

Building an agenda for the monitoring and evaluation of South-South cooperation for development

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South-South cooperation (SSC) first emerged in the context of the anti-colonial struggles from the 1950s onwards in an attempt to promote autonomy in developing countries and a less unequal world order. In the early 2000s, South-South relations have gained new impetus and Brazil became an important actor in international development cooperation (IDC). Since then, innovations have been forged among Southern nations in an attempt to transcend cross-country structural, economic, and social asymmetries.

In a context where the traditional Official Development Assistance (ODA) model is arguably showing limitations, the emergence of SSC raises a number of expectations. However, positive expectations run alongside questionings: to what extent are these “new actors” actually promoting substantive changes to IDC practices?

On the one hand, “traditional development partners” seek to understand how SSC differs from ODA and what results it supports. On the other hand, the domestic constituencies in the “emerging partners” mobilize themselves to better understand and influence this foreign policy instrument. Furthermore, governmental bodies – implementing and coordination agencies alike – agree on the need to invest in the systematization of the innovative dimensions of their actions and to better understand its effects in order to inform strategic decisions and improve existing and future initiatives.

Highlights on the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of Brazilian South-South cooperation:

- > There is a growing demand for the creation of M&E systems to foster learnings, improve initiatives' performance, as well as to contribute to accountability, both domestically and among development partners.
- > The particularities of South-South cooperation should guide M&E efforts, taking into account the extent to which South-South cooperation principles contribute to the development outcomes in all partners, as well as the relationship between the strategies chosen and the nature of the expected changes.
- > Robust M&E systems for South-South cooperation are key to inform the development of a future Brazilian cooperation policy, an adequate legal framework for such policy, and the overall international development agenda. Such debate would benefit from the contribution of a broad range of stakeholders.



There is thus a growing demand for the creation of a conceptual and methodological framework to guide monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices, allowing for, among other things, the systematization of learnings, improving management and performance of initiatives, and generating accountability. In addition, since SSC is recognized as a means for implementing the new global development agenda, also referred to as Agenda 2030², there is a further call to gather evidence to inform the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³. This agenda also underscores the need to use country-systems in evaluation efforts and indicates the importance of negotiated milestones and of understanding the roles, responsibilities, and contributions of each of the parties.

In regards to the management of Brazilian SSC, strategic planning, measurement, M&E, and systematization of lessons learned are crucial for improving and guiding the public debate on setting-up of a future Brazilian development cooperation policy and an adequate legal framework for such policy⁴.

Furthermore, consolidated M&E practices can play a role in contributing to political dialogue and strategic reflection - alongside partner countries and domestically - to promoting further transparency on Brazilian international development actions.

This *Briefing* aims to contribute to the debate on the M&E of SSC, using the Brazilian SSC as a starting point. The issues discussed here draw from the authors' own experience evaluating Brazilian cooperation initiatives⁵ and further explore some issues raised during the event "Dialogues on South-South Cooperation" (see Box 1). In the following pages we outline some reflections on SSC M&E, more specifically on South-South technical cooperation (SSTC), considering: The central object of these initiatives, namely, their capacity development focus; The unfolding of SSC principles during initiatives' implementation and suggestions for their operationalization in M&E; Challenges related to planning and management tools and their implications for M&E; Final considerations on possible pathways to strengthen M&E practices.

1. We thank Bianca Suyama for her contribution during the drafting of the text.

2. ESTEVES, Paulo. Agora somos todos países em desenvolvimento? A Cooperação Sul-Sul e os ODS. Geneva: International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, Pontes, v. 13, n. 2, 8-12.

3. WAISIBICH, Laura T.; SILVA, Daniel M.; SUYAMA, B. Monitoring and Measuring of South-South Cooperation Flows in Brazil. São Paulo: Articulação Sul, 2017.

4. MILANI, Carlos R. S. ABC 30 anos: história e desafios futuros. Brasília: Agência Brasileira de Cooperação, Ministério de Relações Exteriores, 2017, 224 p.

5. Among them: (i) Evaluation of the project "Supporting the development of the cotton sector in the C4 countries" (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mali), 2015. Coordinated by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency; (ii) In partnership with MOVE Avaliação e Estratégia Social, the creation of an M&E system for and an impact assessment of the Centre for Excellence against Hunger interventions (2011-2016), a partnership between the Brazilian Government and the World Food Program; (iii) Evaluation of the project "Capacity Development in Management of South-South and Triangular Cooperation", a partnership between the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, the Japanese Cooperation Agency, and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency; (iv) An Evaluability Study of the project "South-South Cooperation for the Promotion of Decent Work in Cotton-Producing Countries in Africa and Latin America", a partnership between the Brazilian Government and the International Labour Organization.

BOX 1. "DIALOGUES ON SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION"

This series of debates on measurement and M&E of SSC brought together a diverse set of actors, such as cooperation agencies from twelve Southern countries, International Organizations, Brazilian implementing agencies, and Brazilian nongovernmental organizations. The initiative, groundbreaking in its theme and format, was organized in January 2017 by the BRICS Policy Center in collaboration with the Brazilian Cooperation Agency and with the support of the South-South Cooperation Research and Policy Centre (Articulação SUL).

Participants underlined the importance of evaluating SSC and the need to create M&E frameworks respectful of the singularities and the diversity within SSC. Debates underscored the potential contribution of evaluating SSC for improving initiatives, transparency and accountability, for giving further visibility to SSC contributions to IDC, as well as for the expansion of SSC domestic constituencies.

Among the topics discussed, emphasis was placed on the focus of SSC - especially SSTC - on "capacity development" and on the importance of wagering on the creation of M&E strategies that incorporate SSC principles and foster learning to all cooperating partners. The Dialogues have resulted in a final document, named "ROADMAP for Constructing Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for South-South Cooperation Initiatives".

Focus on capacity development

Brazilian SSTC prioritizes horizontal knowledge exchanges that support the strengthening of institutions and sectors deemed crucial to public policies management and to the development of partner countries. Capacity development here can be understood as the "identification, mobilization, and expansion of knowledge and skills available in the partner country, with the hope of achieving local autonomy in the design and implementation of endogenous solutions to development challenges"⁶. Taking the support for capacity development as a M&E issue, we briefly highlight some implications we consider relevant for informing a M&E agenda for SSC, namely, the importance of: (i) understanding expected changes across all the capacity development dimen-

sions supported by the initiatives, (ii) discussing what it means to evaluate results achieved with the support of SSC initiatives, and (iii) considering learning as a guiding element in M&E strategies.

Despite the relative conceptual consensus regarding the dimensions of capacity development (individual, organizational, inter-institutional, and social)⁷, the debate on how to operationalize these dimensions in criteria and indicators has only recently gained ground. The same goes for the debate regarding the best methodologies to assess changes resulting from IDC initiatives supporting capacity development⁸. However, we still lack a consolidated body of practical knowledge on M&E capacity development to apply across different contexts and initiatives. Moreover, considering the multidimensional nature of capacities, significant challenges

6. Brasil. "Manual de gestão da cooperação técnica Sul-Sul". Brasília: Agência Brasileira de Cooperação, Ministério de Relações Exteriores, 2013.

7. For a systematization of the most common dimensions in the field of international cooperation, see PEARSON, Jenny. *LenCD Learning Package on Capacity Development Part 1: The Core Concept*. Learning Network on Capacity Development, 2011.

8. See The World Bank. "Guide to Evaluating Capacity Development Results". Washington: World Bank, 2012. For examples of initiatives that seek to deepen M&E of capacity development interventions, see SIMISTER, Nigel; SMITH, Rachel. "Monitoring and Evaluating Capacity Building: is it really that difficult?". International NGO Training and Research Centre. Praxis Paper, 23. INTRAC, 2010; (ii) UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME. "Measuring Capacity". New York: UNDP, 2010.

persist in assessing whether the strategies chosen to support capacity development in partner countries effectively translate into measurable progress towards innovation and impact. Further thinking on changes across the capacity development dimensions may lead to key learning points on the appropriateness and relevance of SSC strategies.

A capacity development-focused M&E also underscores the importance of debating the meaning of assessing SSC results. In addition to evaluating contributions to national capacity development, it is equally important to explore to what extent jointly achieved outcomes contribute, in the long term, to promote national development objectives. Even though national actors are responsible for assessing those impacts - understood as the effectiveness and efficiency of national plans,

policies, and programs -, evaluations can reveal the contributions of SSC partnerships to the achievement of those national goals, aiming at political dialogue and mutual learning.

Finally, in line with the rationale behind supporting capacity development, M&E strategies should favour learning processes, identifying changes and providing explanations for success factors, as well as for challenges. Learning on changes is therefore recognized as a “strategic tool for social and economic change⁹”. Accordingly, and given that change is commonly a non-linear and multifaceted process, traditional M&E approaches exclusively focused on measuring predetermined results in logical frameworks (*logframes*) set up during the planning stage of a project should be revisited and complemented.

Process Matters: horizontality and demand-driven cooperation from a continuous perspective

The Brazilian experience highlights the importance of engaging in demand-driven cooperation, as well as investing in horizontal relations and in the participation of partners, as strategies for strengthening autonomy and promoting further ownership. These principles may steer the formulation of M&E strategies, investigating to which extent these particularities imprinted by SSC contribute to the achievement of development results.

The demand-driven cooperation principle commonly refers to a country’s initial demand. However, a closer look at Brazilian cooperation practices points to the possibility of broadening this understanding, since during the implementation phase new demands often arise. Also, implementation can call for project adjustments due to

further mutual knowledge, enabling partners to explore new and unforeseen possibilities.

As for horizontality, horizontal relations between partners can take form in the management of SSC initiatives, such as through *Project Monitoring Committees (PMCs)*, which favour constant and participative spaces for operational and strategic thinking, allowing for adjustments during the implementation phase and facilitating the review of activities and outcomes according to the needs imposed by contextual changes or even as a result of a better understanding of the challenges. Furthermore, the principle of horizontality also indicates the need to define M&E dimensions and criteria in a participatory manner among partners.

Thus, demand-driven cooperation and horizontality may be seen as guiding principles for every step in the partnership, continuously impacting the definition of the objectives as well as the conditions for the attainment and sustainability of expected results.

9. THE WORLD BANK INSTITUTE. “The Capacity Development Results Framework. A strategic and results-oriented approach

to learning for capacity development”. World Bank Institute, 2009.

Wagering on mutual benefits

The principle of mutual benefits is multiple-fold. A first dimension refers to the type (or nature) of benefits resulting from SSC initiatives, such as political, economic and commercial gains. Such benefits may be direct or indirect consequences of the initiatives and not rarely difficult to anticipate and measure. Another type of benefits are the institutional learnings (formal and informal) acquired by the institutions engaged in cooperation, and which may generate improvements in the design and implementation of public policies in both sides of the equation.

The second dimension is how to measure these gains and learnings. On the one hand, we acknowledge that benefits are neither the same nor equivalent for all partners. On the other hand, it is also important to recognize that these different types of benefits (sectorial development outcomes, improving political ties among countries, economic gains) are not always verifiable in the short term or quantifiable. Nonetheless, aiming at the future sustainability of partnerships and coherence among SSC initiatives, it seems important for all partners

to strive to reveal their expected benefits and gains at the time of project negotiation, with possible adjustments throughout implementation.

In the case of Brazilian SSC there is still a long way to go regarding the systematization of mutual learning and benefits. Apart from the occasional references to learnings and benefits for Brazilian institutions or policies, there are scarce institutional mechanisms for a more in-depth reflection on the results of South-South exchanges¹⁰. As they grow, these considerations may promote clarity and consensus regarding the tensions between the principle of mutual benefits and solidary cooperation, which have steered Brazilian SSC during the first decade of the 21st century. While they may seem like irreconcilable principles within Brazilian SSC narratives, in the current context it is crucial for national partners to have more information and clarity as to *what they do* and *why they do it*, as well as more inputs to strategically select which projects to invest human and financial resources. In this sense, evaluations that generate better understanding of mutual benefits tend to strengthen institutional practices as well as SSC in Brazil.

Dimensions of change: a brief empirical review at Brazilian SSC results

In addition to the objectives formally expressed in the initiatives, the evaluations and researches conducted point to *systemic results* of Brazilian SSC, going beyond the scope of the expected results for each specific initiative. Such evidences, which require further endorsements by future studies and evaluations, point to dimensions of change that may

potentially contribute to enabling environments to development both domestically and internationally.

One finding in such regard is the 'inspirational factor' of Brazilian SSC in areas such as the intersectoral approach of successful policies and programs within the Brazilian development trajectory, the country's consolidated knowledge and experience in the implementation of public policies¹¹, as well as the country's political commitment to overcome developmental challenges with autonomous strategies.

10. SOUZA, André M; POMEROY, Melissa; ESTEVES, Paulo; ASSUNÇÃO, Manaíra; ADAMS, Karin; PAZ, Leonardo. "Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for South-South and triangular development cooperation: lessons from Brazil for the 2030 Development Agenda". UNDP. 2016.

11. SANTARELLI, Mariana; SUYAMA, Bianca. "Brazilian food and nutritional security in Africa: Planting seeds in unfamiliar soil". Thematic Report on Social Protection. Rio de Janeiro: Rio+ Centre. 2016.

In addition to providing legitimacy to Brazilian SSC, such ‘inspirational factor’ contribute - together with the significant involvement of relevant national actors during all stages of the initiatives - to promote dialogue and build consensus, mobilizing national actors and building coalitions that sustain and legitimize policy solutions. Together, those processes lead to enabling environments for the introduction and implementation of political solutions to developmental problems.

Another finding is the contribution of Brazilian cooperation to the IDC landscape. Brazilian participation in trilateral arrangements has also engendered positive externalities for donors from developed countries and international organizations, thus somehow tempering the crisis scenario within traditional cooperation and experimenting alternative cooperation arrangements. Among these positive externalities, we highlight not only the broadening

of the field of political concertation, which favours all involved parties, but also the learnings generated by the shared implementation of projects – both on SSC principles and on the knowledge disseminated by Brazil –, providing inputs to critically reflect on the North-South cooperation practices

Lastly, one final dimension of change retrieved is the strengthening of SSC and the expansion of dialogue spaces among Southern countries. In addition to the negotiated framework for each project or initiative, there are initial evidences of systemic results in the emulation of SSC practices and dialogue between SSC partners with other third countries. An interesting boundary to be explored in future evaluations is whether there are multiplier effects driving new SSC efforts and strengthening the field as a whole.

Planning and management tools for evaluation

Some of the difficulties faced in the evaluation of SSC projects are the fragility of the *logframes*, the lack of baselines, and the lack of relevant information for M&E produced during implementation.

At times, *logframes* (i) reiterate a logic scheme found in traditional projects – focusing on the impact among beneficiary populations without considering capacity development outcomes and (ii) do not provide the clarity needed for project monitoring, with subsequent implications for the evaluation. It is worth noting, however, that in many cases it is only during project implementation that clarifications on the *logframe* take place, including through the engagement of a wider range of actors more directly involved in taking the planned activities forward.

On its turn, the baseline is a portrait of the project’s initial stage and is used to analyse the extent to which a particular initiative has actual-

ly contributed to the expected changes. For initiatives geared towards capacity development, a diagnosis of the capacities to be strengthened serves as a baseline for the project’s future evaluation. The baseline may be established from self-diagnosis processes with the key national stakeholders. These are both formative and potentially transformative processes that contribute to adjusting partners’ expectations regarding the main dimensions of change supported through the partnership.

Another difficulty often encountered in evaluations concerns project monitoring and, more specifically, the fragility of data gathering tools and processes during implementation. Evaluators might find difficult to reconstruct a reliable account of cooperation initiatives due to substantial information gaps in record of activities, the participants’ profile, or content addressed in SSC initiatives. Moreover, in some cases the existing information is fragmented, non-comparable, or inconsistent.

Final considerations

Growing international debates on SSC and SSTC in the past decade are signs of their importance to the contemporary development agenda. Since the 2009 Nairobi Declaration, a second generation of issues has emerged, related to the broader conceptual framework and governance of SSC, having the M&E debate as its central and inseparable piece. Those issues still lag behind in multilateral recognition and institutionalization.

It would be simplistic to assume the principles informing SSC practices as merely compliance indicators of initiatives on the ground. However, as differentiation factors of “traditional aid” and drivers for the achievement of results, SSC principles may be useful for reflecting upon specific evaluative dimensions to SSC and SSTC.

The current context is conducive for Brazilian public bodies to invest in the consolidation of

M&E practices that promote mutual learning and provide evidence on the contribution of SSC to international development, enabling the country to participate in international debates in a consistent and informed manner. More than verifying if SSC practices are consistent with its principles, M&E should encourage a national debate on the chosen SSC strategies, their successes, and their shortcomings. This reflection, in turn, is a necessary input for the institutional consolidation of SSC in Brazil, both within each implementing agency and within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty), while also contributing to the development of a future national cooperation policy.

There is a need, thus, to invest - materially and symbolically - in more robust M&E systems for SSC, even in times of financial constraints, considering – on a case-by-case basis – the trade-offs between the high costs of undertaking evaluations and the political and institutional costs of not having them.

Possible pathways for strengthening Brazilian SSC M&E practices

➤ **Further reflect on the dimensions of change for capacity development.** This careful consideration would benefit from the participation of partners and implementing agencies as well as from the systematization of past experiences.

➤ **Stimulate a strategic reflection to identify mutual learnings and benefits** acquired in different projects with and among implementing agencies and other actors, such as Itamaraty and other relevant stakeholders in society.

➤ **Explore different evaluation modalities** taking into consideration: (i) the object being evaluated (projects, programs, or bilateral, regional, or sector-

ial project portfolios); (ii) diverse methodological approaches and; (iii) the participation and contribution by different actors (universities, consultants, specialized government agencies, partner countries). The systematized results of this process have the potential to offer relevant learnings to the SSC evaluation agenda.

➤ **Communicate results and stimulate capacity development in SSC M&E**, internally to the government bodies, among partners and other countries engaged in SSC efforts, but also to a potential ‘epistemic community’, involving academia, civil society, and independent evaluators.

This Briefing is part of the Articulação SUL's efforts to strengthen the policy debate around monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of South-South cooperation (SSC). The reflections presented here draw from the organization's previous work in supporting Brazilian SSC M&E efforts between 2015 and 2017, as well as of Articulação SUL's role in the "South-South Cooperation Dialogues". Our sincere appreciation to Oxfam Brasil for supporting us and the Dialogues.



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