from the MDA are working directly with their counterparts in several African countries to adapt Brazil's More Food programme to local conditions. Consultants are occasionally contracted, but most of the work is typically carried out directly by Brazilian technocrats. The advantages of such an approach are obvious, and in fact it is an aspect that recipients frequently praise about Brazilian cooperation (Cabral *et al.* forthcoming). But there are some caveats.

While Brazilian 'development workers' are experts in their own trade, they are not typically (though there are exceptions) well acquainted with Africa and the challenges of development in African contexts. They tend to operate as groups of single-sector specialists, without the opportunities for developing a broader

understanding of local realities that can come from involving different disciplinary perspectives. Embrapa researchers may have the skills to become world-class authorities on African plant genetics and soil structures, but establishing successful and sustainable research programmes will require not only good crop science but also a good grasp of the functioning of local institutions and the political dynamics of development.

The idea that development can be achieved through technical fixes has a long history, punctuated by repeated failures in many fields, not least that of African agriculture. Brazilian imaginaries of agricultural development, shaped by experiences such as the transformation of the *Cerrado*, are dominated by an inflated optimism about the power of technological modernisation that sometimes borders on techno-utopianism (Shankland *et al.* 2012).

#### 4.4 Discourses of historical and cultural affinity

Historical and cultural affinities are often claimed to provide a particularly favourable underpinning for cooperation between Brazil and African countries. The affinities discourse was particularly strong in Lula's administration. For example, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Celso Amorim, noted that: 'Brazil and Africa are connected by inseparable historical, cultural and demographic bonds' (ABC 2010a: 93). Recently, at a BNDES-sponsored event on investing in Africa, former President Lula put the Brazil–Africa relationship in the following terms: 'We are natural partners, we are old friends, we will always be brothers... Gone is the time when the Atlantic separated us. It brings us together into a single border. We are neighbours that bathe in the same waters.'<sup>22</sup>

But despite historical bonds and the agroecological similarities, the much-claimed affinities between Brazil and Africa are largely rhetorical. On the one hand, differences between Brazil and most African countries, whether economic, political or sociological, are not trivial. Brazil has almost a century of experience with channelling the proceeds from agricultural commodity export booms into industrial and service-sector development and fostering the growth of an indigenous bourgeoisie, an experience denied to Africa by the continent's much later decolonisation. African countries

have also had fewer opportunities to innovate at scale, given its fragmentation into smaller polities than 'continental' Brazil.

Brazil's longstanding ties with some countries arise from a Portuguese colonial past in which Brazil and Africa were at opposite ends of the slave trade. Many intellectuals of the Brazilian Left draw analogies between resistance to the military dictatorship in Brazil from 1964–85 and the roughly contemporaneous anti-colonial struggles in Africa, and the MRE corps includes a strong contingent of diplomats whose worldview was forged during the golden age of anti-colonial solidarity (Dávila 2011). Yet the struggles in Brazil and Africa were very different in nature, as were the political systems that arose from Brazilian democratisation and African decolonisation.

On the other hand, gaps in knowledge about the other side of the partnership remain deep across the Atlantic. On the African side, the myth of Brazil's successful agricultural transformation seems strong and a particular model of agricultural development fills the dominant imaginary of prosperity, with insufficient understanding of the social and environmental costs associated with that model (FAC 2010). African elites attracted by the opportunities for profitable association with Brazilian agribusiness have few incentives to question this myth. In general, the main experience of Brazilian agricultural development that African policymakers and practitioners have is the version presented to them during courses and study tours; the more critical perspectives developed by the growing numbers of African students at Brazilian universities have as yet found few opportunities to engage with the official narratives.<sup>23</sup>

On the Brazilian side, the scope for developing a more nuanced understanding of African realities is constrained by several factors. One is how recent and limited the physical presence of Brazilian cooperation is. Furthermore, there is a limited pool of expertise on which to draw, given that Brazilian academic research and teaching on contemporary African politics and society is still limited. There is also limited influence of Brazilian Afro-descendants, the social group with, arguably, the closest cultural kinship with the continent (or at least parts of it), in formal

Brazilian institutions. The potential role of Afro-descendants as brokers in the Brazil–Africa knowledge encounter remains poorly explored. Meanwhile, the Brazilian public’s perceptions of the continent continue to be shaped by representations in the media and the education system that mix idealised ‘*Mama África*’ narratives of Afro-Brazilian history with negative stereotypical representations of contemporary Africa (Oliva 2009).

#### **4.5 The role of civil society: reproducing Brazil’s state–society dynamics**

In the Brazilian context, civil society and social movements have played a major role in public policymaking. Can the development cooperation model, currently confined to government-to-government relations, involve greater participation of Brazilian civil society?

The General Secretariat of the Presidency has been actively engaging Brazilian social movements in government-led development cooperation, including particular projects and the creation of a civil society forum for the Community of Lusophone Countries (CPLP) to promote civil society dialogue.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Brazilian civil society is itself becoming more informed, organised and vocal around the subject of international development.<sup>25</sup>

Within Brazil, the most influential civil society groups are those with historic links to social movements, and they have generally managed to maintain a critical distance in their policy engagements even as the process of ‘institutional hosting’ within structures such as the MDA brings them politically closer to government and as their dependence on state funding grows. However, there is no guarantee that this critical distance will be maintained in the international arena, in the absence of the highly mobilised Brazilian grassroots constituencies who play a key role in resisting the cooptation of civil society representatives by the state.

Some Brazilian NGOs and social movement organisations are already engaging with African civil society groups. This is happening through exchanges sponsored by international NGOs and networks such as *Via Campesina*, which has been particularly present in Mozambique supporting local concerns over the dangers of ProSavana reproducing in Mozambique the social and

environmental costs of Brazil’s *Cerrado* transformation (Chichava *et al.* 2013). It is also happening through the official cooperation channels facilitated by the General Secretariat of the Presidency. These engagements are underpinned by a particular Brazilian understanding of the role of civil society, which combines a critical posture with a premise of symbolic equality and an assumption that the state is permeable to development policies and practices originating in civil society. How applicable such models are in the African context remains an open question.

#### **5 Conclusion**

The Brazil–Africa encounter, as being played out in agricultural development, is rapidly evolving, being framed by each of these themes. Each displays distinct tensions, reflecting different political dynamics, being played out in the domestic sphere in Brazil and within cooperation activities in Africa. For all the emphasis placed on the potential of ‘mutual benefit’ in the philosophy of South–South cooperation, the reality beyond the rhetoric is more complex. Brazil has recently been taking a more self-interested approach. While Lula da Silva insisted that cooperation with Africa was driven by altruistic motivations and a sense of responsibility towards the continent, President Rousseff is revealing a more pragmatic attitude – and since leaving the presidency Lula himself has become increasingly associated with efforts to encourage Brazilian private investment in Africa.

With the emphasis of Brazilian agricultural development cooperation in Africa currently placed so strongly on productivity and technological modernisation, with the direct deployment of Brazilian expertise, alternative framings from within Brazil’s own agrarian and social policy debates have been left behind. Will the coexistence of ‘family farming’ and ‘agri-business’ models in Brazilian agricultural cooperation help to address the long-running debates on small-versus-large production systems in Africa in a holistic way – or will it, instead, help to replicate a particular dualistic agrarian structure and thereby accentuate inequalities of power and access in Africa? Brazilian actors associated with alternative framings, and particularly the focus on ‘family farming’ – from the MST to the agroecology movement – are beginning to mobilise, questioning dominant

development cooperation models within Brazil, reaching out to build alliances with civil society groups in Africa.

Ultimately, however, the outcomes of Brazil's emergence as a major force in African agriculture will be shaped not only by the contestations among Brazilian actors over which agricultural development model to privilege, but above all by the ways in which African

governments, farmers, entrepreneurs and civil society activists absorb and shape the application of the models on offer. It is these encounters – between knowledge framings, diverse technical and political actors and political interests – that will, in the end, determine the contours of the Brazil–Africa engagement. As this article has shown, this is currently evolving fast and is intensely contested.

## Notes

- 1 Sources are IPEA and ABC (2010) for the lower figure and *The Economist* (2010a) for the higher figure.
- 2 Lula's first visit to Africa, in 2003, was marked by speeches emphasising Brazil's commitment to 'pay its historic debt to the continent' (see [http://veja.abril.com.br/121103/p\\_052.html](http://veja.abril.com.br/121103/p_052.html)). In 2005, Lula marked a visit to Senegal by making a formal apology for Brazil's role in the slave trade, while also emphasising Brazil's desire to strengthen its diplomatic and economic engagement with Africa, [www.valor.com.br/arquivo/456691/lula-pede-perdao-para-reforçar-opcao-pela-africa](http://www.valor.com.br/arquivo/456691/lula-pede-perdao-para-reforçar-opcao-pela-africa) (accessed 27 March 2013).
- 3 Interview with ABC official, March 2012.
- 4 A longer version of this article is published as Cabral and Shankland (2013) and available at: [www.future-agricultures.org/research/cbaa/7817-china-and-brazil-in-africa-new-papers#.UUG\\_KdbwAo](http://www.future-agricultures.org/research/cbaa/7817-china-and-brazil-in-africa-new-papers#.UUG_KdbwAo). Details on the international seminar can be found at [www.future-agricultures.org/events/south-south-cooperation](http://www.future-agricultures.org/events/south-south-cooperation) (accessed 27 March 2013).
- 5 See, for example, [www.valor.com.br/arquivo/388309/ministro-diz-que-acordos-com-africa-serao-bons-tambem-para-o-brasil](http://www.valor.com.br/arquivo/388309/ministro-diz-que-acordos-com-africa-serao-bons-tambem-para-o-brasil) (accessed 27 March 2013).
- 6 Interview in *Folha de São Paulo*, 19 November 2003.
- 7 From 17 million Brazilian Reais (US\$10 million) in 2008, to 52 million Brazilian Reais (US\$30 million) in 2010 (Cabral and Weinstock 2010).
- 8 See <http://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/noticia/2012-10-01/presidente-da-embrapa-anuncia-saida-do-cargo> (accessed 27 March 2013).
- 9 'Dilma revê estratégia para a África', *Valor Econômico*, 8 November 2011 edition.
- 10 President Dilma has so far been to Africa twice and visited five countries: South Africa and Equatorial Guinea, to participate in high-level events, and Angola, Nigeria and Mozambique for advancing economic interests.
- 11 These are: Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and S. Tomé and Príncipe.
- 12 The 'Diálogo Brasil–África em Segurança Alimentar, Combate à Fome e Desenvolvimento Rural' ('Brazil–Africa Dialogue on Food Security, the Fight Against Hunger and Rural Development') was held on 10–12 May 2010 in Brazil's capital, Brasília.
- 13 President Lula's opening speech at the 'Diálogo Brasil–África em Segurança Alimentar, Combate à Fome e Desenvolvimento Rural', [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgN4qtLLqGk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgN4qtLLqGk) (minutes 33–34), (accessed 27 March 2013).
- 14 *Ibid.* (minutes 41–42).
- 15 *Ibid.* (minutes 43–44).
- 16 Interview with Embrapa, 13 October 2011.
- 17 Interview with JICA office in Brasília, 10 October 2011.
- 18 Interview with Head of International Development at MDA, October 2011.
- 19 Interview with Embrapa representative in Mozambique, July 2012.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 President Lula's opening speech at the 'Diálogo Brasil–África em Segurança Alimentar, Combate à Fome e Desenvolvimento Rural', [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgN4qtLLqGk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgN4qtLLqGk) (minutes 39–40), (accessed 27 March 2013).
- 22 [www.institutolula.org/em-seminario-no-rio-lula-elogia-iniciativa-africana-de-fomento-do-crescimento/#.UPZ64x1g9Ao](http://www.institutolula.org/em-seminario-no-rio-lula-elogia-iniciativa-africana-de-fomento-do-crescimento/#.UPZ64x1g9Ao) (accessed 27 March 2013).
- 23 Renato Athias, personal communication, 13 July 2012.
- 24 The CPLP comprises the five Portuguese-speaking African countries, Brazil, East Timor and Portugal.
- 25 *Articulação SUL* is one example of this trend: [www.cebrap.org.br/v2/areas/view/35](http://www.cebrap.org.br/v2/areas/view/35) (accessed 27 March 2013).

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