

## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE BRICS COUNTRIES IN THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FIELD

*Uma análise comparativa dos países do BRICS no campo de Cooperação Internacional para o Desenvolvimento*

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### Introduction

The first decade of the 21st century gave way to a series of international political-economic dynamics with the potential to reorganize global power (IKENBERRY, 2018; KITCHEN; COX, 2019; MAHBUBANI, 2009; MEARSHEIMER, 2018, 2019). Among the changes, one common reference is the rise of the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – and, consequently, their performance for demanding reforms of the global governance system (COOPER, 2016; HURRELL, 2018; ROBERTS; ARMIJO; KATADA, 2018; STUENKEL, 2017). The emerging economies have invested in consolidating their new status by acting in different branches of global governance, demanding changes and policies to see a reasonable parity between their economic weight and ability to participate as real decision-makers. In this context, international regimes are a crucial dimension to consider.

The IDC regime<sup>3</sup> becomes a central feature in this context as the rising powers have changed their previous role as “receptors” to be considered “donors” in the context of South-South Cooperation. These nations have in common the desire to distance themselves from the concept of external aid generally used by

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<sup>3</sup> International Development Cooperation (IDC) is a disputed term. It encompasses an ample range of activities carried out by public and private actors aiming to promote socioeconomic development overseas. The concept comprises nomenclatures as different as foreign aid, Official Development Assistance (ODA), North-South Cooperation (CNS), South-South Cooperation (CSS), among others. The most common actions, however, involve donations, subsidized credits, debt relief, and transfer of techniques and knowledge. The IDC field has not been constituted as an international regime along the lines of others, such as international trade, for instance. However, it has become increasingly institutionalized over the years with the emergence of international institutions that deal with them, such as the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) within the OECD and several agencies within the United Nations framework, as discussed below.

the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (DAC/OECD).

South-South Cooperation is a disputed concept. It designates a wide range of activities and practices established among developing states. It customarily refers to policies of cooperation, dialogue, and convergence among Global South nations on both bilateral and multilateral levels. On the other hand, the term may be used to designate a more specific modality of cooperation, i.e., South-South Development Cooperation (SSC-D), relating to multiple actions taken by governments aimed at promoting economic development in the least-developed countries. They also encompass instruments such as technical assistance, loans, and donations (MILANI, 2014, 2018)

The influence of emerging economies in the SSC-D architecture has brought changes to the dynamics of cooperation. The influx of SSC-D resources for financing development have augmented significantly in volume and number of beneficiaries in the last decade (BESHARATI; ESTEVES, 2015). Hence, some critical questions driven the debate are: Is it possible to identify a unified pattern of aid promoted by Southern countries, or are significant differences that set them apart?<sup>4</sup>

This article contributes to this ongoing debate by analyzing the convergences and divergences between the BRICS's IDC projects through a comparative methodology. This constitutes an initial effort to assess the similarities and differences in their activities and the possible causes of these outcomes. First, we examine the characteristics of the BRICS countries' IDC (the dependent variable), and then formulate a comparative framework to discuss the possible independent variables that could affect these results<sup>5</sup>. We hope to provide not only a better comprehension of the BRICS countries' role in the contemporary cooperation field, but also to suggest new avenues for future research in this area.

This paper contributes to this ongoing debate by asking, "How do the BRICS countries behave in the IDC field?" Even though this research paper displays a more descriptive undertaking, the aim is to present some hypothesis that may help to explain the similarities and differences among those countries' policies. Hence, the dependent variable consists of the IDC's policies provided by each BRICS member, and the possible independent variables, which are i) historical context, ii) geopolitical context, iii) institutional context, and iv) domestic policy context.

Under the historical dimension, for instance, it is possible to understand the legacy of North-South cooperation in selected countries critically and to analyze the main pitfalls and critical limits of North-South cooperation that is heavily criticized by those countries. The geopolitical dimension, in turn, provides us with a big picture of how SSC-D is linked to regional challenges and priorities, as well as to broader foreign policies of the countries. The institutional dimension helps us understand what are the speeches, agendas, and practices of the countries studied in CSS, and also what are the main agencies specifically designed to

<sup>4</sup> This literature is vast. See Amus, Fuchs and Muller, 2017; Besharati and Esteves, 2015; Constantine and Shankland, 2017; Esteves and Assunção, 2014; Gu et al, 2016; Kragelund, 2008; Mawdsley, 2012, 2017, 2019; Mello e Souza, 2012; Milani, 2012, 2019; Milani and Carvalho, 2013; Pino, 2014; Quadir, 2013; Woods, 2008 among others.

<sup>5</sup> Different from other authors that study the BRICS as a collective actor (e.g., ROBERTS; ARMIJO; KATADA, 2018), we do so approaching them separately, i.e., considering each BRICS members individually in order to identify and analyze the convergences and divergences among them regarding their IDC practices.

implement these activities and agendas. Finally, the domestic dimension is useful in analyzing what the main internal drivers of their IDC efforts are, and how do internal interests and foreign policy decision making structures impact their IDC policies.

In sum, the structure of the article is as follows: In addition to this introduction and the concluding remarks, in sequence, we discuss the evolution of the IDC field in light of the rise of South-South Cooperation. Next, we focus on the case studies approaching each BRICS members individually, describing their main current IDC policies and analyzing the major issues at the center of their practices. In the end, we provide a comparative analysis summarizing all the previous discussions made along with the paper.

### **The evolution of the International Development Cooperation field and the rise of South-South Cooperation**

The origin of International Development Cooperation dates back to the period right after the Second World War when the United States launched the European Recovery Program for the reconstruction of Western Europe's infrastructure. Once the European economies started to show signs of economic recovery throughout the 1950s and 1960s, these economies, along with some socialist countries, especially the USSR, set in their agencies for international cooperation destined to provide external aid, particularly to developing countries (LANCASTER, 2007).

In the 1960s, some prominent international organizations began to assume the role of augmenting the influx of external aid, such as the recently-created International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the United Nations. Other institutions were also created and incorporated within the institutional body already in place. The International Development Association (IDA), for instance, was included under the World Bank's umbrella, and new regional banks of development were put in place. Simultaneously, a group of developing countries launched, under the auspices of multilateral organizations, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to discuss on their terms issues and concerns regarding development and economic growth (TAYLOR; SMITH, 2007).

Although the introduction of these new sets of players aroused positive expectations in the developing world, they were eminently unsatisfied with the post-war aid regime. On the one hand, there was scant evidence that the external aid had meaningful links with economic growth and improvement of human well-being (MILANI, 2014). On the other, they were demanding new forms of international cooperation as a way to escape from their marginalized situation vis-à-vis the established international structure of economic governance. Hence, in the 1970s the Non-Alignment Movement, with the support of many other UN members, demanded the establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO), denouncing the inherent instability of the world economy, especially its vulnerability to external shocks, and the incapacity of the developed nations to buffer the negative impacts on the poorest (ESLAVA; FAKHRI; NESIAH, 2017).

In this context, a particular issue that emerged among the developing countries was to find a way to tackle the multiple problems of under-representation in the international economic structure, and the lack of capability to set discussions and policies directly related to their more fundamental problems. The

alternative chosen was strengthening voices and stances through what was called at that time, South-South Cooperation (SSC). The practices of South-South Cooperation, however, touch upon many different dimensions. It stems from the “third-world” solidarity and the “Bandung identity” in the 1960s (PRASHAD, 2007, 2013), to the creation of the UNCTAD and the G77 in the UN General Assembly during the 1970s (TOYE, 2014). More recently, it follows the launching of discussions on the notions of the “Global South” after the 1990s (ALDEN; MORPHET; VIEIRA, 2010).

Although these topics may entail many differences, one possible thread connecting them is the criticism of the previous, hierarchical model of traditional cooperation based on the donor-recipient dyad. The countries have called attention to the fact that this practice was principally centered on the donor’s interests and had ultimately contributed to perpetuating the developing world in a very dependent, asymmetrical condition on the international economic structure (PUENTE, 2010).

The odds, however, were against them. One of the main reasons for the ineffective results of SSC was the lack of material capabilities (PINO, 2014). Technical resources, human capital, and institutional and financial conditions were necessary tools to affect, at least at a sensitive level, the cooperative relationship. Some scholars estimate that only a few countries meet these criteria at that moment – e.g., Brazil, China, and India – but all of them were facing domestic socioeconomic challenges (WILLIS; WILLIAMS; METH, 2014).

Consequently, in the 1980s and 1990s, South-South Cooperation experimented a significant demobilization. Not only had the international order suffered a tectonic shift moving from Cold War bipolarity to the “unipolar moment” (KRAUTHAMMER, 1991), but also saw the emergence of globalization and the rise of the so-called “Washington Consensus.” These structural aspects had substantive impacts on economic, political, and financial policies in the developing world (MOMANI, 2014). To get things worse, many economies, from East Asia to Latin America, had performed very poorly in the previous two decades, with substantial debt crises taking place almost in quick succession from one place to another, and the domestic conditions to get rid of the external constraints being even more limited (GILPIN, 2002; WOODS, 1999).

However, in the 21st century, the practice gained a new impetus as some emerging economies intensified their IDC policies. Among them, the so-called BRICS were in the spotlight. Accompanied by expressive economic growth rates since the beginning of the 2000s, they have managed to use this newly acquired status as a way to intensify demands for changes in global economic governance (ACIOLY, 2019). For them, these changes give them a particular place and role in the world economy. The flux of resources directly related to these activities augmented significantly through that decade in volume and number of beneficiaries (BESHARATI; ESTEVES, 2015; GU et al., 2016).

The BRICS countries are not members of the OECD, so they do not have to comply with the organizations’ standards. As Asmus, Fuchs, and Muller (2017) argue, they are less constrained in the way they provide aid, and may follow their political and economic self-interests and strategic considerations, than can DAC donors. Consequently, this affects the rejection of aid conditioned on policies and institutions and contributes to undermining the dominance of traditional donors in international development cooperation.

In the multilateral arena, the United Nations and its regional and specialized agencies have developed an essential role for the reemergence of SSC. For instance, it created a Fund for Cooperation and Development (FCD) in 2005, and the stances adopted by this institution have become a lynchpin to evaluate developing countries' views with regard to the differences and particularities of SSC (PINO, 2014). Simultaneously, the practices of cooperation among developing nations were recognized as an important tool for development in the OECD, particularly in the High-Level Forums for Effectiveness in Rome (2003), Paris (2005), Accra (2008), and Busan (2011).

While the traditional donors still provide the bulk of cooperation for development, the continuous growth of the activism from emerging countries generated a significant impact on the international regime (MAWDSLEY, 2012, 2017; MAWDSLEY; SAVAGE; KIM, 2014).

The so-called “emerging donors” from the South have questioned the dichotomy between “donors” and “receptors,” which for them have entailed asymmetrical, static roles between nations. The newcomers prefer to use “partners” instead of donors. Furthermore, they have rejected the traditional terminology of “donor,” “aid,” and “assistance” generally referenced by the OECD (MILANI; CARVALHO, 2013; ESTEVES; ASSUNÇÃO, 2014).

In sum, since its onset, the IDC was considered as official aid and framed within a well-established institutional architecture comprising the Bretton Woods' institutions and the DAC/OECD. However, today, a more complex scenario is taking shape as the introduction of new players have resulted in new approaches and comprehensions regarding international cooperation. Therefore, a new IDC architecture is emerging but no one knows to where it may run in the future (GORE, 2013). What one expects, though, is that emerging nations will increasingly assume a more robust role in this scenario.

## **The emerging donors: comparing the BRICS countries**

### Brazil

Brazil's relationship with the International Development Cooperation dates back to the origins of this regime established in the post-Marshall Plan context, and the expansion of official development aid flows towards the developing world. In the early decades of the regime, Brazil occupied the role of a receiver. Only in the 1970s, the country started to provide IDC abroad. The experience accumulated as an IDC recipient in previous years, combined with the intensified actions of Brazilian diplomacy as an outcome of economic growth, enabled Brazil to become an emerging provider of cooperation (PUENTE, 2010). This shift is also the result of a change in foreign policy orientation, especially after 2003, when national leaders started to emphasize the promotion of alliances and agreements with Southern partners in an attempt to reduce asymmetries vis-à-vis the developed nations (PECEQUILO, 2008; PINHEIRO; GAIO, 2014).

Brazilian foreign policy emphasized the need to diversify partnerships and to act in multilateral forums as a way to expand its influence in international negotiations (RINALDI, 2015). During Lula's administration (2003-2010), Brazil increased its international position maintaining close relations with

emerging countries, mainly through South-South coalitions (PECEQUILO, 2008). In this context, SSC was a cornerstone in Brazilian diplomacy, considered as an essential tool to pursue its national interests.

Brazil does not consider itself a donor, nor does it conceptualize its cooperation as foreign aid. The country seeks to distance its practices from the traditional model of international aid provided by developed countries (MILANI; CARVALHO, 2013). Not only the Brazilian government is not part of the DAC/OECD, but it also rejects the donor and aid terminology used by DAC members.

The ideals of horizontality and unconditionality present in Brazilian cooperation are in line with the principles of historical Brazilian foreign policy, especially regarding the non-intervention, autonomy, pacifism, and universalism principles (COSTA LEITE et al., 2014). Brazilian IDC combines external motivations with the ability to meet the demands of cooperation from recipient countries. In its activities, the country seeks to build bridges of transmission and exchange of knowledge with other developing countries, besides promoting its own political and economic interests.

The country does not have a single, coherent, and nationally institutionalized IDC policy (MILANI; LOPES; SUYAMA, 2013; SUYAMA; SILVA; WAISBICH, 2017). Several ministries and public agencies act in this area. Besides, there are no legal norms delimiting roles and dynamics for decision-making processes in this field. In general, Brazilian cooperation is often divided into technical cooperation, scientific and technological cooperation, educational cooperation, humanitarian cooperation, and financial cooperation.

The technical modality is considered one of the most critical strands of Brazilian cooperation. It is coordinated by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, it is estimated that more than 170 federal government agencies are involved in this process, including ministries, municipalities, foundations and public enterprises in a wide range of areas, such as agriculture, education, health, environment, public administration, transportation, energy, sanitation, culture, and justice.

## Russia

Unlike the other BRICS countries, Russian aid does not follow the South-South Cooperation discourse. The country was not part of many developing nations' initiatives in the past, such as the so-called Third World and related institutions as the G77. Furthermore, the Russian Federation, as the direct heir of the Soviet Union's power, does not fill today the category of an emerging country (ACHARYA, 2014). In this sense, these credentials contribute to positioning the country more as a re-emerging donor than a new one in the IDC field.

When the Western aid regime was brought up, the socialist countries, especially the Soviets, also sought to establish their cooperation programs. Most Soviet assistance had been provided to countries in the communist bloc, such as North Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba, and Mongolia, in order to stabilize and subsidize their economies (LANCASTER, 2007).

The Soviet decline in the IDC field begins in the 1980s, amidst poor economic performance and a relative increase in defense spending in an attempt to keep pace with the US's military program called "Star Wars" (BEST et al., 2008). The political and economic chaos over the country after the end of the USSR

eventually disrupted the foreign aid program and even turned the country into a significant recipient of Western foreign assistance (MACFARLANE, 2009). It was not until the 2000s that the Russians would rebuild its foreign aid program from the resumption of economic growth and the strengthening of state capacity under Vladimir Putin's presidential terms.

The first steps consist of the approximation with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) under the project "Russia as Emerging Donor: Strategic Research, Consultations, and Training." From 2006 to 2010, under the "Emerging Donors Initiative," the Russian authorities and the UNDP engaged in joint projects to provide practical assistance in building Russia's capacity for IDC. In 2007, Putin signed a document named "Concept of the Participation of the Russian Federation in International Development Assistance." It specified the major goals and objectives of Russia's aid program, some regional priorities, and anticipated modalities (GRAY, 2015).

In 2009, the World Bank started a program titled "Russia as a Donor Initiative," financed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). It had the objective of placing Russia into the status of a DAC-like donor. The first attempt for greater systematization of reporting on aid occurred in 2012 when the Ministry of Finance issued its first report on Russian's IDC initiatives under the title "Transparency and Accountability" (Ibid.).

One important difference between Russia and the other BRICS countries was that Moscow sought to bring its program closer to the OECD guidelines. The Russians have not taken a strong stand in challenging the norms of the traditional donors and its institutions, nor have they presented an alternative development model (BRÄUTIGAM, 2011). On the contrary, the country has been reporting its ODA statistics since 2011 through OECD methodologies (ASMUS; FUCHS; MÜLLER, 2017). Russia also has tried to join this institution in 2007, although the process was suspended in 2014 due to the annexation of Crimea in the context of the Ukrainian crisis (CASULA, 2017; TSYGANKOV, 2016). According to Gray (2015, p. 274), although it is factually correct to say that Russia is a Non-DAC donor, "the increasing trend in Russia has not been to resist the DAC's authority in setting the norms for ODA, but rather to mirror it."

Most of the Russian aid projects are in education, health, food security, and public finance sectors (ASMUS; FUCHS; MÜLLER, 2017). Although the 2007 document "Concept of the Participation of the Russian Federation in International Development Assistance" called for the creation of a specialized government institution for handling its IDC practices, the foreign aid remained dispersed among several Russian ministries (GRAY, 2015). The Ministries of Finance and Foreign Affairs are the leading agencies, although many more integrate the system (LARIONOVA; RAKHMANGULOV; BERENSON, 2016). The Eastern European and Central Asian countries have been the focus regions of Russian aid, but Latin America and Africa have gained importance recently (ASMUS; FUCHS; MÜLLER, 2017).

## India

India implemented its first IDC initiatives in the 1950s. Historically, the country has privileged regional partners in allocating external aid. Above all, Bhutan and Afghanistan, with Nepal and Myanmar,

were the main receivers of flows. The country has been both a donor and a recipient of resources. India's IDC program has been based on the commitments established at the 1955 Bandung Conference. In particular, the principles of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries, and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity are highlighted. Similar to other BRICS countries, New Delhi avoids using the terms "aid" or "assistance" in its vocabulary concerning IDC activities.

Despite its involvement with the field since its origins, only recently, India has started to play a more significant role in it. The economic growth experienced in recent years has boosted Indian IDC policies, engaging in providing resources to countries beyond South Asia, especially in Africa. Besides, it has emerged as a credit provider in financing development abroad, with these lines being used as a means to foster New Delhi's political and economic interests overseas (QUADIR, 2013).

The decision to promote India's strategic economic interests abroad through a dedicated development assistance program was first taken in 2003. The new IDC strategy had as goals: i) providing relief to a select number of bilateral partners using small assistance packages; ii) considering debt relief for those heavily indebted poor countries with substantial overdue payments; iii) launching an 'India Development Initiative' to provide grants or project assistance to developing countries in Africa, South Asia and other parts of the developing world (ROYCHOUDHURY et al., 2015).

In contrast to DAC standards, and similarly to other BRICS countries, India does not impose macroeconomic, environmental, governance or human rights conditionalities for its IDC, and also have fewer procedural requirements. Also similar to the other BRICS, India is not very transparent about its cooperation activities, presenting as well a wide institutional dispersion in its IDC system (MELLO E SOUZA, 2012).

The Indian government has tried to reduce this fragmentation and decentralization over time. At first, Indian activities were mainly inscribed at the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Program (ITEC), established in 1964. Another important branch of the country's IDC policy is the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) within the Ministry of Finance. The DEA supervises the Indian Import-Export Bank loans (AGRAWAL, 2007; ASMUS; FUCHS; MÜLLER, 2017). In 2007, the Indian government proposed the creation of a new agency, the India International Development Cooperation Agency. However, this branch was not established due to the lack of agreement between the Indian bureaucracies on its ministerial affiliation. In 2012, the Indian government created the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) in the effort to centralize its IDC efforts. However, in the years since, there is still no clear policy paper on international development cooperation. Instead, Indian governments have lied on the broad principles of South-South Cooperation without explicitly articulating actionable policy proposals around the operationalization of IDC (ROYCHOUDHURY et al., 2015).

Given the ambitions to become a regional leader and to obtain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, India has been aiming to present itself as a provider of IDC to southern countries, especially since the last decade. While there is no doubt that India has an affinity with other developing countries, its IDC activities seem to be primarily motivated by strategic interests. The objectives consist of secure economic integration, political stability at the regional level, and increasing influence globally. Also, and more

specifically, to ensure access to energy sources, protect Indian diasporas, curb terrorist movements and promote their interests in Africa, particularly in the face of competition with China on the continent for oil reserves, diplomatic influence, and access to consumer markets (AGRAWAL, 2007).

## China

China's involvement with IDC has significantly grown in the last years. However, Chinese efforts in this field date back to the Cold War period. The Chinese assisted several countries, especially in the African continent, primarily to finance major infrastructure projects, such as the Tanzania-Zambia railroad in the 1970s (LANCASTER, 2007). In parallel with the global dispute between the two economic and ideological blocs comprising the US and USSR, China also got involved in an intense dispute with the later regarding who was the most exemplary player to be followed by other socialist countries (WESTAD, 2005).

In recent years, China has been in the spotlight due to its growing role in the IDC field (FUCHS; RUDYAK, 2019). Boosted by its spectacular, recent economic growth and its aspirations to become a superpower, the Chinese leaders are increasingly involved in assisting developing countries (QUADIR, 2013).

In line with its history of supporting showcase projects, Chinese IDC consists mainly of development projects, as they are perceived to produce quick and tangible results to both the Chinese and the recipient countries (TAN-MULLINS; MOHAN; POWER, 2010). It usually offers financing infrastructure, as it funds and builds hospitals, health centers, schools, and others, and does so faster and often cheaper than DAC donors do (KRAGELUND, 2015).

In providing IDC, China's current rhetoric also follows the five principles expressed in the Bandung Conference. The official discourse is that Chinese cooperation is based on equality and mutual benefits, and could not be considered as mere assistance (KRAGELUND, 2008, 2011). Furthermore, Chinese IDC is not tied to policy or economic reforms. China is widely viewed as providing aid without "western lectures on governance and human rights" (THE ECONOMIST, 2010). The eight principles expressed in the Zhou En Lai speech of 1964 regarding Chinese aid to the Third World countries also serve as a guideline to its activities in this field. The contemporary strategies are based on what became known as the "Beijing Consensus." This particular framework emerged as an opposition to the previous elaborated "Washington Consensus" in the 1990s. It stresses principles such as equitable growth, positive social change, self-determination, and massive state control (CHRISTENSEN, 2015; ZHAO, 2013).

China's official discourse drives away from DAC/OECD's orientations. The country provides assistance that can be categorized under the definition of ODA, but it is relatively small. The bulk of Chinese IDC is provided in the form of export credits, non-concessional state loans, and other forms of aid that does not fall into the DAC/OECD's ODA category. The Chinese leaders argue that the country still is a developing economy, so it could not provide "development aid" to others in the same situation (BRÄUTIGAM, 2011). More recently, Beijing's discourse has moved towards the notion of "common development" as it envisions increasing the capital amounts, the number of projects, and geographical scope of its foreign policy after the launching of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (RUDYAK, 2019).

Economic motivations have primarily driven the Chinese practices of IDC. The country aims to ensure access to natural resources in the face of its growing domestic demand. The country is also creating investment opportunities for its global, multinational companies and engaging with strategies to open new markets for exports, services, and goods. Regarding diplomatic reasons, Taiwan's status is often pointed as a reason for IDC activities. Another diplomatic motivation has been seeking political support in international institutions, such as the high correlation between Chinese aid giving and the voting behavior of countries who receive the flux (MELLO E SOUZA, 2012; FUCHS; RUDYAK, 2019).

According to Fuchs and Rudyak (2019), the juxtaposition of these political-economic objectives reflects in China's governance structure, which encompasses three leading governmental agencies: the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Finance. The former deals with the country's aid portfolio, while the Foreign Affairs coordinates aid policy formation and annual planning with the Commerce, trying to align the broader agenda of foreign policy. The latter manages the aid budget and is responsible for China's financial contribution to multilateral development agencies and banks. In this institutional context emerges, in 2018, the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), replacing the role of the Ministry of Commerce as the major bureau to coordinate the Chinese foreign aid. However, some authors argue this aid system is characterized by fierce competition for influence, which affects the Chinese policies in terms of priorities and decision-making (ZHANG; SMITH, 2017)

### South Africa

South Africa's involvement with the IDC regime dates from the Apartheid era (1948-1994). In these years, the country used development cooperation as a way to attract international support since the segregational regime was extensively condemned by many developing as well as developed nations (VICKERS, 2012). In 1968, the Economic Cooperation Promotion Loan Fund was installed as a financial instrument for Pretoria's foreign policy (BESHARATI, 2013). As soon as the regime ended, the country began to seek greater cooperation with its neighbors. President Thabo Mbeki proposed the term "African Renaissance" as a way to emphasize the idea according to which the African countries could achieve cultural, political, and economic renewal through mutual support and cooperation (YANACOPULOS, 2014). This idea was also manifested in the launching of the New Partnership of African Development (NEPAD) in 2001.

Since then, South Africa has also been playing a more prominent role in the IDC field, especially in Africa. As the other BRICS countries, Pretoria's government avoids replicating the traditional "top-down" conditioned aid model customarily displayed by traditional donors. In addition, South Africans do not like to see themselves as donors, since it implicates, in their view, in being embedded in an asymmetrical relationship (ALDEN; SCHOEMAN, 2013).

The country, for its turn, wishes to be seen as a development partner. This concept indicates that, on the one hand, South Africa does not want to be considered a donor, and on the other, desires to use its comparative advantage in terms of knowledge and experience of working in, and being part of, the continent as a conduit for traditional and emerging donors (ALDEN; SCHOEMAN, 2013).

The country has also been playing a more prominent role in finance for the development field, as it has been delivered international loans through the South African Development Bank, notably the 2011 loan to Angola for the construction of a road (ALDEN; SCHOEMAN, 2013). Along with these initiatives, South Africa's development model comprises other important components, such as institution-building, peacekeeping, and post-conflict development.

In line with the other BRICS, South Africa has a wide institutional dispersion and little transparency regarding the flows of its developmental aid. The country's efforts are mainly channeled through the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). In 2010, there were efforts to create an agency to centralize IDC activities. Since then, the establishment of the South Africa Development Partnership Agency (SADPA) has been underway, but at a slow pace (LUCHEY, 2015).

According to SADPA, its programs cover humanitarian support, human resource capacity building, post-conflict reconstruction and development, functional governance capacity for elections, economic cooperation, trilateral/multi-partner cooperation, and acting through IBSA Poverty Alleviation Fund.

### **Similarities and differences in BRICS's IDC: designing a comparative framework**

With respect to the IDC field, these emerging powers share as many commonalities as distinctions. Above, we analyze these characteristics under the lens of four dimensions (or independent variables): i) historical context, ii) geopolitical context, iii) institutional context, and iv) domestic policy context.

Concerning the first dimension, they share a recent political history directly or indirectly related to the Non-Alignment Movement, the Third World experiences, and the New International Economic Order debates within the United Nations and the UNCTAD. The exception is Russia, who, as the former leader of the USSR, was one of the poles of the bipolar order during the Cold War. They all have a history as recipients of aid. This status has left, ultimately, a two-fold legacy: a political one, as in Russia's resentment of the way it was treated when receiving aid during the 1990s; and institutional, as demonstrates the Brazilian legal framework for development cooperation, which was designed assuming that it would operate as a recipient rather than a provider.

The decline in aid given by traditional DAC donors to Middle Income Countries has affected the BRICS countries. Although aid is marginal for them, in absolute terms, the reduction of flows in recent years has affected their attitude towards the IDC regime. As many developing countries face serious financial investment needs, especially in the infrastructure sector, they saw an opportunity to fill these gaps through the expansion of their own national companies (cf. GRIFFITH-JONES, 2014).

To the second dimension – geopolitical matters –, the BRICS nations can be considered regional or global powers, part of the intermediate per capita revenue list of countries, and active members of the G20. They also share the legacy of North-South relations and manifest some geopolitical dissatisfaction (KAHLER, 2013). They all have a qualified foreign service and a history of participating in meaningful international discussions – see, for instance, the Brazilian and Indian role in the Doha Round of the WTO at the beginnings of the 2000s (THORSTENSEN et al., 2012). The main differences regarding this variable are the levels of

geopolitical importance among them, especially in terms of economic and military power – e.g., China and Russia are permanent members of the Security Council, and along with India, the three possess nuclear weapons. This feature almost automatically puts them at the center of debates regarding international peace and security matters.

In this line of reasoning, the South-South Cooperation is used as a tool for strengthening relations between Southern countries and often positioned in direct opposition to the development cooperation provided by Northern countries and other regional hegemony. Russia is the only one who does not stress the South-South character in its practices. It is more willing to identify itself to the Global North in its efforts to be recognized as a superpower (GRAY, 2015).

Geopolitical motivations in providing IDC tend to vary across these countries, although political, economic, and self-interest reasons cut across all of them. However, one can argue that altruistic motivations and the promotion of national interests do not need to be mutually exclusive (MILANI, 2018). The BRICS can be solidary in their policies while simultaneously pursuing foreign policy goals.

Regarding the institutional context dimension, it is important to underline that in recent years the BRICS countries managed to hold a collective institutional capacity thanks to the BRICS Summit processes and the establishment of the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and the New Development Bank (NDB), considered the BRICS's twins (CONSTANTINE; SHANKLAND, 2017). These institutions, seen as either “parallel” to the existents in current international financial architecture (STUENKEL, 2016) or an “outside option” to the BRICS members (ROBERTS; ARMIJO; KATADA, 2018), represent a significant step further towards BRICS institutionalization.

In the internal dimension, all of them have tried to establish institutional capabilities in their efforts to provide IDC. The main difference regarding this variable is the different levels of centralization this institutionalization has occurred. In general, they all are struggling to institutionalize and centralize their IDC activities, but face severe institutional fragmentation, and present difficulties in monitoring and registering the initiatives. India and China have been the most successful ones in this dimension.

Also, they all inscribe efforts in the Principles of Bandung of non-interference, mutual benefit, although not necessarily equal, demand-led cooperation, and direct sharing of experiences. Again, the main exception is Russia, which does not inscribe to the South-South narrative, preferring to be associated with the more traditional powers in its guidelines of IDC's provisions.

The BRICS seek to distance themselves from the concept of foreign aid used by the DAC/OECD, rejecting the terms “donor,” “aid,” and “assistance,” preferring to use the UNCTAD's definitions of “cooperation” (PARÍZEK; STEPHEN, 2019). Once more, the partial exception is Russia, which has shown less enthusiasm in challenging DAC norms (GRAY, 2015). This is one area in which the BRICS are claiming to carve out a new path in their policies on development, or as they prefer to call, “development cooperation.” Notwithstanding the multiple long-term impacts, there were raised concerns about the effects of this choice on political development. In particular, some developed countries are suspicious of the BRICS opposition to the conditionalities attached to aid, and in some cases investments, made by the World Bank and Western

governments, which demand compliance with economic, political, and environmental measures. As we stated above, the BRICS reject conditionality, arguing that is some form of interference in the domestic affairs of recipient countries (LIPTON, 2017).

The BRICS tend to engage in aid-like activities, which are either related to or arranged around other key policy activities under the umbrella of foreign policy, such as trade and foreign direct investment (FDI). The main exception is Brazil, which tries to separate its investment flows from the cooperation efforts.

However, one can see more marked differences between China and Russia. The former has recently used the term “aid” in its last White Paper on China’s Foreign Aid (2014) and has only just launched its ‘China Aid’ logo (CONSTANTINE; SHANKLAND, 2017). The latter, on the other hand, as already stressed, is less embarrassed about using DAC terminologies.

Regarding the fourth dimension, i.e., the domestic context, the BRICS countries express more differences than commonalities. China is an autocracy, Russia, an anocracy, and India, Brazil, and South Africa are democracies (MARSHALL; JAGGERS; GURR, 2014). However, in the first decade of the 21 century, they all expressed interest in playing a more crucial role on the international scene. What would be the main internal drivers of their IDC efforts? How do internal interests and foreign policy decision making structures impact their IDC policies? Those are questions that deserve special attention.

They all seem to be motivated by economic and political interests, especially the expansion of domestic business, and fostering influence in the international arena. Similarly to DAC donor countries, the BRICS’s development cooperation policies have a broad range of drivers and should not be taken *a priori* as representing only a minimal set of interests. In a future research agenda, it would be important to explore further these economic and political interests by analyzing domestic interests in the allocation of resources for cooperation projects. Hence, it is essential to investigate the role of private actors in the implementation of these policies to verify to what extent different projects meet the interests of different actors in the domestic context of these countries.

### **Concluding remarks**

This paper aims to contribute to the International Development Cooperation literature, analyzing the IDC provided by the BRICS countries in recent decades. Since its inception, the IDC field has been studied in various areas of knowledge. Historically, the developed countries were considered the main actors and responsible for the bulk of the resources. Then, they had the ability to define and shape the rules of the regime. However, over time, new players have gained prominences, such as international organizations, private entities, non-governmental organizations, and developing countries.

Among these new actors, the BRICS have gained prominence as they sought to reshape the field by changing their position from recipients to cooperation providers, primarily through South-South Cooperation activities. Although the SSC dates from a context of decolonization processes, and of seeking alternatives to the economic order defined by the Northern countries, this phenomenon has once again gained relevance in the 21st century.

Through a comparative design, we analyzed the convergences and divergences between the BRICS countries concerning their IDC projects. Our purpose was not only to identify patterns and differences but also to comprehend these phenomena and processes. First, we compared the BRICS countries' IDC activities, identifying their differences and similarities. Next, we formulated a comparative framework discussing how different dimensions – or independent variables – influenced their IDC policies.

In order to investigate how the BRICS behave in this field, we proposed four dimensions or independent variables, such as the historical context, the geopolitical context, the institutional context, and the domestic policy context. Under each dimension, we further specified similarities and differences regarding BRICS' IDC actions.

Concerning the historical context, the main similarities consist of these countries' past as a receptor of foreign aid, and the main difference rests on the specificities of each country's history in this field. Principally, Russia does not have a history in providing South-South Cooperation as the other BRICS do.

In the geopolitical context, the main similarities are that all of them presented high rates of economic growth in the first decade of the 21 century, gathering material heft to provide SSC. The significant differences rest on the overwhelming asymmetrical capacities of these countries in geopolitical terms, especially China when compared to the others.

With regard to the institutional context, the BRICS members have established specialized agencies to conduct their IDC activities. The differences lie in the different levels of centralization of these efforts in each of them. Again, China stands apart from the others, as it has been more successful in this attempt.

Relating to the foreign policy context, all the countries have presented more assertive foreign policies recently. The differences rest on the different strategies conducted by these countries in the international arena. Although it is widely said that these countries are only pursuing their interests in the international stage, we argue that the BRICS's IDC activities have a broad range of drivers and should not be considered as representing only a minimal set of interests.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the BRICS countries' activities in the International Development Cooperation (IDC) field through a comparative analysis. In the last decade, some changes have occurred in the IDC landscape as developing countries started to assume a prominent role in a topic historically dominated by traditional donors. Among these new players, the BRICS deserve special attention. Using a descriptive and comparative methodology, we analyze the convergences and divergences among these countries regarding their IDC practices. In particular, we addressed the following question: How have the BRICS countries performed in the IDC field in the last decade? To do so, we analyzed this variable through four analytical dimensions i) historical context, ii) geopolitical context, iii) institutional context, and iv) domestic policy context. The general findings suggest that although their IDC policies present some commonalities, they also manifest important differences, especially regarding the amount and scope of recipients, and adherence to DAC/OECD guidelines and terminologies.

**Keywords:** BRICS; International Development Cooperation; South-South Cooperation; Comparative Analysis.

## RESUMO

Este artigo analisa as atividades dos países do BRICS no campo da Cooperação Internacional para o Desenvolvimento (CID) por meio de uma análise comparativa. Na última década, ocorreram mudanças neste regime na medida em que países em desenvolvimento passaram a assumir papel destacado nesta área historicamente dominada pelos doadores tradicionais. Dentre estes novos atores, os BRICS merecem atenção especial. Ao combinar metodologia descritiva e comparativa, nós analisamos as convergências e divergências entre estes países quanto às suas práticas de CID. Em particular, tentamos responder à seguinte questão: “Como os países do BRICS têm atuado no campo da CID na última década? Analisamos esta variável por meio de quatro dimensões analíticas: i) contexto histórico; ii) contexto geopolítico; iii) contexto institucional; e iv) contexto doméstico político. Os achados gerais sugerem que embora as políticas do BRICS de CID apresentem algumas semelhantes, manifestam, por outro lado, importantes diferenças, sobretudo com relação ao montante e escopo dos receptores, a aderência às diretrizes da DAC/OCDE, e as terminologias utilizadas.

**Palavras-chave:** BRICS; Cooperação Internacional para o Desenvolvimento; Cooperação Sul-Sul; Análise Comparada.

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