For some Brazilian farmers Africa is the new frontier

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by Isaura Daniel

Frademir Saccol is Brazilian and, until late 2008, lived a peaceful life in the city of Guaíba, in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, working on agricultural financing projects in the region. Saccol is still working in agriculture, but now, instead of Rio Grande do Sul, he lives in Accra, the capital of Ghana, in Africa.

From there, he goes to the countryside twice a week, to check on the rice crops. Saccol has a share in a Ghanaian farm, with another Brazilian and one local partner, and he is among the team of Brazilian producers who decided to travel the world to work in agriculture, mainly in the African continent.

A similar movement took place earlier, around forty years ago, heading to countries in South America, like Paraguay. Now, with opportunities in neighboring countries almost finished and due to the expensive land, Brazilian agriculture has started showing up in Africa, here and there, but promising to grow.

"With cultivars that are more resistant to water stress, a great farming frontier is opened in Africa," said the Rural Economic Professor at the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), Eugênio Stefanelo.

Behind the movement are Brazilian farmers seeking competitive advantages, like cheaper land and markets that provide greater revenues, as well as local governments thirsty for learning from the famous Brazilian technology.
developing their agriculture and guaranteeing future food for their people.

"Large-scale crops here are a novelty, and the government provides much support," said Saccol regarding the reception the Brazilian project found in the country.

As is the case with Ghana, in Mozambique the government has also shown it makes a point of hoisting the Brazilian flag among its crops. On visiting Brazil early this year, the minister of Agriculture of Mozambique, José Pacheco, discussed the opportunities for Brazilian farmers.

Next year, the Brazil-Mozambique Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture should promote a delegation of farmers to the country to learn about the possibilities.

According to Fabio Vale, the Chamber's national manager, the government's intention is to grant the country productive and food sustainability, to guarantee jobs, and to dominate agricultural technology. Currently, there is only subsistence farming in the country and lands belong to the state.

"The government provides concessions for use, for up to 50 years, with possible extension for another 30," said Vale. For this, however, it is necessary to present and get approval of a project with the government.

Pinesso Group, from Mato Grosso, also aims to start producing in Mozambique, according to director Gilson Pinesso. The company already plants soy, corn, cotton and beans in Sudan, another African country that has received Brazilians interested in cultivating its land with open arms.

The crops Gilson uses in Sudan, for example, belong to the government, are offered to him for free, the group also received local financing from Sudanese banks, for the purchase of machinery, tractors and seeds.

But what are the advantages of producing abroad? Those who traveled to Africa show many, each related to the reality found. The land is better, richer in phosphorus and potassium, with 80% clay. In Brazil we have very acid land, and much cost goes into lime," said Pinesso, regarding the cultivation area in Sudan, the Blue Nile region.

"We are also closer to the consumer market, the Asian," he said. According to him, the production cost is 20% lower, the price paid for the product is higher and logistics is cheaper. Production this year will be shipped to Asia and the transport cost there is US$ 40 lower, per ton, than it would be if shipment was from Brazil.

In Ghana, Saccol's project, in the South of the country, found a better price for its rice. According to him, it is possible to sell the grain for two and a half times more than the Brazilian product. Apart from that, he mentions other advantages.

"It is summer all year long, is appropriate for cultivation and the market imports between 700,000 and 800,000 tons a year," said the farmer. The project's rice farm, which is leased, covers 500 hectares and the area is expanded by 30 to 50 hectares each month. The objective is to reach 5,000 hectares in four years.

But not all is great in Africa. "We faced many hardships, and the beginning was difficult. Here, land belongs to families, to tribes, and it is greatly appreciated, with many preferring to maintain their land inactive for fear of losing it," said Saccol.

The official language in Ghana is English, but another 47 local dialects are spoken, a problem for foreigners. There are also difficulties with infrastructure, like the lack of energy and water, even in the capital.

However, both Saccol and Pinesso are enthusiastic regarding the possibility of producing abroad and make it clear that to plant abroad, much toil is necessary.

"In Brazil, my life was very peaceful, tepid, I decided to come and look, and could not have imagined what I would find here. It is like us (Brazilian agriculture) 50 years ago, and is a world of opportunities," said Saccol.

He was invited by one of the farms investors, the Brazilian partner, who is also the majority partner and had already started the project. In Ghana, Saccol got married to a Ghanaian and has a small son.

Gilson Pinesso, who lives in Brazil, but visits Sudan every three months, says he accepted the idea due to the possibility of diversification, of planting in a different country, as well as for the business opportunity. But he also sees the social arm of the initiative.

"Thousands of people are starving to death in Somalia. In Sudan there is also hunger. If we can contribute to human development, that is good. We are not there to sponge off anybody; we have plenty of land in Brazil. We make money, but we are also contributing to the people of Africa. Can you imagine if we can produce beans there
at a cheaper cost," inquired the director.

The Pinesso project in Sudan has a 25% government share, a 25% share of the local partner and 50% is in the hands of the Brazilian group. And the crops are serving as teaching to the Sudanese. The group, in fact, brings Sudanese technicians to Brazil for internships.

"There are 32 Brazilians in the project and 152 are Sudanese," said Gilson. Pinesso has in Brazil a project for a free agricultural school and also plans to develop the initiative in Sudan. The crop in Sudan covers 12,000 hectares of cotton, 2,000 hectares of soy, 5,000 hectares of corn and an experimental project for beans.

The same desire of making land that is unexplored viable made Brazilians explore South America in the past. Ervile Dalcin, from Doutor Maurício Cardoso, in Rio Grande do Sul, was one of those who, newly married, decided to migrate to Paraguay after opportunities in the 1990s.

At the time, he, his brother and his brother-in-law bought 96 hectares with the cash originating from the sale of 18 hectares in Brazil. "There was much ease to buy land in Paraguay, the government did not make it hard and the land was fertile," he said.

At Doutor Raul Peña colony, where they established themselves, in the city of Laranjal, there was no electricity, the water consumed came from an artesian well and, for shopping, it was necessary to travel ten kilometers.

The colony was inhabited by Brazilians and the local reality is different, with water supply, electricity and paved streets. Dalcin and his brother - his brother-in-law left the business - cultivate 350 hectares of soy, wheat, corn and canola, including their own and leased land. The technology used in the crops, like machinery and tractors, is 100% Brazilian.

The president of a cooperative of producers, Cooperativa Raul Peña, Dalcin stated that currently Brazilians are no longer moving to the area. "The agricultural area is much explored here and there are few new opportunities. There is market for industry, for transformation of grain, but for that it is necessary to invest in the country and the political instability makes it harder," he said, referring mainly to the land invasions, to which large farms of the country are subject, mainly those of immigrants.

Dalcin stated that there are still advantages to producing in Paraguay as against producing in Brazil and to that lower tax, the simplified import of agricultural inputs and fertile land, which makes the need for investment in cultivation lower.

But the greatest advantage, to him, is that he is already installed and is familiarized with the country. Dalcin has two sons and they were both born in Paraguay. "When I return to my city, I feel I'm a foreigner," he said. Production of Raul Peña Cooperative is sold in Paraguay itself, to multinationals.

According to the councilor of the embassy of Brazil in Asunción, Michel Goggin, the migration process of Brazilians to Paraguay, which was mainly turned to the countryside some 40 years ago, has decelerated. Many, in fact, returned to Brazil motivated by the good economic and employment opportunities back home.

However, according to him, estimates show that there are between 230,000 and 250,000 Brazilians in the country, most integrated to life there. In Africa, in turn, the Brazilians who have started their project there have not yet decided to make that land their homeland. "I plan to live here for about eight years," said Saccol.

According to Stefanelo, the Brazilian migratory process for cultivation in other countries has dropped as a whole, mainly due to difficulties, like the invasion of land, by farmers in South America, where the greatest flow went. The professor said that for Brazil there is not much advantage in planting abroad, but that, for the receiving countries, there is.

"It fosters local production, generates income, develops the region," he said, adding that Brazil lived the same process in the past, with European immigration. It was European immigration that helped contribute to the establishment of agriculture in several regions of the country.

Source: ANBA
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Hello. And Bye.

Very interesting work/list. So what is the pathway forward? What are the policy options? Social movement?

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