The Implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of France and Brazil

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Abstract. The article discusses the main approaches, principles, and foundations of France’s and Brazil’s cooperation in the face of ecological and ecosystemic issues. Furthermore, this article examines the cooperation of these countries in the regional structures which aims to protect the environment - one of the most important global challenges of our time - as well as analyses trends, progress, and gaps between both countries through the UN Sustainable-Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, it examines the legislation in the field of environment and efforts made by such countries to implement the UN-2030 Agenda for Sustainable-Development.

1. Introduction

Since the foundation of the United Nations in 1945, the world has been through many challenges. Countries members and founders of the United Nations such as France and Brazil have been fighting for a more egalitarian world, a world that will not only serve as an arena of political and economic interests, but also become an equitable, welcoming world that respects human rights and its values. And above all, it strives for equitable and sustainable growth. Unsurprisingly, in recent years the world has been on alert, with populations increasingly seeing the effects of climate change and environmental disasters. Therefore, this article aims to analyse some factors that can change the current world we live in, how great powers are addressing such sensitive issues using the SDGs as a tool. Brazil and France undoubtedly have a history of great bilateral relations that grow despite their regional and governmental differences, which is why one of the goals of this article is to tackle how the SGDs are being implemented in both sides.

2. France

France has made major contributions to the upsurge of public aid to development at the European level. This initiating role has in large part based on its colonial past and close relations with its former colonies, which contributed to its emancipation of the European institutions. While France has long justified its autonomy in terms of public aid, it had to adjust its methods European directives, often leading to opposition by national authorities to European integration in terms of development.

As former European colonial power, France has shaped the development policy implemented in 1958 within the framework of the European Community. Its influence has declined, experiencing a "normalization" of its development policy since the late 1990s. Its growing involvement in European aid, which increased from 10.5% to 23.1% of its official development assistance (ODA), and from 47.4 to 56.85% of its multilateral aid between 1993 and 2008, necessarily confronts European dynamics, logic, and discourse (Gabas, 2005).

Under the impetus of European work on aid effectiveness, France has carried out institutional, normative and strategic adjustments of its policy. The transformation, in 1998, of the French Development Fund into a French Agency development (Agence française pour le Développment AFD),
after the integration of the Ministry of Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, can be interpreted in the light of the European trend of New Public Management. Developed in the 1990s. This movement has resulted in a multiplication of agencies, often in new Member States. AFD took advantage of the disappearance of the Ministry of Cooperation to assert itself as the most technically competent institution in terms of development. Under joint supervision of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance, the AFD became the "operator pivot" for the French development aid in several sectors (economy, health, and environment). It therefore promotes cooperation combining loans and grants to global public goods and emerging countries, thus exceeding the historical criteria of French aid.

While, over the past three decades, numerous international conferences and agreements have fostered the emergence of the concept of sustainable development, development practices in certain countries have changed very little. In the coming years, the convergence of several environmental crises will require a break with past experiences and a complete rethinking of development strategies, integrating environmental protection into comprehensive approaches.

In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development's report “Our Common Future” brought the concept of sustainable development to the forefront of the world stage. Over the past twenty years, since the Brundtland Commission's call, this concept has become omnipresent.

Sustainable development, which was seen as a particular model of growth, is now emerging as a prerequisite and sine qua non for development. It imposes significant changes on all parties involved: the government, the private sector, civil society, and the aid agencies.

In September 2015, the 193 Member States of the United Nations (UN) adopted a sustainable development program for 2030, known as "Agenda 2030" [UN, 2015], which constitutes a new global policy framework. According to its usual definition, sustainable development aims to meet the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Thus, following a global approach; comprising three dimensions: economic, social and environmental, which are strong linked between each other and must be analysed together in a consistent manner.

The 2030 Agenda identifies 17 objectives and 169 targets. It allows structures to be articulated around 5 major pillars: planet, population, prosperity, peace, and partnerships. It defines an integrated policy framework for the next 15 years, covering the different dimensions of sustainable development. It has brought together two previous agendas, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Earth Summits [1]. The MDGs, adopted in 2000, concerned only developing countries and focused mainly on poverty reduction and human development. For its part, the last summit of the Earth from 2012, known as "Rio+20", focused on the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Agenda 2030 also includes commitments from other international agreements and broadens the perspective to the rule of law and good governance (justice, fight against corruption, etc.). The follow-up of this Agenda required the establishment of a list of indicators. Their definition was entrusted to a group of experts composed of representatives of 27 national statistical institutes, including INSEE (the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies) for France. Ranked fourth in the report of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) in terms of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the 2030 Agenda. Based on the INSEE report France reaches an average position within the European Union in achieving these goals. [2]

France's participation in the collection by UN agencies of values for global indicators (Paris provides indeed 98 indicators) remains necessary, as it makes it possible to compare France's position and trajectory with that of other countries to feed, on this component, the progress report presented to the UN High-Level Political Forum. The implementation of the 17 MDGs in France is coordinated by the Interministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development (Délégué interministériel au développement durable (DIDDD), mandated by the Prime Minister, in close partnership with the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères (MEAE) for the international
dimension. It leads a network of Senior Sustainable Development Officials (Hauts fonctionnaires au développement durable (HFDD)) who relay all sustainable development issues to departments.

The CICID (Inter-ministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development, Comité interministériel de la coopération internationale et du développement, CICID) of 8 February 2018 decided to draw up a "Roadmap for the implementation of the MDGs by France"[3], currently being drafted, in consultation with all non-state actors. Its development is supported by a high-level steering committee, co-chaired by Secretaries of State Brune Poirson and Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, responsible for ensuring the mobilization of all ministries and non-state actors.

The CICID has about 50 members, including high-level personalities from the National Council for Development and International Solidarity.

The new framework established by the 2030 Agenda and the MDGs provide a unique opportunity for all citizens to participate in building a sustainable world. To meet current environmental challenges; hence, political or financial solutions are not sufficient. Achieving the MDGs requires a real change in our lifestyles, production, and consumption. This is why education for sustainable development at all levels and innovation is at the heart of development policies.

3. Brazil

Brazil as a leader in South America, with almost 191 million inhabitants [4], the planet’s fifth-largest population and member of UNASUR and MERCOSUR has had many challenges in order to create a secure and developed community with its neighbours.[5] In addition to its strategic environment, the country is following the changes and variations in the international political and economic scenario, while exploring the potential of new associations, such as BRICS (Russia, India, China, and South Africa), G20 and the World Trade Organization in order to promote a new world order. Brazil is marked by a diversified natural environment and it is the State’s duty not only to protect this equity but also help in its preservation.

National defence documents are known worldwide as White Papers and they have an important role alongside the Constitution to promote and secure a country’s priorities.

In Brazil, the National Defence White Paper (Livro Branco da Defesa Nacional) play an important role when it comes to assuring that the country’s best interest is being protected with the help and work of the Armed Forces whose job is to defend the national sovereignty and its territory as well as the promotion of development and environmental protection to assure that the country is able to grow economically.

In 1972, the Stockholm Conference of the United Nations for the Human Environment was held. This drew the world’s attention to environmental issues, thereby urging nations to establish institutions that aim to protect the environment [6]. Brazil was not an exception. Despite being an industrial country, it strives to ensure that its environment is not neglected. On this account, in the following year by the Decree No. 73,030, of October 30, 1973, the Special Secretariat for the Environment was established to report directly to the Minister of State, the Special Secretariat for the Environment (SEMA), new methods to promote the conservation of the environment through the establishment of environmental licensing systems as well as the establishment of norms and elaboration of standards related to the preservation of the environment, such as water resources, and other natural resources ensuring the well-being of the nation and their economic and social development. [7]

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Since then, Brazil strives so that international organizations such as the United Nations could create an environment fit for the 21st century. Eventually assuring that basic needs not only of developed countries are met but also that, developing countries could have the same opportunities and investments. Since the 90s, Brazil has worked towards reforms in the “securitization” of the United Nations to assure that, decisions concerning a global range wouldn’t only be in the hands of the permanent members of the Security Council.

Significant changes reflecting multilateralism in the UN have not been noticed unlike other areas such as the financial and economic dimensions. To assure that multilateralism concerning international peace and security of nations, such as climate change, sustainable development, and social inclusion is protected, a reform is urgent. [8] The sustainable politicization of Brazil is based on the construction of a better and fairer world. Brazil has developed several projects in order to carry out an effective policy and for this, an organization was created the objective of which is to open new mechanisms of cooperation between countries.

The Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) was created at the Bretton Woods conference in July 1944, at the end of the Second World War, to promote the development of the country’s role in the world on issues such as science and technology, to promote structural changes in Brazil’s social and economic fields, making a more efficient sustainable development possible.

Since its creation ABC was able to launch more than 7,000 projects and approximately 108 operations were started by 124 Brazilian institutions in Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe and Oceania in areas such as public administration, family agriculture, urban themes, science and technology, culture, defence, social development, education and school feeding, industry and commerce, justice, environment, energy, livestock, fisheries, health, public safety, work and employment.

ABC acts in accordance with the guidelines of Brazilian foreign policy. It is recalled that article 4, section IX, of the Federal Constitution, states that "the Federative Republic of Brazil is governed in its international relations", among others, by the principle of "cooperation among peoples for the progress of humanity". The Brazilian government's fundamental assumption is that the technical cooperation received should contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of the country and to the construction of national autonomy in the areas covered. The same concern applies to the technical cooperation provided by Brazil to other countries as well as the South-South Cooperation (former TCDC). [9]

Brazil plays an important role in the development of the formation of national policies on sustainability. In the past years, Brazil alongside UN-member states hosted the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio-92) and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20) which are considered the two most valuable conferences on this field in history. It is important to those crucial documents, such as the Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Declaration of Principles on Forests and the Conventions on Biodiversity, Climate Change and on Desertification mostly dealing with the conservation and management of resources such as flora, fauna, and biological diversity were ratified. Rio-92 and Rio + 20 are fundamental to the promotion of balanced environmental protection, social inclusion and economic growth. [10]

Brazil attended all intergovernmental sessions on sustainable development and 17 objectives and 169 goals on topics such as the eradication of poverty, food security, agriculture, health, education, gender equality, reduction of inequalities, energy, water and sanitation, climate change, protection and sustainable use of oceans and terrestrial ecosystems were reached [11]. The debate on the environment, besides being part of the Brazilian legislation, is crucial for the preservation of life.
Based on the above mentioned we can analyse how both countries are engaged in delivering those goals. Brazil and France have a long-standing friendship that has changed scale in recent years, through the development of an ambitious strategic partnership. This comprehensive and multidimensional partnership, which looks to the future, was launched in May 2006 by Presidents Lula and Chirac during his state visit to Brazil and confirmed by President Sarkozy in 2008 during his meeting with President Lula on the common border between the two countries. In conclusion, the adoption of an action plan and the signing of many agreements at the bilateral summit in Rio on 23 December 2008 (organized with the EU-Brazil summit) was reached.

This partnership involves know-how and expertise sharing through joint initiatives, based on the pooling of material, technological, human or natural resources. This strategic partnership covers a wide range of areas: military, space, energy, economic, educational, cross-border and development aid in third countries. The cross-border dimension between French Guiana and the State of Amapa has its rightful place there. It is, therefore, this roadmap, the result of a strong political commitment, which gives an overall coherence to a stronger relationship, as proof many dynamic and sustained projects were launched.

The Year of Brazil in France, which included President Lula's visit to France from 12 to 15 July 2005, followed by the Year of France in Brazil in 2009, gave a new impetus to bilateral relations between the two countries. A relation that developed steadily since both sides reached several decentralized cooperation signed on February 12, 2008 in Guyana. However, since 2011, it has declined sharply, with about ten French local authorities now involved. Cross-border cooperation is then itself a unique feature of their relationship, with Brazil sharing more than 700 km of border with France. The construction of the Oyapock Bridge, which is an example of this, is accompanied by growing cooperation in the fields of health, education and sustainable development, in conjunction with the French Agency of Development (AFD) [12]. This cooperation makes it possible to respond to the concerns of each party related to the various cross-border risks (illegal immigration, security, illegal gold panning, illegal fishing, sanitary and phytosanitary issues), to encourage human and commercial exchanges (through education and goods) and to develop the Amazon region's economy while respecting local populations and its exceptional environment.

As one of the world's largest consumers of energy, Brazil also has considerable natural resources, enabling it to produce electricity mainly from hydropower. But, recurrent droughts weaken its production: the country must, therefore, find new sources of renewable energy, relying on its immense wind, solar and biomass potential. Brazilian development banks are playing an active role in the development of green finance for climate change, both within local and international dialogue platforms (International Development Finance Club, ALIDE). The AFD maintains close links with these actors to jointly strengthen the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and contribute to the implementation of the Paris Agreement at the territorial level. [13]

On a national level, since the ratification of the SDGs, a group of studies was implemented in Brazil to work with the Federal Government. To this end, the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) was delegated as a Permanent Technical Advisory Institution to the CNODS [14], with the responsibility to coordinate the process of preparing a proposal of the overall goals of the SDGs, and its implementation. One of the first steps of the institution was to analyse the 169 global-goals and its implementation based on the priorities and reality of the country thus protecting its national interest and economic stability. Different from France, Brazil has had many challenges when it comes to such regulations, a bureaucratic country that since 2002 faced many political and economic challenges, a country that was undergoing one of the world’s biggest corruption scandals coordinated by the Car-wash operation that resulted in Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment in August 2016. It is important to state that the execution of this task was based on the adequacy of the global goals to the national reality.
In order to complete its homework, 75 governmental institutions took part in the analyses of the 17 main goals and the 169 targets forwarded by the United Nations (UN), and as result 167 were considered pertinent to Brazil, although many of them required changes to suit national specificities. One of the main goals was the eradication of poverty that had risen (21%) from 2014 to 2017 in Brazil. Whereas in France over the past five years (2012-2017), the number of poor has stabilized at a high level: the number of poor, at both 50% and 60% threshold, has increased by more than one million people, mainly as a result of unemployment. The poverty rate at 50% rose from 6.7% to 8.5%, and the poverty rate at 60% rose from 13.1% to 14.2%.

The development of education and its quality not only in Brazil, that stands behind the OECD average and France, where education is a priority with 21% of the annual national budget earmarked for this purpose but also in other Latin American countries. As well as achieve by 2030 universal and equitable access to potable water which Brazil reaches as high as 97 percent while in France it stays at 98 percent. Both countries are also engaged in developing reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure both regional and cross-border infrastructure, to support the economic development and well-being of the population. Brazil and France also have been fighting to reduce inequality between countries, and it is important to mention that Brazil also fights for the UN’s reform as well as the Security Council which it believes will give more opportunity for developing countries to influence the international arena. However, Brazil’s view of the world and its international relations as well as its interests dramatically changed since Jair Bolsonaro was sworn president in January 2019. The Amazon rainforest called the world’s attention due to intensive fires that ravaged it in August 2019. The international concern over the Amazon led to a feud between the Brazilian and French leaders. In the last G7 summit that took place in Biarritz (France) last August (24-26 August) seems to have broken the relationship between the two countries due to Jair Bolsonaro’s $20 million rejection aid for the use of Canadairs and firefighting in the Amazon. The fact that Brazil and France have common ground within the rainforest (via Guyana), which is considered the Lungs of the earth, has taken an important place between the G7 leaders. As a result, Jair Bolsonaro’s G-7 Amazon aid rejection alongside his statement on potentially leaving the Paris agreement caused Emmanuel Macron and other EU-Members to threat to veto the Mercosur agreement as well as implement economic sanctions in Brazil.

5. Conclusion

To sum up the SDGs are of great interest to both countries and it is important to highlight that one of the most important at this moment is the implementation of new measures to combat climate change and its impacts as well as the integration of climate change measures into national policies, strategies, and planning.

The current Brazilian government, if compared to previous administrations, is slowing down how climatic policies are implemented in the country with President Bolsonaro’s threats to withdraw Brazil from the Paris agreement on climate change of 2016. The Brazilian leader also called for expanded development in the Amazon rainforest, thus affecting the goals to be delivered based on the 2030 Agenda. France on the other hand is fighting to prevent climate change and deliver these goals. However, the G7 summit raised questions and concerns about the financial support that will not prevent the disaster from happening again, not to mention the fact that France contributes directly to deforestation and fires in the Amazon through soya imports, particularly for livestock feed.

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