

South-South Cooperation through the Lenses of Bureaucrats: Peripheral Policy Transfers

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Abstract: As Brazil makes it to international headlines with its new official stance against human rights and environmental protection, one can hardly imagine that the country was, at one point, engaged in human rights cooperation in the Global South. Most of these projects were outside of the media's radar, as they were low-budget initiatives developed in small and poor countries. One might reasonably ask: Why engage in small, low-profile projects on marginalized topics in the peripheries of the Global South? This article addresses this question by presenting data and testimonies of individuals working on two of those experiences, namely Brazil's cooperation with Haiti for the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities; and Brazil's cooperation with El Salvador for the protection of children against violence and abuse. This article will suggest that the answer to the proposed research question is to be found in the rich experiences these projects brought to the bureaucrats who were, in their own domestic contexts, struggling to secure a place for their policy issues in the agenda.

Keywords: South-South cooperation; human rights; policy transfer; Brazil; Haiti; El Salvador.

Introduction

Since 2015, when the UN General Assembly approved the Sustainable Development Goals, the cross-cutting development principle that no one should be left behind has been followed. The principle represents the concern that development processes often further exclude populations that have been traditionally marginalized and discriminated against. However, even before such principle became a global guideline, Brazil had been cooperating with two of the poorest countries in the Americas in order to strengthen public policies aimed at promoting the rights of populations experiencing exclusion and violence. Those projects were small, both in their budgets and in terms of what they represented within Brazil's major South-South cooperation initiatives. Yet, those engaged with Brazil's human rights cooperation in Haiti and El Salvador tell a different story: one of meaning

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and fulfilment, which can only be understood when one looks at the lived experience of South-South cooperation (SSC). This story is told in this article from the lenses of those individual bureaucrats who were immersed in these cooperation projects and were engaged in making them happen against the invisibility of their policy topics, both in Brazil and abroad.

Given Brazil's neglect of the Global South within its foreign policy since President Jair Bolsonaro took office in January 2019, it is crucial to take stock of the rich nuances that once characterized the country's practice of SSC. As argued elsewhere (Morais de Sa e Silva 2021, 2019), this practice was strongly marked by policy transfer. Brazil's model of technical cooperation with the South was explicitly geared towards the sharing of the policy experiences acquired by the country in the post-democratization period, particularly after the beginning of the Workers Party administrations (2003-2016).

Looking back at Brazil's SSC on human rights, this article will ask the following question: why engage in small, low-visibility projects on marginalized topics in the peripheries of the Global South? In order to answer this question, the article will analyse data and testimonies of bureaucrats working on two projects, namely Brazil's cooperation with Haiti for the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities; and Brazil's cooperation with El Salvador for the protection of children against violence and abuse. At the time, both Haiti and El Salvador were politically and strategically important countries for Brazil. Nonetheless, the referred projects were small in scope and dedicated to low-profile policy issues.

Both projects were negotiated during the Lula administration, possibly reflecting the former President's style of offering an array of cooperation possibilities to partner countries. His cooperation proposals would usually begin with a multi-sector mission to the country, which would result in a multiplicity of smaller projects. However, if some strategic political value can be found in the onset of those projects, what explains their implementation and the continued engagement of Brazilian domestic institutions with them, often sacrificing time and resources of the same teams in charge of implementing domestic policies in Brazil?

This article will suggest that the answer is to be found in the rich experiences those projects brought to the bureaucrats who were, in their own domestic contexts, struggling to secure a place for their topics in the policy agenda. Such abundance of meaning may help one understand what will be called "peripheral policy transfer". The term peripheral policy transfer is defined in this article as referring to practices of policy transfer that concern marginalized policy issues in the peripheries of the Global South¹. Given the plethora of policy issues that are often excluded from mainstream policymaking, especially when it comes to vulnerable and discriminated populations, policy transfers involving those issues become even more unexpected and counterintuitive. Policy transfer research has the potential to unveil the nuances involved in those peripheral practices.

Methodologically, this article uses in-depth case studies. Data mostly stems from participant observation, administrative records, and 20 semi-structured interviews conducted for a larger research project on Brazil's SSC in the field of human rights². Interviews were conducted with government officials in and/or from Brazil, El Salvador, and Haiti.

Interviewees were mid-level bureaucrats who were directly engaged in the projects analysed in this article—except for one, who is a former foreign minister of Brazil. As mid-level bureaucrats, they had decision-making power and autonomy over the projects, as well as over the public policies that were at the heart of the cooperation initiatives.

The following section recounts the existing literature that is relevant to the discussion proposed in this article. Afterwards, the article will present the main features of human rights policies in Brazil up to 2015, hence providing the policy background for the cases under analysis. The article will then move on to detailing the nuances of both case studies, so as to make sense of the meanings that lied beneath those small projects on marginalized topics. A concluding section will wrap up the discussion.

Conceptual framework: looking through the lenses of bureaucrats

Brazil had defined its strategy of South-South cooperation as based on capacity-building (ABC 2013), which often meant the sharing of Brazilian policy models with partner countries (Milani 2017: 105). Within the comparative policy literature, those processes correspond to what has been termed ‘policy transfer’ (Dollowitz and Marsh 1996). The choice for policy transfer as a method of South-South cooperation is a result of a combination of factors. On the one hand, there are legal limitations in Brazilian domestic law that prevent the use of public funds abroad, except if explicitly authorized by Congress. On the other hand, Brazilian financial resources for development cooperation have always been modest in comparison to China’s budget in that area.

Jules and Morais de Sa e Silva (2006) launched one of the first efforts in trying to reconcile the literatures on policy transfer, international development, international relations, and comparative education. Looking at those four literature subsets from a comparative education perspective, they identified how each contributed to the understanding of South-South cooperation in education. In doing so, the authors noted that, while each of the four scholarly fields gave relevant individual contributions to SSC analysis, they noticed some overlap and an overall lack of interdisciplinary dialogue.

The call made by Porto de Oliveira and Milani in this special issue seeks to fill that gap. The editors rightfully identify that scholarly works on policy transfer and on South-South cooperation have developed overtime in disciplinary silos, with little efforts to bridge the conversation. Overlaps between development cooperation, especially South-South cooperation, and policy transfer are noticeable in practice, but scholars have yet to join efforts in providing comprehensive frameworks of understanding. Brazil’s practice particularly provides an excellent opportunity for the empirical observation of the intersections between policy transfer and South-South cooperation, with articles in this special issue bearing testimony to that. Brazil’s option for policy transfer as a method of South-South cooperation turned the country’s development cooperation experiences into common objects of investigation for scholars in both fields.

In this multidisciplinary enterprise, this article will propose to engage not only the research traditions in international relations and public policy, but also studies of the

bureaucracy and bureaucratic agency within public administration. As one attempts to understand Brazil's official cooperation with the Global South through the mobilization of its own policy models, understanding how the state machinery has engaged with SSC will be revealing and beneficial. This potentially contributes to the discussion on instruments, as proposed by Porto de Oliveira and Osmany in the introduction.

For the purposes of this article, the literature on street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010) works as a reminder of the autonomy and discretion enjoyed by bureaucrats. Based on Lipsky's work, scholars have also explored the role and behaviour of mid-level bureaucrats, who are not direct service providers to the public and yet enjoy an intermediary level of authority and decision-making autonomy in their work (Pires 2018). Mid-level bureaucrats are not among the top leadership but are still influential when it comes to policy implementation. The cases analysed henceforth in this article indicate that mid-level bureaucrats also play a significant role in policy transfer implementation. It will be hereby argued that they engage in policy transfer not simply because they are told to do so, but especially because they are able to accrue value from the policy transfer experience.

Looking at the perspectives of bureaucrats in policy transfer processes means shifting the focus of analysis away from system-level dynamics while zooming in on the individual. On the one hand, the individual level of analysis may pose methodological challenges to the identification of patterns and generalizable conclusions. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that rigorous analysis at the individual level allows for the careful observation of subtle dynamics that may not be evident at the system level. Research looking at the role of experts, mayors, and consultants in the case of the diffusion of the Bus Rapid Transfer model (Montero 2019; Wood 2019) points to the value of analysing individual agency in policy transfer processes. Along similar lines, Porto de Oliveira (2020) highlights human agency in revealing the role of 'policy ambassadors' in policy transfer processes.

The role of institutions and their bureaucracies has been considered a source of momentum for policy transfer within SSC promoted by Brazil, even after the inauguration of President Jair Bolsonaro and the marginalization of the South within Brazilian foreign policy (Morais de Sa e Silva 2021). However, the reasons why bureaucrats engage and remain engaged in policy transfer are yet to be explored. They may reveal motivations that are outside of the mainstream expectations of maximization of power and economic gain.

Looking through the lenses of bureaucrats does not mean a return to what Stone (2004) once called 'methodological nationalism', originally present in traditional policy transfer research. International bureaucrats, serving international organizations, also perform a distinctive role that has gained attention in the literature (Nay 2012; Eckhard and Ege 2016) and deserves further research analysis.

Recognition of the perspectives of individual bureaucrats follows the tradition in policy transfer research to recognize conscious decisions, in contrast to an institutionalist view of structural factors that drive policy isomorphism (Stone 2004). In that respect, the policy transfer literature in public policy coincides with the 'policy borrowing and lending' literature in comparative education, which identifies the politics and economics of traveling policies and rejects institutionalists' prediction of unavoidable convergence as a result of globalization (Steiner-Khamsi 2004).

Furthermore, Baker and Walker (2019) stressed the importance of looking at arenas, agents, and actions in policy circulation. Recognizing the value of arenas means that space matters. Policy transfer or circulation originating in the South carries the mark of its 'reference societies' (Schriewer 2008), which may alter the perceptions of those on the 'receiving' end of policy ideas and models. Just like place matters, so does the nature of a particular policy and the issues it seeks to address. Strategic policies that are at the top of the international and domestic policy agendas have a privileged place in policy transfer processes. Marginalized policy issues, however, find barriers in reaching the policy agenda both in the country of origin and in destination countries alike. Hence, policies dedicated to marginalized issues circulating in the peripheries of the Global South— or what this article will call peripheral policy transfer—call attention given their defiance of the odds. The section below will further delve into the importance of a research agenda that is dedicated to peripheral policy transfers and to the hidden gains obtained by government officials in engaging with those transfers.

Peripheral policy transfers: a salient research agenda

The policy transfer literature has long overcome a rationalist approach focused on purported 'best practices' being diffused internationally. The expectation that policies are drawn from distant places because they are best has been replaced by deeper knowledge of the arenas, actors, and actions that enable policy circulation (Baker and Walker 2019); of the cognitive-psychological processes that go into policy learning (Weyland 2009); and of the varied discursive tools used by policy exporters and importers (Montero 2019; Soremi 2019). As the field expands, it has embraced a diversity of related concepts, such as translation (Stone 2012); circulation (Baker and Walker 2019); and assemblages, mobilities, and mutations (McCann and Ward 2012). Albeit coming from different disciplines and perspectives, authors have contributed to a critical understanding of the many layers and dimensions involved in policy transfer.

Since the concept of policy transfer was first defined by Dolowitz and Marsh in their 1996 article (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996), a growing field of research has emerged in the policy sciences. The field has benefited from a plethora of case studies dedicated to better understanding the phenomenon of traveling policies, some of which with high visibility and high-scale diffusion, such as conditional cash transfers (Morais de Sá e Silva 2017); participatory budgeting (Porto de Oliveira 2017); and the bus rapid transit model (Montero 2019, Wood 2019). Growing literature along with evaluations and impact studies on these high-visibility and high-diffusion policies has allowed scholars to conduct rich bibliographic research. Fiszbein and Schady (2009), for instance, conducted cross-national comparisons of conditional cash transfers based on the dozens of studies and publications that existed on individual conditional cash transfers at the time.

Unfortunately, bibliographic research is not a possibility for scholars analysing policy models in topics of lower domestic and international visibility. In that case, qualitative in-depth studies are needed to unveil the political and the policy dynamics at play. Primary

data collection is required to understand why and how policy transfer occurs in policy issues that are not at the top of the agenda. South-south cooperation, broadly understood as cooperation among countries of the Global South, adds a layer of complexity to this process, as countries from the South have limited resources and a policy agenda framed around the need to promote development.

These apparently unlikely processes of policy transfer that take place in marginalized policy issues in the peripheries of the Global South will be termed ‘peripheral policy transfer.’ The use of the term peripheral is intentional and does not imply any demeaning of the experiences under study. The term peripheral draws from the idea of center-periphery used in Dependency and World Systems theories and recognizes that not all policy issues are at the top of the policy agenda (Kingdon 1995).

Examining the two cases analysed in this article involved looking into the features of those transferred policies first in their domestic context, before embarking on their travel abroad. For this reason, the next section will be dedicated to exploring the trajectory of peripheral human rights policies from Brazil and their belonging to Brazil’s South-South cooperation practice.

Brazil’s human rights policies (2003–2018)

‘Brazil’s experiences illustrate the value of best practices as portals to the inherent interface between the policy and practice of international solidarity and the realization of human rights’ (Dandan 2013: 1)

Beginning with President Lula’s first term in 2003 and throughout subsequent years³, human rights policies in Brazil were conceived within a broader framework of inclusion and the reduction of inequalities. In the words of Celso Amorim, Lula’s Foreign Minister:

‘We do not believe that human rights problems shall be dealt with only with condemnations – sometimes condemnations are necessary, but it should not be only or mainly with them. Concrete actions are needed in order to effectively improve the lives of people’⁴ (Amorim 2011: 489).

President Rousseff, Lula’s successor, made the continuation of that view explicit as she delivered her first speech at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly in 2011:

‘Brazil has found that the best development policy lies in combating poverty and that a true human rights policy must be based on reducing inequalities between people, regions, and genders. Brazil has progressed politically, economically, and socially without putting in jeopardy a single one of its democratic liberties’ (Rousseff 2011).

In consonance with that view, Brazil increasingly engaged in South-South cooperation initiatives in the field of human rights, just like the country had already been doing with other public policies. Unlike many countries' international cooperation policy in this area, Brazil developed cooperation initiatives aimed at sharing its own policy experiences and making no judgement about its partner countries' human rights priorities (or problems). This marks a stark difference between Brazil's cooperation and the usual politicization and instrumentalization of the international human rights agenda. Internationally, there is a predominance of finger-pointing the human rights violations occurring in developing countries, whereas violations occurring in rich countries are not mentioned or discussed. Sikkink (2013), for instance, reckons how interrogation practices adopted by US intelligence agencies during the Bush years were a clear violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

According to interviewee no. 03, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, the traditional method of "blaming and shaming" does not always work. "It is necessary to give a hand"⁵ (interviewee no. 03, interview by author, 17 August 2015). Following this approach, Brazil opted not to distance itself nor break ties with countries that had questionable credentials in terms of democracy and human rights.

Brazil's foreign policy approach to human rights meant the framing of human rights SSC as technical cooperation for development (IPEA, 2017, p. 39). Under the auspices of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC), human rights SSC projects should follow the protocol and standard format defined for projects in development fields. Also, consistent with Brazil's SSC principles, human rights projects should emerge from an explicit demand by partner countries of the South in relation to an existing Brazilian public policy (interviewee no. 02, interview by author, 12 August 2015).

Domestically, Brazil relies on a ministerial structure that is dedicated to coordinating and designing public policies for the promotion of human rights. As of 2022, that institution is named Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights. During the period covered by this research (2008 to 2015), it was called Secretariat of Human Rights of the Presidency of the Republic (*Secretaria de Direitos Humanos da Presidência da República – SDH*). Throughout the process of institutionalization of the human rights agenda within the structures of government, the practice of international cooperation—both as a beneficiary and a provider—had become a common practice.

Numerically, human rights projects did not make up a significant part of the Brazilian SSC portfolio. Albeit in small numbers, it seems interesting that some developing countries sought cooperation from Brazil in such a disputed and controversial field, one in which Brazil's record was still seen as problematic (IACHR, 2021). Case studies presented in this article will help illuminate this apparent contradiction. They were projects that involved the sharing or transfer of Brazilian policy experiences in a human rights issue. In a piece dedicated to Brazilian cooperation with Africa, Abdenur and Marcondes (2016) called it 'democratization by association'.

As this research involved working with in-depth case studies, sections 4 and 5 tell the stories behind Brazil's cooperation with Haiti and El Salvador in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and in combating sexual violence against children. Empirical data was collected through interviews with government officials, participant observation, administrative records, and project documents.

Brazil and Haiti: promoting the rights of persons with disabilities

In Brazil, the struggle for the rights of persons with disabilities has been recorded by historiography since the 19th century (Maior 2015). However, the institutionalization of this policy field within the federal government is a lot more recent. It began with a small national coordination⁶ at the Ministry of Justice and it was not until 2009, a year before the negotiations for a SSC project with Haiti began, that it became a National Secretariat within SDH (Junior and Martins 2010).

Internationally, the rights of persons with disabilities only became international law in 2006, with the approval of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006). Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities involves a multiplicity of policy instruments: assuring accessibility; political participation; access to justice; inclusive education and health; among other rights detailed in the Convention. In Brazil, the Convention was promulgated in 2009 and the Brazilian Law of Inclusion, which assimilated several provisions of the Convention, was only approved in 2015 (Brazil, 2015).

The chronology of institutions and policies for persons with disabilities was not too different in Haiti. The approval of the UN convention supported the struggle of local and national social movements in pushing for adequate laws and policies of inclusion. The Bureau of the Secretary of State for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities (BSEIPH) was created in 2007 within the executive branch. In 2009, the country ratified the UN Convention, which was then made effective in 2012 through the Law on the Integration of Persons with Disabilities.

Hence, despite being a much needed policy field, its institutions, laws and policies are fairly recent and—one might say—still under construction in both Brazil and Haiti. Those in charge of national policies were, in fact, among the first to be trying to implement new policies and institutional arrangements. In Brazil, Izabel Maior was ahead of CORDE when the Haiti project was negotiated with BSEIPH Secretary Michel Péan. Later, with the transition from President Lula (2003 – 2010) to President Rousseff (2011 – 2016) in Brazil, Antonio José Ferreira became the new National Secretary for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at SDH. The change of leadership in Brazil coincided with the change of leadership in Haiti, with BSEIPH being then led by Gerard Oriol. Therefore, when the Brazil-Haiti project was implemented, it was led by two new policymakers. Both of them had been recently appointed and occupied mid-level career stages in their respective government structures.

Contrary to the rationalized idea that policy transfer is about best-practice transfer (Morais 2005) or that global models might be quickly spreading as a result of neoliberal

globalization (Peck and Theodore 2015), what this case tells us is a story of recent policies, under construction both domestically and internationally, being led by government officials who were new-entrants to the policymaking process.

To make sense of the benefits arising from this cooperation experience, one has to dig deeper into the experiences gained and shared by the very individuals engaged in the cooperation project. The project involved mid-level bureaucrats in both countries, the highest authorities being the heads of the specialized bureaus. Both were persons with disabilities themselves, with a personal history of activism in the field. Other than them, every other individual involved in the project was either a mid-level bureaucrat or a consultant hired by SDH. The subsection below brings the details of this SSC experience. For Mr. Ferreira and his team, this had been their only SSC initiative up until 2013, when Brazil donated funds to the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) to establish a triangular cooperation program on the rights of persons with disabilities.⁷

The story behind the Brazil – Haiti project

Haiti has never been a crucial commercial partner to Brazil. The two countries are geographically far apart, do not share the same official language and have gone through different colonial occupations. The Basic Agreement for Technical and Scientific Cooperation between Brazil and Haiti, which is the formal basis for any bilateral cooperation initiative between the two countries, was signed in 1982, but promulgated by the Brazilian president only in 2004 (ABC, 2021).

Brazil and Haiti started a historical connection, probably with no turning back, from the moment the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was put under the leadership of a Brazilian commander. From then on, Brazil took an interest in Haiti and vice-versa. According to interviewee no. 6, a Brazilian foreign service officer serving in Port-au-Prince, “Haiti gave Brazil the opportunity to share the decision-making table with the big countries and feel like becoming one of them. Increasing its presence in Haiti was important to that. Therefore, cooperation efforts needed to follow suit that increased presence. Cooperation was meant to counterbalance Brazil’s military presence in Haiti” (interview by author, 22 September 2015). According to IPEA (2013: 20), in 2010, 47.4% of all Brazilian cooperation for development in Latin America and the Caribbean was concentrated in Haiti (including expenditures with the peacekeeping operation).

In 2010, due to the devastating consequences of the earthquake, Brazil tried to strengthen its cooperation efforts by means of the ‘Post-Earthquake Cooperation Program between Brazil and Haiti’. As part of the program, a Brazilian delegation with representatives from various agencies flew to Port-au-Prince in April 2010, in order to identify areas of need and possibilities for technical cooperation. Representatives of Brazil’s then Secretariat for Human Rights (SDH) were part of the mission and met with the authorities working for the rights of persons with disabilities in the country. After that, in August 2010, the Haitian Secretary of State for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities, Michel

Péan, visited Brazil and worked with the Brazilian team on the design of a South-South cooperation project.

According to interviewee no. 1, a Brazilian SDH officer, Haiti's interest in the Brazilian experience came from the Péan's identification that his country faced difficulties in advancing a crosscutting, inter-sector policy for persons with disabilities, such as done in Brazil. By cooperating with SDH, he intended to strengthen his institution's capacity to articulate and coordinate different sectors and organizations for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities (interview by author, 11 August 2015).

The project was entitled 'Strengthening of the political and institutional capacity of governmental and non-governmental actors in Haiti for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.' The project was signed in December 2010, the last month of Lula's second term in the Brazilian Presidency. It was structured around four training sessions, which would be offered to government officials, civil society representatives, media professionals, and members of networks of organizations.

The invisibility faced by persons with disabilities in Haiti has always been a significant issue in the country, especially when one considers the myths and prejudices that have been culturally built around those persons, who are commonly called *cocobai* ("worthless") in Haitian creole. To make matters more challenging, the 2010 earthquake led to a significant increase in the number of persons with disabilities in the country, given the countless victims to the quake. Besides invisibility, accessibility is another significant problem. Sidewalks in Port-au-Prince are narrow, there is lack of paved roads, and years after the earthquake there was still debris on the ground, further blocking many passageways.

Project activities involved missions from Brazil to Haiti, which allowed government officers from both countries to meet. Secretary Antonio José Ferreira was part of the first of those missions, which was meant to collect data on the Haitian policy framework (interview no. 1, interview by author, 11 August 2015). Subsequent missions involved the participation of his deputy Secretary, as well as other SDH bureaucrats, who were able to meet their Haitian counterparts.

Project trainings, which were developed by Brazilian specialists, taught participants about the UN Convention, accessibility, and the importance of including persons with disabilities in the labour market, in schools and health services. In every part of the trainings, participants also learned about the importance of dialogue between government and civil society, using as a background the Brazilian experience with the National Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CONADE).

In Brazil, progress made in securing the protection of the rights for persons with disabilities is directly related to the long-existing civil society movement comprised by that population and their allies. CONADE, whose composition is made up of government officials and elected civil society members, has become the main communication channel for the presentation and discussion of demands to the State. Besides the Council, the National Conference on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has been organized periodically since 2006, extends the participatory process to civil society organizations and individuals throughout the country.

Besides being based on the idea of government – civil society dialogue, trainings prepared by SDH for Haitian participants were also based on the other pillar of Brazilian public policy in this field: inter-sector coordination. Since 2011, the federal government in Brazil had implemented the National Program for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, also known as “Living without Limits” (*Viver sem Limite*). The plan is rooted on the idea of articulation between different policy sectors, like education, labour, health and housing, with the aim of making sure that persons with disabilities are included in all policies across these sectors.

If one were to conduct a formal impact evaluation of this South-South cooperation project, it would be difficult to measure its impact on quantitative terms. It would be only possible to confirm that the project delivered all planned activities, which consisted of a series of trainings, in line with Brazil’s policy of cooperation for capacity building. Participants seemed to have become aware of the importance of the rights of persons with disabilities and discussions about social participation and inter-sector work may have planted a seed for future action. A representative of the Organization of American States (OAS), who was interviewed for this research, highlighted the project’s distinctive involvement of government officials of both countries, stating that “this was a collaboration that was built by all parts” (interviewee no. 20, interview by author, 21 December 2015).

As much as this development cooperation initiative added to Brazil’s soft power and “served to counterbalance Brazil’s perceived military presence” (interviewee no. 6, interview by author, 22 September 2015), it also created a space of exchange and policy transfer among individuals working in marginalized and peripheral policy fields. Domestically in both countries, policymakers and bureaucrats working in the field of disabilities have to struggle to secure a place for their topic on the policy agenda. Internationally, it was not until 2006 that activists from different countries were able to obtain global attention in order to have states sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In Brazil, the cooperation with Haiti allowed Secretary Antonio José to join the delegation of President Dilma Rousseff in her first and only official visit to Haiti on February 1 2012. The presidential visit coincided with the project’s first activities in Port-au-Prince.⁸ Secretary Antonio was later able to establish a direct relationship with the President, which was especially important to garner presidential support to the “Living without Limits” plan. Despite being third in the SDH hierarchy, Secretary Antonio would be personally invited to join the President at ceremonies in the presidential palace, in which policy changes achieved in the framework of “Living without Limits” plan would be announced.⁹

In Haiti, Rousseff’s visit also allowed BSEIPH secretary to be part of the diplomatic activities at the presidential palace, which was still functioning in a temporary building due to the destructions caused by the 2010 earthquake. At the time, Oriol was fairly new to the government, having been appointed to BSEIPH only four months prior to that date. After that, Oriol succeeded in making significant policy progress, with the approval of a “Declaration on Policy for the Disabled” and its signature by then President Michel Martelly in October of the same year (Caribbean Journal, 2012).

When asked about whether he observed some kind of policy transfer as a result of the project, interviewee no. 01 replied that “this was not a case of copying and pasting. It was a case where the Brazilian experience of articulation between various government sectors and civil society formed a model for public policy work” (interview by author, 11 August 2015). His testimony gives a sense of the complexity involved in policy transfer processes. In some cases, policy transfer is evident and bears clear consequences. In other instances, it involves subtle and relational processes that need to be understood within the context of the intricacies of each domestic policy context.

Brazil and El Salvador: combating sexual violence against children

Children’s rights, as a policy field, has a longer tradition when compared to the rights of persons with disabilities. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was approved in 1990 and, that same year, Brazilian Congress approved the Statute on Children and Adolescents, which to this day guides all policies concerning children. Also in that same year, the Ministry of Children was created for the first time in the structure of the Brazilian federal government (Brazil, 1990). A human rights approach to child services, however, is a lot more recent and dates back to 2004, when the Under-Secretariat for the Promotion of the Rights of Children and Adolescents (SNPDCA) within the Special Secretariat of Human Rights was created (DHNET, 2021). Children’s rights encompass a broad policy field. The prevention of sexual violence is only one among many urgent issues within that area.

In El Salvador, a national law for children’s rights – the *Ley de Protección Integral de la Niñez y Adolescencia* (LEPINA) was approved only more recently, in 2009. Institutionally, the *Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo Integral de la Niñez y la Adolescencia* (ISNA) was put in charge of the implementation of the law¹⁰.

*The story behind the Brazil – El Salvador project*¹¹

El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America, with whom Brazil did not traditionally have tight relations. Yet, the two countries became much closer when of the election of Mauricio Funes, from the left-wing party “*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*” (FMLN), in 2009. FMLN had been recognized as a political party after the peace accords of 1992, which put an end to the Salvadoran civil war (1980 – 1992). Funes is married to Brazilian Vanda Pignato, who was the representative to Central America of Brazil’s Workers Party for years. As Ms Pignato became El Salvador’s First Lady, cooperation between the two countries significantly intensified, especially with regards to new projects in the social sector.

In that framework of closer political ties, in 2010, SDH representatives were invited to visit San Salvador. There they identified the need for cooperation actions in the field of children’s rights, especially in combating sexual violence against children and adolescents. The cooperation in question was based on the transfer of two Brazilian policies,

namely the Plan of Integrated and Reference Actions to Combat Sexual Violence Against Children and Adolescents (PAIR), and the National Complaint Helpline (*Disque Denúncia Nacional*)¹². By then, El Salvador already had a sound organizational and legislative framework for the development of child-related policies. What the country lacked, as identified by local authorities, was a policy that would allow them to coordinate different actors and institutions to address the grave cases of sexual exploitation and violence against children and adolescents in the country (interviewee no. 10, interview by author, 03 October 2015).

In Brazil, the Human Rights Helpline started as the National Complaint Helpline, with a specific focus on receiving citizens' complaints and accusations regarding sexual violations against children. The service was combined with the PAIR methodology, which provides a set of techniques and protocols for the joint action of different institutions that can collaborate in the fight against those violations.

The South-South cooperation project between the two countries was negotiated in 2010 and encompassed the transfer of the PAIR methodology and the Helpline service model to El Salvador. Throughout four years of project implementation (2011-2015), Salvadoran ISNA officials visited the Brazilian experience twice and Brazilian SDH officials went six times to San Salvador to implement project activities in the city.

PAIR-related activities involved the creation of an inter-sector network of actors and institutions, which was comprised by several government bodies and civil society organizations. Their representatives and staff members were trained by the Brazilian SDH officials during three workshops organized in San Salvador in 2013 and 2014. According to the PAIR methodology, the formation of a network is crucial for the coordination of actions to prevent and prosecute crimes of sexual violence against children. In order to test the methodology in El Salvador, a pilot experience was developed in the department of Santa Ana, along the border with Guatemala and in the pathway of migrants to the US. According to a Salvadoran government official, that department concentrates the highest number of cases of human trafficking, especially involving children, as well as a high number of non-accompanied minors who had been deported back to El Salvador after trying to make the journey to the US.

The PAIR pilot project in Santa Ana was a Salvadoran initiative that resulted from the trainings developed in cooperation with Brazil (Brazilian official, interviewee no. 11, 06 October 2021). As a result of the pilot, a local network of organizations was created, being comprised by the local *Junta de Protección*, ISNA representatives, the national police, the Office of the Prosecutor, women's organizations and other civil society groups. According to a Salvadoran official, a similar network was then created at the national level – the *Red de Atención Compartida*, which deals not only with issues related to sexual violence but with any kind of violation against children and adolescents (interviewee no. 10, interview by author, 03 October 2015).

The interviewee considers that the PAIR methodology, especially the rapid appraisal method, has been very useful in the fight against sexual violence in the country. However, he concedes that “working together is very difficult. Adopting a human rights approach

and not a charity approach is not easy either” (interviewee no. 10, interview by author, 03 October 2015).

Besides the transfer of the PAIR methodology, this South-South cooperation project also involved the transfer of the service model of operation of the Human Rights Helpline. Initially, the idea was to create in El Salvador a call centre that, like in Brazil, could receive complaints about violations to children’s rights and could forward them to the responsible authorities. It turned out, however, that according to legislation ISNA did not have the mandate to take note of those complaints. Because of that, Salvadoran officials decided to adjust the project, changing the aim of the service, which would instead give out information about children’s rights and useful resources. Even with those adjustments, some further challenges appeared, like the creation of a toll-free number and the setting up of a software that would allow for the recording of information from all received calls.

For the technological challenge, SDH officials suggested that, besides the funds that were foreseen in the project, SDH could also hire a Brazilian specialist to work on customizing the Brazilian software for Salvadoran needs. The consultant made three trips to El Salvador and was able to design, test and adjust the adapted software, as well as to train the team at ISNA, from where the Helpline would operate. The idea was to train the ISNA team not only to operate the platform but also to troubleshoot any issues without depending on the Brazilian technical support.

The ISNA team also worked on negotiating with telephone companies the creation of a toll-free number that, like in Brazil, could be dialled from any phone in any part of the country. However, due to the existing regulatory system for communication services in El Salvador, telephone companies, which are all private, were not mandated to create toll-free numbers in the public interest. In fact, they argue that they already provided the 911 service free of charge to the caller and to the receiver. The solution found by ISNA was to establish a system of shared costs, where ISNA would pay for part of the costs and service users would pay for the other part (interviewee no. 10, interview by author, 03 October 2015). ISNA also invested in the purchase of equipment and hiring of new personnel, which was also not initially foreseen in the project.

After all challenges had been addressed, the Helpline service, called *Línea 134 – Línea Amiga de la Niñez* (Dial 134 – Child-Friendly Line) was launched in September 2014. According to interviewee no. 10, “the service has been fulfilling an important informative and educational role. It informs citizens about programs for children and about children’s rights.” Calls related to complaints and possible violations are forwarded to National Council for Childhood and Adolescence (CONNA), which legally has the power to intervene. Actually, there have been recent discussions about transferring the Helpline to CONNA in the future, so that the service could be more comprehensive and working just like the one in Brazil (interviewee no. 10, interview by author, 03 October 2015).

The cooperation Brazil – El Salvador is, between the two cases analysed in this study, the one in which policy change as a result of policy transfer was the most evident. The PAIR methodology was implemented in the department of Santa Ana and a national network was created, with the adoption of the Brazilian-inspired approach of coordinated

inter-sector work. Moreover, a telephone service was created to inform children, their families, and caregivers about their rights, even though it may not be possible at this point to take note and follow-up on complaints. And yet, policy change was achieved despite the fact that those involved in the project were not at the top of their respective institutions' decision-making hierarchies.

Whereas the Brazil – Haiti project involved the Secretaries in charge of the broad policy field of persons with disabilities, the Brazil – El Salvador project involved bureaucrats belonging to more technical and therefore lower levels in their institutional hierarchies. In Brazil, those included the coordinator-general of the National Program to Prevent Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents, at the fifth level of the SDH hierarchical structure. In El Salvador, the project involved a sub-director from ISNA and technical personnel from CONNA, a council charged with looking into cases of violations of the rights of the child. Figures 1 and 2 provide clear visualization of the institutional placement of the highest authorities who led this SSC project in both countries.

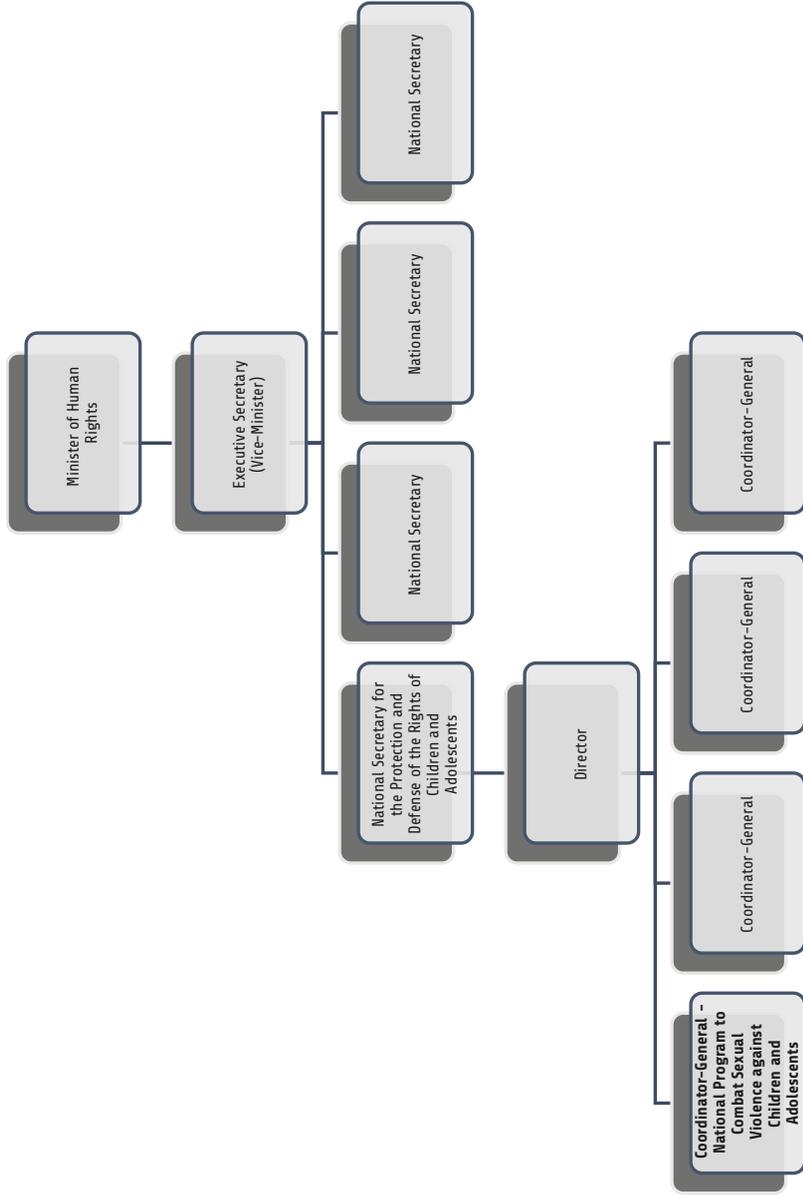
One of the Salvadoran interviewees reflected on his experience:

Brazilian cooperation is horizontal and respectful of the timing and decisions of our government. There was respect to our sovereignty. Besides, Brazilian cooperation is not based on money but in the technical aspects, in follow-up, support in the field, the sharing of methodologies. This is most valuable. Following-up is crucial. They had the 'historic patience'¹³ (interviewee no. 10, interview by author, 03 October 2015).

The Salvadoran case reveals the wealth of details and the many nuances that are present in individual SSC projects, even the small ones. Government officers involved in the project were, in both countries, mid-level bureaucrats working with policy problems that had to secure attention and prioritization in a sea of many other urgent policy issues. This SSC project helped their policy issues gain importance and legitimacy domestically and helped them move the needle of their policy work even though they were not, personally, at the top of the decision-making hierarchy.

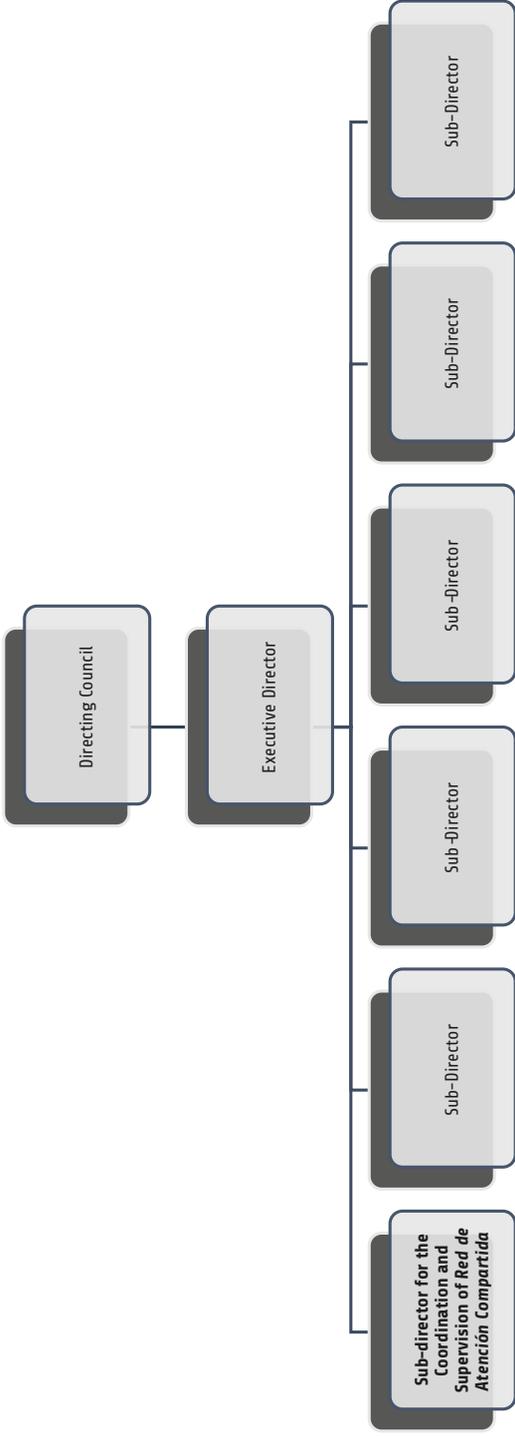
For those working in peripheral and underfunded policy topics, despite their immense relevance, international cooperation provides a boost to their status and brings an indirect recognition of the importance of the work they do at the domestic level. With the positive international image that Brazil enjoyed at time, cooperating with Brazilian officials brought an additional layer of status.

Figure 1. Project leadership within the hierarchy of Brazil's SDH (as of 2014).



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Figure 2. Project leadership within the hierarchy of El Salvador's ISNA (as of 2014).



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Concluding remarks

This article proposes to recognize the stories of policy transfer engagements in marginal topics in peripheral places in the Global South. Based on interviews with bureaucrats and administrative records, the article reveals the wealth of meaning contained in two experiences of policy transfer through South-South Cooperation. In the first experience, Brazil and Haiti collaborated in the sharing of the Brazilian policy experience to promote the rights of persons with disabilities. In the second case, policies and methodologies from Brazil were shared with Salvadorian government officials working in the prevention of sexual violence and abuse against children. A pre-condition for the contemplation of those experiences lies in understanding how Brazilian human rights policies are structured.

In both cases, government officials situated at intermediary levels of authority at their respective state bureaucracies engaged with each other to share learning on policies that, despite their importance, are not at the top of their countries' priority policy agendas. As these encounters took place in the Global South arena, at the margins of the policy agenda, the policy transfer processes observed in these cases have been termed 'peripheral policy transfer'. They call the observer's attention for their occurrence and persistence despite the lack of spotlights on them. For those of us who have studied highly-diffused policies such as conditional cash transfers, participatory budgeting, and the bus rapid transfer model, these low-diffusion, small-scale transfers are fascinating. Those cases are similarly counter-intuitive in light of literatures that have pointed to the occurrence of institutional isomorphism (Radaelli 2000) or that have denounced the emergence of fast-policy as a result of neo-liberalism (Peck and Theodore 2015).

What motivates or provides the fuel for these transfers to happen in peripheral agendas in the Global South? Looking beyond a rationalist approach, this article has revealed meaningful stories of policy transfer that mid-level bureaucrats have experienced in engaging with one another. As the research delved deep into two of those experiences of peripheral policy transfers, it became apparent that government officials involved in the cases under analysis benefited from the wealth of experience resulting from the projects, as they struggled in their own domestic processes to solidify their policy agendas. As our field of study expands and deepens, and as we join efforts in addressing the intersections between policy transfer and SSC, understanding these low-diffusion, small-scale peripheral transfers will likely help us arrive at a more comprehensive analytical framework, one that also contemplates cases outside of the beaten path.

Notes

- 1 Author's definition. The concept of peripheral policy transfer incorporates dependency theory's idea of centre-periphery while recognizing the heterogenous nature of the Global South and inequalities within it.
- 2 Twenty interviews were conducted as part of a research project supported by CLACSO, *Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales*.
- 3 President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (2003 – 2010), President Dilma Rousseff (2011 – 2016), President Michel Temer (2016 – 2018).

- 4 Author's translation of "Não acreditamos que os problemas de direitos humanos devem ser enfrentados simplesmente com condenações – às vezes até são necessárias condenações, mas não somente ou principalmente com condenações. São necessárias ações concretas, que melhorem efetivamente a vida das pessoas" (Amorim, 2011: 489).
- 5 Author's translation of "É necessário estender a mão".
- 6 *Coordenadoria Nacional para Integração da Pessoa Portadora de Deficiência* (National Coordination for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities).
- 7 "Fortalecimento da Capacidade Política e Institucional de Agentes Governamentais e Não-governamentais para a Promoção e Defesa dos Direitos das Pessoas com Deficiência nos Países da CPLP"
- 8 The composition of the SDH delegation that joined the Presidential visit to Haiti is listed in the document *Agenda preliminar. 1a Missão do Projeto de Cooperação Sul-Sul*: "Fortalecimento da capacidade política e institucional de agentes governamentais e não-governamentais do Haiti para promoção e defesa dos direitos das pessoas com deficiência".
- 9 See pictures available at EBC (2013).
- 10 In 2013, the National Council for Children and Adolescents (*Consejo Nacional de la Niñez y de la Adolescencia* - CONNA) was created, with the mandate to identify and investigate violations against children and adolescents.
- 11 See Moraes (2017) for another detailed analysis of this SSC project.
- 12 Currently named Human Rights Helpline – Dial 100 (*Disque Direitos Humanos – Disque 100*).
- 13 Author's translation of "La cooperación brasileña es horizontal y respetosa del tiempo y de las decisiones de nuestro gobierno. Hubo respeto a nuestra soberanía. Además, la cooperación brasileña no está basada en dinero, sino que en cuestiones técnicas, en seguimiento, en el intercambio de metodologías. Esto es el mas valioso. Seguimiento es crucial. Ellos tuvieron la 'paciencia historia'"

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Cooperação Sul-Sul através das lentes dos burocratas: transferências de políticas periféricas

Resumo: Como o Brasil chega às manchetes internacionais com sua nova postura oficial contra os direitos humanos e a proteção ambiental, dificilmente se pode imaginar que o país estivesse, em algum momento, engajado na cooperação em direitos humanos no Sul Global. A maioria destes projetos estava fora do radar da mídia, pois eram iniciativas de baixo orçamento, desenvolvidas em países pequenos e pobres. Pode-se razoavelmente perguntar: por que se envolver em projetos pequenos e de baixo perfil sobre temas marginalizados nas periferias do Sul Global? Este artigo aborda esta questão apresentando dados e testemunhos de indivíduos que trabalham em duas dessas experiências, a saber: a cooperação do Brasil com o Haiti para a promoção dos direitos das pessoas com deficiência; e a cooperação do Brasil com El Salvador para a proteção das crianças contra a violência e o abuso. Este artigo sugerirá que a resposta à questão da pesquisa proposta se encontra nas ricas experiências que estes projetos trouxeram aos burocratas que, em seus próprios contextos domésticos, estavam lutando para garantir um lugar para suas questões políticas na agenda.

Palavras-chave: Cooperação Sul-Sul; Direitos humanos; Transferência de políticas; Brasil; Haiti; El Salvador.

Received on 05 July 2020 and approved for publication 24 November 2021.



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