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Latin America's involvement in agricultural development in Africa:

The role of Argentina and Brazil

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The geopolitics of food and agricultural production has changed drastically over the last two decades, with new players coming from South America, such as Brazil and Argentina. These countries have succeeded in developing industrialised forms of agricultural production with high levels of productivity through foreign and national investments in agricultural science and technology. Indeed, these emerging economies have effectively built a large share of their growth on their agricultural success, exporting grains – but also meat, poultry, and other products to industrialised and other emerging countries. A major share of taxes and duties collected on these exports has been invested in social development policies intended for urban and rural areas. Effectively, the success of industrialised agricultural systems, which has very often broadly been gained at the expense of smallholders, has served to promote public policies in favour of those same small family farmers. Brazil and Argentina further developed and implemented internationally recognized policies in favour of rural livelihoods and small farmers, touching upon aspects as diverse as product marketing, adapted genetics or agricultural machinery and access to water etc.

The success in both archetypal forms of agricultural development – agribusiness vs. small family farming has attracted the attention of other developing countries, mainly African countries. These countries are interested in:

- 1) diversifying their international partnership for agricultural development, forming closer ties with new “successful” countries and
- 2) developing both models of agricultural development.

Over the last ten years, we have thus observed a kind of “exporting”, or “reproduction” of the internal duality of South American agricultural development models, offering expertise and technical solutions to foreign countries based on both models.

When taken in a broader context of increasing political and commercial relations between the South American and African continents, Brazil and Argentina present their international cooperation actions in terms of South-South cooperation, making reference to the historical foundation of the Bandung Conference (1955) and the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (1978). Indeed, justification for their actions lies on a civic level wherein the structuring concept is horizontality: it is a matter of operating on an equal footing with the partner countries, and not in a position of economic, cultural or symbolic dominance. The term “traditional cooperation” signifying what was considered to be or to have been that of the old colonial powers, is thus often presented as an antithesis in order to more effectively define what the cooperation proposed by Brazil and Argentina would be.

An analysis of discourses and practices in Brazilian and Argentinian international cooperation programmes reveals two key points that can contribute to a better understanding of South-South cooperation dynamics between emerging South American and African countries. The first deals with a dominant vision of international cooperation organised through transfers and adaptation of solutions – policies, but mostly technologies, that have been successful in the country of origin. That approach to cooperation finds expression in both models of agricultural development. For example, in both the Brazilian and Argentinian cases, we observe attempts to transfer policies in favour of food production by small family farmers in rural or peri-urban areas. It is the case also for the Argentinian “Pro-Huerta” programme, in which countries like Mozambique and Angola have shown interest. It is also the case for the Brazilian “Mais Alimentos” programme, renamed for the occasion “Mais Alimentos Africa”,

that Ghana, Cameroon, Mozambique, Senegal and Namibia have shown an interest. But this “transfer approach” also finds an expression in the agribusiness or “industrialised” agricultural model, with initiatives and programmes designed to transfer and locally adapt technologies in which Brazil and Argentina are leaders. For example, such is the case for genetics, but also no-tillage technology for grain production (soybean, corn); a concrete illustration of this process can be found in the experiments led by INTA (the public agricultural research and development institute in Argentina) and a company in South Africa, in order to adapt no-tillage to local areas.

The second key point refers, consistently in a certain way with the technology transfer approach to the close ties that public institutions from South America maintain with national industry in their cooperation programme. That fact needs to be contextualised in relation to the rules of traditional aid donors, such as the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee, which requires its country members to provide aid and cooperation untied to their national economic interests. In the case of emerging South American countries, we observe that even public national cooperation agencies (ABC in Brazil, and FO-AR in Argentina) and public agricultural research institutes (INTA and EMBRAPA) are the most important actors, maintaining very close relations with national companies in the execution of their cooperation programme. The national agricultural machinery industries from both countries are very good examples of this tendency, whether for small-scale or industrialised agriculture.

To conclude, we would like to open the discussion focusing on two aspects. The first involves the ambition claimed by South American emerging countries to make a break in the way they do international cooperation, which needs to be put in perspective, as we have seen that technology transfers are, for example, central elements of their visions and activities. In fact, technology transfers were also the bases of “traditional” cooperation when, for example, agronomists from the former colonial states convinced farmers that deep soil ploughing was the right solution for crop growing. Today, even though the technical solution has radically changed towards no-ploughing and no-tillage, the novelty of the South-South cooperants’ approach might be questioned. The second refers, in a broader context, to transnational movements around land acquisitions, which after South America – and

precisely Brazil and Argentina for soybean production – have reached Africa. While the determinants, actors and processes of land grabbing have been very well explored, little information is available about how these lands are brought into production. The processes we describe around technology transfers for no-tillage and grain production with emerging countries trying to export their national know-how and industry products, may perhaps help to document this aspect of the process.

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