

# Development cooperation and transparency in Brazil

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This briefing summarises key findings from two recent reports from Development Initiatives on Brazil, both based on interviews with national stakeholders.

- [Brazil as an international actor](#) presents the domestic debate on Brazil as a provider of development cooperation.
- [Transparency in Brazil](#) provides an overview of domestic initiatives to enhance transparency, foster access to information and disseminate open data in Brazil, in particular on public resource-focused activities.

## Brazil's successes in reducing domestic poverty drives attention to its development cooperation

Brazilian development cooperation has gained more relevance in recent years, mainly as a result of an increasingly multi-polar distribution of power globally and a rise in development cooperation from some Southern providers. Brazil is one of these providers and is seen as a likely candidate to lead an emerging development agenda from the South.

In addition, many developing countries would like to learn development lessons from Brazil. The country halved poverty ahead of the Millennium Development Goals deadline and puts the ending poverty at the centre of its official post-2015 engagement. Its successful national social protection system has gained international recognition.

## Changes in Brazil's foreign policy affect its development cooperation

Brazil would like to have a bigger role in international affairs. President Lula's administration (2003–2011) focused on making Brazil a leader among developing countries – able to raise its voice and be a mediator between developing and developed countries. His main foreign policy objective was to rebalance global power relations.

This agenda has lost traction under President Dilma (since 2011), whose main focus is domestic. Her government's external engagement tends to serve the purpose of fostering the national economy rather than achieving political gains.

Development cooperation is considered a tool to strengthen South–South relations. Brazil largely focuses on sharing its national policies expertise with other developing countries in response to their demands. According to some public officials, the latter is responsible for customising and implementing those policies. Brazil's role is primarily to share its experience.

## This is a new policy space in Brazil, but engagement is growing

Development cooperation issues only attract a small group of actors in Brazil, but new opportunities are emerging. The main priority of academics and civil society is to ensure that Brazil's development cooperation promotes an inclusive and sustainable development model. Most of these stakeholders have a background in national issues and want to be sure that development cooperation does not replicate the limitations and downsides of policies that they criticise domestically.

## The priority is to make foreign relations a public policy, including better accountability and institutions

A more energetic foreign policy has led to requests to open this policy space to public debate. This is a relatively new demand, as Brazilian foreign policy has traditionally received little public attention in comparison with other policy areas. There is very little interest in this agenda among parliamentarians and consequently accountability through national congress and senate is weak. The key demands that emerge from the study are:

- A more accountable, functional, transparent and inclusive institutional and legal framework, including establishing a multi-stakeholder council of foreign relations
- A clearer alignment between Brazil's development cooperation principles and its practice
- Better information on the impact of Brazil's development cooperation in partner countries
- A national development bank that is more transparent and responsible, in particular regarding its operations abroad.

## Transparency is a tool for better dialogue on public policy

Stakeholders signalled that their ability to influence policy is currently limited and raised concerns over information limitations and lack of government dialogue. The reports on Brazilian development cooperation (COBRADI) compiled by Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) are a welcome step towards more transparency, but are still insufficient in meeting information needs.

Civil society and academia see better information as a precondition to building an informed and open debate on Brazilian development cooperation. Brazilian stakeholders understand transparency as a tool to increase knowledge and accountability and to ultimately democratise decision making. Transparency demands cover five areas (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Transparency of Brazilian development cooperation encompasses five dimensions



## A strong national constituency is needed

Brazil still remains a country with major domestic economic and social challenges and development cooperation needs to prove what benefits it brings to both developing countries and to the domestic community. Building a strong and engaged community of support for this agenda is vital to make the most of the country's potential as a development partner. More participation and accountability are essential to maximise Brazil's contributions.

## Overlap between the development cooperation and domestic transparency communities is very limited

The community of stakeholders engaged in the Brazilian development cooperation debate only overlaps marginally with the group of civil society organisations (CSO) committed to improve access to information, foster transparency and disseminate open data in Brazil. In parallel,

progress on improving transparency and implementing access to information legislation in Brazilian foreign policy is weak compared with domestic policy areas.

### **Availability of data and information on domestic issues is vast in Brazil**

Brazil has a vast amount of data and information provided to the public by federal and local governments. Information covers a variety of domestic topics such as federal budget, contracts, social policies beneficiaries, institutional charts and responsibilities among others. The country also has formal mechanisms to file requests for access to information to public bodies.

### **Existing regulation is satisfactory, but needs implementing fully**

This rich availability of government information rests on national legislation that stakeholders assess positively. Legal provisions require that public institutions provide information proactively; access to information requests are allowed with limited exceptions; legislation refers to open data criteria; and the country has an open data national plan.

Fully implementing available legislation remains a challenge, in particular at state and municipal level. The federal bodies generally perform better, but lack of legitimacy, motivation and scarce resources in the public administration can lead to resistance. Governance of the system is also considered inadequate, resulting in weak law enforcement.

### **Inclusive decision-making is at the top of the national agenda**

Interviews show that CSOs engage with these issues for three main reasons:

- Fostering citizenship and access to rights and advocating for better public policies
- Fighting corruption at all levels of government
- Fostering access to information, open knowledge and data

Encouraging a more participatory democracy is at the top of their agenda. Most organisations' main objective is to promote broader participation in public policy decision-making and increase accountability. Transparency, access to information and open data are often a means to these ends. These objectives also inform engagement with the Open Government Partnership, of which Brazil is a founding member.

### **Priorities and backgrounds vary among CSOs, but collaboration is frequent**

Brazilian CSOs that work on these issues have a diverse background. They focus on social participation, freedom of expression, corruption, public budgets, open data and knowledge, human rights, equality research and social progress. Some were established during Brazil's re-democratisation in support of democracy. Others were founded more recently, driven by the new opportunities offered by technology and data.

CSOs with these different backgrounds collaborate quite frequently to foster the transparency, access to information and open data agenda. But collaboration occurs mainly on an ad hoc basis and does not necessarily lead to continuous engagement and a common agenda. The key priorities that emerged in the interviews and that underpin the majority of initiatives are:

- Fully implementing transparency and access to information regulation
- Improving public spending
- Fighting corruption
- Disseminating open data.

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