

# RISING POWERS & INTERDEPENDENT FUTURES

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## CHINA AND BRAZIL IN AFRICAN AGRICULTURE

The question of how Brazil, China and other 'Rising Powers' may change African agriculture is critical and timely. The Rising Powers are important sources of development finance and offer developing countries a combination of investment, lending, trade and cooperation that is gradually challenging the rules of the game of the global aid architecture. Africa is a major destination of the Rising Powers' diplomatic and economic ventures, and agriculture a leading area for investment and development.

Through detailed case studies and in-depth empirical investigations on the ground – in four countries in Africa, as well as Brazil and China – our project aimed to examine the features of development cooperation associated with the Rising Powers in their interactions with African countries' agricultural sectors and

explore whether a new paradigm of development cooperation was emerging.

The issue of China and Brazil in African agriculture was approached from multiple and complementary angles. By looking at Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, our research offers insights into the country-level dynamics at play. By considering Brazil and China's own domestic contexts and histories of agricultural development, it gives an understanding of the 'models', technology and ideas on offer, assessing the potential for their adaptation to African contexts. By analysing the South-South cooperation narratives and instruments, it situates China and Brazil in the context of the changing aid architecture and the recasting of cooperation and development.



President Lula da Silva visits Mozambique, 2010.

Between 2011 and 2016, our project carried out detailed field studies of 16 cases of Chinese and Brazilian engagements in African agriculture. These were complemented by reviews of Brazil and China's agricultural development trajectories and analyses of the two countries' contemporary institutional frameworks for cooperation and drivers for internationalisation, specifically in the agricultural domain. Over 20 working papers and journal articles were published, offering a comprehensive view of emerging patterns and trends.

This research was conducted by a team of researchers from China, Brazil, Ethiopia,

Ghana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and the UK. This team comprised a diverse array of disciplinary expertise, from agronomists to anthropologists to economists to international relations specialists to political scientists, all interested in different facets of development. The cross learning and exchange between disciplines and cultures was in itself an important outcome of the project.

Although offering an eclectic mix of styles and approaches, our team shared a focus on the drivers of policy and the ways in which cooperation, agriculture and development are socially constructed and talked about. Our project's analytical

framing therefore combined political economy analyses with discourse perspectives, used in tracing the movement of actors, interests, narratives and technologies, between Brazil and China and the four African countries. The emphasis on how policies, technologies, ideas and imaginaries travel within the Global South – with its local encounters, translations, re-interpretations and negotiations – is a distinctive contribution of our project.



Rice varieties from China at rice plots in Divo, Cote d'Ivoire, 2011.

Photo by Ding Haitao/Xinhua Press/Corbis

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## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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Throughout our research we asked the following questions:

- What visions and models of development underpin Brazil and China cooperation programmes in agriculture?
- What interests and agendas drive Brazilian and Chinese actors into African agriculture?
- What investments are China and Brazil making in agricultural production systems in Africa? What is their scale, nature (public or private) and focus?
- Are such investments part of a new scramble for Africa?
- How do China and Brazil's visions and models compare with one another and with traditional approaches to development?
- Is there evidence of emerging new paradigms for development cooperation and for agricultural development?

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## SELECTED FINDINGS

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**There are new elements of Brazilian and Chinese cooperation in agricultural development in Africa, and with these a new politics at both global and local levels. But there are also elements of continuity from older experiences.**

A distinctive feature is the centrality of business in Brazil and China's state-led cooperation. Examples from Brazil include the high-profile large-scale agricultural modernisation programme ProSAVANA, in Mozambique, or the multi-country mechanisation programme for family farmers, More Food International.

Examples from China include 'friendship farms' and the state-led but privately managed Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centres, China's agricultural cooperation flagship initiative. The business drive of Brazil and China's engagements somewhat echo past aid relations in Africa and help reproducing an ongoing (and recently re-energised) trend of corporate-driven development. Yet, unlike traditional donors, Brazil and China embrace a 'developmental' or 'entrepreneurial' state model, with a strong and directive role for the state.

Notwithstanding this broad feature and the dominance of the state in the initial drive towards Africa, at least, the experiences of Brazil and China in African agriculture turned out to be a medley of

very diverse interactions that somewhat blurred the linearity of the initial geopolitical ambitions. The South-South channel has mobilised multiple actors into African agriculture (diplomats, government agencies, private companies, state-owned enterprises, research organisations and social movements) who pursue different agendas and hold contrasting views about cooperation and about agricultural development. These contrasting views are rooted in Brazil and China's domestic politics, experiences and contestations. In Brazil, the divisive duality family farming-agribusiness has been a long-running feature of agrarian politics and the institutional framework that is reproduced in development cooperation. Likewise, China's agricultural narrative emphasises both agricultural modernisation and productivity rises, especially in large, mechanised farms, while also protecting the peasant sector to ensure rural stability.

These tensions and contestations expand as they land in Africa and meet other political economies and particular histories of agrarian politics and aid management. Ghana's embrace of economic liberalisation contrasts with Ethiopia's strong authoritarian state. Mozambique's aid-nurtured elite politics, where investments support narrow forms of accumulation, contrasts somewhat with

Zimbabwe's land reform experience and rupture with Western donors. The ways in which these countries interact with Brazil and China and make use of their resources, technologies, policy templates and development narratives is therefore necessarily different.

The Rising Powers have allowed greater space for negotiation by African governments in the handling of the aid system. And in the case of Brazil and China, they have offered new opportunities for exchange and learning from these countries' remarkable (if contested) agricultural development histories. They have also at times stimulated civil society activism that has mobilised in opposition to threats of land grab and corporate-led agricultural modernisation associated with investments by the Rising Powers in African agriculture. The agency of African counterparts is also noticeable at the more micro level of daily knowledge encounters. Cooperation projects are sites where technologies, agronomic practices as well as visions of cooperation, development and modernity are negotiated between technicians, experts and farmers in the frontline of the cooperation exchange, not unlike the history of traditional 'aidland' encounters.

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# IMPLICATIONS

## Implications for research

- Situate contemporary experiences in individual countries' historical trajectories – histories of agriculture and aid politics at origin and destination matter.
- Understand cooperation as co-constructed and with unpredictable effects – rather than unilateral and linear transfer by monolithic actors.

## Implications for development policy and practice

- Move beyond simplistic narratives of new paradigms of cooperation and singular Brazilian and Chinese models.
- Recognise Brazil and China as key influences in Africa's development – style of state-business relations and technologies could open up new development pathways.
- Recognise agency on African side (state and non-state) and how external influences are negotiated and appropriated locally.

## Team

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## Resources

**Project website:** [www.future-agricultures.org/research/cbaa](http://www.future-agricultures.org/research/cbaa)

### Key publications:

- *World Development Open Access Special Issue, Volume 81, 2016*, [www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/0305750X/81](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/0305750X/81)
- *CBAA working paper series, 2015-16*, <http://www.future-agricultures.org/research/cbaa/8031-china-brazil-paper-series>
- *IDS Bulletin Open Access, Volume 44 (4), 2013*, [www.bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/issue/view/24](http://www.bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/issue/view/24)



No to ProSAVANA campaign, Mozambique, 2014. Photo by UNAC