

Africa and Brazil : Brazil's African strategy is a quest for power, profit and sharing knowledge

Sebastian Santander^[1] of the University of Liege examines why Africa is such an attractive place to do business for emerging powers such as Brazil.

For emerging powers, Africa has become a key place to do business. The result has been a number of diverse links with the continent ranging from diplomacy and military co-operation to economics, not to mention trade and co-operation in the development and education sectors. This can be illustrated by the strong upsurge in Brazil's presence in Africa. After a long period of stagnation in the 1980s and 1990s, bilateral relations took a new turn with the Labour government of Lula da Silva (2003-2010) which led to a second 'Golden Age'^[2] of Afro-Brazilian relations. Although she lacks the flamboyant style and charisma of her predecessor, President Dilma Rousseff (2011-2014) has invested as much in the country's relations with Africa.



Since the Labour party came to power, Brazilian authorities have made Africa a priority within their institutional mechanism. Indeed, Brazil has created an office devoted exclusively to African affairs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and increased the resources and staff assigned to Afro-Brazilian relations. There have been dozens of presidential and ministerial missions to the continent which has resulted in over 160 agreements with African countries in sectors such as energy, trade, agriculture, cooperation for development as well as military and academic sectors. The number of Brazilian embassies in Africa has doubled since 2003. This interest has been reciprocated with over 15 African embassies opening in Brasilia in recent years. Brazil has also developed institutional links with Africa through the IBSA Forum, the Africa-South America Summits (ASA) but also through the relaunch of the South Atlantic Peace and Co-operation Zone (Zopacas) or the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP).

To establish Brazilian interests on the African continent, authorities have deployed a strategy to promote their country and notably presenting their development model as a success story and as a potential source of inspiration for other countries in the Global South particularly in Africa. This plan enables the country to expand its influence in Africa mutually. Brazil seems driven by the idea that in order to build her status as a powerful nation, she must position herself as a role model by mobilised intangible resources such as ideology or culture. The African continent seems like fertile ground for this plan not only because Brazil has the largest number of citizens of African origin outside Africa, but also because Brazilian culture already enjoys considerable popularity as a result of the growing interest in the country created mainly by its music, football and television soap operas. In order to develop and consolidate this asset, Brasilia launched a public television station in Mozambique (TV Brazil Internacional) and set up a Portuguese-speaking Afro-Brazilian University of Integration (Unilab). Furthermore, Brazil has consolidated her aid policy toward Africa (cancellation of debt, granting new loans and technical assistance programmes in sectors like agriculture, health and energy).

These initiatives are helping to create a particular image of Brazil on the international stage, namely that of a "benevolent actor". This strategy is far from being economically disinterested.

Brazil regards Africa as an increasingly important outlet for her export products and services and the business sector now views her as providing serious opportunities for its investments. The diplomatic activism that Brazil has engaged in towards Africa in recent years has resulted in an exponential increase in trade relations with Africa^[3]. Brazilian investments in Africa have also grown. There are two sectors that have especially caught the attention of the Brazilian authorities: agriculture and biofuels. As a major agricultural power and large-scale producer-exporter of ethanol in the world, Brazil believes she has the know-how to enable Africa to achieve a “green revolution” and thereby meet her target of food and energy security. Brazil is providing training courses to African countries (Angola, Ghana and Nigeria) in the agriculture and biofuel sectors. She has everything to gain by exporting her expertise in these areas because Africa offers the potential for considerable growth for Brazilian ethanol exports.

The marked interest in Africa can also be explained by Brazilian ambitions to obtain a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. This is one of Brazilian diplomacy's top priorities for reasons of both prestige and principle. Brazil is therefore counting on the support of Africa. Africa is becoming a space that can multiply Brazil's power.

The growing interest shown by Brazil in Africa highlights for us a new African reality and the new development in international relations. The African continent is being courted both by the traditional industrialised powers and by the emerging powers. The arrival of the latter in Africa and their increasing expansion on the continent are contributing to the progressive shift in world power^[4].

[1] Professor (Department of political science, University of Liège, Belgium).

[2] The first ‘Golden Age’, of Afro-Brazilian relations took place during the 1970s.

[3] Trade rose from 3.5 billion euros in 2003 to 21 billion euros in 2012: Neil Ford, « Brazil Throws Its Hat Into African Ring », *African Business*, 10 December 2012.

[4] For more detailed analysis about the African strategy of Brazil see: Sebastian Santander, ‘Brazil in Africa: Strategic Issues’, *African Geopolitics*, N 45, December 2012, pp. 59-70.