

# Policy Brief

| *Wider Atlantic Program* |

**In Brief:** Brazil is in a good position to serve as a bridge to Africa and to reignite more cooperation between both sides of the South Atlantic. Brazil has increased its presence in Africa in recent years in terms of trade, investment, development cooperation, and political alliances with the goal to secure a greater say for the global South in the new world order that has been under construction since the end of the Cold War. This has been pursued through financial support and proactive economic diplomacy. A global Brazil requires a robust partnership with Africa.

## Brazil and Africa: Historic Relations and Future Opportunities

by Marcus Vinicius de Freitas

### Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is likely to see deeper ties between Brazil and African countries. Current economic growth trends show an African continent that will converge with Brazil on economic development and political stability. The negative inheritance of colonial days is slowly fading and the long-term potential of African nations will attract even more investments and trade relations. The challenges of today will represent opportunities tomorrow as good governance leads to improved economic performance and political stability.

Brazil is in a good position to serve as a bridge to Africa and to reignite more cooperation between both sides of the South Atlantic. From the colonial days until now, Brazilian and various African histories have been closely linked. Over the last few years, however, with the increase in African gross domestic products, Brazil has expanded its economic presence on the continent. Exports have grown and many Brazilian companies have been establishing a presence, increasing their market share and creating an ever-growing intra-industry and bilateral trade. More intensive growth has taken place in Portuguese-speaking Africa, as a natural result of colonial ties and an almost forgotten history of interaction in the past. But despite the long history, there is much room

to improve Brazil's relationships with its partners in Africa. Important steps have been taken over the last few decades to increase interaction and to secure an ever growing partnership of equals in business, trade, and multilateral action. This interaction is essential for Brazil as the country intensifies its South-South diplomacy in order to become a global player with an effective voice in the governance of international institutions, with a new outlook on the international order that was built after World War II.

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### Historical Interaction

Around 11 million black Africans were forcibly brought to the American continents during the slave trade period.<sup>1</sup> Brazil received approximately 4 million,<sup>2</sup> making it the country with the most slaves in the world. This imported workforce was of great importance for Brazilian economic growth, particularly with regards to the labor-intensive sugarcane cycle given that there were not enough Portuguese people to colonize the new land. Estimates

show that for every Portuguese person who migrated to Brazil, there were four people from Africa (between 1500 and 1850 approximately 1.3 million Portuguese migrated to Brazil).<sup>3</sup> This resulted in Brazil becoming a melting pot. Social inequality, one of Brazil's long-standing problems, has been the direct result of slavery and is closely connected to the end of the sugarcane commodity cycle and the failure to adapt and retrain the former slave workforce.

During the slavery period, there was also substantial exchange of black populations to and from Brazil. As Portugal expanded its dominions in Africa, large communities of African-Brazilians were moved back to the continent — the so-called *Agudás* in Benin, *Amaros* in Togo and Nigeria, and *Tabom* in Ghana<sup>4</sup> — with some of them playing important roles in the emancipation movements of many African nations, such as Guinea. The possibility of a union between Brazil and the other Portuguese colonies was considered so high that the 1825 Friendship and Alliance Treaty between Brazil and Portugal recognizing Brazilian independence had a specific clause in which Brazil committed not to accept any proposals by Portuguese colonies to become part of the Brazilian Empire. This really meant African colonies.

As the slave trade faded and slavery finally ended on May 13, 1888, Brazil distanced itself from Africa, and Brazilian society later on carried out a “whitening process” of its racial composition through policies favoring the entrance of immigrants from Europe.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the end of the slave trade and the shift toward greater coffee production created the need for a more skilled workforce. A change in Brazilian

1 David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, and David Richardson, “O Volume do Tráfico Transatlântico de Escravos: Uma Reavaliação com Referência Particular à Contribuição Portuguesa/Brasileira” [The Volume of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reevaluation with Particular Reference to the Portuguese/Brazilian Contribution], *Afro-Ásia*, vol. 24, no.1 (2000).

2 Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), *Estatísticas Históricas do Brasil: Séries Econômicas, Demográficas e Sociais de 1500 a 1988* [Historical Statistics of Brazil: Economic, Demographic, and Social Series from 1500 to 1988], 2ª Edição Revisada e Atualizada do v.3 de Séries Estatísticas Retrospectivas (Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 1990).

3 IBGE Centro de Documentação e Disseminação de Informações, *Brasil: 500 Anos de Povoamento* [Brazil: 500 Years of Population], (Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2007).

4 Eurídice Figueiredo, “Os Brasileiros Retornados à África” [The Brazilians that Returned to Africa], *Cadernos de Letras da UFF, Dossiê Diálogos Interamericanos*, No. 38 (2009): 51-70.

5 Decree Law 7,967 of August 27, 1945, affirmed that “in the admission of immigrants, the need to preserve and develop, in the ethnic composition of the population, the more convenient features of their European ancestry shall be considered.”

policy was made to attract immigrants in order to occupy empty spaces in Brazilian territory, particularly along its southern border, and to supply a cheaper and more abundant workforce to replace slave labor, since coffee plantations required a retooling of the available workforce and timing required new skills that were not readily available in the market. Thus, labor started being imported from countries like Italy, Germany, and later on Japan. Until 1929, around 4.5 million Europeans migrated to Brazil coming mostly from Italy (1,485,000); Portugal (1,321,000); Spain (583,000); and Germany (223,000). Japanese immigration reached 86,000 during that period.<sup>6</sup> There was also a major migration movement in another direction, with many African descendants returning to their place of origin. Brazilian diplomatic efforts meanwhile concentrated on finalizing border negotiations in South America and domestic priorities. Until the end of the 1950s, Africa was of little concern for Brazil. Domestic turmoil, the civilian dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas, and the domestic process of industrialization and growth consumed the political agenda, and Brazil pursued an isolationist policy.

It was only during the governments of Jânio Quadros and João Goulart (1961-64), a period in which Brazil adopted a more independent foreign policy, that the African Division was created within the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, also known as Itamaraty. Brazil began more concerted and open support for the self-determination of African peoples. In 1961, Brazil opened embassies in Accra and Tunis, and consulates in Luanda, Maputo, Nairobi, and Salisbury (renamed Harare in 1982). During his presidency, Jânio Quadros even appointed the first African-Brazilian Ambassador, Raymundo de Souza Dantas, to serve in Ghana in 1961. Quadros, who was a firm supporter of self-determination, recognized that Brazil and African countries shared common aspirations, particularly

with regard to domestic development. Brazil shifted its behavior, with a growing increase in support for decolonization in Africa.

This increase in bilateral relationships was interrupted after the 1964 military coup in Brazil. When the military took over, it revised Brazilian foreign policy, adapting it to reflect more of a Cold War perspective of the world. At the time, the Brazilian political establishment perceived African liberation movements as an attempt to increase the communist presence in Africa, more of an ideological than an emancipation movement. Brazil also lined up in support of the policies carried out by Portugal's dictator, António de Oliveira Salazar, with regard to Angola and Mozambique, whereby both were to remain part

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of the Portuguese Republic. Brazil even opposed independence movements at the United Nations' General Assembly, since supporting such movements would place Brazil in opposition to Portugal and their historical ties. Though Brazil supported self-determination in principle, Itamaraty prioritized ties with Portugal. The Friendship Treaty between Brazil and Portugal in 1953 limited the autonomy of Brazilian foreign policy since Brazil committed not to interfere in Portuguese domestic policies. The African colonies were considered a matter of domestic policy.

### The 1970s and 1980s: Brazil Shifts Its Approach toward Africa

In the 1970s, during the Medici and Geisel administrations, things started to change. In 1972, Brazilian Foreign Minister Mario Gibson

<sup>6</sup> Lucio Kreutz, *Magistério e Imigração Alemã: O Professor Paroquial Católico Teuto-brasileiro do Rio Grande do Sul no Movimento da Restauração* [Teaching and German Immigration: The German-Brazilian Catholic Parish Professor from Rio Grande do Sul in the Restoration Movement] (São Paulo: Pontifícia Universidade de São Paulo, 1985).

Barbosa visited nine African countries to secure oil supplies. At the time, Brazil was going through its “Economic Miracle” period when the economy was growing rapidly. This opportunity helped boost Brazilian exports of manufactured goods to African countries and also the establishment of the first Brazilian companies on the African continent. The visit produced joint declarations in areas such as strengthening the United Nations, technology transfer, condemnation of protectionism, and support for the self-determination of nations, legal equality among states, and a repudiation of all sorts of racial, social, and cultural discrimination, as well as support for expansion of the territorial sea of many countries.

Brazil was the first country to recognize the independence of Guinea Bissau on July 16, 1974.

The Revolução dos Cravos (Carnation Revolution) in Portugal on April 25, 1974, opened up a new possibility for Brazil to change its position regarding the independence movements in Africa without Portuguese constraint. Additionally, the oil crises of the 1970s led Brazil to seek new markets for its young industrial sector. As a result of this new pragmatism, Brazil was the first country to recognize the independence of Guinea Bissau on July 16, 1974, even before the negotiations between Portugal and Guinea Bissau were completed. More embassies also followed in Mozambique, Gabon, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cape Verde, São Tomé & Príncipe, Upper Volta (renamed Burkina Faso in 1984), and Lesotho. At this time, Brazil also started pursuing a greater role in the South Atlantic, seeking to convince the international community that the country should act as its gatekeeper against foreign interference, and that Brazil

would be solely responsible for military oversight of the region. It was the Cold War period, and this claim was not welcomed by the United States and Europe.

Nigeria and Angola both became important trading partners for Brazil, with Brazil exporting industrialized products and importing oil. Brazilian exports to Nigeria, for instance, went from \$3 million in 1973 to \$115 million in 1977. Half of Brazil’s trade in this period was done with Nigeria. North Africa started to grow in importance also in the 1970s, with Brazilian exports growing from \$50 million in 1972 to \$300 million in 1980.<sup>7</sup> The net result in Brazil-Africa relations during Brazil’s military period was positive. By 1984, the number of Brazilian embassies in Africa had gone from 12 in 1974 to 21, and Africa had become a major market for Brazilian services and goods.

As democracy was reinstated in Brazil after 1985, the country continued its trade ties with African nations, although with less emphasis, since there was a sense that Brazil should consolidate its relationships with the United States and the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay). However, the Brazilian economy suffered tremendously in the 1980s from its foreign debt. The so-called “lost decade” resulted in Brazil losing ground and influence in Africa, with a drastic reduction in Brazilian exports to the continent. Brazil also had a weaker presence on the international scene.

Africa returned to the Brazilian agenda when the idea for the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) started gaining traction and with the creation of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS) in 1986. Both were given greater importance as a result of Brazil’s quest for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and to build a stronger communication channel for the Portuguese-speaking countries. Brazil also became

<sup>7</sup> Luís Fernando Ligiero, *A Autonomia da Política Externa Brasileira [The Autonomy of Brazilian Foreign Policy]* (Brasília: Fundação Alexandre Gusmão, 2001).

more engaged in peacekeeping missions in many African countries. This approach remained basically the same until the ascension of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to the presidency of Brazil in 2003.

### Lula and Africa's Place in His Multilateral Vision

Lula started a historic visit to the continent on November 2, 2003, to kick off a push for closer ties between Brazil and African nations. During his tour, Lula visited São Tomé & Príncipe, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, and Namibia. This trip, full of symbolism, started in São Tomé & Príncipe, an island nation of 190,000 inhabitants, which was one of the exit doors for slaves taken to Brazil. Lula wanted to demonstrate that Brazil had a moral duty to Africa and that its historical debt should be paid. He also wanted to diversify foreign trade partnerships, open new investment frontiers, and gain greater influence in international organizations. This last aspect proved particularly fruitful with the election of José Graziano to command the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in 2012 and Roberto Azevêdo as director general of the World Trade Organization in 2013.

Under Lula, Brazil adopted a more aggressive position in Africa, with greater emphasis on international equilibrium and multilateralism. He was a firm believer in cooperation in the Global South and sought to promote greater and more intensive diplomatic interaction at the bilateral and multilateral levels in order to intensify economic, cultural, and technological exchange and to increase Brazil's influence and presence at the global level. Brazil also further increased its diplomatic presence, including by opening additional embassies on the continent. Lula's initiative was followed by an increase in private sector investments and debt forgiveness for smaller countries. The idea was to showcase Brazil as an example of a Global South country mostly concerned with social issues, in contrast with nations like China, India, and former colonial powers.

African countries became more attractive markets due to the favorable economic results obtained from the growing demand for commodities and the growth of emerging countries in Africa and elsewhere. During the Lula administration, Brazilian trade with Africa went from \$6 billion in 2003 to \$25.6 billion in 2012.<sup>8</sup> A greater proportion of Brazilian exports went to Africa, with a particular concentration on Egypt, South Africa, Angola, Nigeria, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Ghana, Tunisia, and Senegal. Public funding played an essential role to support Brazilian exports to African countries. At the same time, Brazilian foreign direct investment grew exponentially, especially in areas such as construction and engineering. More than 500 Brazilian companies have set up a presence various African countries. Bank of Brazil (Banco do Brasil) and the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) have issued more than \$4 billion in export credits. Brazilian investments have concentrated mostly in mining, civilian construction, small and medium enterprises, and franchising.

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The political side of the relationship has also grown. Frequent presidential visits, summits, and high-level conferences have taken place to forge closer ties between Brazil and African countries. The Brazilian push for the inclusion of South Africa as a part of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) as well as the IBSA Dialogue Forum (bringing together India, Brazil, and South Africa) have

<sup>8</sup> Brazilian Foreign Trade Secretariat (SECEX), "Balança Comercial Brasileira Dados Consolidados" [Brazilian Trade Balance Consolidated Data], (Brasília: Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, 2011).

represented important assets for galvanizing South-South Cooperation, with closer coordination on global issues between South America and Africa. The IBSA tripartite forum has been positive for convergence on issues of defense, business, non-governmental organizations, and greater academic interaction by providing means and opportunities for sharing knowledge and practical experiences.

### Possibilities Ahead

Brazil would benefit from diversifying the nature of its imports from African countries, which are concentrated in oil. African countries have also been a significant market for Brazilian manufactured products. After years of political turmoil, insecurity, and economic crises, capitalism is taking hold in many African countries, making it a new investment frontier. On economic, political, and security questions, there are many areas where African interests coincide with a global Brazil.

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### Global Governance

Brazil has insisted on the need to adjust and strengthen the world's institutional framework, particularly the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, to reflect a post-Cold War period and the emergence of new players. Brazil and African countries should work together to alter the governance of these international institutions. If Brazil does not get a permanent seat on the UNSC, it should, however, stand with Africa to support the claim of a permanent

African presence on the UNSC. Africa is the continent that has gone through the most transformation over the last 70 years and it should have a place at the world table with equal powers and rights. A global order that is not representative of all the world's people in its design is doomed to failure.

### Trade and Investment

Brazil's trade policy has been an important element of its global agenda since the 1990s, when the Brazilian economy opened up and a more liberal approach to free markets took hold. This is a particular result from Brazil's increased competitiveness in agricultural products and commodities. The Brazilian government has placed greater emphasis in its international negotiations on fixing distortions in trade practices for agricultural goods and creating more equitable conditions for market access.

Brazilian exports to Africa, however, have been falling since 2011, when they peaked at \$12.224 billion.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, recent devaluations of the Brazilian currency may affect Brazilian exports by making its goods more competitive. There are many opportunities for Brazil to keep exporting manufactured products to the continent. However, Brazil will need to compete more intensively with China, its BRICS partner, in providing what African countries currently need. One of the main obstacles to increasing Brazilian competitiveness in Africa is the need to increase the number of shipping routes between Brazil and African countries, together with the improvement of its own ports and logistics for aircraft and ships, since existing facilities are not equipped to handle high-volume trade. This is the case, in particular, with airlines; most of the air traffic between Brazil and Africa still uses the former colonial powers as their hub for travel. Since Brazilian companies have expanded their process to internationalize and diversify in order to become part

<sup>9</sup> Renata Agostini and Dimmi Amora, "Exportação Cai e Brasil Perde a Onda do Mercado Africano" [Exports Fall and Brazil Misses the Wave of the African Market], *Folha de São Paulo*, October 19, 2014, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2014/10/1534782-exportacao-cai-e-brasil-perde-a-onda-do-mercado-africano.shtml>.

of the global supply chain, Africa could represent an opportunity to add value to production of goods and as an important supplier of raw materials, labor, and knowledge to improve the quality of Brazilian production and competitiveness.

There is ample room for improving trade between Brazil and African countries. For this to happen, Brazil and African countries will need to enhance their bilateral agendas to work more intensively on issues related to infrastructure, trade, and energy. Agriculture is an important aspect, where Brazil could not only export its products but also support African countries to improve their agricultural capabilities through joint cooperation with the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) and together learn how to add more value to their agricultural commodities, particularly biofuels and tropical agriculture products.

With regard to investment, Brazil only became an important source of foreign direct investment for African countries early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with most investment done by very few companies. Brazilian companies have focused on sectors such as infrastructure, mining, and energy. The strategy, differently from China's, is not to secure resources for the home country, but to expand internationally and provide returns to their shareholders.

#### *Drugs*

There are growing concerns regarding human and drug smuggling between Latin America and Europe using West Africa as a bridge, with international trafficking corridors linking production in South America to Africa and Europe, where new products are often prepared. Though this is not a major item on the current agenda, this will certainly become challenging for African countries as they become wealthier. This has been particularly true for Brazil.

Drugs have become a major source of social instability in Brazil, which, in the past, used to be just a pass-through route. As the Brazilian economy started

growing in the late 1990s and 2000s, drugs became more readily available, transforming Brazil into one of the largest consumers.<sup>10</sup> With the advent of crack-cocaine, which is a scale-based drug business model, violence increased in the slums of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

African countries will face similar problems as they become wealthier if the drug issue is not controlled. Therefore, it is in the interest of both Brazil and Atlantic African countries to forge greater partnerships to control drug trafficking in the South Atlantic, and to pursue increased support from European countries to enhance the fight against drugs.

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#### *Poverty Reduction*

Over the last two decades, more than 50 million Brazilians have been added to the consumer market. This is the result of economic growth and redistribution policies implemented since President Fernando Henrique Cardoso took office in 1994. Monetary stability brought in by the new currency, the real, helped the country control inflation, which was a recurring problem that had deteriorated the gains resulting from Brazil's economic growth and that greatly increased social inequality.

These redistribution policies, such as Bolsa Família ("Family Allowance"), had a trickle up effect, leading

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2015* (Vienna: United Nations, 2015).

to the inclusion of a greater percentage of the lower portion of the social pyramid in the market.<sup>11</sup> Bolsa Família provides financial aid to families with children as long as the children attend school and are vaccinated, and also provides free education to those who cannot afford it. Contrary to what some expected, this supported overall growth in the Brazilian economy. This growth, based mostly on consumption, was essential to securing stability during the period after the 2008 financial crisis, originating in the United States and the European Union. After a long period of growth until 2011, this model needs improvement, especially as Brazil saw negative growth in 2015. Brazilian growth needs to result from an increase in the quality of its outdated infrastructure and a change in its current economic model, which has based its growth mostly on consumption. The improvement of Brazilian infrastructure — roads, railways, ports, and airports — which were mostly built in the 1970s, would reduce distribution costs, food waste, and fuel consumption as well as launch new opportunities resulting from efficiency gains and better flows.

### | Growth is not sufficient for poverty reduction.

Growth, however, is not sufficient for poverty reduction. Wealth needs to be more broadly distributed, with improvement of infrastructure playing an essential role for growth. The expertise accumulated over the last decades in the creation of social entitlements that encourage self-help could be easily shared with African countries going through similar situations that could benefit from Brazil's positive and negative policy design lessons learned.

11. Sergei Soares, "Bolsa Família: Its Design, Its Impacts, and Possibilities for the Future," *Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA) Working Paper No. 89* (February 2012): 19-29.

### *Health Cooperation*

Brazil has been able to reduce the number of HIV/AIDS cases through national prevention programs and an increasing allocation of congressional funding to fight the disease as well as federal laws mandating the universal provision of antiretroviral medication. By working closely with pharmaceutical companies and civil society entities to reduce the price of drugs, the Brazilian government showed a strong commitment to combatting the epidemic. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, Brazilian lessons could be shared in the hopes of alleviating the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

### *Current Brazilian Challenges*

The current Brazilian corruption scandals involving its largest company, Petrobras, could affect the country's investment policy in the near term. The spillover effect of the so-called Lava Jato (Car Wash) operation could affect financing offered by BNDES, which has played an essential role in supporting Brazilian companies to invest abroad and in securing facilitation mechanisms to ease the process. Since some of these deals may have been tarnished by corruption of public officials, a short-term reduction in Brazilian investments into African countries could happen as a direct result of the investigations, depending on what is learned and how the investigations are conducted. With a decrease of easily available financing, infrastructure works carried out by Brazilian companies in Africa, which benefitted from export financing for equipment and service, could be negatively affected.

Also worth noting, the administration of Dilma Rousseff has been more domestically focused than the Lula administration, leading Brazil to reduce its degree of international engagement. This is of particular concern for the new embassies Brazil has opened in Africa and the Caribbean, since more collaborative projects need to be identified in order to justify their existence. Hopefully, globalization will keep pushing Brazil to increase its international engagement.



Lula greatly improved the relationship between Brazil and many African countries, which have come a very long way in a short time. In certain areas, words were not followed by actions to prevent overlaps and improve synergies. Greater interaction is necessary to secure a cooperative framework for Brazil to work with African countries and constantly evaluate where there are gains to be made by both sides, to correct inefficiencies, and avoid wasting resources.

Brazil has increased its presence in Africa in recent years in terms of trade, investment, development cooperation, and political alliances with the goal to secure a greater say for the global South in the new world order that has been under construction since the of the Cold War. This has been pursued through financial support and proactive economic diplomacy. A global Brazil requires a robust partnership with Africa.

There are challenges ahead. The Brazilian political environment is currently unstable. But crises come and go. History has shown that Brazil can come back from such crises in a stronger position for growth and development. Ties between Brazil and Africa are strong. The partnerships have faced moments of higher and lower intensity due to different political moments on both sides of the Atlantic. However, recent improvements in the South-South relationship have provided positive results. There are many areas for cooperation and economic growth. More than any of the emerging countries, Brazil shares the greatest African heritage. Centuries ago, Africans crossed the Atlantic in the worst of circumstances to help build a nation. Now it is time for Brazil to rediscover Africa and return the amazing legacy left in the country.

The views expressed in GMF publications and commentary are the views of the author alone.

#### **About the Author**

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