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O Brasil Gigante: Bringing The Brazilian Miracle to African Soil

Over the past five years, Brazilian researchers, farmers and capital have been moving into Africa. While there are historical ties between African countries and Brazil, as well as a shared heritage of Portuguese colonization, the level of connection today is massive and unprecedented. Prompted by President Luis Inacio (“Lula”) da Silva in the context of the growing global food crisis, the Brazilian agricultural extension agency EMBRAPA has established multiple training centers in western and south-eastern Africa (beginning in Ghana and moving towards Mozambique). Brazilian researchers see Africa as an “experimental field” and an exceptional “source of biodiversity” (africainvestor 2009); the training centers introduce germplasm exchanges, capacity training workshops, technology development and transfer, and market deepening geared towards a win-win scenario: Brazil expands the reach and competitiveness of its agricultural technology and profits from the development of new crop varieties, particularly in rice and soybeans, while African countries improve crop production and build their agrarian sectors (EMBRAPA n.d.). In other words, “what EMBRAPA sows, the world harvests” (Ibid). To support the technological push, the Brazilian government is providing millions of dollars in loans for Brazilian farmers to buy land in Africa, particularly in the former Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola. These farmers are seen as some of the most technologically advanced and modern producers in the world and the hope is that they will infuse African agriculture with the dynamism and efficiency thus far lacking. Brazil’s push to develop African agriculture mirrors what *The Economist* (September 2010) refers to as “the Brazilian Miracle,” or the rapid growth of agro-industrial production, processing and distribution in the center-west of Brazil, a region known as the *Cerrado*. As it did in the Cerrado, the Brazilian government is partnering with the Japanese development agency, JICA, and the World Bank so that the farming research is embedded in a broader strategy for local economic development.

The push for an “African Miracle,” or a yellow-green revolution in Africa, raises a host of questions that I hope to explore as part of the ISS theme project. The extension work and research being done by Embrapa as well as the migration of Brazilian farmers to Mozambique need to be situated in the broader context of ongoing high and volatile food prices, concerns of peak oil and the search for new energy sources, and debates over the so-called new “scramble for Africa,” or global land grab. I will use funds provided through the ISS theme project to conduct research in Ghana at the Embrapa-Africa headquarters and in Mozambique with Brazilian researchers and farmers to better understand how technologies and techniques created by Embrapa are being adapted and incorporated on the ground, and how different understandings of the land and labor are shaping relationships between key stakeholders. From an ecological standpoint, it is argued that there are many similarities between Brazil and Sub-Saharan Africa (Embrapa Africa 2010), but history and place matter; in this research, I will attempt to understand how.

Works Cited

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