

PANEL 3

Brazil and China in Africa: similarities and differences in South-South exchanges

There is growing recognition of the role that the so-called ‘rising powers’ play in international development. Attention has focused particularly on the countries forming the BRICS bloc (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and the opportunities they offer to poorer nations as trading partners, sources of private investment and providers of development finance and technical assistance. All five countries have longstanding development cooperation relationships with African nations. Yet, over recent years, their cooperation agenda has been significantly boosted and achieved global standing. This has been prompted, to a large extent and with some variations across the five BRICS, by economic prosperity and the related drive to expand markets and secure supplies of natural resources, as well as geopolitical motivations. China’s incursions into Africa have been particularly vigorous and the country today has a widespread and visible presence across the continent. Although China’s activities in Africa have been subject to much speculation and unfavourable comments, a more nuanced and balanced view is now surfacing as research on the topic builds up. Leading Chinese scholars have also begun to reflect specifically on what lessons their country’s agricultural transformation (and particularly the role of smallholder agriculture in this transformation) could hold for Africa, as well as on the challenges of exporting Chinese models to African contexts.

Although they are often grouped together under labels such as BRICS, Brazil and China are of course quite distinct in economic, cultural and political terms. Their approaches to development cooperation are also distinct – for example, China places a greater emphasis on building infrastructure, whereas Brazil relies predominantly on in-kind technical assistance. However, both countries see Africa as a key destination for their investments and agriculture as a core priority sector. Their programmes for supporting African agricultural development are increasingly diverse, with China expanding its engagement in research and training and Brazil beginning to provide credit as well as technical cooperation.

The aim of this panel is to take a comparative perspective on Brazilian and Chinese engagements with Africa and consider how cooperation for agricultural development has been conceptualised and practiced by both rising powers across the continent, highlighting differences and commonalities and reflecting on the potential for future exchange.

Guiding questions:

- What do you see as the main attributes of Chinese development cooperation with Africa? How well does cooperation reflect the lessons from China’s own agricultural development?
- What are the similarities and differences between Brazil and China in the way they think about and practice development cooperation?
- What are the similarities and differences between Brazil’s and China’s respective motivations and priorities for development cooperation with Africa?
- What complementarities can be identified between Brazilian and Chinese approaches to agricultural development cooperation?
- What might Brazil and China do together in this field in future?

Panel participants:

- Alex Shankland, IDS/FAC (chair)
- Paulo Esteves, BRICS Policy Centre Brazil (speaker)
- Qi Gubo, China Agricultural University (speaker)
- Frédéric Goulet, CIRAD (speaker)
- Sérgio Chichava, IESE Mozambique/FAC (discussant)