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Article

# Negotiating accountability in South-South Cooperation: the case of Brazil

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## Abstract

The increased political significance of South-South Cooperation (SSC), globally and within Brazilian Foreign Policy, has produced a variety of SSC accountability-related disputes. This paper unpacks the ways in which accountability has been problematised and negotiated in the last decade between the competing stakeholders and publics of Brazilian SSC along three intersecting dimensions: geopolitical, bureaucratic and state-society relations.

**Keywords**: Brazil; Foreign policy; International development; South-South cooperation; Accountability.

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## Introduction

In the early 2000s, Brazil has emerged as an important player in the increasingly contested and fragmented international development cooperation (IDC) field. Simultaneously, country's activism – under the broad umbrella of South-South Cooperation (SSC) – has made development cooperation a rising 'policy and political field' domestically (Milani 2018). As the topic continued to gain political salience, pressure has started to mount for the country, and other 'SSC providers', to justify their development-related policy options, report on flows and measure outcomes.

This paper uses the case of Brazil to explore current accountability politics in global development and in SSC, in particular. The rise of SSC accountability as an issue takes place in a particular historical juncture marked by shifting global development landscapes, new sorts of global development convergence-divergence dynamics along the North-South divide, and SSC own consolidation and politicisation moment (Esteves

and Assunção 2014; Constantine and Shankland 2017; Mawdsley 2019). Unpacking these politics is hence an opportunity to understand ongoing negotiations over global responsibilities in the development field and their interaction with negotiations taking place within large Southern providers.

I look at the rise of accountability as an issue for SSC providers and the disputes it generates applying two conceptual tools from social and political theory, namely 'problematisation' and 'accountability politics', to the field of critical development studies and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). In its widely used conceptualisation (based on Michael Foucault's work on governmentality), *problematisation* means the socially constructed discursive operation through which development issues are made visible as problems and rendered target for governmental interventions (Li 2007; Roy and Crane 2015). In social theory and public policy analysis, problematisation also describes the process through which social issues are made public through 'rendering problematic' and 'acting upon' them; a dynamic closely related to *politicisation* (Cefaï 1996). These linkages between problematisation and politicisation are also present in FPA thought on Brazilian Foreign Policy (BFP) entering the realm of politics and becoming subjected to social problematisation within and outside the country (Ratton Sanchez et al. 2006; Milani and Pinheiro 2013).

Drawing on these understandings of problematisation, this paper investigates emerging *problematisations of SSC accountability,* asking why and how accountability becomes a problem for a series of different publics inside and outside SSC providers. Additionally, it explores a set of socio-political effects, namely politicisation and conflict, of existing SSC accountability problematisations. To do so, it mobilises the concept of 'accountability politics' to further characterise the 'arenas of conflict over *whether* and *how* those in power are held responsible' (Fox 2007) for their foreign policy and IDC/SSC-related decisions.

Concretely, the paper unpacks how coexisting geopolitical and social problematisations of SSC accountability have been framed and negotiated between the competing stakeholders and 'publics' (or constituencies) of Brazilian SSC and the kinds of sociopolitical conflicts they have generated. It contributes therefore to existing scholarship on international development politics and on FPA, arguing that the growing politicisation of Brazilian SSC is revealing not only of the fragmented and divisive state of contemporary IDC, and the disputes around power and responsibility in global development, but also of the political-institutional-citizenship dilemmas of consolidating and institutionalising SSC as a policy field/issue-area in large providers like Brazil.

Engaging with Mawdsley's (2019) proposition of a current 'SSC 3.0 moment' where SSC providers have to 'manage the success' from the previous expansionary phase in the early 2000s, I argue that the 'success' of the previous phase has actually created the need to manage sociopolitical conflicts around SSC, including accountability conflicts. I also suggest, using Brazil as an example, that the increased political significance of SSC has generated accountability-related disputes along three intersecting dimensions: geopolitical, bureaucratic, and state-society relations. Geopolitically, those disputes reflect global pressures on SSC partners to justify policy options,

show results, and assess impact of SSC initiatives to a set of multiple, and often competing, transnational constituencies. What follows is a series of negotiations of accountability norms and their operationalisation whereby rising powers attempt to respond to competing expectations and assert their differentiated integration in the field of IDC, while disputing the very notion of global development responsibilities. Alongside the geopolitics, disputes are also observed in domestic public and experts' debates on foreign policymaking and spending with SSC, both within (bureaucratic politics) and outside the state (state-society relations).

Methodologically, the paper maps different forms of accountability politics shaping Brazilian SSC between 2010-2018 through an extensive literature review, semi-interviews, and ethnographic event observations.[1] Besides this introduction, the next section explores how accountability emerged as a problem for SSC, became the object of global negotiations between SSC partners and 'traditional donors', and explores how measurement and reporting of SSC have been negotiated globally. The paper then turns to the politics of SSC accountability in Brazil, looking at the politicisation of BFP, bureaucratic politics, and civil society mobilisation as sources of domestic accountability disputes.

## SSC accountability as a geopolitical problem: Brazil as a 'rising power' in a highly audited and fragmented IDC field

Since the turning of the century, Brazil and other emerging economies have become politically, materially, and ideationally engaged in the field joining the club as 'rising powers in international development' (Gu et al. 2016). In an era of 'global development agendas', including the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) one, Brazil became a source of technical cooperation on a range of developmental issues (including health, agriculture, and social policies) and development finance, as well as a contributor to humanitarian assistance and UN peace operations (Leite et al. 2014).[2] Despite its fragmented national SSC policy ecosystem, fragile domestic consensus on SSC as a status-seeking strategy, and fluctuating political and material commitment since 2013, Brazil's continued international extroversion and state activism made the country the object of growing international attention and thus an important piece of contemporary global development politics.

### From 'aid accountability' to SSC accountability

Accountability in international development can be many things: an international soft-norm, a management tool to regulate donor-recipient relations and control aid agencies, a sector of aid

[1] Fieldwork was conducted between 2017-2019, as part of author's doctoral research.

[2] Much has been published on Brazilian SSC, in both Portuguese and English. For one of the first empirically-rich overview, see Leite et al. (2014). For a more recent work, see Milani (2018).

intervention. In the past 20 years, accountability became a ubiquitous term in the field: featuring in portfolios of bilateral and multilateral agencies and in most of the policy documents and discourses on IDC governance.

However, IDC accountability, and in particular 'aid accountability deficits', also became a *problem* to be 'fixed' (McGee 2013). Since the 1990s, 'aid monitoring movements' have appeared and pushed for 'aid reforms' and for the creation of 'transparency and accountability (T&A) aid infrastructures' (McGee 2013; Jensen and Winthereik 2013) to regulate practices and assess the results and impacts of Official Development Assistance (ODA). A series of new accountability policies and mechanisms were implemented in aid agencies, development finance institutions, and recipients alike. In the early-2000s, the principle of 'mutual accountability' also became a pillar of the Paris Agenda for Aid Effectiveness led by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2005).

Aid recipients in the South were among the most vocal in questioning aid practices, its results, and how the proposed accountability mechanisms worked. Within Aidland, accountability was equally contentious, generating its own technical-scientific and political disagreements on roles and responsibilities of development actors (bilateral agencies, multilaterals, NGOs). Debates also emerged on the processes, means, and tools through which development actors should publicly justify their IDC-related decisions and outcomes to multiple (and often competing) constituencies (see, for instance, Sovacool et al. 2019 on the World Bank Inspection Panel).

The rise of aid accountability and effectiveness debates in the early 2000s is the exact point in time where SSC (re)enters the scene through 'oppositional claims' (Cesarino 2013) and 'marketing innovation' (Constantine and Shankland 2017), advancing narratives of SSC being more appropriate and better-suited to the needs of Southern partners. This re-emergence contributed to deepen aid reforms debates, re-politicising and fragmenting the field into two coexisting and competing sub-fields (*doxas*): traditional aid/ODA and SSC (Esteves and Assunção 2014). While the fields, and the actors inhabiting them, are not rigid or immutable, their hierarchies and border-making dynamics do shape the set of geopolitical accountability disputes under scrutiny here.

As the importance of SSC became incontestable, donors' anxieties about effectiveness and fear of competition mounted and SSC accountability deficits began to emerge as a problem for traditional donors in two inter-related ways. First, as a need for increased transparency on SSC flows. Second, as a need for SSC providers to conform with the existing 'donorship' norms (including measurement/reporting, un-tying aid, and socio-environmental safeguards). However, during the early days of SSC re-emergence, SSC accountability was not often problematised by Southern countries themselves. On the one hand, the issue was rarely raised in global forums by low-income countries. On the other, Brazil and other 'SSC champions' largely dismissed the agenda on the basis of the differential nature of SSC (namely, horizontal and demand-driven) and its flows (technical/in-kind or blended finance), and out of fear to be straightjacket into ODA metrics (Corrêa 2017; Chakrabarti 2018).

As years followed, resistance started to coexist with more accommodating discourses and other types of differentiation strategies by large SSC providers. A new consensus was slowly forming around the need for accountability in SSC to be treated as *conceptually* different from ODA standards and operationalised according to national capacities (Kim and Lim 2017). Southern providers also saw in the 'accountability issue', particularly in measuring SSC in the context of the SDGs, an opportunity to boost their '*doxic* battles' (Esteves and Assunção 2014) and internationally showcase SSC successes. Large Southern providers started then to diplomatically negotiate SSC accountability, disputing the particularities of its normative content and its operationalisations: how to justify, to whom, and through which instruments.

## Negotiating SSC measurement and reporting

From the mid-2010s onwards, measurement and reporting of SSC turned into a major battlefield. Metrics and reporting standards are defining practices of 'donorship' and conforming with the Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) rules on ODA has historically shaped donors' identities; producing conformity and disciplining dynamics among donors (Kim and Lightfoot 2011). With the rise of new players, new set of dynamics surfaced this time opposing DAC and 'Non-DAC' donors.

While some Southern countries have shown willingness to either adhere (e.g., South Korea) or relatively harmonise with DAC standards (e.g., Mexico and Turkey), the traditional G77+China diplomatic stance remained to refuse being co-opted into ODA metrics and reporting standards, not only because reporting was a 'donorship' obligation but also because reporting 'according to ODA standards' risked diluting the specificities of SSC ("Statement by Ms. Sahar Nasser, first secretary at the mission of the state of Palestine to the UN on behalf of the group of 77 and China, following the adoption of the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second high-level UN conference on south-south cooperation (BAPA+40)." 2019). However, from 2013 onwards, major SSC providers, including Brazil, India and China, started to combine open resistance to measurement with discursive accommodation, global normative/policy-entrepreneurship, and attempts to conduct internal 'pro-accountability' reforms.

Discursively, albeit not fully dislodged, the initial resistance started to coexist with emphasis on (a) the importance of measuring flows and assessing impacts and (b) the use of measurement tools developed *in the South by Southern actors* to better capture the specificities of SSC (Corrêa 2017; Chakrabarti 2018). As the SDGs agenda progressed, policymakers and knowledge actors in major SSC providers (academics, think-tanks, and development NGOs, some of which gathered in the Network of Southern Think Thanks – NeST) realised that assessing flows and results of SSC initiatives could assist them in not only substantiating the differentiation-based rhetoric of SSC vis-à-vis ODA but also showing that SSC was numerically and qualitatively contributing to the fulfilment of SDGs (Corrêa 2017; "Paths for developing south-south cooperation monitoring and evaluation systems." 2017).

On quantification matters, Southern providers kept refusing to commit to financial targets for SSC (as opposed to the 0.7% ODA/GNI target), thus re-affirming that SSC was complementary and not a substitute to North-South Cooperation ("Statement by Ms. Sahar Nasser, first secretary at the mission of the state of Palestine to the UN on behalf of the group of 77 and China, following the adoption of the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second high-level UN conference on south-south cooperation (BAPA+40)." 2019). While on evaluation, many claimed having no reason to follow OECD evaluation criteria, looking instead for ways to re-conceptualise what 'outcomes' and 'impacts' meant and how to assess them in more suitable ways considering the nature and principles of SSC ("Paths for developing south-south cooperation monitoring and evaluation systems." 2017).

Besides looking for 'Southern ways' to conceive and practice IDC accountability, many also upheld discourses on respecting the 'diversity and plurality of SSC' as to find country-appropriate, rather than common, solutions to the accountability calls/needs (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2019). Large SSC providers also advanced 'experimentation and learning' narratives to emphasise the emergent character of their cooperation and accountability practices, claiming they were 'still learning' how to provide justifications, either drawing lessons from existing development partners or through national experimentation. This learning discourse is found in Brazilian International Development Cooperation *(Cobradi)* report, framed since its first edition as a Brazilian innovation, yet a 'model in the making' (Lima et al. 2018). Chinese scholars equally framed as tentative their 'pilot' evaluation efforts arguing that 'how to establish a SSC framework suitable for China's own context is still a new area in China' (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2019, 26).

At the domestic level, SSC providers started to discuss, craft and adopt T&A infrastructures: transparency tools (platforms, registries, databases), monitoring and evaluation tools (impact evaluation reports, M&E systems), and policy management tools (guidelines, specialised institutional structures). Examples include the Chinese White Papers on Foreign Aid (2011 and 2014) containing official figures for China's foreign assistance, the Mexican quantification/reporting system (*RENCID)* and the *Cobradi* report, compiled by the Institute for Applied Economic Research – IPEA and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC). Not only these national experiments contributed to generating new forms of 'challenging diplomacies' (Xiaoyun and Carey 2014) by Southern governments and knowledge actors, as concrete examples of 'alternative' tools Southern voices could bring to the table, but also they embodied the multiple knowledge battles (metrics and lexicon battles) on how to measure SSC.

How could one make sense of these dynamics and their effects? Policy and positioning shifts are shaped by a range of simultaneous factors, including: renewed diplomatic strategies of cautious rapprochement and/or reputation anxieties, the (direct and indirect) socialisation efforts by traditional development actors (multilaterals, Northern countries, INGOs), and the role of knowledge and policy entrepreneurs inside SSC providers (within domestic bureaucracies and in civil society). Overall, these dynamics relate to middle/rising powers' reformist intents to contest

existing global IDC standards and practices through a 'simultaneous acceptance of a norm's content and rejection of its implementation in practice' (Kenkel and Destradi 2019, 2). These 'ambivalent' compliance and resistance-based behaviours (Sullivan 2015) are embedded in SSC providers' dual quest for a peer-recognition of their 'rising powers status' and of their 'singularity' in the field (Milani and Duarte 2015), a quest for *differentiated integration*. Furthermore, responding to conformity/converging pressures with crafting alternative accountability instruments and tools illustrates the current normative battlefield in IDC where soft-convergence, hybridisation, and 'localisation' (Acharya 2004) are simultaneously taking place.

In sum, by refusing to have their development cooperation defined and counted by others and by starting to build their own metrics, Southern providers further problematise 'donorship', in its very legitimacy/authority core: development knowledges and expertise. Knowledge disputes, in turn, validate and contribute to rising powers' broader quest for status, recognition, and entitlement to play policy and norms-making roles and enable Southern countries to showcase successes rather than being stigmatised as deviants. However, by attempting to re-invent IDC metrics without challenging the logic of showcasing/performing success to prove 'generosity' (Veen 2011), rising powers were also caught in other sorts of 'traps' and 'dilemmas' (Westhuizen and Milani 2019; Lopes et al. 2020), related to relations with their Southern partners (by tensioning the very SSC principles of horizontality and mutual gains) and with their domestic constituencies, to which I turn now.

## SSC accountability as a public problem: bureaucratic politics and politicisation of Brazilian foreign policy

The field of SSC has been commonly portrayed as loosely institutionalised and marked by 'emergence' and experimentation (Cesarino 2013). In the past decade, however, SSC has entered a new era of 'consolidation' (Mawdsley 2019), with a set of institutional reforms and the formalising of development cooperation structures, including IDC agencies and legal/policy frameworks. ABC was created in the late 1980s, but Brazilian SSC 'institutionalisation/consolidation' moment started around 2010 (Ramanzini Júnior et al. 2015; Cesarino 2019). Institutionalisation remains, nonetheless, incomplete: as the country has not yet defined a formal overarching national legal-institutional framework (or state policy) exclusive to development cooperation (Milani 2018).[3] Bureaucratic politics, I argue, are an important factor in why this has been the case. At the same time, Brazilian domestic institutions have continuously experimented with practicing international development finance, technical, and humanitarian cooperation. In many cases, doing cooperation came ahead of procedures and guidelines (Milani 2018; Farias 2018).

[3] During Michel Temer's interim presidency (2016-2018), Itamaraty announced the Executive intention to send a cooperation bill to Congress (Ferreira 2017), which end up not happening.

The absence of a national policy also meant the absence of a coherent, stabilised, national narrative around IDC/SSC. Until today, it remains inconclusive what constitutes Brazilian development cooperation. To base its own quantification efforts, the *Cobradi* project has put forward in its first report (from 2010) an official definition of Brazilian development cooperation. This definition was not consistently followed in successive reports and other actors in the field – scholars, politicians, bureaucrats and civil society – have equally challenged its contours (Leite et al. 2014) signalling yet another manifestation of the knowledge politics and metric-battles around SSC, this time inside Brazil, as I will show below.

In this context, domestic accountability politics are privileged lenses to observe the disputed constitution of SSC as a policy field in Brazil. On the one hand, disputes respond to the broader 'politicisation of BFP' (Lima 2000; Milani and Pinheiro 2013). On the other, considering BFP as an instrument for national development, disputes relate to the very politicisation of development, with bargains over the fiscal space for social spending, the socio-environmental limits to growth, the role of private sector, among others. The following sub-sections analyse politically salient arenas of conflict in Brazil, starting with the controversies around grand foreign policy strategies and then moving to bureaucratic politics and civil society mobilisation. To assist in the analysis, the cases of technical cooperation in agriculture and of Brazil's National Development Bank (BNDES) internationalisation are mobilised as examples where these domestic SSC accountability politics interact.

## Disputing grand strategies

The first domestic arena of conflict is a 'meta-arena' around issues of Brazil's international role and identity, where Brazilian international footprints and its results are disputed and negotiated. Here, SSC accountability politics speak to the policy and public debates on 'grand' foreign policy options and diplomatic strategies adopted by those constitutionally in charge of formulating and implementing BFP: the Presidency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty). Those debates oppose views on the appropriateness (politically and financially) of the South-South and State-Developmentalism agendas, which (re-) gained relevance in BFP in the early 2000s. Both priorities were more emphatically advanced by the Workers' Party (PT) throughout their successive mandates (2003-2016) and have been met with a range of responses by other state actors, political opposition and other societal forces (including the media and pressure groups in the private sector and civil society).

South-South relations were a major point of contention. While governmental narratives reframed country's identity as a Southern developing country seeking to become a global player and foster political, economic, and strategic ties with the developing world, in the political establishment this was met with a mix of reactions ranging from excitement, scepticism, and antagonism. Among the latter, several accused the PT to be engaging on a 'Third-Worldist diplomacy' for 'prestige' rather than 'results' (Kassab 2004). The Itamaraty itself became divided.

This fault-line kept evolving in tandem with the increased 'noisy polarisation' (Lopes 2011) in the country, with growing salience in legislative and electoral debates, as well as in the media.

Critiques of Lula da Silva's 'Africa Agenda' as being 'naïve', 'expensive' and/or an 'ill-prepared instrument' (República Federativa do Brasil 2017) exemplify these disagreements. Disputes achieved a new peak in the years preceding Dima Rousseff's impeachment and immediate after, when the PMDB-PSDB political coalition came to power, in 2016. The new incumbents opposed the previous contours of the South-South/Africa agendas, framing their intention to look for 'concrete partnerships' and an 'effective economic, technological and investment exchanges' rather than 'compassion' ("Discurso do ministro José Serra por ocasião da cerimônia de transmissão do cargo de Ministro de Estado das relações exteriores: Brasília, 18 de maio de 2016." 2016). Result-based/managerial criticism is also found in the controversy over the opening of new diplomatic representations - 17 in Africa - during PT's era. Opposing voices challenged this decision with managerial accountability arguments, claiming the new diplomatic missions were not 'useful' or 'cost-effective' (Mello and Nublat 2016). New embassies were also object of scrutiny and oversight by the Senate and the Federal Court of Accounts (TCU) after the impeachment.

A second grand area SSC faced political opposition inside Brazil was the renewed 'developmental state' and its materialisation in BFP. Here the re-activation of the developmentalist state by the PT at home and abroad (Leite et al. 2014) was the object of political debates, not only from the opposition but also from below, from civil society. Two main issues became symbolic battlefields for the constant negotiations between the Executive and other actors inside and outside the state: first, increased state spending in social policies and, second, the role of BNDES. Both issues had very clear international/SSC interfaces: for the former, several of the social policies enhanced domestically were simultaneously internationalised through SSC (Pomeroy et al. 2019; Stone et al. 2019), while for the latter, BNDES got increasingly involved with infra-structure projects outside Brazil, through its Exim Bank scheme, supporting Brazilian engineering companies to export their services in Latin America and Africa (Hochstetler 2014).

## SSC bureaucratic politics

A second domestic arena of conflict is found at the bureaucratic level. Bureaucratic politics are constitutive of Brazilian SSC due to its inherent decentralised nature. Brazilian technical SSC, for instance, relies on numerous public institutions and public servants who act as the 'development experts' implementing projects, either responding to the demands from Itamaraty/ABC or following their own international agenda. ABC still faces coordination challenges and has no monopoly over all the technical cooperation provided by the country (Farias 2018). Conceived as a foreign policy instrument, development cooperation quickly became 'multiples instruments' (Leite et al. 2014), serving different national public agencies in their domestic and international policy-institutional battles.

SSC bureaucratic politics manifest, for instance, in the ways different entities within the state negotiate competing priorities and gains (political, material, symbolic, institutional, individual) to be procured from international engagements. Being *de facto* operationalised by national institutions, technical cooperation is subjected to their internal politics. If on the one hand, ABC/Itamaraty can more easily see and claim foreign policy and soft power gains from cooperating with other developing countries, is less clear for other federal bureaucracies (whose main mandate is not to work on international development) the gains procured from working internationally (Cesarino 2013). Some institutions value cooperation as part of their own efforts to internationalise Brazil-grown technologies, expose human resources to international experience, and gain legitimacy for policy narratives at home. Simultaneously, years of expanded international activism have strained implementing partners and created external (with ABC, the private sectors and/or civil society) or internal frictions (intra-institutional) due to the political, programmatic, and budgetary trade-offs Brazilian ministries are subjected to (Farias 2018).

The Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation – Embrapa has been an emblematic case of this dilemma. Once a 'poster-boy' (Leite et al. 2014), Embrapa has progressively retreated from the scene, due to a decrease in ABC's budget and to an 'institutional fatigue', if not 'resistance', to cooperate with developing countries. This fatigue has concrete material dimensions, namely overburden of specific divisions (such as Embrapa-Cotton), but also political questionings of what Embrapa was gaining from exchanging with 'poorer countries in the South'[4] and concerns that 'by helping African countries Brazil would be "feeding tiger cubs that will one day grow and eat us up"' (Cesarino 2013, 31-32).

By the end of 2018, Embrapa had already significantly retreated (Walendorff 2020) and ABC had to diversify its partnerships reaching out to universities and state-level agriculture extension services. Tensions at Embrapa are not an isolated case. Rather, they represent a trend within Brazilian SSC ecosystem where international advisory departments – often the focal points for SSC – reported discomfort, criticism and/or jalousie by peers for either 'traveling too much'[5] or diverting resources from the domestic priorities. Such criticism echoes public opinion tropes on SSC providers' 'spending public tax-payers money abroad when having several problems at home' (United Nations Development Program China 2017). In Brazil, however, not only the 'South-South nature' but the very 'international work' became problematic for domestic bureaucracies from 2015 onwards as the political-economic crisis unfolded and allocating resources for SSC became politically and materially challenging.

Finally, bureaucratic conflict is also found around the SSC measurement agenda. To account for Brazilian federal spending on IDC, *Cobradi* researchers have developed a survey methodology to retrieve flows and practices from the more than 120 Brazilian federal agencies involved in development cooperation (Lima et al. 2018). *Cobradi's* methodology is reliant on IPEA's

[4] Interview: development cooperation expert at Embrapa (remote, 2018).

[5] Interview: development cooperation expert at FNDE – Brazilian National Fund for Education (Brasilia, 2019).

convening-power and peer-pressure on public institutions to provide detailed information on their IDC/SSC expenses and practices. Throughout the years, IPEA has faced challenges to collate information, including data availability, insufficient political support for this transparency exercise and/or political sensitivities with publicising their international work.[6]

Even if internationally celebrated, *Cobradi* was not consensual inside Brazil and has been challenged and complemented by other transparency/reporting initiatives. In 2017, the Presidency and ABC started to build a 'Brazilian International Development Cooperation Platform' to account for inwards and outwards cooperation flows of both public and private actors. This new T&A infrastructure aims to counter *Cobradi's* deficiencies, such as its narrow definition of development cooperation and limited accessibility. The proposed platform (still in the design phase when Jair Bolsonaro came to power) mean two things for SSC measurement politics in Brazil: first, a methodological and conceptual departure from *Cobradi's* autonomist model and a closer alignment with SDGs-related proposal to account for the total flows for development (under the OECD-led TOSSD metrics).[7] Second, the rise of an open institutional competition – or 'duelling' (Paxton and Ingram 2017) – for the power to count and account. Simultaneously, Brazilian civil society also launched an autonomous project, led by the think-tank ASUL in partnership with Oxfam Brasil, to measure SSC through existing national open-access budgetary systems. Their methodology was framed as complementary to *Cobradi's* surveys, while bringing openness and accessibility gains (Lopes and Costa 2018), showing that duelling is also occurring with non-state actors.

In sum, existing bureaucratic arenas of conflict feature a series of distinct, but interlaced, dynamics: first, public agencies and/or their civil servants questioning the purposes and workings of SSC, either targeting the 'Southwards-looking' of the exchanges or, more commonly, the 'international work' done by few experts inside over-strained bureaucracies. Their pressure on ABC, Itamaraty and/or the Presidency to justify policy options and even the very decision to engage in SSC are thus cause and consequence of the poorly institutionalised state of SSC as a domestic policy field in Brazil. SSC still lacks the status of a state policy and the minimum internal consensus to be sustained in the years to come. Second, bureaucratic disputes over measurement are also materialisations of knowledge politics (what counts as development cooperation and who is entitled to count on behalf of Brazil) and their correlated inter-institutional and state-society conflicts, to be explored in the coming section.

## Challenging SSC 'from below'

A final arena of conflict is the one of state-society relations in SSC. This arena reflects the ways civil society actors have problematised, disputed, and mobilised around BFP, and within that SSC. The analysis here is circumscribed to *Brazilian* civil society actors openly engaged in

[6] Interview: development cooperation experts at IPEA (Brasília, 2018).

[7] Interview: development cooperation expert at IPEA (remote, 2018) and ABC (Brasilia, 2018).

*policy work*, acting as interest/pressure groups. Their engagement has been driven by participation claims: the right to participate in SSC policymaking and/or implementation, but also by dissent claims: to watchdog, protest against and resist Brazilian official SSC initiatives. Through this engagement, Brazilian civil society has brought accountability discussions to the forefront of SSC policy debates (Cabral and Leite 2015).

Brazil is traditionally seen as a 'participation innovation hub', having developed a range of social technologies and relatively institutionalised socio-state interfaces between state officials and civil society actors (Pires and Vaz 2014). Participation in foreign policy is less institutionalised than in other sectors but has expanded in several sub-issues, including SSC, from the 1990s onwards (Pomeroy and Waisbich 2019). The last decades were particularly important in shaping new forms of participation, since Brazilian 'emergence' has actually opened new venues and opportunities (political, symbolical, material) for civil society groups to act (Cezne 2019).

Civil society engagement with SSC has been multi-faceted in terms of actors (NGOs, social movements, labour unions, and knowledge actors/think thanks) and modes of engagement, encompassing confrontation and collaboration at the policy and/or project-levels, both nationally and transnationally (Milhorance and Burszynt 2017). Despite the multiplicity of engagement forms, there have been recurrent dynamics and trends worth mentioning. First, civil society mobilisation has been stronger around two sectors/modalities: technical cooperation in agriculture and/or food and nutritional security (FNS) and international development finance. Second, despite the diversity of modes, a recurrent form of *critical collaboration* with the Brazilian state.

In the case of agriculture and FNS, tracking the diffusion of Brazilian policies and instruments abroad has infused existing policy communities and civil society networks already mobilised in the agenda (Milhorance and Burszynt 2017). During the 2000s, the domestic constituency for FNS issues in Brazil has grown and secured the creation of socio-state interfaces, namely the former National Food and Nutritional Council (Consea),[8] where those actors could discuss Brazilian international food security policies. At the time, the agenda was also fostered by state/institutional activism (Pomeroy et al. 2019; Stone et al. 2019), both nationally and internationally. Brazil partnered with the World Food Programme to establish the Centre of Excellence Against Hunger and with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to disseminate 'Brazil-grown' solutions.

FNS civil society networks (gathering land and environmental movements, rights-based organizations, and academics) not only developed inside Brazil, but they were also connected to transnational agrarian movements in Latin American and Africa. SSC became another site of contention (Milhorance and Bursztyn 2017), with disputes around technical cooperation building into existing agricultural politics in Brazil that opposed agribusiness and family farming agriculture (Cabral and Leite 2015). In this agenda, civil society both actively mobilised to *influence* development cooperation policies (as in the case of the political advocacy to shape Brazilian

[8] Consea was extinguished in a presidential decree by Bolsonaro, in January 2019.

policies and crate a FNS Strategy for ABC or to create citizen participation spaces at FAO) and to *challenge/resist* what they perceived as exploitative or socio-environmental damaging models (as in the case of 'No to ProSavana Campaign' against the trilateral cooperation project between Brazil, Japan, and Mozambique).

In the case of development finance, although BNDES internationalisation was approved in 1997, mobilisation on BNDES 'international projects' only peaked between 2012 and 2016, when projects increased considerably (Hochstetler 2014). Attention to these mounted in tandem with concerns over BNDES overall policies, practices, and impacts at home. Concerns with mega-infrastructure projects funded in the Amazonian region coexisted with an intention to participate in discussions of developmental models and shape what a public development bank should be funding (Atkins 2019). In the international agenda, attention was given to infra-structure projects in South America and Africa, built by Brazilian companies with the support of BNDES.

Drawing on previous experiences with international financial organisations, NGOs, social movements, and labour unions took part in autonomous watchdog platforms, like *Plataforma BNDES* (2009-2013), which enabled them to build common knowledge around BNDES's operations. This first mobilisation was followed by participation in a socio-interface with the bank under the short-lived *CSO-BNDES Dialogue Forum* (2014-2016). At the same time, regional infrastructure projects in countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru under BNDES Exim Bank scheme kept encountering social resistance locally hence fostering transnational ties between local groups and those doing policy advocacy inside Brazil.[9]

Civil society socially problematised BNDES funding priorities and negative socio-environmental impacts, in other words, its developmental model, as well as the lack of transparency of its operations. The transparency agenda, described as the 'low-hanging fruits' and 'easy picks' for advocacy with the bank, advanced significantly.[10] By 2018, BNDES had improved its communications and created a Transparency Portal with interactive open-data tools on its export operations. Crucially, reforms shall be understood in conjunction with pressures on BNDES coming from other domestic actors. These include the disputes within the productive sector on BNDES role as a national development bank and the strong criticism it received since the *Lava Jato* anticorruption operation started to reveal, in 2014, the bribing schemes involving these same construction firms and numerous law-makers and politicians.

Reforms fell, nonetheless, short of CSOs expectations: with the bank refraining from publicising the Environmental Impact Assessments for both its national and international projects, including higher-risk projects. Despite not being criminally charged with corruption and having improved its compliance and transparency standards, reforms did not impede domestic debates to peak once again, in 2018, when the then candidate Bolsonaro repeatedly stated his will to solve

[9] Interview: Brazilian CSOs' representatives (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, 2018).

[10] Idem.

the 'BNDES black-box' problem 'created by the PT'. Once elected, the President kept referring to the issue and promised to 'audit all BNDES contracts'. This time, however, BNDES 'transparency problem' found little echo among other stakeholders, not even among the more liberal economists who criticised BNDES during PT's rule in the first place (Cruz 2020). Transparency might had been a problem, but Bolsonaro's 'black-box' was a myth.

## Conclusion

The increased role of emerging economies in IDC in the early 2000s has profoundly altered the global landscape and re-politicised a field often dominated by technical narratives on development and development cooperation. This paper contributes to the conversation on the politics of international development looking at one - often spoken but poorly studied - dimension of this shifting landscape: the rise of debates and disputes around accountability in SSC.

Using the example of Brazil, it explored the discursive construction of 'SSC accountability' as a problem to be intervened upon and the ways multiple problematisations unfold in transnational and domestic arenas of conflict around who, whether, and how Southern providers should justify their development cooperation.

At the global level, the main arenas of conflict identified speak to power disputes between traditional donors and SSC providers, where the lack of accountability from Southern partners is rendered visible, problematic, and becomes a target for traditional donors' intervention as to make SSC providers conform to the existing 'donorship' norms. On the one hand, accountability disputes between 'old' and 'new' powers constitute one of the many arenas for the ongoing geopolitical negotiations over international norms/regimes, responsibilities, and hierarchies. On the other, they are equally telling of the socio-technical dynamics of contemporary global development, with its ubiquitous T&A monitoring movements and infrastructures, its audit cultures, and its success-performing logics. Negotiating accountability globally allowed for agency from Southern powers, like Brazil. Their reluctance to adhere to standards created by others (ODA standards and measuring practices) offered governments and knowledge actors from large SSC providers the space to re-assert their identities, innovate discursively and in practice, and devise their own T&A knowledges and tools.

As for the domestic arenas of conflict, those are materialisations of particular spatial-temporal forms of mobilisation and negotiation around foreign policy and SSC, where a range of domestic actors (within and outside the state) dispute the institutionalisation of SSC as public policy: a field that remains 'emergent' and 'in-the-making' in Brazil, but also rapidly changing, due to country's extreme political volatility since 2015. The analysis of the growing intra-state (bureaucratic) disputes is a lens to understand the growing pains of SSC and its evolution as a policy field in a controversial environment, where institutionalising and dismantling pressures occurred simultaneously. SSC bureaucratic politics in the past

decade responded to the ways BFP bargains evolved and unfolded under PT's rule as well as to country's evolving politico-institutional dynamics, particularly the polarised left-right divide and their diverging ideas on country's international insertion and development at home and abroad. As for the state-society relations, Brazilian emergence as a 'SSC champion' has provided groups watchdogging BFP and other policy communities with material, political, and symbolic opportunities to contribute to shaping SSC policy instruments, to monitor country's global footprints, and to challenge official narratives and practices. Advocacy campaigns around agriculture cooperation and the BNDES operations are illustrative of these disputes over development/IDC models as well as over democratising BFP. Civil society mobilisation highlights conflicting expectations on Brazil's developmental actions: on what development and development cooperation is or should be and what is the role of the state in promoting development at home and abroad.

Looking across the different disputes in this first wave of politicisation of SSC, until 2018, is possible to differentiate between, first, socio-technical and diplomatic disputes over foreign policy and IDC norms and knowledges and, second, other types of socio-political conflict, such as bureaucratic disputes and public debates. Whereas the former was limited to a small community of policymakers, bureaucrats, and experts, the latter resulted from broader dynamics of sociopolitical problematisation of Brazilian state/public action. Its emergence responded to the political-partisan disagreements between governing forces and other political forces, to the inter and intra-institutional dynamics in several key policy areas Brazil provides cooperation, and to growing social mobilisation questioning official policies and practices.

Since 2019, Brazil has been ruled by a new elected coalition led by Jair Bolsonaro that ascended to power promising to radically revert the legacies of the previous mandataries. Is fair to assume that SSC accountability politics in the coming years will be deeply affected by this new political environment and their configurations of bureaucratic and foreign policy politics. Some tendencies are already visible. Brazil's bid to join the OECD, formalised in 2016 after Rousseff's impeachment and actively pursued by Bolsonaro's economic team, has immediately promoted a shift in the 'differentiated integration' strategy pursued in the previous decade toward more accommodating strategies, putting Brazil further away from G77+China confrontational discourses. Bolsonaro despise for the South-South agenda also affects SSC bureaucracies and civil society mobilisation. Some bureaucracies have further disengaged from the agenda, while others have adopted a cautious, low-profile, approach, to sustain their IDC/SSC engagements. De-mobilisation is also observed among civil society groups, struggling to balance domestic activism with critical collaboration and watchdogging in a context where state SSC extroversion is vanishing. Future scholarship will have the possibility to contrast and compare future domestic accountability politics with the ones mapped-out here, as much as assess the impacts of the retreat of Brazilian actors (state and non-state alike) from the agenda on shifting development accountability dynamics.

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