

# ACTIVE NON-ALIGNMENT: BRAZIL AND THE MEASUREMENT OF SOUTH-SOUTH DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

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Measuring South-South cooperation (SSC) has gained policy and political salience in International Development Cooperation (IDC) debates in recent decades. This article applies the concept of *active non-alignment* to analyze the efforts of “southern providers”, such as Brazil, for autonomous, differentiated, and proactive engagement in the measurement debate, as well as in the field of international development more broadly. The article combines analyses of foreign policy and public policy and traces the evolution, since 2010, of the international debate and the Brazilian response – diplomatic, institutional, and non-governmental – to the growing “duty of measuring” the flows and impact of its SSC. Far from being purely a technical issue, the reconstruction of processes and negotiations surrounding the creation of measurement instruments and practices to count and account for Brazilian SSC contribute to illustrating political, geopolitical, and (inter)bureaucratic disputes in the production of transnational public policies, such as Brazil’s IDC.

**Keywords:** international development; South-South cooperation; Brazilian foreign policy; measurement; non-alignment.

## NÃO ALINHAMENTO ATIVO: O BRASIL E A MENSURAÇÃO DA COOPERAÇÃO SUL-SUL PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO

A agenda da mensuração da cooperação Sul-Sul (CSS) ganhou força no debate internacional sobre Cooperação Internacional para o Desenvolvimento (CID) nas últimas décadas. O artigo aplica o conceito de *não alinhamento ativo* para analisar os esforços de “cooperantes do Sul”, como o Brasil, por uma inserção autônoma, diferenciada e propositiva no debate sobre mensuração da cooperação, bem como no campo do desenvolvimento internacional, mais amplamente. O artigo combina análises de política externa e política pública e traça a evolução, desde 2010, do debate internacional e da resposta brasileira, diplomática, institucional e não governamental ao crescente “dever de mensurar” fluxos e impacto de sua cooperação Sul-Sul. Longe de uma questão puramente técnica, a reconstituição deste processo, e sobretudo das negociações em torno da criação de instrumentos e práticas de mensuração da CSS no país, contribui para ilustrar dinâmicas e conflitos políticos, geopolíticos e (inter)burocráticos na produção de políticas públicas transnacionais, como a cooperação brasileira para o desenvolvimento internacional.

**Palavras-chave:** desenvolvimento internacional; cooperação Sul-Sul; política externa brasileira; mensuração; não alinhamento.

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## NO ALINEAMIENTO ACTIVO: EL BRASIL Y LA MEDICIÓN DE LA COOPERACIÓN SUR-SUR PARA EL DESARROLLO

La agenda de la medición de la cooperación Sur-Sur (CSS) ha cobrado fuerza en el debate internacional sobre la Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo en las últimas décadas. Este artículo aplica el concepto de *no alineamiento activo* para analizar los esfuerzos de los “cooperantes del Sur”, como Brasil, por una inserción autónoma, diferenciada y propositiva en el debate sobre medición de la cooperación, así como en el campo del desarrollo internacional de manera más amplia. El artículo combina análisis de política exterior y política pública, y traza la evolución, desde 2010, del debate internacional y la respuesta brasileña (diplomática, institucional y no gubernamental) ante el creciente “deber de medir” los flujos y resultados de su cooperación Sur-Sur. Lejos de ser una cuestión puramente técnica, la reconstrucción de este proceso, y especialmente las negociaciones en torno a la creación de instrumentos y prácticas de medición de la CSS en el país, contribuyen a ilustrar las dinámicas y conflictos políticos, geopolíticos e (inter) burocráticos en la producción de políticas públicas transnacionales, como la cooperación brasileña para el desarrollo internacional.

**Palabras clave:** desarrollo internacional; cooperación Sur-Sur; política exterior brasileña; medición; no alineamiento.

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of measuring South-South cooperation (SSC) has gained momentum in International Development Cooperation (IDC) related debates in recent decades, especially since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Measurement here refers to the production of data and knowledge through the *quantification* of financial flows and the *evaluation* of processes, outcomes, and impact of initiatives aimed at promoting international development (Besharati and Macfeely, 2019; Waisbich, Silva and Suyama, 2017). As a public policy tool, the measurement of development cooperation is simultaneously a *technical* and *political* affair (Abramovay and Lotta, 2022), unavoidably permeated by power relations and disputes between different actors and interests.

The growing political salience in international arenas – and, to a lesser extent, also in domestic arenas – of measuring SSC flows is indicative of important dynamics in this changing field. IDC is, as Milani (2018) argues, a political and public policy field in dispute that cuts across domestic and transnational arenas. In this sense, it reflects (while contributing to) political, material and symbolic power disputes around issues of global governance, as well as the production of (domestic and foreign) development policies in different countries (Westhuizen and Milani, 2019).

In recent decades, developing countries (in the so-called global south), historically positioned as passive recipients of “international aid or assistance”, have also become champions of development cooperation initiatives geared towards least developed countries what is known as Southern-led or South-South development cooperation (Duarte and Milani, 2021; Mawdsley, 2012). The “dualism” (Leite et al., 2014) in the role and identity of some developing countries in the system (acting as simultaneously “recipients or beneficiaries” of aid as well as “cooperation partners/providers”) affects the existing IDC regime, contributing to its increasing politicization and political-normative fragmentation (Esteves and Assunção, 2014; Milani and Duarte, 2015). Middle-income countries – among them “emerging powers” such as Brazil, China and India (as well as Mexico, Turkey, among others) – have come to define themselves and act as “Southern development cooperation partners” (hereafter “Southern partners”). Under this new position and identity, they displayed variegated degrees of adherence and opposition (or even resistance) to the current IDC regime, its rules, and institutions (Duarte and Milani, 2021; Kim and Lightfoot, 2011; Kobayashi, 2023).

Diversity within the group of Southern partners – resulting from distinct socio-historical trajectories, identities and positions in world affairs – explain variations in the diplomatic positions of these countries and in their participation in the regime led by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (DAC/OECD). The DAC functions as a “donors’ club” (Eyben, 2013) linked to an oligarchic (mini)multilateral institution: the OECD (also informally referred to as “the club of the rich”).

Countries such as Mexico and Turkey (both OECD members) show partially adherence to the regime, through “customizations” based on their identity as developing countries, opting, for example, not to participate in the DAC (Haug, 2020). Others, such as China and India, remain openly critical of the set of rules and instruments created by the “donors’ club” (Kim and Lightfoot, 2011). Brazil and other Latin American countries, such as Colombia, have an intermediate position between the two previous approaches: formally non-aligned with the DAC/OECD discourse and practices, but willing to establish a critical and constructive collaboration with “traditional donors” and their institutions. Despite these differences, most Southern partners (including the most skeptical ones) pursued a sort of *differentiated integration* (Waisbich, 2022) in the current IDC regime. While rejecting the label of “new donors”, they have nonetheless established critical, and to some extent propositional, conversations with the (soft law) norms and practices that guide the behavior of the major *development partners*. Such approach in the field of development cooperation reflects a broader paradigm of “moderately revisionist” international action by “geopolitically dissatisfied” Southern countries (Milani and Duarte, 2015, p. 54). This paradigm

found in emerging economies, such as Brazil, the political will, authority and capacity to openly question the rules of the game (Milhorance and Soule-Kohndou, 2017) as well as the diplomatic and institutional capacity to innovate and propose alternative policies, norms, and solutions (Duarte and Milani, 2021; Leveringhaus and Estrada, 2018).

This paper discusses Southern partners' quest for an autonomous, differentiated and propositional integration in the context of the growing debates on SSC measurement, using the Brazilian case as an example. Applying the concept of *active non-alignment*, the paper explores Brazil's participation in the debate on measurement, emphasizing how this apparently technical agenda reflects geopolitical and (inter)bureaucratic dynamics and conflicts in the production of transnational public policies, including foreign and development cooperation policies. Active non-alignment emerges as an unfolding of Latin American thinking on autonomy and bargaining processes applied to the current context of competition between the United States and China (Fortin, Heine and Ominami, 2021).<sup>2</sup> In a recent opinion piece, Lopes (2023) suggested applying this conceptual framework to Brazil's foreign policy in the current government led by Lula da Silva Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT).

The idea of active non-alignment is mobilized here to unpack Brazil's role in the IDC regime as a "Southern partner" from 2010 to the present moment. Such framework helps understanding the efforts of traditionally subordinated and peripheral countries, such as Brazil, to expand their room for manoeuvre (in a system crafted and led by so-called "rich countries/Northern countries", through organizations such as the OECD). It also helps understanding Southern partners' capacity to produce autonomous thinking and practices that better reflect the identity and aspirations of developing countries. Through active non-alignment, Southern partners, such as Brazil, seek to navigate a world of "variable geometries" (Heine, 2022) moving away from total conformity with what the DAC/OECD recommends for "donor countries", while avoiding absolute revisionist stances based on conceptions of a *radically/exceptionally different* global South. In practice, this means sometimes turning to OECD standards, other times rejecting them, without, however, automatically adhering to neither full conformity nor full rejection. As a concept, active non-alignment also allows us to combine analyses of agency and structure and to appreciate the production (not always easy or finished) of responses to transformations in the division of power in the international system. These responses translate into strategies that are at once defensive (or reactive) on the part of structurally subordinate countries, and propositional, aiming at symbolic, normative and political changes to this same system.

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2. The resumption of the idea of non-alignment has also guided analyses about the behavior of other developing countries, such as India, in the 21st century.

To analyze Brazil's trajectory in SSC measurement issues since 2010 in light of the concept of active non-alignment, this paper combines theoretical, conceptual and analytical tools from both foreign policy analysis and policy studies (Milani and Pinheiro, 2012). As a methodological strategy, the paper relies on a case study method backed by extensive empirical research, conducted between 2017 and 2023. The set of sources includes official documents, semi-structured and informal interviews. In total, more than 150 SSC, development cooperation, and foreign policy experts (linked to government institutions, international organizations, civil society organizations, and/or academics), mainly in Brazil, India, and China, were interviewed. Of this total, 76 interviewees work or have worked in Brazil-based agencies, including governmental bodies – i.e., Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty), the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (Agência Brasileira de Cooperação – ABC), and the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada – Ipea) –, non-governmental and academic organizations – i.e., Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), the University of Brasilia, the South-South Cooperation Research and Policy Centre (Articulação Sul), and the Institute of Socioeconomic Studies (Instituto de Estudos Socioeconômicos – Inesc) –, as well as offices of United Nations (UN) agencies in Brazil. In a complementary vein, the study also benefited from the author's participant observation in 30 national and international events related to SSC between 2017 and 2023, and insights from a professional immersion in the field of development cooperation since 2012.<sup>3</sup>

Given the accelerated geopolitical changes in the field of IDC, and in international politics more broadly, as well as the political shifts and instability in Brazil since the mid-2010s, this analytical effort to reconstruct public policy processes, positions, and instruments is inevitably incomplete and permeated by discontinuities and inconsistencies. Despite the limitations, it remains a valid attempt to understand the measurement agenda and its role in the IDC regime, as well as the consolidation and transformation of the SSC field in Brazil and worldwide in the last two decades.

The remainder of the paper is divided as follows: the first section reconstructs the genesis of the international debate on SSC measurement, providing a socio-political analysis of the evolution of this debate since 2010, as well as the positions of Southern partners on the topic. Next, it discusses the Brazilian response and the governmental and non-governmental initiatives that have emerged to account for a growing “duty to measure” SSC. The last section concludes the paper with reflections on the future of this debate.

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3. Of this total, 137 interviews were conducted during author's doctoral research between 2017-2020 at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, and 15 in the context of a follow-up postdoctoral research project between 2022-2023 at the University of Oxford, UK. See Waisbich (2021) for a discussion on the research methodology. The research received funding and support from the Department of Geography and Newnham College (at Cambridge), as well as the Department of Global and Area Studies and the John Fell Fund (at Oxford).

## 2 THE INTERNATIONAL DEBATE: THE EMERGENCE OF A “DUTY TO MEASURE” SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

This section discusses how the measurement of SSC has become not only an important dimension of international development debates in the last decade, but also a “duty” for major Southern partners. The measurement of Official Development Assistance (ODA), a concept coined by the OECD to define the contours of international development assistance provided by DAC member countries, or “donors”, is a constitutive element of the IDC system (Milani and Duarte, 2015; Waisbich, 2023). ODA related measurement norms and practices, conceived and refined since the late 1960s, can be seen through a set of (both formal and informal) transparency and accountability principles, rules, regulations, as well as mechanisms to guide the behavior of “donors” (traditionally from the North) and “beneficiaries” (traditionally from the South) in quantifying, evaluating, and reporting flows and results of cooperation initiatives. Supporting this set of norms, practices, and mechanisms is a broad infrastructure of systems, instruments and platforms, heavily based on data and information technology (Eyben et al., 2015; Honig and Weaver, 2019; Jensen and Winthereik, 2013).

There are numerous studies showing how measurement, quantification, and reporting of financial flows, as well as the evaluation of initiatives, make up a *way of governing* and, above all, *governing through data and numbers*<sup>4</sup> constitutive of the field and practices of the so-called “international aid/development industry” (Eyben et al., 2015; Honig, 2020). Such obsession with measuring flows and impact responds, firstly, to the expansion of the results and evidence-based public policy paradigms to improving government interventions in contexts of scarce public resources. Second, the expansion of measurement in IDC also responds to specific dynamics in the field, whereby bilateral cooperation agencies in developed countries – such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in the US or Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in Germany – publicize actions and outcomes to convince domestic audiences (political parties, interest groups, and the public) of the results of investing in initiatives implemented in “poor/Southern countries”. By doing so, they hope to ensure the continuity of public resources for fighting poverty and promoting development abroad (Yanguas, 2018). The construction of notions of “success” and “effectiveness” of interventions, to which the measurement of flows and results contributes, underlies the legitimacy of this sector (Mosse, 2005) as well as in the multiple reform agendas that emerged in the field since the 2000s, in the framework of the so-called Aid/Development Effectiveness Agenda.

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4. In the wake of Michel Foucault’s thinking on governmentality, numerous international development scholars explore the question of “governance by data and numbers” in multilateral processes and donor practice, see for example Fukuda-Parr and McNeill (2019).

Another feature of the ODA measurement system is interconnectedness with domestic and transnational political and power dynamics in donor countries and within the DAC/OECD. This is a constitutive relationship, well-studied by anthropologists and critical development studies scholars. From agreeing on a common definition of what constitutes ODA to setting up the Creditor Reporting System to compile aid-related financial flows, the resilience of the OECD aid measurement system (since its inception in the late 1960s to the present), can be explained by successive methodological renegotiations, alongside “selective normative adherences” and “tactical adjustments” by different donor countries (Kim and Lighfoot, 2011; Kobayashi, 2023; Waisbich, 2021). This includes attempts to inflate numbers by violating pre-established agreements on *what* can be counted as “development aid/assistance” (what modalities and what types of spending) and *how*. One example is the accounting of so-called “in-country” (inside a donor country) spending, such as refugee support or scholarships. In the ODA framework, there are limitations to qualifying in-country spending as “international aid”, yet in recent years, many countries (such as Turkey, Germany, and the United Kingdom) have repeatedly counted these in their reporting to the OECD.<sup>5</sup>

The ODA measurement system (and especially the OECD statistics), it is argued, are seldom tools built exclusively for regulating donor action and improving the international aid system, for instance, balancing geographic or sectoral allocation, or making visible the donor community’s compliance with the commitment to allocate 0.7% of gross national income annually to international development. Rather these are also ranking and competition tools among/between donors, which serve to highlight the “generosity” of (some) rich countries towards “the South” (Sears, 2019; Veen, 2011). Considering the multiple “tactical adjustments”, as well as the fact that almost all donor countries have been consistently failing to meet the 0.7 aid target, some treat the ubiquitous measurement systems and practices as a fiction (an accounting fiction, in the case of aid statistics). Such fiction supports the legitimization of the international development regime and “aid industry” (Eyben et al., 2015; Laporte, 2015), but contribute little to the improvement of cooperation policies in donor countries or to better development indicators in the poorest countries.

In the words of Pezzini, heterodox economist and former director of the OECD Development Centre: “we must be able to measure what we value and not only value what we can measure”.<sup>6</sup> His provocation certainly alludes to the inherent pitfalls of international cooperation measurement practices, especially

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5. Several Southern partners, however, value these types of modality and have sought to integrate them into their definitions of what counts as SSC. Brazil also accounts for them in its official Cobradi report (section 3).

6. Speech given at a think tank 20 event during the Indian presidency of the Group of Twenty (G20) (Bhopal, India, January 2023).

when these rely on an excessive “trust in the objectivity of numbers” (Porter, 1995). It also alludes to heated debates in the field of development, of special interest to Latin American countries, on the limitations of metrics such as gross domestic product (GDP), and on the shortcomings of the “graduation” of official development assistance by middle-income countries, whose journey towards inclusive and sustainable development remains fraught with persistent challenges, including the ongoing struggle against poverty and inequality.

Given the importance of measurement in development and development cooperation, it is not surprising Southern partners, such as Brazil, have faced mounting pressure (mostly external, but also internal) to measure and publicize their cooperation flows, and to conform to the rules of the game and to the expected behavior standards ruling major actors in this field. Different types of conformity pressure, can be observed, since the early 2000s, in policy dialogues on SSC measurement held by the DAC/OECD and its members, capacity building initiatives promoted by traditional donors and UN agencies to socialize Southern governments and experts to the grammar of measurement (Esteves, 2018; Waisbich, 2021), and attempts to include the topic on the multilateral agenda, including at the UN high level meetings on SSC in Nairobi (in 2009) and at the 2019 Buenos Aires Plan of Action Plus 40 (BAPA+40), in Buenos Aires (Waisbich, 2022).

In parallel, the pressure to make SSC financial flows and impact transparent has also increased inside the largest and most active Southern partners, although with little salience in the public sphere (when compared, for example, to the visibility of this agenda in the media and parliaments of “traditional Northern/Western donors”). Such internal (or domestic) pressure to measure cooperation in Southern countries comes mainly from specialists (in the so-called “epistemic/policy communities”). It reflects moreover the growing consolidation of SSC as a policy and political field inside major SSC champions, and the growing engagement of national governmental and non-governmental actors, including bureaucracies coordinating or implementing cooperation initiatives, research centers and civil society organizations (Westhuizen and Milani, 2019; Waisbich, 2020).

It is precisely this set of internal/domestic and external/international pressures, throughout the 2010s, that ultimately raised the salience of SSC measurement (quantification, evaluation, and reporting of flows and results) in IDC specialized debates and allowed for the emergence of national, regional, and multilateral experimentation with SSC measurement by government entities, as well as by academics, and civil society. What has followed is quite revealing. On the one hand, the pressure to conform to a “duty to measure,” albeit symbolic,



since it is anchored in a low-intensity and not very binding international regime (Milani, 2018), generated an initial discomfort in the major Southern partners. On the other hand, the measurement of SSC flows and results has progressively come to be seen, especially after the adoption of the SDGs at the UN in 2015, by governments and experts from the South less as an imposition or obligation, and more as an opportunity.<sup>7</sup>

How, then, to characterize this uncomfortable but strategic “duty to measure” that currently falls upon Brazil and other cooperating countries from the South? Firstly, by treating certain developing countries as “new donors” and SSC flows as “financial contributions to the implementation of the SDGs”, actors in the field (both the DAC/OECD and the governments of OECD member countries, as well as civil society and UN agencies active in the field) start demanding from Southern partners a degree of adherence to the parameters and practices already agreed upon among the members of the OECD “donors’ club”. Integrating the most active Southern partners, especially China, India and Brazil, into the existing regime then became a necessity of the first order as to guarantee the coherence, integrity, and legitimacy of the system as a whole. The socialization of the major Southern partners (among them Brazil) to the existing regime also aimed at controlling and disciplining them, as was previously done with other members of the OECD/DAC, especially Japan (Bracho, 2017; Kim and Lighfoot, 2011; Kobayashi, 2023). In other words, by boosting the SSC measurement agenda, actors in the field sought to regulate the behavior of Southern partners based on a set of expectations about what it means to be a “good donor/development cooperation partner,” which include the “duty to measure” cooperation flows and impact (Waisbich, 2023). Not surprisingly, the debate on measurement becomes then perceived, especially by diplomats in Southern partners, as (yet another) attempt by traditional donors to coerce them or, in the words of the then Indian ambassador to the UN, impose a “straitjacket” (India, 2019). This is hence the contours of the geopolitical unease related to the measurement agenda for Southern partners, which, in many ways, is shaped by broader disputes for status and recognition in the international arena (Reus-Smit and Zarakol, 2023).

In parallel, certain governments and some of the (incipient, but growing) political and epistemic community of SSC inside certain Southern partners, including Brazil, started to look favorably on the adherence to the rules of the game and “good practices” in terms of transparency and accountability. For them, measuring SSC flows would make them visible and show the “unique”, “distinctive” contribution of Southern-led development cooperation to the SDGs.

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7. In another paper, I characterize this discomfort as an important feature of what I call a “measurement paradox” in SSC, given the inherent technical and political tensions embedded in the act of measuring and reporting public policies, and in particular foreign policy (Waisbich, 2022).

It could also help demystifying myths and generating alternative narratives about SSC practices, based on information and evidence, and even contribute to the improvement of the field, internally to each country and as a whole (Escallón, 2019; Esteves and Klingebiel, 2018; Waisbich, Silva and Suyama, 2017). In the words of Corrêa (2022) from ABC: “It is better that developing countries take the lead in the development of a method to quantify SSC considering its particularities, rather than a void that will be filled by other international actors, through approximations”.

Without abandoning the geopolitical unease, the above-mentioned speech of the Brazilian representative illustrates the sense of opportunity embedded in the measurement agenda. If led by Southern countries, measurement efforts could indeed serve as an instrument for the differentiated ascension of Brazil (and other Southern partners) to the list of major players in the field (Waisbich, 2022). But what exactly constitutes this continuous quest by countries like Brazil for *differentiation* and, in the terms of this paper, for an *active non-alignment* in the SSC measurement agenda? I argue here that active non-alignment in the context of development cooperation measurement is characterized, on the one hand, by the active vocalization of a political-normative discontent, materialised in the repeated criticism of the mechanisms and metrics developed by the “club of donor countries” in the DAC/OECD and, on the other, by a proactive approach to the issue, through a search for autonomous and differentiated solutions to the “problem” of measuring development cooperation flows and impact.

Specifically with regard to the political-normative dispute, one observes, in the wake of the narratives that have permeated the resurgence of SSC since the 2000s (Mawdsley, 2012) an emphasis on the *difference* between “South-South cooperation” and “international aid” and a refusal to simply adopt existing metrics and tools developed in the framework of “traditional”/North-South cooperation. Such tools would be, in the words of experts from the South, not only inadequate to capture the nature and impact of South-South exchanges, but would also reduce SSC to financial flows, weakening precisely its differential, potential, and complementarity *vis-à-vis* international aid (Corrêa, 2017; Escallón, 2019; UNOSSC and UNDP, 2021). Far from exclusive to measurement, the *logic of difference* and *differentiation* is a central point in practical and symbolic disputes between South-South and North-South cooperation systems (Esteves and Assunção, 2014; Milani and Duarte, 2015).

Faced with external pressures from all actors involved in IDC, a set of diplomatic and para-diplomatic responses by Southern partners emerged during the 2010s. Such responses range from reluctance and resistance (as in the Indian case) to experimentation and institutional innovation (as in the Brazilian case, discussed in the next section), alternating between reactive-defensive and

constructive-propositive postures. Such variation can be observed between countries, but also to some extent within countries, with (inter)bureaucratic disputes and divergences between political groups, also visible in the Brazilian case, as I will show.

Due to the fragmented nature of the IDC regime (Esteves and Assunção, 2014; Milani and Duarte, 2015), characterized by an OECD-UN divide and the rise of diverse political dialogue spaces like the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) and the G20, countries select arenas for action and influence based on their preferences and political calculations. This is precisely why, despite the countless debates and experimentation efforts on a national, regional – especially in Latin America, under the aegis of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Ibero-American General Secretariat (Secretaria-Geral Ibero-Americana – SEGIB) –, and multilateral arenas over the last 10-15 years, progress in agreeing on frameworks and creating common metrics to quantify and assess SSC has been slow (Waisbich, 2022). In an increasingly post-Western world marked by growing emphasis on pluralism and the right to difference in international negotiations (Acharya and Buzan, 2019; Reus-Smit and Zarakol, 2023), aiming at consensus and common arrangements between Northern and Southern countries, but also within the group of developing countries, is increasingly complex, if not impractical.

However, after intense debate and multiple impasses in the multilateral arena, in 2022, a breakthrough was achieved for the quantification of SSC within the framework of the statistical working group for the SDGs at the UN (IAEG-SDGs). National experts sitting in this body in charge of creating data collection templates for all SDGs indicators finally agreed on a roadmap for indicator 17.3.1 of the agenda (namely, foreign direct investment (FDI), official development assistance and SSC as a proportion of total national budget).<sup>8</sup> Although the submission, compilation and publication of the data *per se* is still pending, political agreements were reached on three main points: i) SSC measurement efforts will be led by Southern countries; ii) reporting will be voluntary; and iii) the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) will be in charge of data management. Brazil has volunteered to be one of the countries that will test the methodology between 2022-2023 alongside China, Colombia, and Mexico.

While modest, this breakthrough illustrates the continuous technical-diplomatic action of the Brazilian government, especially the ABC, and, to a lesser extent, the Ipea, to move from criticism to proposition, so that the reservations raised by Brazil and other Southern countries regarding the limiting character of

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8. See the set of objectives and indicators available at: <https://www.ipea.gov.br/ods/index.html>.

monetary quantification of SSC are in fact incorporated in the construction of alternative measurement instruments for Southern-led development cooperation (Waisbich, 2022), at least in the context of the SDGs. However, it remains to be seen what else will be done so that the dialogue at the UN, and in other international IDC-related forums, will be of a two-way adaptation process, of “mutual adjustments”, an expression used by Ipea researchers, also on the part of traditional donors (Ferreira et al., 2020, p. 12). Although formulated as a demand on the part of the Brazilian government when negotiating the measurement of its cooperation, “mutual adjustments” have been increasingly frequent in the field, illustrating ongoing dynamics of *mutual socialization* and *circulation of models* (Waisbich, 2023) between “traditional donors” and “Southern partners”.

Finally, while recent negotiations have enabled the emergence of acceptable solutions for the integration of “Southern perspectives” into the existing IDC measurement systems, power dynamics still strongly shape these debates. This is visible, for example, in the asymmetries of political, material, and symbolic resources *between* “traditional donors” and “Southern partners”, but also *within* the global South (between the large emerging countries and the other developing countries). It is also visible in the fact that the current negotiations have done little to change the primacy of “governance by numbers,” in which measurement practices do not always contribute to improving the promotion of global development, but rather serve to legitimize the “generous” efforts of certain “donor” countries. Although the arrival of “new contributors” from the developing world (especially from the large economies of the South) embodies a greater plurality of voices and aspirations, the low presence of African voices in these debates is telling. Africa is the continent that concentrates the largest number of low-income countries and “beneficiaries” of global efforts to promote development. The continuous marginalisation of African voices is therefore an indicator of the tensions and limits of this agenda in the broader context of the effectiveness of efforts undertaken in the name of international development.

### **3 THE “BRAZILIAN RESPONSE”: DIPLOMATIC ACTIVISM, INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION AND SOCIAL MOBILIZATION**

This section delves into the dynamics and disputes surrounding the agenda and production of SSC measurement policy responses in the Brazilian case. The analysis here is done by combining three analytical lenses – the diplomatic, the (inter)bureaucratic, and state-society relations – in order to provide a multifaceted panorama of the “Brazilian response” to the uncomfortable imperative of measuring its IDC.

### 3.1 Diplomatic activism

Brazil's diplomatic position on the issue, expressed mainly through the Itamaraty-affiliated ABC, reveals a diplomatic continuity, since 2010, with the principled and pragmatic position, discussed above, of valuing the multilateral debate on measurement as well as the peculiarities of countries from the global South as "development partners". Nevertheless, upon closer examination, one can also discern the ramifications brought about by shifts in power at the federal government level, along with the diverse perspectives surrounding Brazil's international identity as a "Southern" nation and its role as a development partner (Milani, Pinheiro and Lima, 2017; Waisbich, 2020) during the specified period. The variance, more or less explicit depending on the topic, materializes in distinct currents of diplomatic thinking, as well as in the programs and governing mode of political parties more in tune with pragmatism and rapprochement with the US, the West, and the OECD or, conversely, with autonomy and partnership diversification, especially in the South-South axis.<sup>9</sup> Although not always explicit, divergences about the value of South-South relations/SSC to Brazil and the position the country should have in the IDC system shape the diplomatic dynamics and the development of SSC measurement tools analyzed here.

Throughout the period, despite fluctuations and even political retraction of the South-South agenda especially from 2015/2016 (Cesarino, 2019; Marcondes and Mawdsley, 2017), Brazil has maintained a prominent position in the multilateral debate on measurement issues, especially at the UN. In the early 2010s, the country led debates on the matter within the Core Group of Southern Partners (a forum established at the UN to bring together Southern partners) with a proposal for a Reference Platform and a common methodology for recording exchange flows between developing countries (Corrêa, 2017). The proposal ended up not advancing, partly due to lack of diplomatic energy on the Brazilian side to build consensus, but also because the forum itself was not institutionalized (Silva et al., 2016). In the years that followed, Brazil maintained active dialogue with the working group in charge of creating indicators and data collection methodologies to measure the implementation of SDGs, through a new statistical structure called Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD). It did so at a time when other emerging countries, such as China, India, and South Africa, preferred a more antagonistic, sceptical, or disinterested stance due to beliefs that TOSSD was under the orbit of influence of the DAC/OECD (Besharati, 2017; Bracho, 2017). In parallel, Brazil also actively participated in the debate on measuring SSC within UNCTAD and regional bodies, such as

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9. Broadly speaking, the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira – PSDB) and the far right-wing coalition that ruled the country between 2019 and 2022 championed a vision of a greater alignment to the Western world, and the US. The PT, and other left-wing parties, on the other hand, are closer to the autonomist thinking.

ECLAC and SEGIB (Corrêa, 2022). In 2018, in preparation for the following year's BAPA+40 Conference in Buenos Aires (and as input for the Brazilian measurement initiatives in gestation at the time, discussed below), ABC hosted an international seminar on Methodologies and Instruments for Measuring International Technical Cooperation with the participation of representatives from different countries and international organizations.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the Brazilian government continuous – albeit oscillating in intensity – engagement in strengthening a Southern voice in several measurement debates, the country has maintained a constant dialogue with the OECD: both in technical and political terms (especially after the Brazil's request to join the organization in 2016). Such impetus to convince the OECD of Brazil's application to become a member has lost strength since PT's return to power, in 2023.

As both Itamaraty and ABC are currently rethinking structures and portfolios, as to reflect a new foreign agenda in the making, what can be anticipated for the coming years, regardless of the outcome of Brazil's application to join the OECD? On the one hand, the countless technical-political controversies that have dominated the diplomatic debate in recent decades seem to have partially dissipated, in part because the issue was strategically removed (thanks to the efforts of countries like India) from the multilateral political agenda during BAPA+40 (Waisbich, 2022) and treated as a matter to be pursued “voluntarily by countries of the South and in accordance with their capacities and national specificities” (United Nations, 2019). Added to this “nationalization of the issue”, and its displacement from the “more political” high-level arenas to the so-called “more technical” arenas in the UN System (namely, statistical bodies), is the loss of salience and relevance of the problem of measuring SDGs in the course of IDC-related debates in a context of multiple crises. To some extent, the sense of urgency imposed by the climate emergency, the covid-19 pandemic, and the rise in international energy and food prices in recent years have shifted multilateral debates and foreign policy priorities in the major Southern partners.

While negotiations on definitions and metrics for SSC are far from over, the international debate on measurement will most certainly follow its course away from the spotlight and “noisy politicization” (Waisbich, 2021) that accompanied the issue in the 2010s. Even further away from the spotlight, but no less important, is the set of Brazilian policy responses to the “duty to measure” and domestic disputes around experiments with measuring SSC, which will be the subject of the next two sections.

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10. See the report of the seminar on the ABC website, available at: <https://www.gov.br/abc/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/abc-organiza-seminario-internacional-sobre-mensuracao-da-cooperacao-tecnica>.

### 3.2 Institutional innovation: the case of the Cobradi project

The Brazilian Cooperation for International Development Project (Cooperação Brasileira para o Desenvolvimento Internacional – Cobradi) is the first, most robust, and long-lasting institutional innovation by the Brazilian government to respond to the imperatives of the IDC measurement agenda. Launched in 2010, following a request from then president Lula da Silva (which at the time was finishing his second term) to Ipea, Cobradi remains the best materialization of the official effort to systematize and publish statistics on Brazil’s international cooperation. In addition to Cobradi (led by Ipea in partnership with ABC), other innovations include the successive evaluations of Brazilian technical cooperation for international development, led by ABC and UN agencies, alongside independent experts (discussed below), and numerous smaller ABC-led initiatives: the project database, the International Development Cooperation Observatory, and the reference platform for measuring SSC flows (mentioned above). Some of these initiatives show continuity (such as the project database). Others, such as the reference platform and the observatory (the latter launched in 2022, but with little traction to date), have lost strength or were incorporated into other efforts.<sup>11</sup>

The Cobradi initiative, by contrast, has survived the test of time. It is the first compilation of this nature among Southern partners. Conceived, initially, as a survey of the federal government’s expenditures on international cooperation, Cobradi sought to provide a “Brazilian response” to the need to measure and publicize country’s SSC in an autonomous and distinct manner. The search for a “national solution” was particularly important for the Brazilian government, which considered the DAC/OECD-led ODA accounting logic (based on the idea of “contribution to international development relative to national income”) and its metrics as “foreign to the Brazilian reality” (Lima and Pereira Junior, 2019, p. 19). According to this view, adopting a solution developed “by others” would make Brazilian SSC – a foreign policy instrument seen as increasingly important to the country – so small (in monetary terms) that it would become invisible in the total account of financial flows destined to international cooperation around the globe, as well as in the Brazil’s own public spending accounts.

This is the reason why, from the beginning, the Cobradi team at Ipea sought not only to create new methodologies for accounting the “Brazilian effort”, for example through the technical hours of public servants allocated to international cooperation activities, but also to include qualitative descriptions of cooperation practices. Such descriptions allowed the Brazilian government to explain what the various national implementing institutions were doing rather than simply

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11. See the initiatives’ websites available at: <https://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/cobradi>; <http://www.abc.gov.br/Projetos/pesquisa>; <https://ocid.ibict.br/>, respectively.

account for the resources invested.<sup>12</sup> When reflecting on the Cobradi project, its main operators until 2020 affirm their intention to keep the official accounting within the established boundaries of the IDC regime and, at the same time, develop practical solutions consistent with the country's budgetary reality (Lima and Pereira Junior, 2019). Such a compromise solution, and a Brazilian one, reflects, therefore, the search for active non-alignment. In parallel, the Cobradi project went further and incorporated South-North cooperation flows, especially in the case of Brazilian scientific-technological cooperation, in an unprecedented effort to make visible the contribution of Southern countries to the development of the North.<sup>13</sup>

If, as a tool to measure development cooperation, the Cobradi was conceived – and still functions – as an alternative policy solution, designed and implemented autonomously by a Southern partner, and a tool to show Brazil's growing role in the field of IDC; as a public policy instrument, the Cobradi experience unavoidably reflects its constitutive technical-political disputes. Its construction is filled with advances and challenges, as well as changes in direction and re-adjustments. Here, I argue that these dynamics result from technical-political negotiations within and between bureaucracies: at the most strategic level (within Ipea and between the institution and its counterparts in the Presidency and ABC/Itamaraty) and at the most operational level (between the project team and the various cooperation-implementing agencies, to collect data on Brazil's cooperation expenditures and actions). These multiple negotiations permeate the entire trajectory of the Cobradi enterprise, since its conception, in a context marked by power shifts and high intensity staff turnover, as well as successive waves of political and economic instability.

Take, for example, the successive changes across the reports in the definition of “Brazilian international cooperation”, the list and nomenclature of the different cooperation modalities accounted for, or the indicators used to describe and quantify them in the different reports. Besides the challenges generated by the successive conceptual-methodological changes to the dialogue with the national implementing agencies that report on their cooperation activities to Ipea and to the very usage of the historical series of data by different audiences. In this paper, however, I emphasise the way these successive changes reflect the very negotiated process of building this public policy instrument. As such, changes to Cobradi indicate not only a continuous institutional learning process of Ipea (and the Brazilian State more broadly), but also the technical-political divergences that permeate this type of effort. As mentioned, the process of building Cobradi was

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12. Interviews with four Ipea researchers in Brasília, 2018; Brasília, 2018; remote interview, 2018; remote interview, 2023.

13. The author thanks the reviewers for their suggestion to include this point.



filled with disagreements among Ipea researchers directly involved in the project and between them and other peers at Ipea as well as ABC representatives. These disagreements arose in relation to defining the scope of Brazilian international cooperation, vis-à-vis the established labels of both “South-South cooperation” and “development aid”. Furthermore, there were differences in opinion regarding the approach to measurement, with some favoring quantification while others advocated for more qualitative analyses. Additionally, there were debates on what aspects should be taken into account and how to account for them. For instance, there were discussions on how to incorporate trilateral cooperation initiatives with international organizations or the export credit operations of the Brazilian Development Bank (Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social – BNDES).<sup>14</sup> Far from being purely technical matters, these issues reflect broader political disagreements, mentioned above, about Brazil’s international identity and foreign policy.

Besides these technical-political methodology debates, the politics behind the Cobradi project are also visible in the oscillating political support it received from the highest echelons of the federal government throughout the period (table 1). As well as in the different attempts at not only profoundly reforming the tool but also creating parallel instruments to publicize and account for Brazilian cooperation, led by other agencies, in a clear sign of fragmentation or overlapping efforts, if not competition between agencies. Between 2016-2018, in parallel to the work of the Cobradi team at Ipea of collecting cooperation-related data and publishing periodic reports, a new partnership was forged between ABC and the Strategic Affairs Secretariat of the Presidency<sup>15</sup> to radically reform, and eventually even replace Cobradi. Far from being consensual, for some, this reform would involve emphasizing more the quantification dimension of flows in the survey, including by moving closer to the international metrics adopted by the OECD, and for others, it was about broadening the types of flows collected (including other actors and other modalities). In common, the government specialists interviewed believed that Cobradi should be improved to become more strategic and “useful”.<sup>16</sup>

Several of these changes were in fact carried out in 2020 (as we will see below), but it is important to highlight that some of them were already being discussed years before, illustrating the inter-bureaucratic disputes around the Cobradi as a public policy instrument. Table 1 illustrates the trajectory of Cobradi, which, although sustained, had its periodicity compromised and its prestige

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14. Interviews with Ipea researchers in Brasília, 2018; Brasília, 2018; remote interview, 2018; remote interview, 2023.

15. These efforts took place in the framework of a strategic project of the Presidency called “Brasil Três Tempos: 2007, 2015 e 2022”, started in 2004 with the support of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

16. Interview with Ipea researchers (remote interview, 2018; remote interview, 2023).

downgraded in the *Esplanada*, as shown in the authorship of the prefaces to the different editions.

TABLE 1  
The Cobradi project (2010-2022)

Edition	Year of publication	Years covered	Number of institutions consulted <sup>1</sup>	President of Brazil at the time of publication	Author of the preface
1	2010	2005-2009	66	Lula da Silva	Lula da Silva, president of Brazil.
2	2013	2010	91	Dilma Rousseff	Antonio Patriota, minister of foreign affairs.
3	2016	2011-2013	95	Michel Temer	Ernesto Lozardo, president of Ipea.
4	2018	2014-2016	126	Michel Temer	Ernesto Lozardo, president of Ipea.
5	2020	2017-2018	243	Jair Bolsonaro	Ivan Oliveira, director of international studies (Dinte/Ipea).
6	2022	2019-2020	163	Jair Bolsonaro	Erik Figueiredo, president of Ipea.
7	2022	2021	263	Jair Bolsonaro	N/A <sup>2</sup>

Source: Editions of the Cobradi report (until Mar./2023).

Author's elaboration.

Notes: <sup>1</sup> The number of institutions consulted is higher than the number of answers received. In the last editions Ipea provided both numbers. For the 2019-2020 edition, 71 responses were received, while for the 2021 edition, 75.

<sup>2</sup> Until the publication of this paper the preliminary version of the Report for the year 2021 made available by Ipea did not contain a preface.

Obs.: Dinte – Diretoria de Estudos Internacionais.

However, and similarly to the trajectory of ODA statistics, the resilience of Cobradi is also explained by its successive adjustments and exchanges. In this sense, the 2019-2020 edition, published in 2022, constitutes an important juncture in the project's trajectory, with the adoption of a new methodology to approximate, or "converge," in the words of Ipea (2022, p. 21) with the TOSSD metric within the scope of the SDGs at the UN. As mentioned earlier, the notions of approximation and convergence have broader political implications in these debates. Especially since 2016, the federal government has given signs in this direction, with trials and propositions within Ipea, the Presidency, and Itamaraty, of measurement initiatives complementary to (and sometimes competing with) Cobradi. The turning point finally occurs within the Cobradi project itself, starting in 2020, and materializes in the survey for the years 2019-2020.

Seeking to safeguard a margin of manoeuvre, Ipea characterizes convergence with TOSSD as partial, based on a new conceptual framework and methodology "beyond North-South dualities" (Ipea, 2022, p. 40). On the one hand, it announces reservations regarding TOSSD accounting parameters as well as the areas in which the country intends to go beyond, and account differently (e.g., in refugee support and educational cooperation). It also announces its intention to measure "other things", based on the "complex systems" approach (characterized

by being open, interactive, and adaptive to the people and contexts in which they develop) that enable capacity development processes through knowledge networks and institutional partnerships.

If the reservations and adjustments between Cobradi and TOSSD point to attempts to safeguard an identity of Southern partner, the work with complex systems beckons, in turn, to heterodox models of measuring IDC, rejecting the experimental/quasi-experimental paradigms that assume the linearity of development processes instead of working with complex and long-term ones. By doing so, Ipea researchers echoed the work of independent Brazilian SSC experts (from research institutions like Articulação Sul and the BRICS Policy Centre), who had been advocating for evaluations of Brazilian SSC initiatives through contribution rather than attribution analysis (ABC, UNDP and Articulação Sul, 2022; BRICS Policy Center and Articulação Sul, 2017). Another recent change is the reinforcement of the commitment to the principles of open government and open data, this time beckoning academics and civil society, who have demanded access to Cobradi micro-data since the first editions, as discussed in the next section.

In the end, from a public policy analysis perspective, the trajectory and successive changes that Cobradi has undergone as a transparency and accountability “instrument” and “infrastructure” reveal the delicate relationship between technical and policy matters in the case of SSC measuring tools. On the one hand, after over a decade since the Cobradi project was launched, Brazil’s effort to publicize and measure its engagement in IDC is not only consolidated but also resilient: it is now a State rather than a governmental effort. On the other hand, as the Brazilian State’s response to the “measurement problem” and as a public policy instrument, the multiple changes in categories, ways of accounting for them, and data collection strategies reflect the dynamics of a disputed political and public policy field in Brazil and around the world. As such, from a foreign policy analysis perspective, the methodological changes proposed for the sixth edition are an important milestone in an ongoing debate about Brazil’s participation in the IDC regime. As we show here, behind the resilience of the policy and epistemic communities (inside and outside Ipea and the government) in “reforming” and “improving” the tool there were negotiations over technical-political decisions. This includes whether or not to use terms and concepts that are convergent with the current IDC regime, and whether or not trying to create exceptionally unique tools (or “jaboticaba methodologies”, in the words of one interviewee), incapable of dialoguing with neither the DAC/OECD member countries nor with other Southern partners.<sup>17</sup> It also includes negotiations over Brazilian domestic and foreign policy stances, over what dimensions of Brazil’s

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17. Interview with ABC representative (Brasília, 2018).

development cooperation (initiatives, partner countries, national institutions involved, sectors and shared policies, amount of public spending etc.) should be rendered transparent (over what should be emphasized and what should be concealed or minimized). This is precisely why the tool has generated and will continue to generate debates and disputes within and outside the government about the choices made by its proponents, as discussed below.

### **3.3 Beyond the Cobradi: gaps, inconsistencies and civil society measurement “from below”**

Although celebrated by the community of experts in government and civil society engaged in the Brazilian cooperation agenda since the early 2000s, Cobradi received a number of criticisms not only inside the government, as mentioned before, but also by outside actors in civil society (Leite et al., 2014). As discussed, in the view of other government agencies, and even of some other Ipea researchers, the survey model adopted by the Cobradi team until 2020 was not very useful, besides being very laborious. In some regards, Cobradi was also a politically sensitive exercise, placing Brazil in an international ranking in which the country would not be able to be among the top performers and, at the same time, exposing the federal government to domestic criticism for investing in other countries instead of allocating these resources domestically (Waisbich, 2020).

In the eyes of civil society actors, understood here as an umbrella term for several distinct types of non-state actors (social movements, non-governmental organizations, and universities and research centers) and their forms of action, engagement, and dialogue with public authorities,<sup>18</sup> Cobradi presented important shortcomings and limitations in its comprehensiveness, periodicity, and timeliness (Milani, 2019; Waisbich, Silva and Suyama, 2017). In fact, as illustrated in the previous section, the pace of publication of the first six editions (surveying Brazilian cooperation between 2005 and 2020) was slow, with a gap of more than two years between reports. As mentioned, dynamics inherent to the construction of public policy instruments, in particular transparency and accountability ones, are at the root of these limitations. First, the need for the Cobradi team at Ipea to convince implementing agencies to submit their data on the activities and spending with international cooperation by filling questionnaires made data gathering very time-consuming. It also made the whole enterprise highly dependent on both implementing agencies' will to provide information and publicize their own cooperation actions and on Ipea's editorial decisions regarding what to include and how. Second, up until 2022, the Cobradi project only partially adhered to the highest standards of transparency and open government. The data provided

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18. For further discussion of the plurality of actors that make up the category of civil society active in SSC issues in Brazil, see Berrón and Brant (2015) and Waisbich and Cabral (2023).

lacked the necessary levels of disaggregation and openness, and thus fell short of the expectations held by academics and interest groups seeking to monitor expenditures in a more consistent and systematic manner.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, as alluded before, non-governmental experts also raised concerns about the “invisibility” in the Cobradi report of certain modalities and instruments. This includes regional integration and financial cooperation initiatives (including debt forgiveness and disbursements made by national public banks, such as BNDES, Banco do Brasil or Caixa Federal) (Cabral, 2011; Articulação Sul and Oxfam Brasil, 2018; Leite et al., 2014). Even though Cobradi features a category of “contributions to international organizations” that discloses information on official contributions made to multilateral development banks (i.e., World Bank, New Development Bank, etc.), extra-budgetary operations such as credit lines for exports of goods and services made by the BNDES were never included in the Ipea survey. BNDES Exim-like operations grew until 2016 and then stagnated given the repercussions of Lava Jato Operation (Waisbich, 2020). Cobradi researchers interviewed confirm their past internal efforts to include BNDES export operations in past surveys. Still according to them, BNDES export credit operations were not included in the reports for two reasons. First, lack of (technical and political) consensus among experts on whether or not export credits should be considered by the Brazilian government part of its “SSC portfolio”. Second, whether BNDES loans had been made at more favorable rates or conditions (i.e., whether they had the *concessional/grant-like element* in the DAC/OECD vocabulary). Until the present date Cobradi reports do not account for any BNDES operation.<sup>20</sup>

The truth is that neither BNDES nor any other government agency has ever conceptually framed export credit operations as part of Brazil’s “development cooperation/development financing”. In this sense, the Brazilian identity as a Southern partner differs from the one adopted by other Southern countries like India or China for whom the separation between the commercial and concessional dimensions of South-South exchanges is counterproductive, and undermines the spirit of South-South relations as multidimensional and mutually beneficial (win-win) (Waisbich, 2021). This position is reflected in Chinese and Indian narratives about their identity as “Southern partners” and in their strong defence of extending the UN principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) to the field of IDC. For them, the “duty to measure” *concessional/grant-like*

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19. Interviews with Ipea researchers (Brasília, 2018; remote interview, 2018).

20. Despite the controversies regarding the inclusion of information about the BNDES in Cobradi, it is important to mention the bank’s own transparency efforts to publicise its export credit operations. Such tools are the result of the dynamics of political, democratic and social control and pressures on the bank arising from the increased scrutiny of the bank’s activities resulting from the Lava Jato context, and not from the more diffuse pressures directed at the federal government within the framework of its performance as a “South partner” (Waisbich, 2020).

flows stems from an accountability to the commitment made by “rich countries” to allocate 0.7% of their gross national income to international aid, an “obligation” that does not exist in South-South relations (Besharati, 2017; Bracho, 2017; Waisbich, 2023).

Given these and other blind spots in Brazil’s official SSC data and evidence tools, as well as the steady expansion of civil society engagement in SSC (in response to the government’s own activism and protagonism in the agenda), non-state actors have also sought ways to fill some gaps in “information and analysis about Brazil as a Southern partner” (Waisbich, Silva and Suyama, 2017, p. 2). In addition to the production of academic knowledge, based on official data, it is important to highlight civil society production of policy knowledge about measuring SSC, or else, the independent measuring done by civil society actors. Examples include external evaluations of Brazil’s bilateral or trilateral technical cooperation projects commissioned by public institutions and international organizations to independent research centers and experts. Among the initiatives evaluated one finds the network of vocational training centers in other developing countries from Latin America and Africa, bilateral cooperation projects on social policies, and multi-country technical cooperation initiatives in agriculture (notably in the cotton sector in Africa). One also finds evaluations of several trilateral partnerships with international organizations such as the Center of Excellence against Hunger (with the World Food Program – WFP) and the trilateral SSC programs with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (Costa, 2018). Another example is civil society monitoring of the activities of Purchase from Africans for Africa (PAA Africa), a partnership between Brazil, FAO and WFP with five African countries inspired by the Brazilian food acquisition program (Miranda, Klug and Braz, 2015). This was done under the umbrella of the National Council for Food Security and Nutrition (Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional – Consea), by organizations sitting in the council. Given the short duration of PAA Africa (from 2012 to 2016), as well as the attempts from 2016 onwards to dismantle and even dissolve Consea (which eventually happened in 2019) this partnership modality was quite one-off. However, it may re-emerge again given the reinstallation of Consea, in 2023, and the new impetus to food and nutrition security cooperation by the current government.

Apart from studies and evaluations, for a short period between 2016 and 2018, civil society groups attempted to create autonomous measuring tools based on alternative methodologies to those adopted by Cobradi at the time. This is the case of the project Looking for South-South Cooperation in the Federal Budget, developed by Articulação Sul and Oxfam Brazil (2018). The proposed innovation was to use public budget information systems, especially the Federal

Government Integrated Financial Administration System (Sistema Integrado de Administração Financeira – SIAFI), to capture cooperation actions in open public budget information systems in a different and complementary way to Cobradi. The use of SIAFI was considered, at the time, as promising to solve the issue of comprehensiveness and timeliness and eventually automation in data collection, when compared to the questionnaire-based strategy adopted by the Cobradi project at the time. Additionally, by using existing official budgetary tools, the initiative also made it possible to improve the set of information related to international cooperation/SSC in open public planning and budget systems, such as SIAFI (Articulação Sul and Oxfam Brasil, 2018).

As in the case of official initiatives, measurement efforts led by civil society also ran into technical-political challenges (conceptual-methodological, technological, financial, and political dialogue with the government): what in the official budget should be accounted for as SSC? Which flows and modalities? Can one use public budget information systems even when these tools do not present disaggregated spending for all cooperation initiatives or modalities? Although the proposed tool has not actually been implemented, this civil society initiative to create monitoring methodologies via public budget has been publicly presented to Ipea and ABC and documented as a case study for civil society in other Southern partners, including India (Mitra, 2018). One notes, moreover, that using budget data collected through SIAFI was a marginal strategy in the Cobradi project at the time but has since become the core of the new 2020 methodological strategy. Such convergence indicates the capacity for methodological innovation, “from below”, by civil society actors, and the potential for collaboration between government and non-state actors on these issues in the future.<sup>21</sup> In fact, within the framework of the new cycle (2021-2024), Ipea opened public consultation for the preliminary version of the latest Cobradi (published in December 2022), showing a renewed openness to dialogue.

Although distinct from government initiatives, the actions carried out by Brazilian civil society listed here share the same principles of valuing a distinctive element of SSC. They recognize, for example, that the characterization of Brazilian cooperation, as well as its effectiveness and impact, does not depend on the measurement of exclusively financial contributions, and they also echo a strong rejection of the agenda and measurement tools established by traditional North-South cooperation actors, who invariably end up comparing (negatively) SSC to ODA. In this sense, they sought, in their own way and independently, although in dialogue with the Brazilian State, to contribute to an alternative

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21. The hypothesis that this civil society-led measurement effort has influenced changes in the Cobradi methodology is plausible and deserves consideration in future research endeavours. Further exploration of this specific aspect can contribute to better enlightening change dynamics in the context of the Cobradi project, as well as to broader discussions about the patterns of civil society's engagement in and influence on foreign policy issues.

agenda for measuring SSC that would contemplate and value its principles and practices, from Brazil and based on the Brazilian experience.

Research centers, universities, and civil society organizations have also sought to foster different and specific approaches to SSC at the international level, for example through networks such as the Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST). Between 2015 and 2020, NeST led discussions among experts from different countries (including South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, China, India, and Mexico) in order to create parameters, specific to Southern partners, for the measurement of SSC. Initially, the network produced a proposal for a common framework for monitoring and evaluating SSC (Besharati, Rawhani and Rios, 2017), but the proposal was not considered technically and politically feasible. Disagreements emerged among network members about the proposed parameters and their proximity to the OECD framework and even the relevance and validity of common instruments given the plurality of countries in the South and their experiences as development cooperation partners/providers (UNOSSC and UNDP, 2021). Despite not having succeeded in creating the instrument, NeST is another example of non-state (or para-diplomatic) mobilization and innovation in the field.

In recent years, due to the covid-19 pandemic and the intensification of geopolitical disputes between the West, China, and Russia, we see a clear loss of interest on the part of civil society (in Brazil and elsewhere), in parallel to the decreased interest of governments of the South, in the debate on measurement. As mentioned, already in 2019, in the framework of BAPA+40, the topic had been removed from the agenda, for being perceived as little consensual. The Indian government, along with its think tank Research Information Systems (a major driver of NeST since 2017), led the resistance to the topic in multilateral spaces (opposing the creation of common measurement tools) (Waisbich, 2022). Other independent voices in India, initially active in monitoring Indian foreign policy and SSC, have also demobilized given the growing political-administrative restrictions imposed on non-governmental organizations in India, especially those that are independent, critical and/or involved in international networks or funded by the West. In Brazil, the downturn in interest and social mobilization on development cooperation issues stems from fluctuations in the political importance given to IDC/SSC by the federal government and a shift in efforts of civil society networks previously monitoring Brazil's foreign policy to domestic issues (Waisbich and Cabral, 2023). With a new impetus given to South-South relations under the new Lula administration, it is possible that civil society will once again monitor the agenda more closely and seek to participate more actively in the evaluation and measurement of Brazilian SSC, either autonomously or in partnership with government institutions, as was the case in the past.



#### 4 CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the evolution of the SSC measurement agenda internationally and its translation in Brazil, analyzing the country's diplomatic position in these debates as well as the responses of the state and the epistemic and public policy communities in the last 10-15 years. Applying the concept of "active non-alignment", the paper explored the continuities in the critical-propositional stances of Brazil in multilateral negotiations around the issue of SSC measurement, as well as the changes in country's dialogue with the current IDC regime. While doing so, the paper emphasized the (bumpy) consolidation of the SSC field in Brazil amidst successive (and sometimes radical) changes of power within the federal government and its repercussions on the institutional-bureaucratic arrangements that shaped Brazilian diplomatic activism and official responses to the "duty to measure" SSC.

When analysing Brazil's SSC measurement initiatives, such as the official international cooperation statistics compiled by the Ipea-led Cobradi project, the paper showed the resilience of this measurement tool despite the political and economic instability that engulfed the country in the last decade. The methodological changes applied to Cobradi since its inception, it is argued, stem from the maturation of the initiative itself as well as reflect divergences among specialists at Ipea, the Itamaraty, and the Presidency over the last decade. These divergences revolved around what should be measured and made transparent, as much as around Brazil's identity in the IDC system and its relationship to and adherence to its normative center: the OECD-led "donors' club".

It remains to be seen how the "Brazilian solution" to this ongoing SSC measurement debate will look like in the years to come. The Brazilian response will unavoidably be a comprise one, bridging, on the one hand, Ipea's decision, in 2020, to align Cobradi reporting with TOSSD metrics (already materialised in the two latest reports, published in 2022), and, on the other, the new autonomist impulse coming from the new federal administration, once more under the leadership of Lula da Silva. The challenge faced by the Cobradi project under its current cycle (2021-2024), and by the Brazilian government more broadly, is secure an approach for data collection and systematization that is conducive to responding to two imperatives. First, to balance the financial, non-financial (monetizable) and non-financial (non-monetizable) dimensions of Brazil's cooperation. Second, to serve the purposes of monitoring and accountability to the international community (in the framework of the SDGs and beyond) as well as to the Brazilian society.

The pitfalls of the monetary quantification of SSC will continue haunt Southern partners. In the last decade, Brazil has been one of the most vocal critics of the obsession with quantifying cooperation. It denounced the risks such quantification brought to SSC, by impoverishing the nature and value of cooperation between Southern countries, which remains a multifaceted domestic and foreign policy tool to both State and society actors involved in cooperation initiatives. Unlike other countries, such as India, Brazil's criticism was assertive and effective because it relied on the Cobradi project, an enterprise backed from the beginning by a will to prove that it was possible to produce information and measure cooperation beyond the parameters of the DAC/OECD. The pioneering character of the Cobradi experiment relies on it being the first of its kind among Southern development partners, but also by its avant-garde way of thinking about the very exercise of understanding South-South flows, beyond the more classical financial and monetary contours. Looking forward, the challenge is now to continue adding robustness to Brazilian measurement initiatives by balancing these different imperatives and uses of different tools. Brazil's participation in UNCTAD efforts to quantify SSC (under the umbrella of the 2030 Agenda), and its will to carry on evaluating its South-South and Trilateral Cooperation initiatives will be a good test of Brazil's (government and civil society) capacity to continue innovating and producing relevant data for the international community and for the domestic audiences.

On the issue of active non-alignment, more broadly, the case of Brazil's responses to the "duty to measure" SSC illustrates a long trajectory of critical dialogue and even partial harmonization, without necessarily total convergence, with the normative and power center in the IDC regime. On the contrary, Brazil maintained its autonomy to seek solutions consistent with the reality of its cooperation: modest and inconstant in financial terms, but rich, diverse, and innovative in its practices and partnerships. As in the cases of non-alignment *vis-à-vis* ongoing geopolitical tensions, this type of positioning tends to generate frustrations and multiple questionings, including regarding the will and capacity to – beyond pure rejection – generate alternative proposals for global problems. Far from being solely technical or methodological, the debates on the measurement of SSC contribute to this broader reflection on the role of the great Southern powers, such as Brazil, and the limits and challenges they face in going beyond (fair and rightful) denunciations and criticisms of international power hierarchies and asymmetries.

Given the overlapping crises in the contemporary world, the search for international recognition and the emphasis on the logic of differentiation, including when applied to responsibilities and duties in development issues, proves increasingly costly when used to justify inaction. Whether in the case of the

measurement of SSC, discussed here, or in many other impasses in international negotiations in the recent past (including in the SDGs), Brazil has demonstrated a combination of will, authority, and capacity to innovate. The challenge for the country, and for the other Southern powers, is – and will continue to be in the years to come – to realize, by giving shape and content, this active and propositional non-alignment.

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