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International Development Cooperation and Multipolarity: Scrambling North and South?

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The field of International Development Cooperation (IDC) has undergone a structural transformation since 2010. International agreements such as the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action had profound impacts upon the IDC field to the point that many of its elements lost relevance (Orliange 2020). While in 2015, internationally agreed goals established the most ambitious development agenda ever adopted, the political will needed for its implementation collapsed in 2016, with the rise of far-right governments in key countries like the UK and USA (Zoccal, in this issue). Moreover, there is a clear mismatch between goals and the means of implementation, due to a conspicuous disconnection between narratives, strategies and instruments, according to Klingebiel and Gonsior, in this issue.

The lasting crisis of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is at the center of the disentanglement between development goals and IDC. During the last decade “development assistance” was pronounced dead many times by analysts in different positions within the international development cooperation field (Janus et al. 2015). Practitioners like Jean-Michel Severino and Olivier Ray, from the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), announced the end of ODA due to its relatively little success in fostering economic convergence and the emergence of new challenges, such as the provision of global public goods related to climate change, food security and public health, to name a few (Severino and Ray 2009). Furthermore, analysts like Andrew Rogers and Homi Kharas, from the Overseas Development Institute, acknowledged that the

three key disruptors challenge the “aid industry”: philanthropy, South-South Cooperation (SSC) and alternative finance, as the climate change finance (Kharas and Rogerson 2012). Finally, even following different rationales, scholars like José Antonio Alonso (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) or Emma Mawdsley (Cambridge University), among others, converged around the same diagnosis: the emergence of a “beyond aid” era (Alonso 2012; Mawdsley et al. 2014).

Despite their differences, ODA’s autopsies acknowledged the rising powers’ growing footprint within the international development field as one of the causes of death. Such diagnosis refers to a systemic change that would sign the end of the so-called unipolar moment¹ and begs the question of how changes in the distribution of power patterns impact upon norms, rules and practices in specific fields or sectors.² Taking this analytical puzzle into account, this special issue aims at assessing how systemic changes impact upon the practices of international development cooperation. Surveying the body of literature on the relationship between emerging providers and traditional donors, we may find two opposing claims: opposition and socialization. The opposition thesis assumes that differences are incommensurable and emphasizes the competitive dynamics between traditional donorship and SSC practices (Abreu 2013; Besharati 2017; Bracho 2017; Corrêa 2017). Regardless of differences, the socialization thesis claims that emerging powers will end up adapting existing norms and rules of IDC (Bergamashi and Tickner 2017; Eyben and Savage 2012; Manning 2006; Xiaoyun and Carey 2014). Of course, we may agree with Orliange’s claims that new players, particularly Southern providers, did not change the game in terms of providing alternatives for IDC that are fit for implementing internationally agreed goals (Dongxiao et al. 2017). Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore that emerging providers have brought the very rules of the game to the fore. This hypothesis does not imply that emerging powers became norms-entrepreneurs within the IDC field. Yet, while following their own norms and principles, SSC providers induced traditional donors to change the norms and principles they have established for themselves, at least 60 years ago (Chaturvedi et al. 2016; Mawdsley 2018; Zoccal and Esteves 2018)

China’s South-South Cooperation

China’s rise alone did not generate all the turmoil within the IDC field. Nevertheless, its practices as SSC provider had a significant impact in the field in three dimensions, addressed by a set of three articles collected in this issue: norms, instruments and development outcomes. Vadell, Lo Brutto and Leite’s article addresses the differences between China’s SSC and conventional ODA. As the authors highlighted Chinese approaches to SSC seem to be more comprehensive in regards to its goals (fostering structural transformations across the developing world) as well as to its instruments (combining political dialogue, trade agreements and infrastructure financing).

1 On the unipolar moment and its end, see et al.: (Ikenberry 2004; Krauthammer 1991; Layne 2011; Mastanduno 1997)

2 On the contested relationship between systemic changes and international order, see et al.: (Acharya 2014; Ikenberry 2011; Kupchan 2012)

Against the backdrop drawn by Vadell, Lo Brutto and Leite, two other articles contend with China's SSC instruments and development impacts. First, Xu, Liu and Fan focus on the most ambitious development program since the Marshall Plan: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Second, Bustillo and Abduvaliev's article is an attempt of assessing the impacts of ODA and SSC, mainly provided by China, in Tajikistan.

BRI's drivers, meanings and effects are being discussed by a burgeoning literature. As per the drivers, while some analysts like Zhou and Esteban (2018) and Shambaugh (2015) see the BRI as a soft balancing initiative, others like Johnson (2016) and Clarke (2017) understand the initiative as an attempt to adjust domestic imbalances and solve the excessive production capacity. Beyond the BRI's drivers, Xu, Liu and Fan engage with a body of literature which has focused on the institutional effects of financial arrangements adopted within the BRI framework. The authors interrogate how "Beijing applies development finance when advancing the BRI". Their finds stress how financial arrangements mobilized by the BRI emulate indigenous models of Chinese development finance. Moreover, the article finds itself side by side with a body of literature that calls for an understanding of the BRI as part of a process of reshaping the landscape of finance for development.³ Indeed, as they pointed out, BRI is supported by new International Financial Institutions backed by China, such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank or the New Development Bank, and by a model of blended finance which combines grants, loans and technical assistance.

The impacts of Chinese SSC in the field is another contentious issue. Bustillo and Abduvaliev present a case study contrasting ODA and Chinese SSC in one of the BRI's beneficiary countries: Tajikistan. According to the authors' findings, the coordination among traditional ODA donors decisively contributed to Tajik economic growth as well as to poverty reduction in the country. As per the impacts of SSC, particularly Chinese SSC, the authors suggest that: "South-South Cooperation in Tajikistan remains far from being considered as a win-win phenomenon, due to several factors, such as the government's high debt to China, strong commercial dependency on China [...]" (pp. 20-21). This is a highly politicized field, and, as the authors suggest, more research is required to arrive in a definitive assessment. Beyond the Tajik case, the coexistence of ODA and SSC either in the field or in the norm-setting arenas is an issue worth analyzing. As Bustillo and Abduvaliev show, traditional donors and SSC providers converge neither in their goals nor in their instruments. The second set of contributions, presented below, addresses the interaction of SSC providers and traditional donors in multiple settings.

Becoming an International Development Cooperation provider

Emerging SSC providers operate in a system already framed by ODA donors. Becoming an SSC provider is a complex and contested process. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, this is not

³ On China's and emerging powers' impact on the Finance for Development agenda see, et al.: (Abdenur et al. 2014; Hooijmaaijers 2019; Yang and Gorp 2019; Yu 2017)

a linear and unidirectional path exclusively dependent on the acquisition of material capacities. In fact, the development of material capacities is just part of the equation. Economic growth may lead to the so-called graduation, *i.e.* a transitional process where a developing country is recognized by traditional donors as developed, according to diverse criteria. As Besharati and Esteves have observed, though, “for ‘new providers’, graduation thus poses a dilemma as they not only receive less aid, but become also under greater pressure to share, with traditional donors, the burden of the responsibilities (and costs) of international development” (Besharati and Esteves 2015). The “Graduation Dilemma” was further developed by Margheritis (2017) and Milani et al. (2017), who stressed the “lack of consensus about the path to graduation”.

Becoming a SSC provider, then, entails a series of domestic and external adjustments where the country’s status and the consequent ability to influence international policymaking are at stake (Carvalho et al. 2020). The special issue collected four empirical analyses showing two critical dimensions involved in self-fashioning processes of development cooperation providers: (i) socialization; and (ii) the ability to influence international policymaking.

Examining the case of Uruguayan SSC, Morasso and Lamas addressed the ways newcomers are socialized within the field of IDC. In this context, the role of International Organizations is noteworthy. These organizations played a significant role as norm diffusers, operating throughout capacity development programs, policy dialogues, triangular cooperation projects, monitoring and evaluation activities, and framing “good practices” classification criteria. As the authors have concluded, Uruguay’s self-fashion process as an IDC provider was highly influenced by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB): “the OECD and SEGIB have had a clear role in the definition of concepts and approaches that Uruguay has adopted when developing its own positions on the IDC system” (p. 15).

Laura Waisbich has also tackled the IDC provider self-fashioning process. Focusing on the Brazilian case, Waisbich discusses the political disputes implicated in such socialization processes. Through this case study, we may understand that beyond the international level, the process analyzed by Morasso and Lamas also comprises a fierce political dispute at the domestic level. Although mobilizing different approaches, both articles suggest that becoming an IDC provider is a more or less contested process of acquisition of international norms.

Is self-fashioning a unidirectional process or would emerging SSC providers be able to influence international policymaking, or even, norm-setting? This interrogation frames the backdrop of two articles collected in this special issue. First, Lima and Santana’s case study of Brazil’s position towards the food aid regime reform suggests a negative answer for this question. As the authors claim, Brazil’s strong foothold within the food aid regime, as one of the largest food donors in the world, was not translated in an autonomous and challenging position, but rather, in a mainstreamed behavior. However, Moreira examines the response of recipient actors to ODA donors and SSC providers and offers a slightly different answer. According to the author, “the outcomes of the encounter of SSC with traditional hosting practices highlights the determining

role of host actors in shaping projects' processes and impact" (Moreira 2020, 15). Rather than claiming that SSC providers follow existing norms or influence norm-setting processes, the article finds that, in the field, ODA and SSC are delivered side by side, following their own principles, patterns and assessment procedures.

South-South Cooperation and its discontents

Considering these case studies, we could rush to the conclusion that the self-fashioning process of an IDC provider is based on the acquisition or internalization of existing norms and would not produce any effect on existing regimes. Nevertheless, it is essential not to miss important clues about how traditional donors have to change themselves in order to respond to SSC providers growing incidence in the IDC field. Campos Mello's article on the OECD's enlargement demonstrates how systemic changes have produced profound impacts upon the IDC field. Taken for its face value, the OECD enlargement appears as a response to the declining relevance of OECD countries' economies, which the report "Shifting Wealth" acknowledged in 2010 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2010). Confronting a potential decline in effectiveness and influence, the OECD invested in a series of outreach activities during the last decade in an attempt to cope with the mounting weight of emerging powers. Organized across many committees and sectors, these activities aimed at attracting emerging powers and influencing their behavior in critical areas, including IDC. As discussed above, Morasso and Lamas analyzed OECD's influence upon the Uruguayan cooperation. The process of enlargement is the culmination of these activities. Nonetheless, it had so far achieved mixed results: although many Latin American countries were attracted to the OECD's orbit, China and India still keep a pragmatic distance.⁴

Beyond the OECD's attempts of accommodating emerging powers, a closer look may show that SSC providers had germane impacts both on the very definition of what constitutes development cooperation and its procedures, modalities, and instruments. The overarching impact of SSC providers upon the IDC was also addressed by four other papers. Xu, Liu and Fan suggested a first clue: the BRI financial arrangements and the set-up of China-backed financial institutions are coeval with a new tool for IDC measurement, the Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD). The TOSSD was manufactured by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) as a response to the claims of its constituency: traditional donors. The authors did not analyze the nexus between China's development finance and the establishment of the TOSSD. Nevertheless, the scholarly literature has already established such nexus (Chaturvedi et al. 2016;

⁴ China and India have not shown interest in becoming OECD members. However, it is worth noticing the China-DAC Study Group, established in 2009. The OECD/DAC and the International Poverty Reduction Center in China form the joint secretariat of the Study Group. Also, the OECD's report "Active with People's Republic of China" show a turning point in 2017, when there was a considerable increase on Chinese financial contribution to the OECD, and China became a participant of the OECD Corporate Governance Committee (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2018).

Mawdsley 2018). Chaturvedi et al. (2016) argue that the TOSSD neutralized the distinction between ODA and SSC. Moreover, as a matter of fact, the metric neutralizes the differences between many flows, designed to achieve distinct, and perhaps contradictory goals: (i) economic development of developing countries; (ii) other motivations (commercial, cultural or political); and (iii) mutual benefits (including SSC flows) (Esteves and Klingebiel 2020).

Morasso and Lamas offered a second clue: Uruguay was a promoter and a pilot case for the “Multidimensional Country Review”, a revision of the old graduation criteria. The new criteria of assessing development progress, and to determine eligibility for ODA, should not rely exclusively on aggregate income (GDP): “development is much more than increases in per capita national income. Development is a multidimensional process with the ultimate measure being the well-being of citizens” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2017, 3). The review of graduation criteria was conducted by The Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission, the OECD Development Center and the Economic Commission for Latin America & the Caribbean, and supported by Uruguay and Chile. This effort created a new concept, or rather a buzzword: Development in Transition (DiT).

The OECD and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) feature DiT as an innovative approach to overcome key development traps found on the way “towards higher income levels” and to align national development strategies to internationally agreed development goals: “DiT calls for improving domestic capacities and adopting more innovative modalities of international co-operation for development. In so doing, it could support both national development objectives and international efforts to advance regional and global public goods” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2019). Despite its vagueness, DiT seems to work both for traditional donors and emerging providers (as well as remaining recipients). While the latter are still within the ODA eligibility list, the former preserve their foothold as donors in high-income countries (at least in Latin America).

TOSSD and DiT are two dimensions of the all-encompassing IDC structural transformation, and we should not underestimate the meanings of such transformation. In a field built around donorship practices, both TOSSD and DiT evidence how traditional donors and ODA are being decentered and losing influence (Zoccal and Esteves 2018). Zoccal’s article on the mushrooming practices of Triangular Cooperation, from one side, and Esteves and Soares’ on the Private Sector Engagement with IDC, from the other, substantiate the decentering hypothesis.

Triangular cooperation is a mushrooming practice that very often ties together a developed country, a developing country and a recipient. Zoccal interrogates the reasons for such hype around triangular practices and their meaning vis-à-vis current transformations within the IDC field. The article argues that triangular cooperation became a bridge between ODA donors and SSC providers in a context when multilateral institutions have been weakened, and club diplomacy has gained momentum. Facing the impossibility of generating a broader common normative framework to shelter traditional donors and emerging providers, agents in the field opt to adopt cooperation schemes based on specific reciprocity and tit for tat behavior.

In the second case, Esteves and Soares focus on the latest trend within the IDC field: “Private Sector Engagement” through development cooperation (PSE). Even though the IDC field’s history has been marked by its strict regulation (and exclusionary attempts), profit-oriented practices have always been part of the so-called aid industry as goods or services providers. Nevertheless, in recent years traditional donors have stretched existing rules and common understandings in order to mobilize ODA resources for fostering private engagement into the field.

Enacting new PSE practices, traditional donors are actually enabling private sector organizations as legitimate agents in the field beyond their supportive roles. Such enactment follows a decade of accusations or suspicions against Chinese mobilization of private or state-owned companies for development cooperation activities. Yet, traditional donors made the case for having the private sector back into the IDC field around four arguments: (i) the need for additional resources for implementing the 2030 Agenda; (ii) the potential generation of development outcomes by PSE based on the belief of the generation of development additionalities; (iii) the launch of a set of principles for disciplining PSE; and (iv) the establishment of monitoring and evaluation tools.

While some articles gathered in this special issue would fit into what we have called opposition thesis, others would be closer to the socialization thesis. Nevertheless, taken together in a broader conversation, the contributions tell us a different story. In spite of fundamental differences between ODA donors and SSC providers, it is possible to identify a socialization process that is currently producing significant changes across the north-south divide. Indeed, while many agents in the South are increasingly adopting principles and instruments created by traditional donors (see the cases of Uruguay or Brazil, discussed here), traditional donors are also adopting instruments created by SSC providers (blended finance) and adapting their own principles and practices (TOSSD, DiT, Triangular Cooperation and PSE). Neither this process means that SSC providers are being co-opted by traditional donors, nor that we are observing some kind of southernization of IDC (Chaturvedi et al. 2016; Mawdsley 2018). On the contrary, the complex process of socialization (Esteves and Klingebiel 2020) generates a dynamic of competition and emulation scrambling North and South.

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