

Innovative Partnerships for Agricultural Research and Development

Examining the Africa-Brazil Agricultural Innovation Marketplace

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Key messages

Brazil has increased its engagement across Africa, and with an alternative approach to international aid is contributing to the changing landscape of development cooperation. Embrapa, its national agricultural research institute, is the protagonist of such support, focusing on food security and rural development. Brazil also participates in triangular cooperation schemes in African countries, with the Agricultural Innovation MarketPlace considered as particularly successful, due to its peer-to-peer dimension and low administrative burden of participation

Despite discussions by the European Commission and member states on triangular cooperation, there are major perceived obstacles for EU engagement, e.g. lack of information and some skepticism about 'new donors' initiatives. On the other hand, the EU is increasing its support to agricultural research for development, emphasizing the importance of locally-owned research that can be scaled up and more directly beneficial for smallholder farmers (uptake of research results). If the EU would engage with the MKTPlace, it would be a pragmatic case of cooperation with Brazil in agricultural research, useful to promote mutual trust. This could also increase MKTPlace impact and effectiveness, and potentially lead to broader EU participation in innovative triangular partnerships.

Introduction

The economic dynamism displayed by some African states has transformed the continent into a strategic partner for many emerging countries, including Brazil. Building on its historical links with the continent, Brazil has developed quite an assertive foreign policy towards Africa. Greatly boosted during the Lula administration, this 'African strategy' sought to reaffirm Brazil's influence, while expanding the country's economic, diplomatic and cultural ties with the continent. In addition to trade and political relations, Brazil

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has also greatly increased its development cooperation activities across the continent. With an alternative approach to cooperation and aid, Brazil, as other 'new' donors², has been hence changing the 'traditional' landscape of development cooperation in Africa.

Indeed, over the past decade, the architecture of aid and development cooperation has moved away from the traditional 'North-South' paradigm. The emergence of 'South-South' schemes has increased the complexity of cooperation frameworks, introducing a different set of actors, institutions and policy tools. Although such divide has been questioned, the reality is that the so-called 'old' (DAC) and 'new' (non-DAC) donors are still described as competitors - or antagonists - in the development cooperation field. Usually presented as incompatible, such perceived conflicting interests, goals and values tend to widen this gap.

Instead of focusing on apparent oppositions, this Briefing Note makes a strong case for bringing 'old' and 'new donors' together. Searching for new partnerships at donors' level seems all the more pertinent since it can enhance not only the impact, sustainability or ownership, but also the effectiveness of donor's actions.

Based on literature and interviews, this Note analyses African-Brazilian cooperation on sustainable agricultural development, focusing on one particular initiative: the Africa-Brazil Agricultural Innovation Marketplace (MKTPlace). Conceived to promote knowledge and technology exchange among Brazilian and African researchers, the MKTPlace has become a 'success story' of South-South cooperation.

But, more interestingly, this initiative can also be seen as a successful case of how 'old' and 'new donors' can cooperate despite apparent differences. Indeed, as the MKTPlace experience indicates, partners as diverse as African and Brazilian research institutions, international organizations and 'traditional' development cooperation agencies can not only share the same approach, but also promote shared development goals.

The first part of this Briefing Note gives a brief overview of the African-Brazilian cooperation on sustainable agricultural development, in terms of its main players, modalities and governing 'principles'. Key elements of the so-called 'Brazilian approach' will be examined, such as Brazil's focus on knowledge exchange and technology transfer, and the prominence of the national Brazilian agricultural research institute, Embrapa, in the Brazilian 'South-South' cooperation initiatives with African countries.

The second part of the Note will examine the Africa-Brazil Agricultural Innovation Marketplace. A closer look at the MKTPlace offers an opportunity to further understanding around new ways to support agricultural research for development. It can moreover bring out potential synergies between the Brazilian approach and the variety of European strategies to make research more relevant and responsive. The MKTPlace could in fact offer an opportunity for the EU to reach out for new partnerships with 'new donors' like Brazil.³

² Refusing the donor-recipient language, the Brazilian government uses instead 'horizontal partnerships' or South-South cooperation to refer to its development cooperation initiatives (ABC, 2001). These categories are also connected to the discourses and so-called 'principles' of Brazilian development cooperation (see below). Brazil also rejects the very idea of 'aid' as well as the 'aid vocabulary' that goes along it. 'Donor' and 'recipient' are hence banned and being replaced by 'partner countries'. This Note uses the terms 'new' donor and 'emerging donor' interchangeably, for lack of a better terminology.

³ See 'The European Union, Africa and New Donors: Moving Towards New Partnerships (2015). Highlights.', available at http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/com-411-africa-final_highlights_11052015_en.pdf

1. Brazil-Africa Development Cooperation in Agriculture: a short overview

Though not new⁴, Brazilian presence in Africa was considerably boosted during the first decade of the 2000s. Between 2000 and 2010⁵, Brazil has reoriented its foreign policy strategy, focusing on the developing countries of the 'Global South'. Integrating political, economic and development cooperation tools, such 'South-South' strategy aimed to increase Brazil's influence and economic reach in the developing world.

In this new strategic framework, the African continent has become one of Brazil's main priorities after Latin America (Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2007; Doelling, 2008). At this time, Brazil has opened 20 new Embassies and diplomatic representations in Africa, enhancing its diplomatic and political connections across the continent. Economic relations with African countries have also gained momentum. Trade flows between Brazil and Africa grew at 14.41% annually between 1997 and 2012. Most of this growth took place between 2003 and 2012, when Brazilian trade with Africa rose from US\$6 billion to \$26.5 billion, with Brazilian oil imports still dominating the trade portfolio (Tralac, 2013).

Former President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva was one of the main figures behind Brazil's 'drive for Africa' in the 2000s. Lula made 34 official state visits to Africa during his term (2003-2010), an unprecedented number for any other Brazilian President. Besides being convinced of the economic opportunities offered by African markets, Lula was also aware of the importance of African support to accomplish Brazil's global ambitions. Indeed, to raise the country's profile at the international level, the Brazilian government sought notably to increase Brazil's representation in key multilateral institutions, in which the support (votes) of African and other developing nations was crucial.⁶

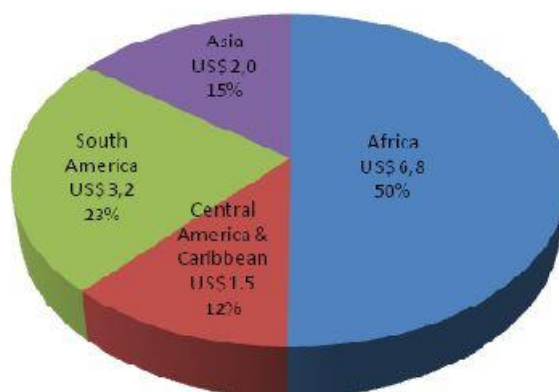
This decade also corresponds to an increase of Brazil's political engagement in Africa, notably by the implementation of new development cooperation initiatives (Cabral and Weinstock, 2010). In recent years, the Brazilian government has, for instance, contributed to the opening of a plant making antiretroviral drugs to fight the AIDS epidemic in Mozambique. It has also lent \$150 million to fund the construction of roads in Kenya, and signed a new security agreement to support part of the training of Angolan military personnel in Brazil.

These 'horizontal partnerships' have become over time one of the key drivers of Brazilian foreign policy strategy to the continent. By the end of 2010, for instance, 57% of Brazilian technical cooperation budget was directed to projects in African countries (IPEA and ABC, 2010).

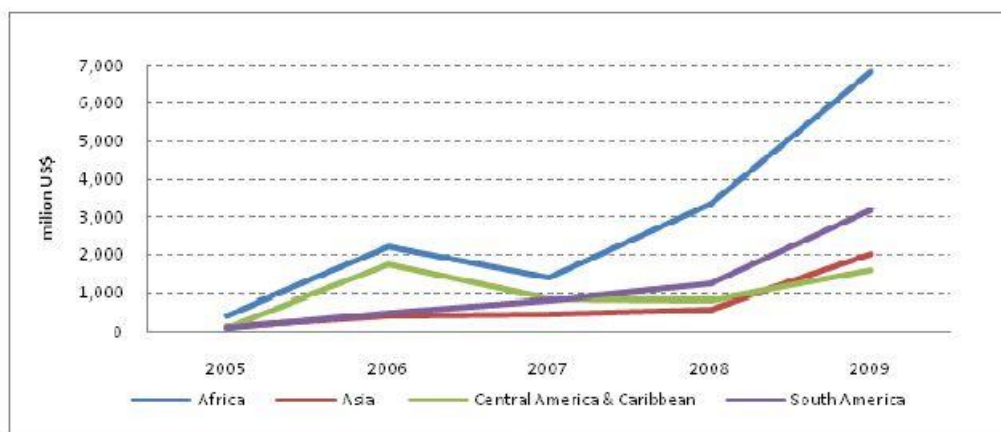
⁴ Brazil relations with Africa can be traced back to the colonial period and the slave trade in the 16th century. However, while Brazil supported various African independence movements during the 1970s, particularly in lusophone countries, such support remained at the level of formal recognition, with little (concrete) political engagement. In fact, until the early 2000s, Brazil-Africa relations could be better characterised by a 'relative distance'. Economic exchange with the continent remained also fairly timid, dominated by Brazilian imports of African oil and other commodities (Freitas and White, 2015).

⁵ The election of President Dilma Rousseff in 2011 seems to have had an impact on Brazilian strategy and engagement with the African continent. President Rousseff is known for her relative distance from international/foreign policy issues, including the African continent. Hence, despite some concrete measures, such as the implementation of Brazil's 'Agenda for Africa' in 2013, the number of initiatives and programmes developed with (and in) African countries have been reduced, or at best frozen. The MKTPlace seems to be however one exception to this relative (political) disengagement of Brazil in Africa.

⁶ The appointment of Brazilian diplomat Roberto Azevêdo as World Trade Organisation (WTO) Director-general in 2013 can be seen as a successful achievement of such strategy.

Execution of Technical Cooperation Project per Region, 2009 (million US\$ and %)

Source: ABC.

Resources Channelled by ABC to Technical Cooperation across Regions (million US\$), 2005-2009

Source: ABC.

Brazilian development cooperation is largely technical and based on the transfer of knowledge, technology or policy experiences that have proved successful at the domestic level. Instead of funding or traditional aid, Brazil offers in fact quite concrete and tested tools, often seen as better suited to tackle developing countries' challenges and needs in areas such as health, social policies or agricultural development. As other sorts of 'South-South' schemes, the main difference (or 'value-added') of Brazilian development cooperation when compared to more traditional OECD modalities does not lay on the innovative aspects of the technical assistance offered, but rather on the particular status of the country offering them. Brazil's and other Southern countries' own development experience, their technical capacity and the availability of adapted and practical know-how is particularly valued by beneficiary countries.⁷

Brazilian cooperation with African countries has traditionally, though not exclusively, been focused on areas such as rural development (including support to family farming), agriculture research and sustainable agriculture. This is due not only to Brazil's cultural and linguistic proximity to Africa⁸ or positive domestic achievements in these areas, but also to environmental factors (i.e. climate or soil composition) shared by Brazil and many African countries.

⁷ See UNDP 'Enhancing South-South and Triangular Cooperation', Study commissioned by the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, UNDP, 2009.

⁸ Brazil has the largest black population in the world outside of Africa, suggesting also a deep cultural affinity with the continent (World Bank and IPEA, 2011).

A government-driven cooperation

Brazilian 'South-South' cooperation is largely 'government-driven'. This means, among other things, that cooperation projects tend to be negotiated and coordinated by the Brazilian government through the Ministry of External Relations (MER).

Inside the Ministry of External Relations (MER), the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, ABC, has been given coordination and oversight competences, with little implementation capacity. ABC functions in fact as a sort of (political) intermediary between beneficiary countries and other Brazilian (implementing) institutions that are responsible for development projects' implementation. The agency's mandate, defined in the 1980s, includes the coordination of development cooperation initiatives offered, but also received by Brazil. In reality though, ABC is not really an agency, but a small sub-division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, composed by and run by career diplomats. Though highly qualified professionals, these diplomats are not trained development cooperation experts, and may have in reality little experience on the topic. Development cooperation analysts working in the agency are usually hired on an ad hoc basis through international organizations based in Brazil that run ABC funding. They work on the monitoring and/or coordination of particular projects, but often leave the institutions once projects finish. This particular aspect tends to limit ABC's institutional memory and learning capacity.

In addition to the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA), the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply (MAPA)⁹ and the Ministry of Social Development (MDS), a particular institution has become one of the leading actors of Brazilian development cooperation with African countries: the Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária, known as Embrapa.

Set up in 1973, this public company was created to modernize agricultural research and practices in Brazil. Over time, Embrapa has become one of the world's leading research institutions in tropical agriculture. With approximately 9800 employees¹⁰, 46 different research centres and an annual budget of nearly USD 1,1 billion¹¹, Embrapa has been involved in different areas of agriculture research, from breeding new seeds and cattle to developing new operational farm techniques.¹² Embrapa is often pointed out as one of the main drivers of Brazil's agricultural expansion. It has notably helped unlocking Brazil's agricultural potential in the 'cerrado', the Brazil's savannah.

Embrapa was not entirely new in the field of international cooperation, especially with African countries (Ferraz et al. 2014). It was however between 2000 and 2010 that the company gained greater weight, becoming the protagonist of Brazilian cooperation in Africa on issues such as food security, the fight against hunger, and rural development.¹³ After the mid-2000s, the number and volume of projects led by Embrapa in Africa was rapidly expanded, reaching sometimes the (material, human) limits of the institution¹⁴.

Even if Embrapa works in close collaboration with ABC, it has been able to preserve a considerable autonomy to design and implement its different projects at the international level. Embrapa's own international cooperation division was considerably strengthened between after 2008 when the company became the main driver of Brazil-Africa Dialogue on Food Security. The technical character of Embrapa and its institutional set up seem to have helped the company preserving its relative autonomy at the international level.

⁹ Embrapa is institutionally linked to MAPA.

¹⁰ Embrapa has approximately 2000 senior (PhD) researchers and 2400 researchers.

¹¹ Before 2015.

¹² One example is the 'no-till' agriculture, in which the soil is not ploughed nor the crop harvested at ground level. The plant is instead cut high and what remains is left to rot into a mat of organic material, increasing soil nutrients. Currently over 50% of Brazilian farmers use no-till farming - they were 2.6% in 1990. Another technique developed more recently by Embrapa is called forest, agriculture and livestock integration, which aims to restore degraded pasture lands.

¹³ According to the official presentation of the 'Brazil-Africa Dialogue on Food Security, Fight against Hunger, and Rural Development', Brazil aimed 'to cooperate with African countries (...) [by] profiting on the knowledge accumulated by Embrapa.' See: 'Brazil-Africa Dialogue on Food Security, Fight against Hunger, and Rural Development', Brasília, May 2010, available at <http://www.agroafrica.itamaraty.gov.br/en-us/Main.xml>

¹⁴ Interviews Embrapa officials, August 2015.

The 'Brazilian Approach'

The design, content and focus of Brazilian development cooperation initiatives are often not pre-defined, but decided/defined in close collaboration with beneficiary countries, according to their needs and specific requests. This is partly due to an important characteristic of the so-called 'Brazilian approach' to development cooperation: programmes and other tools are made 'on demand' of beneficiary countries, and in principle cannot be 'offered'. Countries need therefore to express their interest and formally request Brazilian support on a specific area so a project can be set up. This 'demand-driven' approach has a number of concrete policy and political implications. Projects and partners are for instance often not defined or selected in advance, which makes the elaboration of long term policy plans or programmes upon which the government can build (or expand) its development cooperation strategy more difficult.

In reality, though, this 'principle' seems to be rather limited by policy and political imperatives of Brazilian foreign policy. Some initiatives, such as the project Cotton-4, now called C-4+Togo, seem to have been designed in advance, driven by Brazilian interests in West Africa and its position as one of the main cotton producers in the world. Launched in 2008 and implemented by Embrapa, the project aims to 'develop the cotton sector, increasing productivity, generating genetic diversity and improving the quality of the product grown'.¹⁵ Classified as a 'projeto estruturante' (structuring project) Cotton-4 was the first long-term and broad range (regional) initiative launched by Brazil.

Indeed, Brazilian cooperation initiatives tend to be limited both in time and geographical scope. Due to funding, material and human limitations, projects often focus on one or two beneficiary countries, and tend to last a few years. Initiatives such as C-4+Togo and the ProSavana (see below) were launched to change this 'ad hoc/ short term pattern', paving the way for longer and more 'structured' initiatives.

C-4+Togo is also a good illustration of the modality of cooperation Brazil provides in the field of sustainable agriculture and rural development. Most Brazilian initiatives are in fact technical cooperation projects, with a strong emphasis on knowledge transfer and capacity building¹⁶.

Brazilian technical cooperation involves very little (direct) transfer of funding and capital to partner countries.¹⁷ Projects do not oversee the construction of buildings or other structures (e.g. laboratories, schools, etc.), the payment of foreign experts or the purchase of important quantities of material. Instead, programmes and other policy tools tend to focus on human capacity and exchange of techniques already existing in Brazilian institutions. In the case of Embrapa, for instance, project costs tend to be limited to (in-house) experts' and instructors' salaries ('technical hours'), per diems and travel/accommodation expenses.

Solidarity, Horizontality and other Narratives of Brazilian 'South-South' Cooperation

Another characteristic of Brazilian technical cooperation is the lack of a legal framework¹⁸ defining its basic strategic goals, main actors and their competencies. There are indeed no laws or policies defining the basic norms of Brazil's development cooperation or regulating the action of state institutions in this particular field (Cabral and Weinstock, 2011).

¹⁵ The project's official name is 'Strengthening technological and dissemination of good agricultural practices for cotton in the countries of Togo and C-4'. For more details see, among others, 'OECD Aid for Trade case story', available at: <http://www.oecd.org/aidfortrade/47699046.pdf>

¹⁶ See ECDPM Discussion Paper 146 <http://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/DP-146-CAADP-Emerging-Economies-Case-Ghana-Brazil-2013.pdf>

¹⁷ There are in fact legal reasons for that. In Brazil, public institutions cannot transfer money, purchase goods or hire personnel abroad. Engaging in trilateral cooperation schemes with international organizations (such as the WFP, FAO or UNDP) and/or third-countries (like Japan or the UK) has been one of the solutions identified by the Brazilian government to solve this problem. Trilateral and multilateral partnerships allow more flexibility and facilitate the implementation of Brazilian development cooperation initiatives.

¹⁸ That said, all cooperation agreements and projects are regulated by specific regulations.

Regardless the absence of such a legal or policy structure, Brazilian 'South-South' cooperation has been oriented by a set of loose principles, partly based on the Brazilian Constitution¹⁹. These principles are: solidarity; non-interference; non-conditionality; horizontality and demand-driven cooperation (ABC, 2011). These principles strongly shape the discourses of stakeholders, as well as the narratives around Brazilian development cooperation (IPEA and ABC, 2010). Presented as the markers of a so-called 'Brazilian approach', they also play a symbolic (discursive) role in differentiating Brazil from other traditional or 'emergent' donors, notably China.²⁰

In fact, the existence of a so-called 'Brazilian difference' remains a vivid topic in the narratives of Brazilian development cooperation in Africa. More than its cultural, historical or linguistic proximity, Brazil's horizontal (non-hierarchical) relation with African countries, and 'insider' understanding of their challenges and needs tend to be presented not only as differentiator, but also as a value-added to more 'traditional' cooperation arrangements.

To which extent Brazilian perceptions coincide with African ones is still an open question. Moreover, like other emerging powers, the nature, efficiency and, more importantly, the purposes of Brazil's engagement in Africa have often been questioned. Despite the country's horizontal and solidarity discourses, Brazil's reluctance to use its influence and commercial leverage to push for greater democratic accountability in Africa, for instance, could hardly differentiate it from other emergent (or traditional) donors (Freitas and White, 2015).

South-South...and North?

If divergent principles – and goals – can be used to differentiate Brazil from other 'donors', it has not prevented the country from engaging into triangular (or multilateral) cooperation arrangements with the so-called traditional partners. In fact, triangular cooperation mechanisms normally involve North ('old') and South partners working together in collaboration with a third, 'South' ('new') 'donor' that coordinates and runs a given development project.

Among other things, triangular cooperation schemes are often said to improve the service delivery of developing countries' policies, but also increase local (national) ownership of international development. As these projects are crafted on (Southern) donors' successful development experiences at home, financially supported by traditional donors, they are also pointed out as more appropriate and hence effective to tackle development challenges in developing countries. In 2011, OECD's Busan Partnership Agreement has notably recognized the value of triangular cooperation tools to increase effectiveness of development and aid initiatives. This particular cooperation design seems to resonate well with the 'Brazilian approach' to development cooperation, based on the transfer of techniques, know-how and expertise already tested at the domestic level.

Brazil has been indeed quite active in engaging in triangular cooperation initiatives. The country has in the last decade negotiated a number of memoranda of understandings with 'old' donors, such as the United Kingdom, Japan or Germany, but also multilateral organizations, such as the UNDP, FAO or the World Bank, to run triangular cooperation projects. Until 2011, Brazil was one of the world's top participants in trilateral cooperation; ABC managed, for instance, approximately 88 projects across 27 countries (Cabral and Weinstock, 2011).

Africa has been one of the preferred targets of Brazilian triangular cooperation, notably in the field of sustainable agriculture, though not exclusively.²¹ Projects such as the 'Purchasing in Africa for Africans'

¹⁹ In particular article 4, which states the main principles of Brazilian international relations, namely: '1. national independence; 2. prevalence of human rights; 3. self-determination of the peoples; 4. non-intervention; 5. equality among the states; 6. defense of peace; 7. peaceful settlement of conflicts; 8. repudiation of terrorism and racism; 9. cooperation among peoples for the progress of mankind; 10. Granting of political asylum.'

²⁰ Put together, these narratives imply that Brazilian development cooperation projects and tools cannot be offered, but need to reply partner countries' specific demands (see above). Brazil decides to engage in these initiatives on the basis of its solidarity towards 'fellow developing nations'. Development cooperation arrangements are consequently free of any requirement, conditionality or compensation.

²¹ An example is the Africa-Brazil Cooperation Program on Social Protection, a partnership between the Brazilian Ministry of Social Development (MDS), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and the International Poverty Center, a program run by UNDP and the Brazilian government. The project is based on Brazilian successful experience with the so-called 'Bolsa Família', conditional cash transfer programme that ensure that children are not only vaccinated but also attending school.

(PAA)²², ProSavana²³ or the MKTPlace are good examples of how Brazil has been engaging with traditional donors and African partners in a number of its development cooperation initiatives. Interestingly, in their engagement in trilateral initiatives, Brazilian institutions tend to be more flexible regarding the observance of some of their guiding principles. Hence, instead of reacting to partners' demands ('demand-driven' principle), the identification of cooperation opportunities, as well as projects' design, tend to result from bilateral dialogues between Brazil and recipient countries - or between Brazilian institutions and (traditional) donor's agencies (Cabral and Weinstock, 2011). This is precisely the case of the MKTPlace platform we examine below.

2. Brazil-Africa Agricultural Innovation MarketPlace: Communities of Knowledge and Practice

The Brazil-Africa Agricultural Innovation MarketPlace (MKTPlace) emerged in 2010 from a dialogue between Embrapa, the World Bank, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). The idea was to bring together Embrapa's scientific and technical excellence, FARA's role in coordinating agricultural research in Africa and the World Bank's experiences in knowledge exchange²⁴. The DFID was then approached by the World Bank to engage in the platform by providing the first financing for the Marketplace - a commitment repeated at several occasions by the institution.

In a way, the MKTPlace was designed to combine these different experiences and expertise and create a 'place' where African and Brazilian scientists could meet, exchange ideas and develop solutions to shared agricultural challenges.

Although African countries have committed to allocate 10% of their national budget to agricultural development, the amount of funding directed to agricultural research remains very low. As a result, Africa produces only 1.1% of global scientific knowledge.²⁵ And yet, knowledge and innovation are crucial to boost agricultural development, as outlined in CAADP's 4th Pillar²⁶ and illustrated by Embrapa's experience in Brazil.²⁷ African research and researchers also need to be supported so the continent can develop their own solutions, adapted to their needs and local contexts.²⁸ The MKTPlace was set up to tackle existing blockages to African scientific development, notably by facilitating access to funding and innovative technologies.

²² The 'Purchasing in Africa for Africans' (PAA) Programme is a multi-stakeholder initiative that engages FAO, WFP, Brazilian experts and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Based on the national 'Food Purchase Programme (PAA)', PAA Africa aims to vulnerable communities facing food and nutrition insecurity five countries: Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger and Senegal. As in the Brazilian programme, PAA Africa aims to link smallholder farmers with structured demand, notably food purchase for humanitarian assistance. For more information: <http://paa-africa.org/about/general-information-2/>

²³ ProSavana is a triangular cooperation programme for agricultural development involving Brazil, Mozambique and Japan. The programme aims to improve, modernize and diversify agriculture to increase productivity and production in the tropical savannah region of Mozambique, using the techniques and scientific knowledge developed by Embrapa and already used in Brazil (notably in the 'cerrado' area). The project also has a strong economic/trade dimension, that focuses on unlocking the Nacala corridor opportunities, supporting infrastructure investment and establishing economically sustainable supply chains in for example rice. The project is in reality quite complex as it has not only different dimensions and ambitions (research/knowledge exchange, social development, unlocking of economic/trade opportunities), as well as different actors involved. The main coordinators are ABC, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security of Mozambique (MASA) and the Japanese Cooperation Agency, (JICA). For more information see: <http://www.prosavana.gov.mz/index.php>

²⁴ Such as the 'South-South Knowledge Exchange': <http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/>

²⁵ UNESCO Science Report, 2010: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001899/189958e.pdf>

²⁶ CAADP's Pillar 4 stresses the commitment of African countries and institutions towards 'improving agriculture research, technology dissemination and adoption' to increase economic growth through agriculture-led development. See: <http://pages.au.int/caadp/about>

²⁷ As mentioned earlier, Embrapa has helped grow output of numerous farm products in the country, from soy beans, vegetable crops to wheat and livestock.

²⁸ See: 'African governments must urgently invest in science and research', Global development professionals network, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/sep/30/african-governments-must-invest-in-science-and-research>

The programme is based on the premise that research priorities need to be defined in the countries where research will eventually be applied. More than local/regional ownership, it also ensures that research results are in principle aligned to countries' (and farmers') agricultural contexts, traditions and requests. Ensuring such alignment in practice and, more important, that new technologies and research results effectively reach the 'final users' (i.e. farmers, rural communities, etc.) remains a challenging but crucial issue for MKTPlace stakeholders and researchers.²⁹

In the framework of this platform, research goals are outlined together by African and Brazilian experts³⁰, in line with the 'Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme' (CAADP)³¹, and the Brazilian (Embrapa) agriculture research agenda. Research results are hence not only shared, but also mutually beneficial to partners involved, in line with the South-South cooperation approach.

The platform has currently four main thematic areas³², namely:

1. Productivity enhancing technologies, including the development of land productivity enhancement and saving technologies;
2. Natural resource management improvements, notably the generation of low cost natural resource and soil conservation technologies;
3. Policy, institutional and market strengthening and knowledge management, in particular the development of strategies for knowledge management and improved access to knowledge and information by stakeholders in the commodity chain;
4. Smallholder and poverty-alleviation targeted technologies.³³

These topics were defined by the platform 'Steering Committee' (see below) based on the identification of particular areas where joint Africa-Brazil research could make a difference.

Despite its ambitious goals, the MKTPlace had a rather modest start. With limited funding, the initiative supported 10 projects over its launching year. In all, African researchers from 7 countries³⁴ received US\$ 80,000 each to develop research in collaboration with Brazilian experts.

Quite surprisingly, the initial results have proved encouraging; projects were not only successfully concluded, but also showed to be highly (cost-)effective. The 'peer to peer' model of the platform, its 'bureaucratic minimalism', as well as the prominent role given to researchers seems to have greatly contributed to this success.³⁵

Between 2010 and 2013, the MKTPlace has connected 103 research institutions, from more than 20 African countries, to Embrapa research centers in different Brazilian regions (Ferraz et al. 2014). The project has so far supported 66 research projects in Africa. While 10 have already been completed, other 25 will be closing by the end of 2015.³⁶ The successes of the experience in Africa have moreover encouraged the launching of a similar initiative focusing on the Latin America and the Caribbean in 2012.

²⁹ See in particular the Report of MKTPlace Forum 2014: <http://www.mktplace.org/site/images/documents/Forum%202014%20Report%2027%20may%202014.pdf>

³⁰ Participatory research, where farmers and other 'end users' identify key problems and potential solutions, is moreover encouraged.

³¹ The CAADP was established in 2003 as part of the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). See: <http://nepad-caadp.net/>

³² Although it may restrict the spectrum of research proposals, thematic areas are in fact quite broadly defined. This offers experts some space to propose topics they consider relevant to a given region/country.

³³ For more details see: http://www.mktplace.org/site/images/documents/Mktplace_Guidelines_pre_proposals_2014-15call.pdf

³⁴ Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania, and Togo.

³⁵ FARA and other African research institutions have also played a key role in this initial stage. They have notably helped increasing the visibility of the project, making MKTPlace known among the African research community, thereby strengthening the links between Brazilian technology and African (research) needs.

³⁶ Source: <http://faraafrica.org/news-events/science-agenda-for-africa-agriculture-show-cased-at-EmbrapaEmbrapa-headquarters-brasilia-brazil/>

That said, Africa remains the bulk of MKTPlace activities. Over the 2010-2013 period, 75% of pre-proposals received in the framework of MKTPlace calls were formulated by African researchers. Only 25% came from Latin American and Caribbean countries.³⁷

But contrary to expectations, the most active researchers in the platform do not come from African Portuguese-speaking countries, but rather English speaking ones, in particular: Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda and Ghana.³⁸

Linguistic aspects seem an important variable to explain the prominence of these countries in the platform's calls (Ferraz et al. 2014). English is not only the lingua franca in the scientific domain, but also the main communication language among platform members. Researchers from English-speaking countries have been therefore considerably benefited by this linguistic bias, which is reflected in the concentration of MKTPlace activities/projects in these countries (see figure below).

Geolocation of MKTPlace Projects in Africa and LAC



Source: MKTPlace Website³⁹

The 'monolingualism' of MKTPlace is in fact one important challenge of the initiative (Ferraz et al. 2014), especially considering African countries' plurilingual contexts. To tackle this challenge and increase the participation of other countries, the platform needs to localize its content and website and open calls in other important languages in Africa, such as Portuguese and French. This implies however important additional costs to platform members.

MKTPlace Governance Model

Following the achievements of its initial year, the MKTPlace has called the attention of other international institutions and government agencies, such as the United Nation's International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (B&MGF). These institutions have progressively joined the network, thereby increasing the MKTPlace funding and outreach capacity.

³⁷ For more details see: 'MKTPlace Proposal Information 2010 – 2014': <http://www.mktplace.org/site/images/documents/Proposal.pdf>

³⁸ Hence, while Angola sent only 1 and Mozambique 14 pre-proposals over the first four MKTPlace calls, Kenya sent 38; Ethiopia, 34; Nigeria, 32; Uganda, 29 and Ghana, 23 (Ferraz et al. 2014).

³⁹ <http://www.mktplace.org/site/>

In fact, though Embrapa has a central role as one of the leading coordinators, the MKTPlace is not a 'Brazilian initiative', but a multi-stakeholder platform that gathers more than 10 different partners, from both 'North' and 'South' countries.

The platform is composed by the following institutions: Embrapa, World Bank, FARA, IFAD, DFID, B&MGF, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Brazilian Ministry of External Relations (ABC), the Brazilian Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (MCTI), the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply (MAPA), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) of the CGIAR.⁴⁰

Internal differences, development approaches or agenda do not seem an obstacle to joining the MKTPlace. In that sense, the platform is neither exclusive, fixed nor closed, but remains open to other potential partners willing to support the initiative and its particular approach to development.

MKTPlace stakeholders are in reality not simply donors, whose participation is limited to the transfer of financial resources or human capital. When engaging in the platform, institutions are in fact called to become active partners, taking charge of pre-proposals and full proposals' assessments and approvals, participating at MKTPlace annual fora, Steering Committee meetings, etc.

Although it considerably increases ownership levels at donor's end, such level of commitment may sometimes be problematic. In fact, internal diversity implies that not all partners have the human, financial or technical capacity to engage in every activity they are required to. Moreover, the prominence of certain institutions (notably Embrapa) can create a 'participatory gap' among MKTPlace members. Coupled with internal (institutional) rivalries, this may entail a certain distancing between members of the network, jeopardizing the platform.

Indeed, institutional rivalries represent one important risk of triangular (and multi-stakeholder) cooperation initiatives. As projects' costs are shared, so should be the ownership of their positive results. Yet, although 'South' and 'North' donors may be willing to split the burden, they tend to be less inclined to carve up the credits of successful initiatives. As visibility issues become increasingly important in the international cooperation environment, triangular/multilateral cooperation schemes put to test the (political) generosity and solidarity of traditional and emergent donors.

In the framework of the MKTPlace, interviews suggest that disagreements over the platform's ownership, as well as the lack of commitment/engagement are increasing. This could endanger the internal strength of the network and hence of the initiative as a whole. A more detailed account of this trend is however not in the scope of this Briefing Note and should be subject of further research.

Bureaucratic Minimalism and the Role of Researchers

One of the key success factors of the MKTPlace seems to lie on the relative simplicity of procedures and reduced bureaucratic burden it requires from researchers. To begin with, the whole process is web-based and all information is accessible online. This is particularly important since scientists not only live in different continents, but often do not know their future research partners before engaging the platform.

The platform website is actually the main communication tool and source of information for participants. Via the website, researchers can try to find ('match') research partners⁴¹, submit pre-proposals and proposals, and follow the evaluation procedures. The procedure for submitting research projects⁴², as well as

⁴⁰ According to the governance model adopted, all these institutions are members of MKTPlace Steering Committee (SC). The Executive Committee is composed by Embrapa and FARA, who are responsible for the general coordination of the platform. See: <http://www.mktplace.org/site/index.php/what-we-do/governance>

⁴¹ The MKTPlace functions as a sort of 'match maker', creating synergies between African and Brazilian researchers. But more than putting researchers 'virtually' in contact, the platform also organizes annual forums, where researchers meet and discuss their experiences, lessons learned and the difficulties faced. These annual meetings seem to be particularly important to platform members and researchers, who have a unique opportunity to (physically) meet other projects, but also to visit Embrapa premises and labs in Brazil.

⁴² Once submitted online, pre-proposals are evaluated by the Executive Committee (Embrapa and FARA). If successful, pre-proposals receive can be further developed and submitted again as 'full proposals'. After a second evaluation, successful (full) proposals receive the financial support that will allow their implementation.

application dossiers does not require extensive bureaucratic work and form filling. Evaluation and follow up procedures tend also to be quite straightforward. The administrative burden of applying for grants of Framework Programme 7 (FP7) or Horizon2020 is seen as an important bottleneck for African participation in these EU research programmes.

Moreover, researchers assume a quite prominent role within the MKTPlace model.⁴³ They elaborate, design, but also implement research projects. In this process, they are in charge not only of the scientific aspects, but also of management of projects, including budget expenditure aspects.⁴⁴

African researchers are particularly empowered by the MTKPlace approach. Contrary to more traditional capacity building and mentoring initiatives, African researchers are not passive recipients of knowledge or techniques, but actors that (co)produce and (co)develop innovative knowledge and techniques.

Indeed, projects are designed by researchers from African (public and private) institutions, in cooperation with Embrapa researchers.⁴⁵ Hence, each project needs to have a Brazilian and African researcher. This is in reality a requirement for the submission of pre-proposals. When engaging the research, researchers need to have from the beginning a genuine (common) interest in developing a given project, which needs to have a proven (scientific) impact for their research institutions and countries. This particular approach guarantees high levels of engagement and ownership of projects on both the Brazilian and African side.

The Challenges of Scaling Up

Although research remains the focus, the MKTPlace is not about research *only*. The platform has a strong focus on the link between research and practice. Hence, the knowledge, techniques and innovation produced need to be connected to the final users' needs and help them tackling existing challenges. The demonstrated link between research and practice is indeed one of the criteria for awarding a proposal with a grant.

That said, scaling up projects and connecting them to farmers and markets remain a challenge for agriculture research in general, and for the platform as well. A number of variables seem to hinder the impact of research and its reach outside labs, such as the lack of clear business and funding models, poor communication and engagement levels of final users/markets; policy obstacles or deficient or inexistent infrastructures.

With this particular challenge in mind, MKTPlace stakeholders have decided to launch a new, parallel initiative called 'Building on Successes of the Agricultural Innovation Market Place' (MBoSs). The idea, as the project's name indicates, is to financially support the successful research projects so the innovative solutions and techniques they have developed can be (re)produced in larger scale and reach users and markets. The MBoSs can be seen as an attempt to tackle the 'research impact' challenge already identified by members of the platform. Indeed, MKTPlace researchers and stakeholders have been discussing internally how to scale up and out research results, in order to bring them closer to farmers' needs and demands.⁴⁶

The projects should be launched in 2015, with the financial support of the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation and DFID. Embrapa and FARA will remain the executive partners of MBoSs implementation.⁴⁷ At the moment of publication of this Briefing Note (November 2015), there was no confirmation of an official launching of the programme.

⁴³ Brazilian and African researchers have moreover the same status in the framework of the project they develop, and are identified as 'co-leaders'

⁴⁴ In fact, though rigorous, the rules regulating budget expenditures are relatively flexible, allowing researchers a certain space to manage the disbursement of the grant received (US\$ 80,000 per project).

⁴⁵ African scientists are in fact the initiators of the process: they draft pre-proposals, along one of the four thematic areas of the MKTPlace. These pre-proposals are then (re)elaborated together with a Brazilian counterpart, before being submitted to as ('final') proposals. This also makes the whole process more competitive, as the final selection by the Steering Committee.

⁴⁶ See MKTPlace Forum 2014 Report, in particular page 6:
<http://www.mktplace.org/site/images/documents/Forum%202014%20Report%2027%20may%202014.pdf>

⁴⁷ See : <http://faraafrica.org/news-events/science-agenda-for-africa-agriculture-show-cased-at-Embrapa-headquarters-brasilia-brazil/>

MKTPlace: Can the EU join?

The MKTPlace is based on a common belief: only by investing in science, technology and innovation can developing countries find the appropriate solutions to the challenges they face. This particular assumption is also shared by the European Union (EU) and a number of its Member States (MS). The European Commission has been increasing its support to agricultural research for development⁴⁸ and pressing for more attention for the 'last mile' - the uptake of research results.

More than securing research funding, the MKTPlace requires that research priorities and results meet both African and Brazilian needs. Project proposals are assessed on the level of impact on improving farmers' abilities to innovate. Projects' impact, ownership and sustainability are hence particularly strengthened by the project's 'bottom-up' approach. As the platform enters a new phase with the setting up of MBoSs, the MKTPlace comes even closer to some of the key priorities set at the EU level.

Indeed, the EU has been emphasizing the importance of inclusive and locally-owned research that can be shared, scaled up and mainstreamed. The way to accomplish this takes different forms. Support to the CGIAR is one of these ways, but there is also increasing attention towards other forms of cooperation like the one embodied by the MKTPlace.

Although the platform entails a number of risks, its research and policy impact seem robust enough to justify an EU engagement. Moreover, the support of a partner like the EU could help overcoming some of the existing challenges the platform faces, but also increase the impact of research results (scale up and out), or the number of participants beyond English-speaking countries. The EU participation could thereby considerably help to increase MKTPlace impact and effectiveness.

The EU engagement in the MKTPlace could be moreover seen as a political statement, or an indication that the EU is ready to effectively partner with 'emerging' or 'new donors'. Indeed, in the last years, the European Commission and a number of member states have been discussing the possibilities and potentials of these 'new partnerships'. And yet, despite an increasing number of studies, political/policy dialogues and recommendations⁴⁹, concrete actions (partnerships) have yet to emerge.

The EU seems in fact still reluctant to effectively engage in triangular (or multi-stakeholder) cooperation schemes with the so-called 'new' donors. Conflicting development approaches or cooperation goals, even if important, do not seem to be the major reasons here. It seems instead that the lack of information about 'new donors' initiatives and their impact on the ground, as well as a certain skepticism regarding non-traditional donors' intentions have been the major obstacles for further EU engagement.

Creating spaces and the (political) conditions for EU and emerging donors to exchange experiences, views and increase confidence in possible specific 'triangular initiatives' seems hence essential to promote their cooperation in the agricultural research field. In other words, promoting mutual trust, knowledge and acknowledgement of each others' roles is key to future participation by the EU in 'new partnerships' with emerging donors, such as the MKTPlace.

⁴⁸ European Commission, 'Research and innovation for sustainable agriculture and food and nutrition security': https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/guide-approach-paper-ar4d-2014_en_0.pdf

⁴⁹ See among others Rosengren, A., de Roquefeuil, Q., and Bilal, S., ECDPM Discussion Paper 150. September 2013.

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ECDPM Briefing Notes

ECDPM Briefing Notes present policy findings and advice, prepared and disseminated by Centre staff in response to specific requests by its partners. The aim is to stimulate broader reflection and debate on key policy questions relating to EU external action, with a focus on relations with countries in the South.

This publication benefits from structural support by ECDPM's following partners: The Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Luxemburg, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria and the United Kingdom.

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