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Brazil and francophone Africa: Opportunities and challenges

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BRICS Policy Center Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas - BRICS



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1. Francophonie 2. Afro-Brazilians 3. Carbon Credit
4. CFA Franc.

Abbreviations

BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CAR	Central African Republic
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
IBSA	India, Brazil and South Africa Dialog Forum
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDB	New Development Bank
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OHADA	Organisation pour l'harmonisation en Afrique du droit des affaires
OIF	Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie
PEC-G	Programa Estudantes-Convênio – Graduação
TRIPS	Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZPCAS	South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone

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Executive Summary

The diplomatic efforts made by Brazil towards Africa in the last decade focused mainly on Portuguese-speaking countries, but represent the importance the continent is given within the foreign policy of the world's 9th economy. The connection between Brazil and Africa goes beyond new markets, rocketing growth rates and abundant raw materials, but is based on historic and cultural roots since the South Atlantic shares a long cultural and multifaceted common history of migration, trade and security issues.

Brazil has important historical and cultural ties to the francophone part of the continent, from which slaves were sent to the Brazilian coasts (from Dahomey). Francophone Africa is not a homogeneous group of countries, yet it shares the same currency (the Franc CFA), the same language and, to some extent, the same uneasy relationships with its former colonial power, France. From this perspective, Brazil's role as a progressive Southern country gives these countries a view of an emerging power and a potential new partner that takes their interests into account.

This paper aims at examining how francophone Africa presently perceives Brazil's ambitions in light of the current and past economic, political and diplomatic relationships. It identifies the opportunities the two counterparts represent for each other. The paper analyzes the shared history of francophone Africa and Brazil, from Lula's offensive on Africa to Rousseff's initiatives, but also a historical look at the emigration of Afro-Brazilians back to Dahomey and other West African countries in West-Africa. It addresses geopolitical interests and opportunities common to both Brazil and francophone Africa, and how South-South cooperation is constructed to defend both counterparts' interests. It also highlights the deteriorating relationship between France and francophone Africa, to give the reader a sense of the opening spaces and the convulsions of the system called "Françafrique". Finally, it analyses the economic potential of francophone Africa as a whole, and how Brazil is taking advantage (or not) of the space created by the steady withdrawal of France and the extent to which Brazil is competing with BRICS.

Brazil and francophone Africa: Opportunities and challenges

Khalid Tinasti

1. Introduction

The diplomatic efforts made by Brazil towards Africa, over the past ten years, represent the importance the continent is given within the foreign policy of the world's 9th economy.¹ Looking for new markets, attracted by rocketing growth rates and abundant raw materials, Brazil nevertheless focused much of its efforts on Portuguese-speaking Africa. But the connection with Africa goes beyond, based on historic and cultural roots that are far more complex than the relationship of Brazil with its other South partners in Asia, the Middle-East or even among the BRICS. In fact, the South Atlantic shares a long cultural and multifaceted common history of migration, trade and security issues.

Within its African efforts enhanced under President Lula and diminished somewhat under President Rousseff, Brazil has also targeted francophone African countries in a more superficial sense, as the interaction is generally limited to security issues through multilateral settings, or mining and oil trade. Nevertheless, Brazil has important historical and cultural ties to the francophone part of the continent, from which slaves were sent to the Brazilian coasts (from Dahomey). Francophone Africa is not a homogeneous group of countries, yet it shares the same currency (the Franc CFA), the same language and, to some extent, the same uneasy relationships with its former colonial power, France. From this perspective, Brazil's role as a progressive Southern country gives these countries a view of an emerging power and a potential new partner that takes their interests into account.

(1) Gross domestic product ranking table 2015. World Development Indicators, The World Bank; Washington: 2016. Available from: <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/GDP-ranking-table>

The aim of this paper is to examine how francophone Africa presently perceives Brazil's ambitions in light of the current and past economic, political and diplomatic relationships. It will also identify the opportunities the two counterparts represent for each other. In other terms, can Brazil replace France in its predominant presence in francophone Africa? And what are the free spaces Brazil can still fill through its African policy in this part of the continent? To respond to these questions, this paper analyzes the shared history of francophone Africa and Brazil, from Lula's offensive on Africa to Rousseff's initiatives, but also a historical look at the emigration of Afro-Brazilians back to Dahomey and other West African countries in West-Africa. The paper addresses geopolitical interests and opportunities common to both Brazil and francophone Africa, and how South-South cooperation is constructed to defend both counterparts' interests. This section will explore common international pathways for future collaboration – be it on the carbon credit or the reform of international institutions. The paper also highlights the deteriorating relationship between France and francophone Africa, to give the reader a sense of the opening spaces and the convulsions of the system called “Françafrique”. Finally, it will analyse the economic potential of francophone Africa as a whole, and how Brazil is taking advantage (or not) of the space created by the steady withdrawal of France and the extent to which Brazil is competing with BRICS.

2. A brief history of Brazil and francophone Africa's relations

The sub-Saharan lusophone countries comprise Brazil's natural sphere of influence on the African continent. But President Lula significantly expanded Brazil's diplomatic activity in Africa during his two terms in office (2003-2010). Lula's first official trip to a sub-Saharan francophone country was Gabon, in July 2004. He then visited Cameroon and Senegal in April 2005 followed by Benin in February 2006. His last visit, in October 2007, was to Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).² Out of the 21 countries visited on the continent,³ 6 at least were francophone. Dilma Rousseff has yet to visit a francophone country, even if her trip to Addis-Ababa for the 50th anniversary of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 2013 was marked by Brazil's cancellation of \$900 million debt of 12 sub-Saharan countries – the major share for francophone states including Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea and DRC.⁴

Brazilian official visits to francophone Africa have been very limited since the independence in 1960. The first visit of a Brazilian official and the launch of an African policy took place in October 1972, when the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mário Gibson Barbosa visited Côte-d'Ivoire, Togo, Zaïre and Senegal. In the context of strained relationships with Argentina and the oil crises, Brazil looked to Africa in an effort to diversify its supply of oil. In 1983, President João Figueiredo was the first Brazilian head of state in francophone Africa when he visited Senegal; this was to be the last until Lula's election.⁵ Brazil went on to open 20 new embassies between 2002 and 2012.⁶

(2) Lafargue, François. Le Brésil, une puissance africaine ? *Afrique contemporaine*, 2008/4 (n 228). DOI : 10.3917/afco.228.0137

(3) Alves, Ana Cristina. Brazil in Africa: Achievements and Challenges. *Emerging Powers in Africa- Special Report*, Edition: SR016. 2013; LSE IDEAS, Editors: Nicholas Kitchen, pp.37-44

(4) Le Brésil annule la dette de douze pays africains. *Le Monde*; 25 May 2013. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/article/2013/05/25/le-bresil-annule-la-dette-de-douze-pays-africains_3417518_3222.html#KcgV5oBJJwWdrOxD.99

(5) Lafargue, François. Le Brésil, une puissance africaine ? *Afrique contemporaine*, 2008/4 (n 228). DOI : 10.3917/afco.228.0137

(6) *Afrique-France : mettre en pratique le co-développement*. Contribution au XXVIe sommet Afrique-France. Institut Montaigne; Paris: December 2013. Available from: <http://www.institutmontaigne.org/res/files/publications/Rapport%20Afrique%20France.pdf>

Brazil first started moving beyond its lusophone partners in sub-Saharan Africa through its involvement in the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZPCAS), an accord which aimed to enhance military and economic partnerships on both sides of the southern Atlantic.⁷ Brazil has also been closely involved in the HIV/AIDS response in Africa, be it through convening the “Unitaid” initiative with several francophone countries, or by supporting the use of flexibilities of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), for better and inexpensive access to generic anti-retroviral therapy in Africa.

But Brazil’s interest in Africa shifted significantly under Lula, who adopted a strategy of common history to legitimize stronger economic and political engagement. During his first visit to Benin, Lula visited the “Door of no return” in Ouidah, one of the biggest slave ports in Africa. Brazil has the second largest black population in the world after Nigeria and, in line with Lula’s insistence on this common history, Rousseff passed a national law on social quotas⁸ to counter the under-representation of blacks and other people of colour in Brazilian universities in an effort to improve economic inequalities, institutionalizing a policy that started in the early 2000’s.

While the political partnership between Brazil and Africa is more of a modern phenomenon, the relationship between the two has deeper historical roots. What is less known in the history of francophone Africa and Brazil is the role played by the Afro-Brazilians that returned to the continent after the Malé Revolt and the abolition of slavery at the end of the 19th century.⁹ This emigration has been marked, differently from the African-Americans that settled in Liberia, by the return of the former Slaves to their original lands, especially in the Dahomey and Yoruba tribes (the current Benin, Togo, and some western parts of Nigeria). The Aguda, the Afro-Brazilian descendants, can also be found in Gabon and Central African coasts. There were several famous Afro-Brazilian figures in francophone Africa, be it Chacha de Souza, Domingo Martinez or Joaquim Almeida,¹⁰ all of them slave traders at some point. But the most famous figure of the Aguda is certainly Sylvanus Olympio, the first President of Togo. His grandfather moved from Bahia in mid-19th century to what is present day Ghana, but his family settled in Lomé, where they were one of the most prominent indigenous families to join anti-colonialism movements be it against the Germans or the French.¹¹ Olympio was the first independent African Head of State to be assassinated in 1963 after a coup d’état in the newly independent francophone African states.

3. Common international interests

Lula’s diplomatic offensive on Africa was well perceived by francophone Africa, as Brazil inspired Gabon’s or Côte d’Ivoire’s “emergence agendas” (these countries and others in the region adopted development agendas to become emerging markets by 2025, inspired mostly by the BRICS and their progress towards advanced economies). For Brazil to have a stronger international position is also not

(7) South-South Cooperation in Support of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development, Experiences of Africa-Latin America and the Caribbean. Office of the Special Adviser on Africa-United Nations; New York: 2004. Available from: <http://www.un.org/esa/africa/South%20South.pdf>

(8) Davis, Thomas W. Affirmative Action In Brazil: Its Recent Developments And The Argument For A Narrow Federalism Doctrine. *Race and Social Justice Law Review*, University of Miami; 2014. Available from: <http://repository.law.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=umrsjlr>

(9) Alinta, Sara. The Afro-Brazilian legacy in the bight Benin. *Pambazuka news* 2013-07-24, Issue 640. Available from: <http://www.pambazuka.net/en/category/features/88387>

(10) Viillard, Monique. La communauté afro-brésilienne du Golfe du Bénin, un cas unique de Diaspora africaine dans l’aire culturelle lusophone. *Latitudes*, n 23: April 2005. Available from: http://www.revues-plurielles.org/uploads/pdf/17_23_8.pdf

(11) Amos, Alcione M. Afro-Brazilians in Togo, the case of the Olympio family, 1882-1945. *Varia*, 162: 2001. Available from: <http://etudesafricaines.revues.org/88>

problematic, as it opens doors to the Global South. Francophone Africa's interest in cooperating with Brazil has been slowed by Dilma's relative lack of engagement, but the 2013 debt cancellation and the creation of the New Development Bank (NDB) in 2014 appear to have improved Brazil's image as an important partner on the continent.

Internationally, Brazil's UN reform proposition was a smart diplomatic move that would have assured Brazil a permanent seat at the Security Council. Brazil, along with Germany, Japan and India suggested the Security Council to have 10 new members, 6 of these being permanent seats. Four of them would have been the countries putting forth the proposal, while the two other seats would have been for Africa.¹² This request has been put forward in a UN General Assembly resolution in 2005.¹³ Nevertheless, the requested reform would have been problematic for francophone Africa for two reasons: the first is that one of the seats would have certainly been granted to South Africa, Africa's most advanced economy; while the second would have been assigned to Egypt, the second largest populated country in the continent as well as a representative of the Arab world.

Another major global interest shared by Brazil and francophone Africa, and especially Central Africa where the equatorial forest lies, is the development of the carbon credit. Brazil, combined with Gabon, Congo and the DRC have by far the largest carbon offset market in the world. In Gabon, President Ali Bongo Ondimba made the carbon credit one of the pillars of his presidential campaigns in 2009 and 2016, calling for a "Green Gabon", that would be a major source of revenue for the country in the longer term.

The UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) held in 2015, recognized the carbon credit as a climate change mitigation tool in the Paris agreement only.¹⁴ In the subsequent COP22, while African countries came together at the "Africa Action Summit" to request that polluting countries comply with international agreements and protocols and to submit the funds in the form of official development aid or carbon credits to countries managing to curb deforestation; the Brazilian delegation was in disagreement between the government representatives on one hand and the parliamentarians and civil society on the other, on the official request of Brazil to exclude policies for combating deforestation from the list of activities suitable for selling credits.¹⁵ Such a divide has certainly impacted negatively on the positions of the Global South in multilateral negotiations.

Finally, Brazil's respectable position in the international community can only reassure its African partners. With its effort to promote the TRIPS at WTO for the production and use of generic drugs in case of medical emergency or to denounce the agricultural subsidies of countries in the northern hemisphere, Brazil's call for the reform of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), its push for increased biofuel production, or its role in the creation of the G20, is earning the status of a new defender of the Global South's interests. The creation of the NDB as an alternative to international assistance driven by the IMF and the World Bank is an important example of the role Brazil can play in francophone Africa. Brazil has been a founding member of the NDB, with its creation adopted during the 6th BRICS Summit in Fortaleza in 2014, and an initial contribution of 10 billion US Dollars by Brazil.¹⁶

(12) Ribeiro, Claudio and Malaquais, Dominique. La politique africaine du Brésil et le gouvernement Lula. *Politique Africaine* 2009/1 (N 113). DOI : 10.3917/polaf.113.0071

(13) Resolution A/59/L.64, Security Council reform. United Nations General Assembly; 6 July 2005. Available from: <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=a/59/L.64>

(14) Agreement CCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1., Paris Agreement. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; 12 December 2015. Available from: <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf>

(15) Amaral, Ana Carolina. Financial Incentives for Preserving Forests Divide Brazilian Delegation. *Folha de Sao Paulo*; 16 November 2016. Available from: <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/internacional/en/scienceandhealth/2016/11/1832592-financial-incentives-for-preserving-forests-divide-brazilian-delegation.shtml>

(16) New Development Bank. Agreement on the New Development Bank – Fortaleza, July 15, 2014. Available from: www.ndb.int/download/Agreement%20on%20the%20New%20Development%20Bank.pdf

4. The decline of Françafrique

Francophone Africa has lived its 50 first years under a strong institutional and technocratic French influence, a tradition called Françafrique. Françafrique is a neo-colonial system initiated under Charles de Gaulle and directed by his adviser Jacques Foccart. The Foccart networks were born from the French interference in the African affairs for two main reasons: the first was mainly to ensure France a privileged access to the extractive industries in sub-Saharan Africa, and the second was to counter communism and the soviet influence during the Cold War in this part of the world. Achille Mbembe described the concept of Françafrique thus:

“Françafrique is often talked about as if it consisted only of a few middlemen, envoys and offices operating in the shadows. But what is it if not a model of control and domination without responsibility? A broad system based on the reciprocal assimilation and mutual corruption of segments of the French and African elites, Françafrique, an inversed decolonization model, is governed by all sorts of private arrangements and favoritism and supported by a series of illegal practices, even criminal ones. For its survival, this tributary and suzerain system depends on the persistence of forms of tyrannical powers in Africa and a heritage of the French African policy without any democratic or parliamentary control.”¹⁷

But if Françafrique model's importance is not to be undermined, the study of the relationship between France and its former colonial empire should be undertaken through a contemporary approach, more adapted to the current diplomatic environment, with institutional reflections and consequences in the legal framework of the state. This new approach to Françafrique is on today's agenda since this system of French policy in Africa has been declining in many ways for the last decade.

The relationship between France and francophone Africa began to decline with the rise of legal action implicating political elites on the continent. The most resonating ones are most certainly the “Affaires des biens mal acquis” (ill-gotten gains) in which civil society representatives from Transparency International and Sherpa sued the heads of state of Gabon, Congo and Equatorial-Guinea for their estates and fortunes in France. The other example concerns the murder, with the implication of members of the Djiboutian regime, of the French magistrate Bernard Borrel in Djibouti. The last case of importance is the “Angolagate” implicating members of the regime of Angola in an arms sale affair. Other important litigious cases concerned the Rwandan genocide or the murders of French citizens in Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁸ The independence of the French judiciary is not well understood by African leaders, and its investigations of Françafrique affairs are perceived as a political manipulation on the part of France. This situation has led several African presidents to look for other commercial partners and mainly among the BRICS, which do not interfere in their national politics.

The relationship between France and Africa deteriorated even more after the first African speech of Nicolas Sarkozy, the former French president (2007-2012). In July 2007, and part of his visit to several francophone African countries, Sarkozy gave a speech at the Dakar University known as the “discours de Dakar” or Dakar speech. In this now infamous address, the French president relied on stereotypes of Africa and its place in the contemporary world, focusing on the general inertia of the continent and how “the African man has not yet entered history.”¹⁹ This speech has been challenged by intellectuals and scholars both in Africa and France, gaining criticism from one of Sarkozy's ministers and compelling his former presidential challenger Segolene Royal to ask for Africa's forgiveness.

On the continent, several presidents started to openly criticize the Françafrique system, such as Ali Bongo Ondimba of Gabon, who stated: “This is an affair of no concern to us, it is an affair of the past as far as I am concerned. I do not know the Françafrique, I know the relations between a state and a state, one of our most

(17) Mbembe, Achille. *La France : une puissance en voie de déclassement*. Les Inrockuptibles. Paris : 17 octobre 2012.

(18) Moncrieff, Richard. *French relations with Sub-Saharan Africa under president Sarkozy*. South African institute of international affairs. N 107, Johannesburg: January 2012.

(19) Sarkozy Nicolas. *The Dakar Speech*. *Le Monde*; 26 July 2007. Available from: http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2007/11/09/le-discours-de-dakar_976786_3212.html

privileged partners, as we have other privileged relations with several other countries.”²⁰ Similarly, Macky Sall of Senegal left little ambiguity with his declaration that “Françafrique does not exist, what exists is a link between France and Africa.”²¹

Francois Hollande marked his election as French president in 2012 with a commitment to put an end to Françafrique. His government was the first to pass a development and international solidarity law called commonly “LoiDev” and promulgated in July 2014. This law gave parliament the power to supervise the aid granted by France and instituted a legal framework for granting the money,²² a departure from the former practices of Françafrique. Hollande also distanced himself from controversial African presidents and decided to visit Senegal for his first African official visit (right after the democratic transition from Abdoulaye Wade to Macky Sall), and then to attend the Francophonie Summit in DRC where he called for the need for democratic governance on the continent.

Nevertheless, two years after his election, the relationship between Francois Hollande and his African counterparts suffered a defeat at the Dakar Francophonie Summit in November 2014. The African member states felt that France supported the victory of the Canadian candidate to the Secretary-General position of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), a position that has always been given to a representative of a country of the South.²³ They also heavily criticized Hollande’s speech in which he called all African rulers tempted by changing their constitutions to remain in power to take the Burkina experience for an example of what might happen to them as well (the resignation of President Blaise Compaoré in 2014, triggered by popular contest after an attempt to amend the constitutional article limiting the incumbent’s terms in office to two).²⁴

Notwithstanding all the ups and downs in France’s relationship with Africa, France still plays its role of defender of its francophone African “backyard”. This was demonstrated by French military interventions “Serval” and “Berkhane” in Mali and the larger Sahel as well as the operation “Sangaris” in the Central African Republic (CAR). This constant French intervention is the intervention of a “black knight”, or the “counter-hegemonic powers whose economic, military, and/or diplomatic support helps blunt the impact of US or EU democratising pressure. Russia, China, Japan and France played this role at various times [...] using economic, diplomatic and other assistance to shore up authoritarian governments in neighbouring (or, in the case of France, former colonial) states”.²⁵ France also considered intervening against Boko Haram if it had received a call for help from Cameroon, Chad or Niger. In a 2015 meeting of NATO’s Chiefs of Defence, the French General Pierre de Villiers said France will consider it and reminded the UK and the US of their responsibility in defending Nigeria.²⁶

The strong and historic role of France in francophone Africa leaves little space for the new emerging powers, and countries like Brazil or China suffer the consequences of this hegemonic position, as well as their own competition to enter the francophone African markets. But times are changing, African markets are opening, policymakers are looking for new partners and business leaders are looking to the BRICS as the model to follow. There is a clear space for Brazil in these small and fragmented markets, but the return on investment may take long to be profitable.

(20) Affaire Bourgi : Ali Bongo “ne connaît pas la Françafrique”. Jeune Afrique; 16 septembre 2009. Available from : <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Articles/Dossier/ARTJAWEB20110916090208/france-s-n-gal-gabon-justiceaffaire-bourgi-ali-bongo-ne-conna-t-pas-la-fran-afrique.html>

(21) Macky Sall : “La Françafrique n’existe pas”. Euronews. 19 April 2014; Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFPA7TdKXSU>

(22) Loi du 7 juillet 2014 d’orientation et de programmation relative à la politique de développement et de solidarité internationale. Vie Publique. Available from: <http://www.vie-publique.fr/actualite/panorama/texte-discussion/projet-loi-orientation-programmation-relative-politique-developpement-solidarite-internationale.html>

(23) Pierre Buyoya : “Comme beaucoup, j’ai été surpris par la manière de faire de François Hollande”. Jeune Afrique; 1 December 2014. Available from: <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20141201173545/>

(24) François Hollande à Dakar : « Ce qu’a fait le peuple burkinabè doit faire réfléchir ». Jeune Afrique; 29 November 2014. Available from: <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20141129163714/>

(25) Levitsky, Steven and Way, Lucan. Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War. Cambridge: 2010; Cambridge University Press.

(26) Hugué, Vincent. Boko Haram : Paris sonne le rappel. L’Express N 3317; 28 January to 3 February 2015.

5. The commercial potential of francophone Africa

Since Brazil's engagements in Africa have been largely concentrated on mining, oil and infrastructure²⁷ for the last ten years, it seems necessary to look into the potential of francophone Africa as a whole. But francophone countries member of the OIF, as a block of 54 member countries represents a very heterogenic group and only 6 to 8% of the world's economy,²⁸ including France, Canada and Switzerland. Moreover, targeting francophone countries in sub-Saharan Africa would be ill-advised because of the inexistence of any economic integration. The fact that francophone Africa will comprise, in 2050, 85% of the French speaking populations of the world²⁹ does not change the challenges each of its countries faces and the need for more integration. Initiatives to integrate the francophone African market, such as the Organisation pour l'harmonisation en Afrique du droit des affaires (OHADA)³⁰ created in 1993, have not yet given conclusive results. The majority of the francophone African countries are concentrated in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). But what would be left in the commercial balance of ECOWAS without Nigeria (the continent's largest economy) or Ghana, and what would ECCAS be without Angola? Still, in 2013, the growth rate of the "Franc Zone" was 4.2%, lower than the rate for all sub-Saharan Africa, which was at 4.9%.³¹ In 2016, ECOWAS is expected to reach a growth rate of 7.2% and ECCAS a rate of 2%.³²

There are other priorities for francophone countries on the continent, such as ending the fragmentation of their economies and building coherent and integrated systems with their neighbors, and that is where partners like Brazil can play a role. Francophone Africa tends to have very fragile economies, with major problems which consistently place these countries among the lowest ranks in the human development index.³³ On education, access to healthcare and democratic rule, Brazil has much more to offer than focusing on mining and oil extraction, domains that many Africans see as exploitative. The country maintained, despite its financial and budgetary difficulties, the student program called Programa Estudantes-Convênio – Graduação (PEC-G)³⁴ offering African students scholarships to study in Brazil (created in 1965 by Decree No. 55.613). Ten countries out of the 25 African countries concerned by the programme are francophone.³⁵ On reducing economic disparities, the "Bolsa Família" or "Fome Zero" are seen by many African policymakers as paths to follow as well.

There is also evidence of reduced commercial interchange between France and francophone Africa. The French market share in francophone Africa (the CFA Franc Zone) declined from 35% in 2004 to 12% in 2012, while China's grew from 5% to 18% during the same period.³⁶ Worryingly, Brazil's exports have also declined from 0.9% between 1995 and 2005, to 0.6% between 2005 and 2009, when they evolved in Africa as a whole from 1.8% to 2.7% in the same period.³⁷ But this could be explained partly by Brazil's African policy's narrow

(27) Muggah, Robert and Thompson, Nathan. What Is Brazil Really Doing in Africa? Huffington Post; 4 January 2015. Available from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-muggah/what-is-brazil-really-doi_b_6413568.html

(28) Salif Sy, Cherif, Nubukpo, Kaku and Boillo, Jean-Joseph. La Francophonie ne doit pas devenir un espace économique. Jeune Afrique Economie; 31 December 2014. Available from: <http://economie.jeuneafrique.com/tribune/408-tribune-internationale/23786-la-francophonie-ne-doit-pas-devenir-un-espace-economique.html>

(29) Dénombrement des francophones. Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. Available from: <http://www.francophonie.org/Denombrement-des-francophones.html>

(30) Organisation pour l'harmonisation en Afrique du droit des affaires. Available from: <http://www.ohada.com/accueil.html>

(31) Perspectives économiques régionales pour l'Afrique subsaharienne. International Monetary Fund; April 2014. Available from: <http://www.imf.org/external/french/pubs/ft/reo/2014/afr/sreo0414f.pdf>

(32) Banque de France. La Zone franc. Novembre 2015. Available from: https://www.banque-france.fr/fileadmin/user_upload/banque_de_france/publications/l_eco_en_bref/l-eco-en-bref-la-Zone-franc.pdf

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perspective between the ambitions of other BRICS and the traditional partners. Brazil can hardly compete politically and financially with China that uses low paid Chinese labor or biased competition by subsidized state enterprises. Brazil also faces competition from India, whose companies covet the same investment sectors such as mining and oil.³⁸ Vale lost the bid to the Belinga iron ore mine in Gabon in 2006 to the Chinese company CMEC.³⁹ Nevertheless, in May 2012 Brazil launched the largest Africa-focused private equity fund (\$1 billion) through investment bank BTG Pactual,⁴⁰ focusing mainly on lusophone countries.

Finally, there are common characteristics shared by francophone African countries and that directly influence their economies: organized crime, terrorism and political instability. Mali and Niger are still under the threat of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb; CAR is experiencing a civil war; Cameroon is now directly threatened by Boko Haram; the Guinea Gulf is a hub of piracy; and West Africa is a major drug trafficking route. In the area of security, Brazil invests moderately in sub-Saharan Africa through its South Atlantic strategy. Cooperation agreements have been signed with francophone countries such as Senegal, Mali and Equatorial Guinea,⁴¹ while Brazil sells small arms and ammunitions, in a limited quantity compared to the US or Russian competition, to a series of francophone African countries with the major client being Algeria.⁴² Yet, the bulk of Brazil's contribution to the security of the continent is played through indirect or multilateral channels, be it at the IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa Dialog Forum) or through United Nations programmes.⁴³

6. Conclusion

Francophone Africa is at a turning point in its history, reaching better democratic rules and enjoying stronger political institutions. After 56 years of independence, francophone countries on the continent are now slowly emerging from the shadow of the former colonial power and turning to new partners. They are anxious to join the club of emerging markets, in an attempt to leverage advantages, such as a large youth population, a robust workforce, good debt to GDP ratios and high growth rates. At the same time, these countries face shared challenges, of which the ownership of the response to their problems with less reliance on international aid, the development of access to healthcare and the financial protection from health-related expenditures, youth education and training and, most of all, poverty reduction and the reduction of economic disparities.

For a number of these challenges, francophone Africa could look to Brazil. Brazil and the African continent do not only share similar geography or face the same issues, they both look for a new international order in which the Global South will play a role as important as it is intended to through the number of its populations and the dynamic of its economies.

Even if francophone Africa represents a heterogenic ensemble, Brazil should consider adopting a specific approach taking into account the particular history of these countries, their need to build strong

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economies based on the green market that would take into account their potential, and focus on the services instead of investing heavily in mining and oil where the competition is at its high with other BRICS and north players. Any approach Brazil may take towards this part of the world should be a long-term one.

Francophone Africa, culturally, is the future hub of the French-language. In less than 50 years, the majority of French speakers will live in the continent, but it cannot limit itself in a battle to make the Francophonie an economic space. Just as well, francophone Africa can learn from Brazil's failures in its economic development, avoiding the over-exploitation of some of its resources, while it can reproduce many of its successes in access to health, to education, and to lower inequalities between its citizens.

About the authors

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