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Sharing responsibility: jeopardised multilateralism and the growing centrality of Triangular Cooperation

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Abstract

Multipolarity is casting doubt on the notion of responsibility, and *diffused reciprocity* of the multilateral system of international development cooperation is falling short. In midst of this crisis, what are possible mechanisms to foster the implementation of the 2030 Agenda? I argue that Triangular Cooperation, through *specific reciprocity*, presents opportunity for nurturing partnerships and enhancing models to share responsibilities toward international development cooperation. Looking into recent trends of TrC, I argue that through this modality, DAC countries push for greater involvement of the South, and Southern providers share responsibility towards international development.

Keywords: Multilateralism; International development cooperation; Triangular cooperation; Common but differentiated responsibilities; 2030 Agenda; Responsibility.

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Introduction

By the end of 2015, we had an ambitious joint plan for the future, with the approval of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Yet, the emergence of nationalist movements, populist governments and the rise of authoritarianism in the following year shook the optimism of the international politics community and indicated the beginning of turbulent times. Economic nationalism and growing criticism against international organisations are taking up the space of global governance and globalisation, and putting multilateralism under question. The year after the adoption of common and ambitious agendas for a sustainable development came with several and significant setbacks to the multilateral system.

The most pressing examples in 2016 are Trump's ultranationalist programme to the United States and the "Brexit" referendum, which was followed by almost two years of severe negotiations for the United Kingdom (UK) to actually leave the European Union (EU), in the beginning of 2020. Furthermore, populist nationalism is also on the rise in other parts of the world. Also in 2016, South Africa was the first country to formally withdraw from the International Criminal Court. Brazil, Hungary, Poland and Turkey are also putting up examples of anti-globalisation and authoritarian ideas taking the centre of their policies and political platforms. Multilateralism, which increased substantially after World War II, is in crisis (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016, Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019).

A number of elements can explain the recent global turn against multilateralism. Amongst them is the increased polarity and fragmentation in world politics. Many multilateral organisations have created permanent winners and losers, jeopardising the *diffused reciprocity* holding those relations, to use the term coined by Robert Keohane (Keohane 1986, Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016).

Systemic changes towards multipolarity are also resonating in the multilateral system of international development cooperation. The emergence of South-South Cooperation (SSC) is an indicative of a political dispute within the development cooperation landscape. Recent transformations on the system of international development cooperation point to a scenario in which the *diffused reciprocity* of the multilateral arrangements is falling short to different actors. Emerging countries and their institutions are not adjusting to already established international standards. Most of the new providers do not identify their initiatives with the framework of Official Development Assistance (ODA), as established by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The increasing footprint of emerging powers, such as the BRICS, MIST, and Arab countries, are transforming traditional practices, established mainly between 1945 and 1970 by traditional donors. New-comers to the system advanced SSC as an alternative to ODA. Concurrently, traditional institutions such as the OECD and the World Bank are adapting policies, practices and regulatory frameworks to the scenario of polarisation and fragmentation (Zoccal and Esteves 2018).

The present debate in the system of international development cooperation presents enormous cacophony. Approaches such as *Blended Finance*, or categories such as *More Advanced Developing Countries* and *Development Transition* point to tensions in the very definition of a new set of values to define the framework and practices of different actors (Zoccal 2018).

Alongside, global challenges seem to be more pressing than ever. Complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye 1977) makes it clear that different actors of international politics have to coordinate action to tackle global issues, such as climate change, refugee crises and pandemics. No country acting alone is able to face those challenges, which are global in scope and unprecedented in scale.

In early 2020, the UN Secretary-General called for a *Decade of Action* to accelerate speed and scale of action towards sustainable solutions to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set on the sphere of the Agenda 2030. However, amid the crisis of multilateralism, what are the possible mechanisms within the system of international development cooperation to foster international cooperation to the implementation of the SDGs set by the 2030 Agenda?

Within this context, different partnership arrangements, as Private Sector Engagement and Triangular Cooperation (TrC) for development, have progressively gained centrality. TrC emerged a few decades ago, having its first initiatives fostered within the framework of the United Nations Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC), known as the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA), in 1978.

After progressive, but somewhat marginal advances, TrC has recently gained momentum. In the outcome document of the Second High-Level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, known as BAPA+40, held in Buenos Aires in March 2019, TrC was broadly and significantly discussed in an internationally agreed document, leaving a niche, and becoming a tool for development dialogue not only at implementation, but also at policy level.

This article advances the argument that, in times when the *diffused reciprocity* of the multilateral system of international development cooperation is falling short, mechanisms such as Triangular Cooperation, through *specific reciprocity*, present opportunity for nurturing partnerships among different actors, and for enhancing models to share responsibilities toward international development cooperation. Through this article, I will illustrate this debate looking into the recent trends of the multilateral system of international development cooperation in general, and into Triangular Cooperation specifically.

The next section offers a brief analysis of multilateralism in world politics and the trajectory towards the current crisis. Section 2 analyses global governance of the multilateral system of international development cooperation, and the set of rules and principles that framed this system and relations among the different actors. The *diffused reciprocity* sustaining those relations and set of rules together has, however, been eroding, and other actors, such as countries from the global South, increased influence in the system. This section includes, hence, the emergence of South-South Cooperation and how it also led to other arrangements, as Triangular Cooperation for Development. Section 3 pursues a deeper look into TrC, framing the current debate around this modality, whose centrality has recently increased. The 2030 Agenda highlights that partnerships are crucial to achieve the SDGs, and TrC has been fostered as a modality to share costs, solutions and responsibilities. Section 4 takes a closer look into the universality principle, central to the 2030 Agenda, and the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), which was recently included into the debates of international development cooperation over challenging negotiations between North and South divide. In the final section, I offer a framework for TrC according to which *specific reciprocity* – in opposition to *diffused reciprocity* of multilateral initiatives – is a modality where Southern providers agree to share responsibility, bypassing contestations present in the inclusion of the CBDR principle into the 2030 Agenda.

Jeopardised multilateralism

Robert Keohane defined multilateralism as “the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through *ad hoc* arrangements or by means of institutions” (Keohane

1990, 731). Nevertheless, besides the nominal difference, multilateral relations also have a distinctive qualitative essence. Unlike bilateral relations, in which “specified partners exchange items of equivalent value in a strictly delimited sequence” and reciprocity is specific, multilateral relations are characterised by *diffuse reciprocity*, in which “the definition of equivalence is less precise” and “involves conforming to generally accepted standards of behaviour” (Keohane 1986, 4).

Multilateralism is a generic institutional form in the modern State system that increased substantially in relevance and formats, mainly after the Second World War, proliferating multilateral conferences and organisations. Its generic form should not be confused with formal multilateral organisations (Ruggie 1992). Multilateral institutions are “multilateral arrangements with persistent set of rules; they can be distinguished from other forms of multilateralism, such as *ad hoc* meetings and short-term arrangements to solve particular problems” (Keohane 1990, 732-3).

In the years following the end of the Second World War, there was a profusion of multilateral organisations and increase of the “conference diplomacy.” The Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 established the normative framework that ruled the international economic governance for many decades. John Ruggie later coined the term *embedded liberalism* to refer to this framework. Two elements characterised the embedded liberalism: “unlike the economic nationalism of the thirties, it would be multilateral in character; unlike the liberalism of the gold standard and free trade, its multilateralism would be predicated upon domestic interventionism” (Ruggie 1982, 393). At this time, institutions and mechanism such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Marshall Plan were put into place aiming at reconstructing Europe and crystallising international aid.

In the same vein, many multilateral organisations were established. Many are specialised and technical, as the World Health Organisation (WHO), established in 1948, and some are multipurpose and of universal membership, such as the UN, established in 1945. Those multilateral organisations were “based on little more than shared aspirations, with broad agendas in which large and small had a constitutionally mandated voice” (Ruggie 1992, 583).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the number of global and regional multilateral institutions rose exponentially. The end of the Cold War was a high point of multilateralism. However, in the turn of the century the picture was already different. Many of the emerging powers were dissatisfied with the framework established after the Bretton Woods Conference. If multilateral organisations are designed to achieve collaborative action to solve a problem (Keohane 1990), many of them were failing to deliver the declared goals. Examples of this are the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the ineffective negotiations of the Doha Development Agenda, or the failed Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016). Expectations of *diffused reciprocity* – under which its members expected to benefit aggregately, over time, and on a rough equivalence basis – were falling short for many actors, mainly developing countries (Keohane 1986, Ruggie 1992).

A revisionism movement has started long before the current multilateral crisis. The Non-Alignment Movement, establishment from UNCTAD, G77 and the declaration for the establishment

of a New International Economic Order (NIEO), all happened until the 1970s. Nevertheless, emerging countries, such as Brazil and China, which in 1970 were the 10th and 7th largest economies in the world, in 2010 occupied 7th and 2nd place respectively. In the early 2000s, economist Jim O'Neill pointed out that in 50 years Brazil, Russia, India and China would be among the world's largest economies. The current scenario is of fragmentation and multipolarity.

The BRICS countries viewed the international order designed by liberal-cosmopolitan norms as a Western ploy to cement dominance in international institutions at a time when the global power distribution was changing in favour of non-Western powers and tilting from unipolarity to multipolarity (Rüland 2018, 7).

Driven by optimistic forecasts, in 2009 the first BRIC Summit took place, which incorporated South Africa in 2011 as a full member, and renamed itself as BRICS. In addition to GDP growth, some countries in the Global South underwent an increase in economic and social complexity at the end of the 20th century, with substantial scientific and technological development and a considerable reduction in poverty rates, hunger, child mortality, among other indicators (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada 2010).

In the geo-economic and geopolitical arenas, the dramatic shift of the economic balance from the G7 countries toward the emerging market economies has meant that what used to be a bipolar world (USA–USSR, 1950–1990) and briefly a unipolar world (USA, in the 1990s) is now rapidly becoming a multipolar one (China, Europe, India, Russia, USA, and perhaps others) (Linn 2018, 87).

Within the changing architecture of global governance, coalitions among developing countries strengthened multipolarity. Alongside the scenario of fragmentation in world politics, the emergence of nationalist movements also threatens multilateral coordination and cooperation. The recognition of structural systemic asymmetries underlies the *diffused reciprocity* of the multilateral system and hence the cooperation among actors. Nationalist strategies often disregard those asymmetries, casting doubt on the notion of responsibility, which will be analysed in more detail later in this article (section 4). The rise of emerging powers contributes to a revival of East-West tension, especially the escalation of the USA-China conflict.

Recent threats to multilateralism might be short-term and cyclical in nature, predominantly the US' withdrawal of support to global and regional institutions in favour of a nationalist policy and the pursuit of "our country first" objectives. However, threats might also be of a longer-term nature, such as the extension of economic and geopolitical multipolarity that might lead to the revival of global conflict among big powers, and the strengthening of authoritarian regimes undermining political stability in many countries (Linn 2018).

The multilateral system of international development cooperation

The previous section indicated that through the Bretton Woods institutions, after the Second World War, there emerged a normative framework for international governance, defined as *embedded*

liberalism (Ruggie 1982). Multilateral in character, organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF were the first to set the system of international aid for development in stone.

What is now understood as the multilateral system of international development cooperation was established primarily during the 1960s, with the definition of norms and practices on international cooperation. At this time, the UN's General Assembly defined the 1960s as the UN's Decade of Development. Other multilateral institutions were also created, such as the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) and the OECD.

Multilateral institutions differ from other multilateral *ad hoc* arrangements inasmuch as they have a persistent set of rules (Keohane 1990). During the first years of that decade, a framework, practices and categorisation of the stakeholders were put into place. The *Resolution on the Common Aid Effort*, adopted in March 1961 by the Development Assistant Group – DAC's predecessor, calls for a common effort to expand assistance and points to the “need to help the less-developed” (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006).

The *diffused reciprocity* of the multilateral system of international development cooperation was then based on the recognition of the structural systemic asymmetries and, consequentially, on the notion that developed countries had a moral responsibility to offer aid, and developing countries had the right to receive it (Bracho 2015).

The establishment of the DAC in 1961, under the OECD's umbrella, crystallised a system of opposition between donors and recipients (Zoccal 2018). The DAC was designed to bring together the largest donors at that time, and is currently the only OECD Directory that is not open to all OECD members. Within this sphere, Official Development Assistance, agreed upon for the first time in 1969, outlined assistant flows as those between a developed country or multilateral organisation and a developing country, in a vertical relationship of transferring concessional resources and development knowledge.

John Ruggie highlighted that multilateralism is different from bilateral relations not merely by a nominal difference. The qualitative dimension is what makes it distinct, not the number, but the kind of relation established between the actors. Through multilateralism, there is some sort of principle ordering the relations among those states. “Principles which specify appropriate conduct for a class of action, without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrence” (Ruggie 1992, 571).

The DAC members have negotiated and adapted the ODA's definition and its reporting mechanisms. Nevertheless, in general terms, it has remained unchanged since the beginning of the 1970s, and it is currently laid out as flows to countries and territories on the DAC List of ODA Recipients, and to multilateral development institutions that are: i. provided by official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies; and ii. each transaction of which: a) is administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective; and b) is concessional in character (Official Development Assistance 2019, 6).

By naturalising the development aid flows, and embedded in prescriptive and normative value, that framework also strengthened the common sense rooted in ancient colonial relations. It was also in the early 1970s that the current target – that ODA should account for 0.7% of the gross national income (GNI) of developed countries – was set, in the quest to increase ODA volumes. The target was first put forward in 1958 by the World Council of Churches, based on the belief of a moral duty that motivated aid. Developed countries had, thus, a moral responsibility towards international development (Zoccal 2018).

Erosion of diffused reciprocity and the emergence of South-South Cooperation

Since the stipulation of a persistent set of rules that outline the multilateral system of international development cooperation in the 1970s, a lot has changed in the architecture of international system. A more diverse constellation of actors expanded its prominence and practices, going beyond the binary division donor – the developed North – and recipient – developing countries from the Global South. The new ecosystem includes now providers from the Global South, and also non-governmental actors such as civil society organisations and the private sector.

It is clear that horizontal cooperation initiatives among developing countries exist since the 1950s. In the end of the 1970s, the Buenos Aires Plan of Action, following the revisionist initiatives of the NIEO, sought to change the terms that guided the relationship between industrialised countries for the North and developing countries from the Global South. However, this movement gained strength mainly after the turn of the 21st century, as the fragmentation and multipolarity in the world order increased significantly.

The term South-South Cooperation was entrenched on the report *The Challenge to the South*, published in 1990 by the South Commission. The report recognised the structured systemic asymmetries, stating that “the countries of the South are unfavourably placed in the world economic system.” At once, the report also questions the results of *diffused reciprocity* until then, arguing that countries from the South “are individually powerless to influence these processes and institutions and, hence, the global economic environment which vitally affects their development.” (The South Commission 1990, 2). This established an opposition to the dichotomy donor-recipient that defined the multilateral system of international development cooperation since the 1960s, established within the DAC.

In 1995, the UN High-Level Committee on the review of TCDC, in defining “New Directions Strategy on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries,” identified 22 “pivotal countries” for the promotion of South-South Cooperation, among them Brazil, China and India, that should act as catalysts of the new modalities presented to the development cooperation system (United Nations 1995). In the beginning of 2000, during the South Summit, G77 countries defended that SSC should be a modality in the system of international development cooperation, and decided to convene their first High-level Conference on South-South Cooperation in 2003 in Marrakesh.

The coalition among countries from the Global South, and hence the South-South Cooperation agenda, begins to appear not only among the conferences and documents of the Global South, such as the G77, UNCTAD or the UN High Level Committee for the TCDC, but also in the negotiation spheres of the broader multilateral system of international development cooperation.

Even with large volumes of resources distributed by traditional donors since the end of the Second World War, poverty and inequality were still important topics on the international policy agenda. The expected diffused reciprocity of the multilateral system was falling short. Dissatisfied with many of the ODA results, middle-income countries kept pressing to increase participation and relevance of countries from the Global South in the multilateral system.

In Mexico, March 2002, there happened the First International Conference on Financing for Development, under the UN umbrella. The conference, which aimed to consider the financial commitments of traditional donors to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), was key to the consolidation of South-South cooperation. There is an increased focus on financing Least Developed Countries and Low-Income Countries in relation to financing the development of Middle-Income Countries, reducing the participation of the latter as recipients of ODA. Thus, the outcome document, the Monterrey Consensus, emphasises the need for a new partnership between developed and developing countries to reach the MDGs (United Nations 2003, Leite 2012).

Under the DAC/OECD umbrella, South-South Cooperation appeared as a cooperation modality only in 2008, during the Third High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. The outcome document, the Accra Agenda for Action, recognised “the contributions made by all development actors, and in particular the role of middle-income countries as both providers and recipients of aid.” It acknowledged its particularities and encouraged “further development of triangular co-operation” (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2008, 4).

Triangular Cooperation: not only sharing costs and solutions, but also responsibilities

In the multilateral system of international development cooperation, a set of rules and a guiding framework were established through multilateral negotiations, mainly by traditional donors, as the establishment of the DAC and demarcation of ODA. The multilateral system of international development cooperation was outlined around the binary donor-recipient, reflecting a hierarchical and vertical relation between developed and developing countries.

The majority of ODA is implemented through bilateral relations. ODA reports from the past decade encompass the following categories: (i) bilateral development projects, programmes and technical co-operation, (ii) multilateral ODA, (iii) humanitarian aid, (iv) in-donor refugee costs, and (v) net debt relief grants. Considering the data from 2008 to 2018, the category of bilateral development projects, programmes and technical co-operation accounts for around 55% of total ODA in those years (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2019a).

In the past years, the ecosystem of actors became more complex. A coalition among countries from the Global South exposed the disparities of the *diffused reciprocity* of the system that was established mostly by DAC members. The fragmentation and multipolarity led to transformations in the set of rules framing the system. Those changes include not only moving beyond the North and South divide, but also beyond government-to-government partnerships (Global Partnership Initiative 2019). The number and the nature of actors involved in this system increased, and there also increased the different arrangements established among them, which includes Triangular Cooperation.

This modality¹ emerged around 40 years ago, under the perspective that traditional donors, developed countries and UN organisations should act as catalysts for cooperation between developing countries (United Nations 1978). On the UN scope, TrC was recognised in 1995, in the document “New Directions Strategy on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries.” Through Triangular Cooperation “donors would agree to fund exchanges among developing countries” (United Nations 1995, 2). Presently, UN defines TrC as “southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries, supported by a developed country(ies) or multilateral organisation(s), to implement development cooperation programmes and projects” (United Nations Secretary General 2016, 5).

Triangular Cooperation also created spaces for policy dialogue between North and South. The emergency and strengthening of South-South cooperation brought different tensions to the established framework of traditional cooperation. From a political perspective, in a context of contestation between North-South and South-South Cooperation, TrC also became an arrangement of which traditional donors make use to learn from and influence SSC, hence, bridging these two modalities (Zoccal 2018). The modality was then mainly advanced to support SSC and to build a bridge between the traditional North-South cooperation and the then emerging South-South cooperation.

In the past years, different actor that engaged in TrC initiatives have, besides advancing in joint execution of development projects, developed joint operation manuals, guidelines, and processes, as the “Brazilian-German Trilateral Cooperation Programme: Operational Handbook” (Agência Brasileira de Cooperação 2019). Hence, TrC strengthens collaboration among different actors, despite contestation in other multilateral political spaces. By going beyond cost sharing of development projects, it creates room for policy dialogue (Zoccal forthcoming).

The idea of a more horizontal partnership, especially between DAC-donors and Southern providers, is also folding into wider initiatives, as the Partnerships for Global Development (PGD), which Brazil introduced. During the fifth International Meeting on Triangular Co-operation, a professional of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency indicated that the country is engaged in very

1 TrC is often defined as a tool, instrument, mechanism, initiative, or other terms. On one hand, modality can be used to encompass initiatives such as project support, budget support, and sector programme support. On the other hand, South-South and Triangular Cooperation are also usually referred to as alternative and complementary modalities when in reference to North-South Cooperation. Throughout the BAPA+40 outcome document, TrC is also referred to as a modality.

well defined TrC initiatives and programmes and, inspired by those, the PGD is a new approach that aims not to replace TrC, but to coordinate different strategies and initiatives. It aims to be a long-term strategy of engagement with traditional donors, such as the United Kingdom.

Within this scope, UK and Brazil have, since 2011, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for a Global Development Partnership (Marcondes 2017, Institute of Development Studies 2019). Most recently, in November 2019, the two countries jointly hosted, with the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), a meeting in Mozambique to “exchange views on how the UK and Brazil can strengthen and maximise opportunities for effective trilateral development cooperation to promote sustainable development in Africa”² (Waisbich 2020, 1). The establishment of “strategic partnerships” point to a resurgence of bilateralism, based on *specific reciprocity*, bypassing international institutions and negotiations that are paralysed in multilateral organisations (Rüland 2018).

The modality plays different roles for traditional donors on one hand, and Southern providers on the other. The ration of TrC on the total development cooperation is, however, difficult to accurately outline. It often lacks official, verified and comparable data on TrC. Only in 2016, TrC initiatives started being monitored in the OECD DAC statistical framework (reporting period 2015). In 2017, only Germany reported using the TrC code and, in the following year, eight members did so.

A broader effort is the TrC online project repository, developed and maintained by OECD, under the scope of work of the DAC’s Foresight, Outreach and Policy Reform Unit. The repository currently lists more than 800 TrC initiatives, including a wide range of projects, dating back to 1996. Nevertheless, the repository includes what countries, international organisations, representatives of the private sector, civil society, philanthropy and sub-national actors shared with the OECD on a voluntary basis, and does not cover the whole picture of the TrC initiatives worldwide. For example, the India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation (IBSA Fund) is an initiative by those three countries, managed by the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC). However, Triangular Cooperation is not mentioned in the programme guidelines, and the three countries involved do not report it as a TrC initiative. Nevertheless, some partner countries report projects supported by the IBSA Fund as a TrC initiative to the OECD repository, for instance Guinea-Bissau (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2020b).

Despite the lack of broad, official data, the relevance of TrC has been increasing in the international debate, and 2019 represented a turning point and paradigm shift, as highlighted by both Jorge Moreira da Silva, Director of the Development Co-operation Directorate, OECD, and Jorge Chediek, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General for SSC and Director of the UNOSSC. For the first time, TrC was broadly discussed in an internationally agreed document, and moved

2 Professionals from the Brazilian International Cooperation Agency frequently use the term “trilateral” instead of “triangular.” Despite the fact that various analyses and studies use these variants as synonyms, there is contestation regarding the indiscriminate use of the term. These contestations are linked to the definition of principles and practices of this modality. For more on this debate, see Milani 2017 and Zoccal forthcoming.

from being considered a niche to becoming a mainstream tool for development dialogue (Silva and Chediek 2020).

This is the result of the role TrC assumed during the negotiations of BAPA+40, and a few months later, both during the fifth International Meeting on Triangular Cooperation, held in Lisbon in October 2019, and the 11th High-Level Forum of Directors General for Development Cooperation, held in Istanbul in December 2019. If in the outcome document of the first High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, held in Nairobi already in 2009, the modality was mentioned 14 times, ten years later, during the BAPA+40, TrC appears 73 times, and the voluntary efforts of the Global Partnership Initiative (GPI) on Effective Triangular Cooperation were also included in the document (United Nations General Assembly 2019).

The GPI on Effective Triangular Cooperation, led by Mexico, was one of the 29 global partnership initiatives established in the scope of the Second High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) in 2016. Its core group and members have worked in various initiatives since then, as voluntary guidelines for effective TrC, presented also during the BAPA+40 (Global Partnership Initiative 2019).

Although there is no common internationally agreed upon definition of TrC³, the debate is on the rise, and dynamic global partnerships are taking shape to foster TrC as a modality to share not only costs and solutions, but also responsibilities towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. This includes partnerships bridging traditional donors and Southern providers that have contested narratives on the policy level, and also other actors, such as UNOSSC and OECD, both part of the core group of the GPI on Effective Triangular Cooperation (Zoccal forthcoming).

If the first initiatives of this modality touched upon the idea of financing the then emerging South-South Cooperation, current efforts try to move away from this concept. A key component of many TrC projects is the cost-sharing. A recently published evaluation of the eight projects advanced under the scope of the European Union's flagship programme on triangular cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), ADELANTE, indicated that a 50-50 cost-sharing model was not realistic, due to the high budgets of the ADELANTE projects. Therefore, the EU covered 80% of the project's budget. Nevertheless, the analysis also highlighted that, providing 20% of the resources, "all partners exerted ownership by contributing resources [...], which was a successful way of ensuring ownership and co-responsibility" (Piefer-Söyler and Aigües 2020, 20).

There are other examples that indicate a different and even more balanced cost-sharing model, as the German Regional Fund for Triangular Cooperation in LAC, established in 2010. Implementing projects with a much lower budget when compared to ADELANTE, the German Regional Fund had approved 69 projects until October 2019. The German contribution accounted

3 The two main TrC definitions are the UN's, already indicated in this article, and the OECD's, which understands TrC as an arrangement that involves at least three partners, fulfilling three main roles: beneficiary, pivotal and facilitating. The main difference is that, if on the one hand, in the UN definition TrC is strictly linked to the relation between South-South Cooperation and traditional donors, excluding other arrangements, the OECD's definition includes "countries (at national and sub-national levels), international organisations, civil society, private philanthropy, private sector and academia" (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2019a, 4-5).

for 37% of the total budget of projects managed by the Regional Fund, while contributions from the Southern partner accounted for 39%, from beneficiary country, for 22%, and from other partners, as other DAC-donors or private sector, for 2% (Zoccal 2019).

Accordingly, the cost-sharing models also include contribution and active participation of beneficiary countries, moving away from the idea that TrC is a tool for enhancing South-South Cooperation initiatives. The actors' position in the system may fluctuate beyond the donor-recipient binary. The GPI on Effective Triangular Cooperation argues that any actor can potentially assume any of the three roles needed for an activity to be considered triangular – facilitating, pivotal, and beneficiary partner (Global Partnership Initiative 2019).

Including the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities into the 2030 Agenda

Partnerships among different actors, as Triangular Cooperation, are central to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The approval of this agenda was “a high point in this trend toward a global agenda underpinned by multilateralist approaches” (Linn 2018, 87). Goal 17 is to “strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.”

The need to go “from billions to trillions” when debating the implementation of this agenda is frequently mentioned, especially by Multilateral Development Banks (International Monetary Fund 2015). In 2016, the year after setting the 2030 Agenda, ODA from DAC countries summed US\$ 150,6 billion. These figures have been descending and, in 2019, reached US\$ 145,2 billion (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2020a). The goals will only be achieved if there is an increased efforts and active involvement of a broader constellation of actors.

However, in a context of increasing ultra-nationalist movements, as described in the first section of this article, there is a twofold rejection: “first, the notion of responsibility in regard to international development is rejected; second, the structural asymmetries of this system are ignored”⁴ (Esteves 2017, 8). Those two rejections are in line with the principle of universality, present in the 2030 Agenda.

To understand this principle, it is relevant to recollect a key difference of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals from their predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals. At that time, DAC members were having difficulty justifying its disbursements with ODA domestically, which was considerably falling. If in 1961 ODA represented 0.51% of the GNI of DAC-countries, in the year 2000 it represented 0.22% (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2020a). The MDGs were outlined within the DAC in the attempt to reverse this

⁴ Translated by the author. In the original – Portuguese: “há uma dupla rejeição: em primeiro lugar, rejeita-se a noção de responsabilidade em relação ao desenvolvimento internacional; em segundo, ignoram-se as assimetrias estruturantes desse campo.”

scenario (Zoccal 2018). Thus, the goals were set by DAC countries, to be achieved by developing countries, in a top-down approach.

The 2030 Agenda set in 2015 incorporated, in opposition, the universality principle. They were not set within the sphere of the DAC, but of the UN's General Assembly. They are global in nature and universally applicable, in a sense that its goals and targets are directed not only to developing countries, but also to developed ones. This has, however, raised the notion that "we are all developing countries now"⁵ (Horner 2020).

Paulo Esteves proposed, in 2017, a critical analysis of the universality principle in relation to the dispute of responsibility of development, and of the multilateral system of international development cooperation. Under the notion that "we are all developing countries now," "who would 'pay the bill' of the SDGs also came into question. And the message was clear: now that we are all developing countries, we must share the costs"⁶ (Esteves 2017, 8).

Framing responsibility towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

As seen previously in this article, the belief that ODA should account for 0.7% of the GNI of DAC countries was based on the idea that developed countries had a moral responsibility towards international development. This is expressed as a collective responsibility of the rich nations of the North to help the poor ones of the South reach development. Having said this, such responsibility was simply assumed and became gradually embedded in the post-war political discourse (starting in the UN), though it was never formally codified (Bracho 2015, 2).

The North-South cooperation, under the donor-recipient logic, rose from the perspective that developed and industrialised countries had the responsibility to offer aid, and developing countries had the right to receive it. Unlike this responsibility/rights framework established after the Second World War, the South-South Cooperation narrative was of voluntary cooperation and solidarity (Bracho 2015). The 2030 Agenda includes the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities, recognising the different contexts and possibilities of North and South countries.

Elements of the CBDR principle can be traced back to the 1970s, in the sphere of the New International Economic Order. But it was first mentioned as an official international principle in 1992, in the Rio Declaration of the UN Conference on Environment and Development. This principle has particular eminence within global climate governance. Yet, it is also relevant to other international negotiations and conflicts of interest along the North-South binary (Pauw et al. 2014).

The adjectives "common" and "differentiated" clearly denote that CBDR is not about exempting anybody from responsibilities or actions. It is about creating a framework that should seem fair, equitable and legitimate for all and, thus, a good basis to start serious negotiations on

5 The economist Kate Raworth, Senior Researcher of OxfamGB, has firstly elaborated this statement, in 2012 (Raworth 2012).

6 Translated by the author. In the original – Portuguese: "estávamos discutindo quem 'pagaria a conta' dos ODS. E o recado era claro: agora, que somos todos países em desenvolvimento, devemos compartilhar os custos."

who should do what and why, to effectively address the major collective action challenge of our time (Bracho 2015, 24).

In the system of international development cooperation, CBDR principle was included under the 2030 Agenda as a fundamental principle to tackle the development challenges (United Nations 2015). The *diffused reciprocity* of this multilateral system is also based on the recognition of the asymmetries between actors, reflected on the CBDR principle.

However, the negotiations to include the principle within the new development agenda under the UN umbrella were difficult. While developing countries advocated for its inclusion, for developed countries, in general, the CBDR principle was shaped to deal particularly with environmental issues and the burden-sharing for provision of global environmental goods. Therefore, they would not be applicable to the whole multilateral system of international development cooperation (Jiang 2016). The Chinese position, for instance, reiterated that CBDR “is the important consensus of the international community on development and the foundation for international development cooperation” (Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations 2013).

Gerardo Bracho (2015) highlights that, even with different elements hindering the consolidation of CBDR as a clear and legitimate concept in the climate agenda, “there should be no doubt that CBDR expresses the right framework to bring the emerging powers into the development cooperation agenda as cooperation providers in a legitimate and fair way” (Bracho 2015, 24).

Conclusion

In the previous sections, I have argued that the *diffused reciprocity* sustaining the multilateral system of international development cooperation is eroding. Dynamics leading to this scenario are manifold, and this article highlighted two of them. The first one is the changing architecture of global governance, mainly after the turn to the 21st century. Fragmentation and multipolarity opened space for an increasing influence of countries from the Global South in the international cooperation system, presenting alternative practices and principles to the set of rules established mainly between the 1960s and 1970s by DAC countries. The second dynamic is the strengthening of nationalist movements in global politics. The pursuit of a “our country first” strategy ignores systemic structural asymmetries and puts the notion of responsibility into question, endangering international development cooperation.

However, challenges are increasingly global in scope and unprecedented in scale. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the interlinkages and integrated nature of the SDGs. The crisis of multilateralism threatens the implementation of this ambitious plan. In this scenario, the importance of Triangular Cooperation is increasing as a modality to foster partnership among different actors.

Key emerging powers, such as the BRICS, MIST, and Arab countries increased their footprint in the system of international development cooperation. Many of those countries advanced South-South cooperation and presented an alternative narrative to traditional principles and practices established after the Second World War. As *diffuse reciprocity* of this multilateral system was falling short, a coalition of countries from the global South accentuated contestations to multilateral processes of the system of international development cooperation.

Within this, TrC became an arrangement that could bridge North-South and South-South Cooperation initiatives, creating spaces for policy dialogue. Actors that present contested narratives in institutionalised political platforms – and hence do not agree on sharing principles, practices, or assessment mechanisms – can coordinate action towards achieving the 2030 Agenda through TrC. Through *specific reciprocity*, in which partners collaborate based on exchange of equivalent importance and in a fairly defined time frame – in opposition to diffused reciprocity that characterises multilateral relations (Keohane 1986), the modality fostered cooperation not only between North and South countries, but also among other non-governmental actors, as well as among multilateral organisations, such as the OECD and the UNOSSC.

Despite the lack of broad and official data on TrC, the modality has gained importance in the international agenda. Beyond the joint execution of projects, examples of the elaboration of joint operation manuals, guidelines, and processes have been increasing. Advancing on joint strategies for cooperation between actors, as the already mentioned Partnerships for Global Development between Brazil and the UK, allows identifying and making use of comparative advantages among different stakeholders, and also raises the level of trust among them.

Fostering long-standing partnerships with common-guidelines and practices would, hence, reduce transaction costs of initial or *ad hoc* triangular initiatives and compensate higher costs due to the increased number of partners. Different cost-sharing models advanced through TrC initiatives, as the German Regional Fund for Triangular Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, are also notable.

TrC catalyses the sharing of not only costs and solutions towards implementing the 2030 Agenda, but also of responsibilities. Fostering this modality, DAC countries legitimately incorporate countries from the global South as cooperation providers into the agenda of cooperation for development, pushing for their active involvement in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Southern providers, in turn, agree to share responsibility of international development, bypassing the political debate of multilateral negotiations and the contestations of the North-South divide.

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