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115. South-South Cooperation

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South-South cooperation (SSC), or South-South development cooperation (SSDC), has since the 2000s enjoyed a resurgent interest due to a significant increase in South-South trade and the formation of such initiatives as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA-TCP), the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS). Between 1995 and 2017, South-South merchandise trade grew from USD 0.6 to USD 5 trillion, and in 2017 one quarter of world total trade occurred among South countries (UNCTAD 2019). Yet, SSC is a multidimensional set of relations and processes across the political, economic, cultural, social, environmental, military, legal and humanitarian domains. Besides trade, this includes knowledge and resources exchanges in agriculture, education, energy, finance, food, health, industry and business, information and communication, transport and infrastructure, and science and technology. The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC 2021) defines SSC as...

...a manifestation of solidarity among peoples and countries of the South that contributes to their national well-being, their national and collective self-reliance...[that] must be determined by the countries of the South, guided by the principles of respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs and mutual benefit.

The absence of direct political interference and conditionality and related notions of 'horizontal', 'partnership' and 'win-win', sharply contrast the more paternalistic, hierarchical donor-recipient relations of conventional North-South official development assistance (ODA) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC). Accordingly, SSC actors refer to themselves predominantly as 'South partners'. Other labels include '(re)emerging', 'new', 'non-traditional' or 'non-DAC donors'. These are not unproblematic as, for instance, many South actors have a long history of SSC involvement. Simultaneous membership in OECD-DAC and such South formations as the Group of 77 (G-77), however, is considered incompatible. This North/South dichotomization has been challenged by triangular (or trilateral) cooperation, where a DAC member or multilateral organization acts as mediator in SSC, providing resources and/or expertise for best practice or policy transfer (funding, training, management, technology).

This entry reviews SSC as a contested concept and social practice. A periodization of SSC post-1945, derived from historical turning points, provides an analytical framework specifically for identifying conceptual shifts in the global context. On this basis, major controversies are explored.

Historical phases

The emergence of SSC is generally attributed to the 1955 Asian-African Conference convened in Bandung, Indonesia, in which representatives from 29 newly independent

nations participated. The Bandung Conference spirit, however, evolved from the centuries of nationalist liberation wars in conjunction with local and transnational anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles – Pan-Asian and Pan-African as much as women's, workers', anti-apartheid and other anti-fascist movements, including the Communist Internationals. Embracing notions of friendship, solidarity and brotherhood/sisterhood, at Bandung these norms and subaltern struggles attained diplomatic expression while overcoming their compartmentalization (Pham and Shilliam 2016).

Concertation (1945-1981)

In the bipolar Cold War context, Third Worldist SSC was associated with political, economic and cultural decolonization struggles. This included the foundation of the League of Arab States (also 'Arab League') in 1945; the 1947 Asian Relations Conference, convened in India prior to formal independence; and the 1954 China-India Panchsheel Agreement, whose Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were incorporated into the Bandung agenda: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence. These, alongside the principles of collective self-reliance and self-determination, were institutionalized via the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), formed in Baghdad in 1960; the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), created in Belgrade in 1961 (formally the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, with 120 members in 2021); and the G-77, launched at the first United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva in 1964 and constituted as a permanent group via the 1967 Charter of Algiers (134 members in 2021). Non-alignment never meant neutrality or impartiality, but becoming independent co-actors in a democratization of the world order. Likewise, national and collective self-reliance never pursued absolute delinking and autarky from the North, but structural transformation through selective replacement of exploitative dependency-perpetuating relations with more egalitarian South-South relations promoting complementarity and interdependences. State-led inter-governmental concertation conjoined with mass popular organization, notably the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) formed in Cairo in 1958, extended as the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL) at the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana.

Efforts of economic decolonization culminated in the 1974 UN Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO), reaffirmed that same year by the UN Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States. Underpinned by global Keynesianism and dependency theory, the NIEO demanded fairer terms of trade, reparations for colonial atrocities, a reformed international monetary system, and the right to regulating and nationalizing transnational corporations (TNCs). During the 1970s, technology exchange moved centre-stage, leading to the establishment of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC) in 1974, and the 1978 Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) for Promoting and Implementing TCDC. As a complement to TCDC, the UNCTAD Unit on Economic Cooperation among Developing Countries (ECDC) was created in 1985, following the 1981 Caracas G-77 High Level Conference on ECDC.

The order-transforming aspirations remained unfulfilled. First, despite successes, such as the China-financed Tanzania-Zambia railway completed in 1975, objective difficulties in the practical implementation of SSC initiatives (ineffective institutions, scarce resources) often joined with governments' lack of commitment (Kragelund 2019). Second, many of the

Western order's foundational organizing principles were affirmed, especially territorial nation-state sovereignty, the human rights regime, and modernist development (Phillips 2016). Nation-statism in conjunction with modernization ideology, for example, engendered internal colonialism over minoritized nationalities, driving disunity. Third, political, economic, cultural and social diversity limited consensus, often in conjunction with structural contradictions. For instance, while OPEC demonstrated that collective action can effectuate control over a commodity's price, the strategic failure to build a South-wide counter-structure undermined solidarity as petroleum exporters' interests started to diverge from those of oil-importing developing countries. Fourth, order-(re)building was constrained by the North-dominated neo-colonial governance structure into which the post-colonial South integrated: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the UN, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) – all established between 1944 and 1947 when most developing countries did not even exist as sovereign states.

Containment (1981-1995)

The capitalist North, despite internal issue-specific discordances, never abandoned its colonialist aspirations. Hostile and condescending reactions to Bandung included the mobilization of deeply entrenched colonialist stereotypes, tactical delaying and blocking of initiatives, and overt and covert warfare. Intra-South frictions and differences were actively accentuated, using political, economic and informational and communicational power. It was the neoliberal counter-offensive, however, that aborted the twenty-year effort of UNCTAD-mediated South-North diplomatic dialogue at the 1981 Cancún International Meeting for Cooperation and Development. For the Reagan and Thatcher-led USA and UK governments, the South's demands were non-negotiable.

A combination of factors and forces corroded developmental state action while exacerbating South disunity: global economic recession and a significant deterioration of the terms of trade, which increased competition in global commodity markets and for foreign direct investment; the debt crisis and 'Washington Consensus' structural adjustment policies (SAPs), accompanied by neoliberal elite formation; the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), hence of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) as an alternative development system; the North-driven strengthening of the World Bank and IMF over the UN system as global development leaders; the reconfiguration of UNCTAD, eventually accommodating the post-Cold War good governance conditionalities (free market, liberal democracy, rule of law, anti-corruption, effective government promotion); and the GATT Uruguay Round negotiations (1986-1994), where developing countries failed to act in concert (Toye 2014). Endorsement of 'self-reliance' by the OECD and World Bank implied its reconceptualization as neoliberal entrepreneurial self-sufficiency (microcredit and microenterprise schemes), for eventual withdrawal of ODA as every country is considered to be responsible for its own development. By 1995, when GATT was integrated in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Third Worldist vision of SSC had been marginalized to the annual G-77 and tri-annual NAM meetings.

Co-option vs confrontation (1995-present)

The mainstreaming of SSC since 1995 already started with the 1978 BAPA. Widely celebrated as a milestone in SSC promotion, the BAPA reduced SSC to technical cooperation, entailing a shift from a critical structuralist-transformative to an instrumentalist

problem-solving approach. Frequently associated with ‘depoliticization’, however, recasting SSC in managerial-technical terms as an order-stabilizing practice is as political as SSC as a system-changing process. While the BAPA (Recommendations 35, 36, 38) laid the foundation for triangular cooperation, the 1995 UN report ‘New Directions for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries’ explicitly started promoting triangular cooperation among governments and the private business and NGO sectors, while endorsing developing countries’ integration into the new neoliberal global order. This agenda has been codified, first, in the OECD-orchestrated High Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness in Rome, Paris, Accra and Busan in 2003, 2005, 2008 and 2011, respectively, culminating in the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation; and, secondly, in the UN system, including the two High-level Conferences on SSC in Nairobi in 2009 and Buenos Aires in 2019 (also dubbed ‘BAPA+40’), the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, and the 2030 Agenda for Development. Proponents of triangular cooperation insist on its resource-leveraging and transparency-increasing, thus cost-effectiveness and efficiency-enhancing, potential through coordination between ODA and SSC. It may also boost SSC’s visibility, recognition and acceptance, as reflected in the establishment of the UNCTAD Unit for Economic Integration and Cooperation among Developing Countries (ECIDC) in 2009, and the re-launching of UNDP’s TCDC Unit as UNOSSC in 2012. However, despite the UN’s continued discursive adherence to the Third Worldist framing, the now dominant compound ‘South-South and triangular cooperation’ implies the subordinate co-option of SSC into the global development governance regime. The concomitant appropriation of ‘partnership’, ‘win-win’ and ‘mutual benefit’ by ODA discourses, underscores this.

Conceptual co-option, however, does not mean complete structural assimilation of South actors. Notably, the G-77+China convened two South Summits, in Havana in 2000 and in Doha in 2005. Often overlooked, this occurred in a context in which the Third Worldist vision of SSC had been revitalized through the establishment of the Geneva-based South Centre in 1995, as the first intergovernmental organization exclusively of the South. This think tank originates in the work of the South Commission, which was an independent group of South intellectual and political leaders formed with NAM support in 1987. Their 1990 report ‘The Challenge to the South’ can be read as a blueprint for the Cuba-Venezuela-initiated ALBA-TCP/Petrocaribe, formalized in 2004 and 2005, respectively, as the currently most pronounced institutionalizations of this resuscitated Bandung spirit. Simultaneously, the tri-annual FOCAC was launched in 2000, the IBSA in 2003, the BRIC(S) from 2006 onward (formalized as BRICS in 2010), and three IAFS have been convened since 2008.

Major controversies

The Anglophone SSC literature is biased towards China-Africa relations and the BRICS, which mirrors the neo-imperialist geopolitical interests involved in knowledge production. Also, much published material lacks empirical substantiation. In its extreme, Chinese, Saudi Arabian and Venezuelan SSC has been polemicized as ‘toxic aid’ by ‘rogue donors’ (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley, 2019; Kragelund 2019). Contentions, however, also arise from theoretical and methodological issues, some of which this section examines.

First, in the absence of a universally accepted definition of SSC, ambiguities start with two complementary conceptualizations of ‘the global South’. In nation-state-centric or methodologically nationalist terms, ‘the global South’ is a group of developing countries, a geographic north-south binary as depicted on the well-known front cover of the 1980 ‘Brandt

Report'. 'Global South', however, is also associated with intra-country inequalities. Within such a socio-geographic understanding, the global (or globalized) South is co-constituted relationally with the globalized North within and across countries. A global South identity is then produced through inter- and transnational solidarity-building in resistance to common historical experiences of structural oppression, subalternization, exploitation and peripherization (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley 2019). Examples of such global(ized) SSC include the Venezuelan government's solidarity cooperation with dispossessed households and communities in the USA and UK (Muhr 2013).

These ontological considerations, second, underlie the unresolved problem of measurement, where definitional inconsistencies combine with unsystematic data collection and technical limitations. While traditional cost-benefit analysis may use such variables as international trade and finance volumes and flows, methodological challenges include capturing the multifarious modalities, mechanisms and practices of SSC: (a) the multitude of inter- and transnational actors involved – state (e.g. ministries and enterprises at national and subnational levels); private (e.g. multinational corporations, business associations, small-scale traders); and societal (e.g., migrants); (b) in-kind exchanges, which are very common in SSC and difficult to account for in exact quantum and value; and (c) synergies or multiplier effects generated from the multiple, co-constitutive dimensions of SSC. For instance, how may diplomatic solidarity, collective identity-building through cultural and sports events, and emancipation of the South, be quantified? Conversely, decolonialists question why SSC should be subjected to modernist-positivist measurement altogether, and not aspire to transcend the mediation through capital.

Third, who benefits is the probably most polarizing issue. Does SSC reproduce neo-imperialist exploitation and dependency, as often claimed by reference to resource extractivism by Chinese and Brazilian companies on the African continent? Has SSC become synonymous to further roll-out of growth-oriented global neoliberalization, as now most of SSC activities seem to be performed by private actors? Is SSC merely problem-solving best practice transfer or South solidarity for structural transformation – or both simultaneously? (see Gray and Gills 2016; Mawdsley 2020). Again, economic reductionism and methodological limitations often conceal the complexities of who is involved in what activity, where (geographically and sector-wise), and to whose benefit(s). On the one hand, direct and indirect impacts assessment would require disaggregating such issues as labour conditions, added value accrual and appropriation, technology and skills transfer, environmental impact, and tax payment. On the other hand, competing interests and contradictory outcomes would have to be accounted for. While, for instance, resource extractivism may reproduce exploitation, simultaneous counter-dependency effects can be generated in the form of enlarged policy space through increased negotiation power and independence from ODA due to the availability of alternative sources (Kragelund 2019). Moreover, even though the principle of solidarity normatively contradicts exploitative practices, SSC was never anti-capitalist, and solidarity and commercial and political interests are not per se mutually exclusive (Muhr, in Gray and Gills 2016). Overall, a consensus is emerging that generalizations should be avoided.

Finally, Western-centric epistemologies rarely recognize the neo-colonial/imperial nature of the modern world order and non-Western thought and agency. Decolonial critique has particularly targeted the dominant strands of conventional IR theory – (neo)realism, liberal internationalism, and the English School (Pham and Shilliam 2016; Shilliam 2011). Accordingly, much misunderstanding originates in fitting SSC into familiar, pre-established

problematiques, tropes and templates. Typically, the (neo)colonial projection of order couples with the (methodologically nationalist) idea of nation-states as rationally and strategically behaving self-interested units/subjects locked into permanent struggle for survival and domination in the international society ('power politics'). Framings of this kind portray SSC as a tool in the pursuit of a presumed 'national interest', and the SSC principles as mere rhetoric to mask realpolitik intentions. A cardinal example of resulting misrepresentation is the myth of a Brazil-Venezuela rivalry, popularized in the 2000s/2010s, while in fact a comprehensive bilateral SSC agenda had been established between 2003 and 2016. The frequent transposition of Joseph Nye's 'soft power' (co-optive rather than coercive power) from USA foreign policy discourse to SSC reinforces the imagery of international winner-loser relations, as power is depicted as a unidirectional mechanism (rather than relational-dialectical), in which the affected is inherently objectified and win-win relations are ruled out. Beyond conceptual inadequacy, modernist IR theory simply omits such emotions and sentiments as solidarity and friendship.

Conclusion

Contemporary SSC is a variegated and contested set of ideas and social practices whose cumulative and often contradictory effects defy generalization, and it may be appropriate to think in the plural of South-South cooperations. While SSC may partially have reconfigured the historical hierarchies of international development (Mawdsley 2020), this occurs through the institutions of global development governance where frequently the BRICS – individually or collectively – strategically ally with the G-77. Nonetheless, the South's demand for reform of the international financial architecture has, except for voting power adjustment in the World Bank, been ignored (Kragelund 2019).

The mainstreaming of SSC notwithstanding, this equally produces a spatiality through which the Bandung spirit also materializes (Muhr, in Gray and Gills 2016). Commonly underrated or ignored, the ALBA-TCP/Petrocaribe had, for instance, by the early 2010s become by far the largest provider of concessionary finance in absolute terms to partner countries (see Muhr 2013). The (neo-)imperialist reaction to such relative successes in structural transformation – hybrid warfare that combines disinformation campaigns with economic, financial and military coercive measures (embargoes, confiscations, paramilitary terrorism, coups d'état) – evokes the historical question of how far decolonization is actually permitted to go. After all, virtually all South actors that only in the slightest challenge the hegemonic order, including Cuba, China, Iran, Russia and Venezuela, are subject to such aggression. This, however, appears to generate its own counter-movement, arguably reconciling South-South solidarity with distinct commercial interests.

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