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Africa-Brazil Relations in the Context of Global Changes

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Introduction

Relations between Africa and Brazil dates back to the era of slave trade in which many African slaves were settled in Brazil and other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean Island. Due to the historical experience of slave trade, 'the African dimension remains very robust and apparent in Brazil, through genetic, cultural (such as folklore, music, religion, literature and cuisine) and linguistic legacy' (Alves, n.d). Africa and Brazil also suffered extreme exploitation under European colonial rule in the post-1490 period. This similarity in historical experiences has developed some form of bond and sense of solidarity between Africa and Brazil. They share similar views on international politics and have taken common positions on issues affecting relations between the global north and the global south. This policy briefs reflects broadly on the nature and character of this relationship in a changing world.

The Context

During the Cold War, various African countries and Brazil were members of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77.

After the end of the Second World War, Brazil was part of the countries that championed a New International Economic Order under the South-South Cooperation. Although Brazil had suffered the same fate with Africa in form of authoritarian rule and misgovernance under various military dictatorships, the country returned to global reckoning and importance under President Lula Da Silva. This continued under his successor, President Dilma Rouseff. Brazil has over the past twenty years lifted millions of people out of poverty and reduced the level of inequality (Ravallion, 2009). As the domestic environment determines the strength of foreign policy, the improvement in the economy performance of Brazil has translated into greater relevance in the global arena.

As various reports have shown, Africa as a continent has, over the past few years, been the fastest growing region in the world (Gumede, 2013, World Bank, 2012). Many countries on the continent such as South Africa, Angola, Nigeria and Ghana have been top investment destinations for foreign direct investment. Economic growth in Africa has been fuelled by boom in commodity sales, which itself is a reflection of the growing economies of emerging countries such as Brazil, India and China. The simultaneous growth in Africa and Brazil has foisted further cooperation and strengthened their voices in the demand for a more equitable and just global order.

Growing Diplomatic Relations

Recent relations between Africa and Brazil have involved both political, economic, cultural and social dimensions. Politically, there have been diplomatic exchanges between Brasilia and leading African countries. Past and present presidents of Brazil have visited African countries and past and present African leaders have also reciprocated the visits.

Contemporary Brazil-Africa relations is a product of serious diplomatic efforts initiated and sustained by leaders of both partners. According to Juma (2013), former President Lula Da Silva visited 21 countries in the continent in what amounted to more than 20 visits between 2003 and 2011. He also worked to increase the number of Brazil's embassies in Africa to 37. Correspondingly, African embassies in Brazil also increased from 16 to 34 (Milani, 2013). In order to further strengthen diplomatic relations, Brazil-Africa forum was established through which African and Brazilian leaders meet to foster cooperation among themselves.

Brazil-Africa and the BRICS Pivot

In February 2013, Brazil's President, Dilma Rouseff, visited Nigeria and signed an agreement geared towards fostering further Nigeria-Brazil cooperation. Although South Africa is the only country in Africa in the BRICS countries, of which Brazil is a member, this group of countries are creating opportunities for African countries to diversify their business and investment partners. Contrary to the brazen neo-colonial relationship that has existed between African countries and the West, relations between Africa and the BRIC countries are being defined into a win-win affair. The total trade of BRICS nations with Africa was US\$340billion in 2012, which is more than an 11-fold increase from \$28billion in 2002 (Juma, 2014). Notwithstanding, there have been concerns that the presence of China in Africa, though benign, could have some neo-colonial imprints (Taylor, 2006, Oloruntoba and Akinboye, 2013)

The most tangible measure of the increasing relations between Africa and Brazil is in the areas of trade and investment. Trade volume between Africa and Brazil has increased geometrically over the past few years from about US\$4.3billion in 2000 to around US\$26.5billion in 2012.

However, a disaggregation of the trade flow shows that though it is surplus for Africa, Brazil has a better deal. Its exports aggregate to Africa shows 42 percent manufactured, 27 percent semi-manufactured, 31 percent basic, while on imports, it is highly concentrated on natural resources at 66 percent, and 34 percent on raw materials (Alves, n.d). Trade is also concentrated in just four countries of Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt and Angola. The increase in volume of trade further creates opportunities for diversification away from the traditional partners in the West, whose relations with Africa have been more of exploitation and expropriation (Mathews, 2004).

There has also been an increase in the volume of foreign direct investment of Brazil in Africa, especially in oil and mining sector. These are carried out through Petrobras and Vale companies, partly owned by the state and the private sector. Despite the opportunities for investment in Africa, Brazilian companies are not spared of the challenges that businesses in Africa face. Such challenges include, infrastructure bottlenecks, unstable regulatory frameworks, inefficient institutional framework, (red tape and heavy bureaucracy and skill shortage).

Implications for Africa and Global Governance

The current level of mutually beneficial relations between Africa and Brazil presents two interrelated dynamics which should be interrogated. First is the implications of this relations on the global governance architecture and second is the need for strategic engagement of Africa with Brazil in terms of defining what its interests are, designing appropriate strategies of engagement with the country and taking in some lessons on issues of governance, institution building, mix of policies and agential factor in boosting socio-economic development and building inclusive societies.

There is no doubt that a mutually reinforcing relationship between Africa and Brazil can exert some pressures on the Western powers to carry out the necessary reforms of the international organisations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations Organisation. The reforms of these organisation are long overdue in view of the changes that have occurred both at country levels and at the international environment since they came in effect in the 1940s. For one, most of the countries in developing world were still under colonial rule when these organisations were formed. Consequently, their voice were not heard.

The clamour for the reform of the international institutions has been particularly stringent in recent years due to the changes in the geography of global power (Oloruntoba and Akinboye, 2014). Already, there have been some form of cooperation between Brazil and African countries on pushing for a more development oriented deal under the Doha Round of negotiation at the World Organisation. In actual fact, the deadlock in the Doha Round has much to do with the stronger voice that Brazil, along side other countries like China, India and to some extent South Africa, at the multilateral levels. They should leverage on the current economic growth to exert more pressure for the reforms of these institutions to make them more development friendly and more representative not only of the huge population of the global south but also of the diversities in the membership of these institutions.

At the domestic level, Africa has a lot to learn from how Brazil has become a force to reckon with at the global level. One of the areas that African countries can learn from Brazil is in governance and organisation of politics. Since the economic crisis of the 1980s, adoption of liberal democracy has been made one of the conditionalities for aid and development assistance.

However, as several scholars have argued, liberal democracy is the democracy of the market, which only benefits the capitalist class and the political elites (Ake, 1996, 1994). Brazil on the other hand has adopted a form of democracy that gives the state leverage over the market. The state intervenes where necessary to make businesses serve the interest of the society. The subordination of economics to politics in Brazil has also impacted positively on the ability of the state to formulate appropriate social policies that have helped in massively reducing poverty and inequality in Brazil. The commitment of Brazil to building the human resource base through investment in education, especially of the poor families is a lesson for most African countries where many children are still out of school.

Africa should also learn from Brazil in the innovative approach that the country has brought to bear on aviation. Such lessons can help make Africa's aerospace industry to be more dynamic, accessible, safer and reliable. Africa has a lot to learn from the agricultural revolution that has taken place in Brazil. For example, lessons can be learnt on how Brazil used the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) to bring about agricultural revolution in the country. In view of the increasing challenge of food security in Africa today, the continent must borrow initiatives from a country like Brazil, through which technical and credit support can be given to farmers such that the vast potentials of agriculture on the continent can be fully harnessed.

Conclusion

Lastly, in relating with Brazil, Africa must leverage on its abundant resource base to attract technological know-how from the country. Best practices on governance and social policies that have helped the country reduce poverty and inequality could also be adopted on the continent. Given the historical ties between Africa and Brazil, there is room for more cultural interactions and learning.

Recommendations

The following policy recommendations are made with a view to elevating the strategic posture of the Africa-Brazil relations in the context of changes in the balance of power internationally and Africa's pursuit of strategic partnerships in line with the vision 2063:

- Africa should see relations with Brazil as strategic for its ability to advance its goals with regard to global economic reform.
- Africa through the African Union should consider developing a strategy document looking at areas where Africa could learn from Brazil and vice versa with a view to developing these into agreements between the two.

Notes

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