

Brazil Moves Toward South–South Cooperation

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Brazil has taken important steps to stimulate the internationalization of its higher education and South–South cooperation through two new programs: CAPES Global and the *Brasília* Charter with its related CAPES-Move Africa project. These new initiatives intend to primarily focus on South–South cooperation and the development of alliances of universities from the different regions of the country. They manifest a shifting paradigm in the internationalization of higher education from a Western-dominated process to a global phenomenon.

Brazil has taken important steps to stimulate the internationalization of its higher education and South–South cooperation through two new programs: CAPES-Global.edu (hereafter “CAPES Global”) and the *Brasília* Charter, which involves the related CAPES-Move Africa project. Like many other higher education systems, Brazil has until now focused primarily on international cooperation with the Global North, with the country’s leading research universities dominating the process. The new initiatives by CAPES—the federal agency responsible for quality assurance in Brazilian higher education—intend to break that pattern by primarily focusing on South–South cooperation and by developing alliances of universities from the different regions of the country.

CAPES Global

The new CAPES Global (Networks for Institutional Internationalization) program was inaugurated in April 2026. The program builds on two previous initiatives by CAPES: Science without Borders and CAPES-PrInt. Science without Borders was the flagship program of the Dilma Rousseff administration and ran primarily between 2011 and 2017. It was followed by CAPES-PrInt, launched in 2017 during the Michel Temer government and implemented throughout the Jair Bolsonaro administration (i.e., 2019–2022).

Science without Borders was focused on providing scholarships for study abroad but lacked adequate vision and revision processes as well as institutional capacity for internationalization. This resulted in the development of CAPES-PrInt, which was intended to enhance the organization and policy of internationalization in the main universities in the country. That program indeed helped to improve the internationalization of a small group of selected research universities but faced challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic and radical cuts by the Bolsonaro government. While the former focused on massifying individual mobility, the latter attempted to institutionalize internationalization.

The current CAPES Global program, inaugurated under the Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva government (2023–present), represents a third generation of policy that seeks to correct the elitism and regional imbalances of its predecessors. It is designed to modernize the internationalization of higher education in Brazil through collaboration networks; these aim to foster cooperation between national institutions with varying stages of internationalization and to promote, through international cooperation, the development of strategic research and postgraduate activities of participants.

In total, 54 proposals were reviewed in 2026 (the first year of the initiative), covering a broad range of institutions from different regions and states of Brazil. Each network was required to be composed of one coordinating institution and three to five associate members from other regions of the country. The review of these proposals was conducted by a group of experts, both from within Brazil as well as elsewhere in Latin America and from other continents. In total, [33 alliances were selected for funding](#), a group that involves 33 coordinating institutions and 95 associate members. Of the institutions, 72 are federal universities, 30 are state universities, and 10 are private institutions, with good representation from the Northern, Northeastern, and Central-Western regions.

Challenges and Fragilities

Although the program has addressed many challenges identified within the previous initiatives, it also faces notable fragilities. Its primary weakness is the persistent “mobility-first” mindset: many participating institutions still view internationalization through the narrow lens of outbound scholarships rather than considering internationalization at home or curriculum reform as viable strategies for internationalization.

Additionally, there is a structural “dependency” on the Global North for research validation, which may hinder the program’s ambitious goal of fostering meaningful South–South cooperation. This structural dependency on the Global North transcends mere research validation; it reflects an entrenched

epistemic hierarchy that historically delegitimizes South-centric knowledge systems. To truly pivot toward meaningful South–South cooperation, Brazilian institutions must confront the tendency to replicate Northern standards at the expense of local relevance. The transition from the elite-driven models of Science without Borders and CAPES-PrInt to the current network-based approach requires more than just new funding routes; it demands an ontological shift. True internationalization must be measured by its capacity to foster “epistemic justice,” ensuring that Southern perspectives on issues like climate change and food security are treated as foundational rather than peripheral.

The intention of the initiative is that the networks operate as alliances working together on the themes they have identified, create a common ground for further cooperation, and stimulate the internationalization of the member institutions and the alliance. The participating universities and CAPES are aware of the challenges they face in realizing these objectives, and for that reason, an intensive ongoing review process—something missing in the previous two programs—will be developed.

For CAPES Global to achieve long-term success and social legitimacy, it must move beyond traditional metrics such as “number of papers published” or “students sent abroad.” Ultimately, the impact of these 33 alliances must not be felt primarily in university rankings but instead in the democratization of knowledge, ensuring that a student in the North or Northeast of Brazil has the same global opportunities as one in the South or Southeast, and in the stimulation of South–South cooperation.

The Brasília Charter and the CAPES-Move Africa Program

The second contemporary initiative, the [Brasília Charter](#), focuses on the strengthening of academic and scientific networks between Brazil and African countries. This includes the expansion of mobility (both face-to-face and virtual) of undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, administrative personnel, and managers; cooperation in teacher

training; the promotion of open science mechanisms to share science outputs; and active participation in innovation ecosystems. In addition, the *Brasília Charter* focuses on collaborative research, technology, and innovation in priority areas, with emphasis, among others, on the fight against hunger and food security; agrarian development; climate change; blue and green economies; and digital sovereignty and democratization.

The CAPES-Move Africa program, also launched this year, is the first step in implementing the *Brasília Charter*. CAPES-Move Africa is a US\$47.4 million postgraduate scholarship program for 2,600 African students—1,000 master and 1,600 doctoral students—to study at Brazilian universities and higher education institutions. The collaboration focuses on four strategic areas—agriculture, health, technology, and AI—and aims to facilitate joint research, the exchange of faculty and students, curriculum development, and the mobility of postgraduate students.

A Shifting Paradigm

The Brazilian initiatives manifest a shifting paradigm in the internationalization of higher education from a Western-dominated process toward more attention to inclusion and diversity within and between the countries in the Global South. The emergence of these initiatives marks a maturing of Brazilian educational diplomacy, where the “global” is no longer synonymous with the “North.” By intertwining internal regional democratization, rectifying the historical neglect of Northern and Northeastern Brazilian institutions, with strategic African alliances, Brazil is redefining the role of the university as an agent of social equity. This “third generation” of policy moves beyond the pursuit of prestige in global rankings to focus on the democratization of knowledge. However, the success of this shift depends on whether these networks can move past traditional bibliometric metrics and embrace a model where impact is measured by community development and shared sovereignty. Responsible internationalization is not merely an exercise in academic exchange but a radical commitment to global equity and the ethical co-construction of knowledge across borders.

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