

## Understanding South-South Cooperation:

### A Comparative Analysis with North-South Cooperation Approaches

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*South-South Cooperation was first conceived at the 1955 Bandung Conference, which led to the foundation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 and other important initiatives within the UN system, such as creating the G77 and elaborating the Buenos Aires Plan of Action. Since the beginning of the century, this cooperation modality has re-emerged and is now considered a catalyst for sustainable development. Given this context, this paper aims to analyze its ideological and political origins, definitions, and evolution, highlighting its importance as an instrument of foreign policy and development cooperation. In addition, a comparison between South-South and North-South Cooperation is made through five dimensions: ideas, institutions/political systems, interests, organizations, and vectors/schemes. Through this comparative approach, the author seeks to present consensual aspects of what is understood as South-South Cooperation and portray the diversity of strategies implemented by countries in the Global South.*

**Keywords:** *South-South Cooperation; North-South Cooperation; Global South; Sustainable Development; BRICS*

#### Introduction

The study of the Global South, and especially South-South Cooperation (SSC), has regained interest among states, policy-makers, academics, and other stakeholders since the beginning of the century, often due to a professed desire to identify ways to maximize the potential benefits of the policies and practices developed by states across the Global South (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Daley, 2020).

The interest is also given by recent economic and diplomatic achievements of several countries of the Global South, especially Brazil, Russia, India, China, and

South Africa (BRICS) group. This situation has promoted diverse debates and considerations about the potentials and downsides of a new phase of contest or construction of alternatives to the traditional politics of the Global North (Gray & Hills, 2016).

Despite the undeniable increment in SSC initiatives in the last two decades, evidence points out that SSC analysis faces a few obstacles: the definition of activities, access to reliable data, the influence of traditional donors, limitation of civil society engagement, and a notorious deficit of empirical analysis, despite an increasing body of literature oriented toward describing and

interpreting the phenomenon (Brun, 2018; Santander & Alonso, 2018; Adjani, 2023).

Amidst this trend, this paper poses the following research questions:

1. How has South-South Cooperation evolved as a modality of international cooperation?
2. What are the similarities and differences between South-South and North-South Cooperation?

To answer the first question, the content analyzes the ideological and political origins of the SSC, its definitions and evolution, as well as its rhetoric vs. reality based on official documents from Southern countries and international organizations and an extensive literature review on the subject.

To address the second question, a comparison between SSC and North-South Cooperation (NSC) modalities is made to showcase common and specific features within the Global South and better understand the SSC as an instrument of foreign policy and development cooperation.

This comparison gains importance when the development landscape is experiencing convergences among traditional donors and emerging providers. Therefore, deepening into the characterization of SSC could contribute to a more accurate comprehension of this cooperation modality.

This paper assumes the theoretical frameworks provided by Lancaster (2007)<sup>1</sup> and Kragelund (2019)<sup>2</sup>, as the starting point for comparing SSC and NSC based on ideas, institutions, interests, national/international

organizations, and vectors. The author used these dimensions to characterize cooperation models implemented by different states within the Global South.

The “ideas” refer to worldviews and principal beliefs shared by a significant part of the public and political elites that characterize cooperation processes. The “institutions/political systems” establish the rules of the political dynamics, e.g., electoral rules, presidential systems, and the legislature’s role. The “interests” are the goals that the government aims to achieve through cooperation dynamics. “Organizations” refers to the location within the government of tasks related to a major function or program of government. Although Lancaster did not consider international organizations in her framework, due to their increasing importance and proliferation, the author included regional and international forums in which countries have memberships and promote cooperation initiatives. Finally, the “vectors” are defined as the way of engagement between two or more countries involved in SSC.

It is essential to point out that these dimensions are intertwined and are not static, as they could change with the unfolding of socio-political and economic developments at the national and international levels.

Consequently, the selection of this analytical framework, rather than analyzing isolated aspects, aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the cooperation approaches implemented by countries of the Global

<sup>1</sup> Lancaster studied the cooperation models of the United States, Japan, France, Germany, and Denmark.

<sup>2</sup> Kragelund examined Global South dynamics, the various vectors of engagement, and their interrelationship.

South.

## Concepts, origin, and evolution of South-South Cooperation

### Conceptualizing South-South Cooperation

SSC's definition and conceptual delimitation are controversial aspects usually discussed in international forums without any existing definitions that completely fulfill the involved actors' aspirations.

The vast heterogeneity of participants involved in SSC means that countries like Chile and Colombia, which have historically good relations with traditional donors, push for technical approaches. In contrast, countries like Venezuela and Cuba aim for a more political stance (Santander & Alonso, 2018). Moreover, countries like Russia include military collaboration in their cooperation models.

Brun (2018) pointed out that "governments, international organizations, and academics issue their proposals without reaching an agreement within each group" (p.173).

Given this situation, one possible formulation is the one made at the UN Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries in 1978: "... SSC is a conscious, systematic and politically motivated process developed to create a framework of multiple links between developing countries" (UN, 1978.p10).

The final document of the UN High-Level Conference on SSC, celebrated in Nairobi in 2009, included other elements that enrich the concept, defining it as:

...a common endeavor of peoples and countries of the South, born out of shared experiences and sympathies, based on their common objectives and solidarity, and guided by, among other things, the principles of respect for national sovereignty and ownership, free from any conditionalities (UN, 2009, p.3).

Currently, the UN defines it as a broad framework of collaboration among countries of the South in the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and technical domains. (UNOSSC, 2021a).

Likewise, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, emphasized that "the past decades have demonstrated the power of SSC to advance sustainable development," adding that "together, they can multiply their sustainable development efforts to mitigate climate disruption, find solutions to a global health crisis, manage supply chain disruptions, and deliver humanitarian assistance" (UN, 2023).

Scholars have also attempted to define this cooperation modality. For example, Surasky (2014) understands it as: "...a politically motivated process of reciprocal and equitable exchange of capacities carried out among countries of the South that are associated with promoting their development" (p.9).

Likewise, Mawdsley (2019) described SSC as "the transfer and exchange of resources, technology and knowledge, set within claims to shared colonial and post-colonial experiences and identities and anchored within a wider framework of promoting the

collective strength and development of the global South” (p.2).

Considering all this, it is clear that SSC represents a partnership among Southern countries, moving beyond the donor-recipient relations of traditional cooperation models (Adjani, 2023).

Although the international community lacks a singular concept for SSC, drawing from previous definitions and acknowledgment of its accomplishments and potentialities, this paper understands SSC as:

Cooperation among countries of the Global South aimed to improve the quality of life of their population, reinforce the role of developing and least developed countries in the international system and achieve sustainable development. This type of cooperation encompasses modalities beyond economic cooperation, including political, cultural, social, environmental, and technical cooperation (Zavarce, 2023a, p.2).

### **Origin and evolution**

The emergence of SSC can be traced back to the Asian-African Conference in Bandung in 1955, where governments of developing countries first articulated the notion of shared interests and advocated for collaboration to amplify their collective voice (Lopez, 2014; SEGIB, 2017; Taylor, 2018).

The Bandung Conference led to the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961. By confirming the ‘Spirit of Bandung,’ the NAM also adopted a posture that rejected the bilateralist impulses

that dominated the world through the system of Cold War alliances.

It was precisely based on claims aligned with the attempt to establish a New International Economic Order (NIEO) that the UN Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Group of 77 (G77) were constituted in 1964. They symbolized institutional efforts to create a global governance system different from the existing one (Taylor, 2018).

A significant step in SSC was taken in 1978 at the UN Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries. The conference led to the “Buenos Aires Plan of Action” (BAPA), which “may well be the most exhaustively, carefully debated document of its kind” since it encompassed five years of drafting and negotiation and included “hundreds of government specialists in development from all over the world” (UN, 1978, p.3).

The BAPA aimed to overcome the traditional donor-recipient dynamics with the broader concept of SSC, emphasizing partnership over hierarchy and setting objectives that remain, to some extent, valid for SSC providers: fostering self-reliance, promoting the establishment of a new international economic order, increasing technical cooperation, strengthening technological capacities, and attaining a greater degree of participation in global economic activities, among others.

When reviewing SSC’s history, different periodizations have been made to understand the evolution of this cooperation modality, its increasing relevance, and



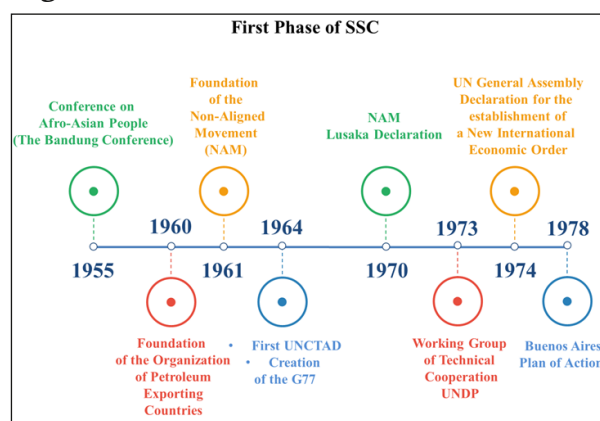
the appearance of emerging actors at the regional and international levels. For example, Mawdsley (2019) divided SSC progressions into 1.1 (1950s - early 2000s), 2.0 (early 2000s - present), and 3.0, which represent the upcoming future of this modality.

From a more chronological stance, Colacrai and Kern (2009) identified four phases: (1) 1955-1970s, (2) 1980s, (3) 1990s, and (4) 2000s. Additionally, Lopez (2014) acknowledged a fifth and current phase, which began in 2009 with the Nairobi High-Level UN Conference on SSC.

During the first stage (1960s-1970s), several organizations were created to strengthen the links among the Global South and obtain greater influence in multilateral forums. This activism in South-South relations originated partly from the independence of various sub-Saharan, African, and Caribbean countries seeking to increase their international presence and collaboration.

This phase was characterized by the surge of tricontinental organizations (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) such as the NAM, the G77, and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), partnerships among developing countries to unify their voices against the Global North, calls for peace, disarmament, decolonization, and reduction of the gaps between developing and developed countries in industrial, economic and agricultural sectors.

**Figure 1**



Source: Elaborated by the author based on official documents such as SEGIB 2014 and 2017 (2024).

In the 1980s, during the second phase of SSC, Cold War tensions affected global dynamics. Also, a disarticulation of the South was observed due to individual and fragmented responses that gave rise to the external debt crisis, especially in Latin America (SEGIB, 2014).

At the regional level, the Middle East region was characterized by increasing instability due to conflicts like the Iran-Iraq war (1980- 1988). There was also a process of institutionalization in Latin America by creating the Latin American Integration Association (1980) and the Rio Group (1986). In Asia, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (1985) and the APEC became relevant forums for economic cooperation. Similarly, different attempts at integration were made in Africa, such as the Conference of the Southern African Development Community (SEGIB, 2014).

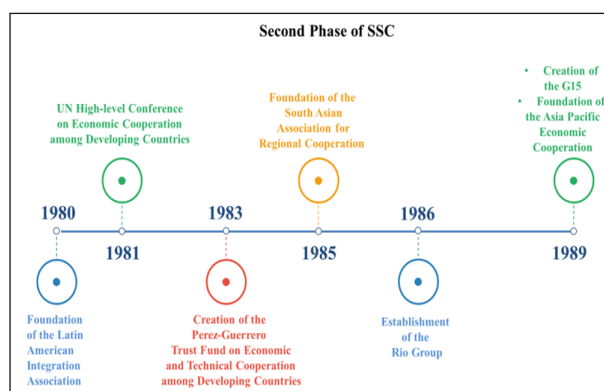
During this period, China and India retreated from the NAM and other third-world approaches, moving from highly political models towards more economic and

technical-oriented ones (Mawdsley, 2019).

SEGIB (2017) recorded only 19 international events linked to SSC during this decade, highlighting, as the most important, the ones in Figure 2. However, sustained economic growth since the late 1980s led to more developing countries becoming regional centers of economic dynamism (UNDP, 2007).

Despite regional integration efforts, the second phase of SSC was characterized by a decline in the collective South concept, notably in tricontinental platforms like the NAM and the G77, due to the failure to achieve an NIEO, limited cooperation resources, and the dominance of NSC.

**Figure 2**



Source: Elaborated by the author based on official documents such as SEGIB 2014 and 2017 (2024)

In the 1990s, the third stage featured the emergence of a globalized economy. There, SSC began to be considered a tool for developing countries’ international insertion. SEGIB (2017) reported 32 SSC events during that period. Likewise, the UNDP (2009, p.35) South Report highlighted that from the beginning of the 1990s to 2005, the South’s export share was upward, reaching

\$3,721 billion in 2005 and accounting for 36% of world trade.

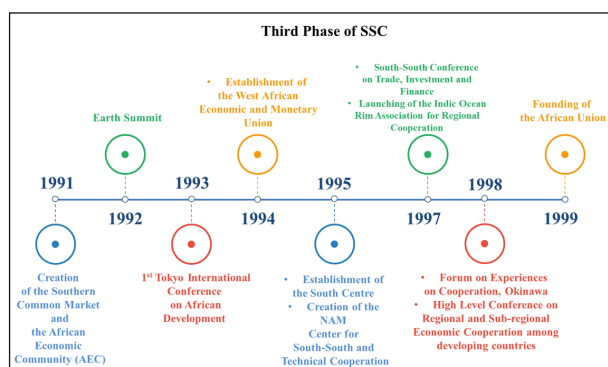
Similarly, another UNDP report (2007) showed that “during the 1990s, South-South FDI flows grew faster than North-South flows, and large Southern transnational corporations grew from only 19 in 1990 to 58 by 2005” (p.3).

There was also an increase in specialized forums on technical and economic cooperation, like the Tokyo International Conference on African Development and the Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Insular Developing States, in addition to political, trading, and strategy organizations. This expansion widened the scope of SSC, sometimes resulting in overlapping and blurred boundaries (SEGIB, 2017).

Therefore, this phase was characterized by a reactivation of South-South relations. However, this relaunching was made from commercial, financial, technical, and environmental orientations rather than political ones.

Increased economic ties, including trade and investment, within the Global South fostered several integration initiatives, e.g., the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), and the African Union (AU). These initiatives have nurtured regional cooperation, trade, investment, citizens’ mobility, and inter-regional agreements.

Figure 3

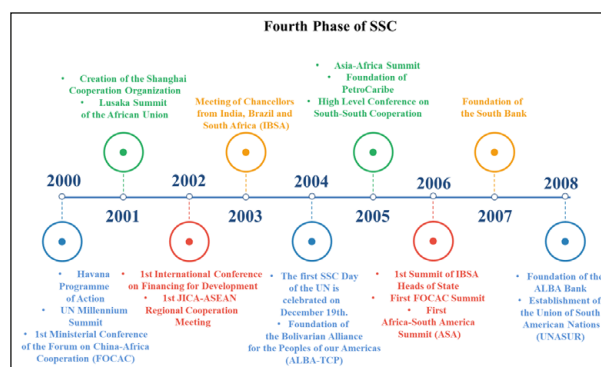


Source: Elaborated by the author based on official documents such as SEGIB 2014 and 2017 (2024)

The fourth phase began in the 21st century with an idea of the South as a group of states linked in multiple dimensions (political, economic, technical), motivated to diversify ties by exchanging experiences for mutual benefit. SSC was characterized by proactive presidential summitry, a reinforced narrative of diverging from traditional donors, growth in funds, projects, and international presence, and the emergence of new international forums like IBSA, BRICS, and the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) (Mawdsley, 2019).

During this period, countries like Cuba (5.1%) and Venezuela (1.5%) became large providers of foreign aid in relation to their GDP, surpassing the UN target of 0,7% and the main promoters of cooperation in Latin America (Morales, 2012, p.97).

Figure 4



Source: Elaborated by the author based on official documents such as SEGIB 2014 and 2017 (2024)

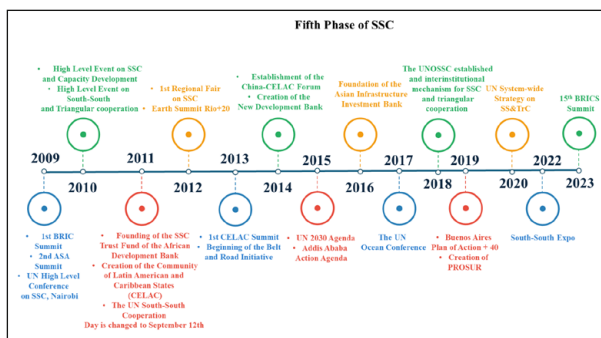
The fifth and current phase partly occurred due to the 2008 economic crisis. It resulted in lower aid volumes for middle-income countries and, conversely, continued economic growth in developing countries. This situation led to increased SSC in economic terms and more significant impacts of this cooperation modality at the international level.

Mawdsley (2019) identified three constant features in SSC during the 2010s: 1) a more pragmatic turn in SSC discourse focusing on effectiveness and outcomes rather than political narratives; 2) greater awareness by SSC providers of the challenges of working within partner countries; 3) growing cooperation and convergence between NSC and SSC.

In addition, there have been growing resources, finances, and institutions, the consolidation of Southern development practices, and the acceptance of emerging actors as development partners in the international system.

Proof of the consolidation of SSC in the development arena can be seen in the SEGIB annual report (2021, p.39), which informed that from 2009 to 2019, 12.914 initiatives were undertaken by Iberoamerican countries with partners worldwide. Similarly, between 2010 and 2017, 638 SSC international events were reported, highlighting the most important in Figure 5, representing the highest ever.

**Figure 5**



Source: Elaborated by the author based on several official documents (2024)

The fourth and fifth phases have been characterized by the rise of Brazil, China, India, and South Africa as key actors in the global political economy (Quadir, 2013, p.321). This situation raises expectations about changing traditional development cooperation practices, which have been dominated by multilateral institutions and bilateral aid agencies from developed countries since the 1950s (Quadir, 2013).

### South-South Cooperation: Rhetoric vs Reality

Since its genesis, SSC has had a strong political dimension inspired by attempts of developing countries to change the glob-

al governance system. Countries from the South have framed their narrative based on the Bandung Principles: sovereignty, equality, no intervention in internal affairs, no use of force, and mutual interests, as well as the claims for an NIEO based on more equalitarian rules in international trade, reforms in the international monetary system, financial and technology transfer to foster development, and promotion of cooperation among Southern countries.

Nonetheless, by adopting the BAPA, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which prioritized technical and economic approaches over political ones, SSC has also gained recognition as a catalyst to achieve sustainable development.

Given this duality between political and technical purposes, there have been discrepancies between the rhetoric (official narratives) and practices of developing countries regarding this cooperation modality.

Authors like Lechini (2009) and Ayllon (2009) argued that SSC overcomes NSC by combining multidimensional policies encompassing ideology and cultural affinity with strategic, commercial, and technical issues. They suggest that the SSC provides significant incentives for participating countries, such as increased bargaining power and international influence.

From a technical perspective, Yamada (2011) proposed that emerging donors offer advantages over traditional approaches. SSC leverages linguistic, historical, and geographical similarities among partners to deliver tailored solutions to the needs of



other developing countries.

However, it is important to recognize that some countries approach SSC differently from the ideals outlined in the Bandung Declaration and the BAPA. Consequently, Santander and Alonso (2018) pointed out that “very different development cooperation models coexist, with different narratives, purposes, and practices, and not all the features (solidarity, complementarity, non-intervention, among others) attributed to SSC providers appear to be equally founded on empirical experience” (p.1924).

One clear example of the distortion between rhetoric and reality lies in conditionality. Traditionally, NSC has imposed conditions covering policy areas such as economic reforms, governance, and social development, as well as the policy-making processes, including civil society involvement, transparency, and results-based management techniques (Bergamaschi et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, Brun (2018) expressed the need to contextualize the notion of conditionality. Southern countries generally avoid imposing governance or development model conditions on partner nations. Still, partners may expect other obligations, like purchasing products from the providing country as needed for projects or supporting the provider’s bilateral or global aspirations.

Another duality between rhetoric and reality is that, in theory, emerging countries often distance themselves from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) standards on Official Development Assistance (ODA), preferring

the term “cooperation” and considering involved parties as development partners (Brun, 2018). However, despite being labeled SSC practitioners, countries like Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Türkiye are OECD members and follow OECD-DAC standards. More recently, in 2024, Argentina, a country with a strong tradition in SSC and regional integration, declined an invitation to enter the BRICS and joined the OECD instead.

Moreover, according to official information, “the OECD works closely with some of the world’s largest economies: Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, and South Africa, who are OECD Key Partners” (OECD, 2023a).

Given this reality, Mawdsley (2019) argued that “growing familiarity, shared contexts and interests, institutional deepening, and collaborations are producing a more complex, multidimensional ecology of development actors, in which simple North/South identities are even less anchored than before” (p.21). Thus, nowadays, while some Southern countries still frame SSC from a highly political standpoint against traditional donors, there has been a significant increase in activities, interactions, and convergence around particular ideas and frameworks, e.g., the foundation of the Group of 20, comprising emerging and traditional donors, and the 2030 Agenda, which included developed and developing countries and represents the roadmap adopted by the international community to achieve sustainable development.

Consequently, considering the different approaches, it is possible to recognize three major groups within the Global South. The first promotes policies that seek to part

ways with traditional donors and reinforce the particularities of the SSC. The second, while pushing for strengthening SSC, attempts to gain a better position in the current international system without breaking with it. The third group aims to maintain the best possible relations with traditional donors.

### **Comparison between North-South and South-South Cooperation**

This section compares NSC and SSC, attempting to show the similarities and differences in development cooperation promoted by these two models by identifying five dimensions (ideas, institutions, interests, organizations, and vectors) that shape both NSC and SSC.

#### **Ideas**

Historically, countries of the Global South promoted cooperation based on the ‘Ten Principles of Bandung,’ which represent a political statement guiding their efforts to promote cooperation globally.

Likewise, since the elaboration of the BAPA, key principles guiding SSC within the UN System have been emphasized. These principles are strict respect for national sovereignty (non-interference), equity in distributing costs and benefits, government leadership, horizontality, consensus decision-making, action under association schemes, and recipient-led efforts.

In addition, UNOSSC established that:

The guiding principles of SSC are based on solidarity between the peo-

ples and countries of the South that contributes to their national well-being, national and collective self-sufficiency, and the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the 2030 Agenda. (UNOSSC, 2021b).

However, it is necessary to highlight that despite a broad consensus on principles from the Bandung Declaration, the BAPA, and other documents, governments of the Global South selectively apply common principles following their foreign policy orientation.

In this direction, the OECD (2021a) showed that Brazil’s principles include respect for sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and non-conditionality. The most fundamental principles for India are respecting its partners’ priorities and showing solidarity with other developing countries.

In the case of China, it has recently launched a White Paper entitled “China’s International Development Cooperation in the New Era” which drew China’s Principles for Development Cooperation: Respecting each other as equals, Doing the best we can to help, Focusing on development and improving people’s lives; Providing the means for independent development; Conducting effective cooperation in diverse forms; Ensuring delivery and sustainability; Being open and inclusive to promote exchanges and mutual learning; and Advancing with the times and breaking new ground (The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, 2021).

These principles updated the Eight Principles for Economic Aid and Technical Assistance to Other Countries adopted in 1964. They express China's intention to adapt its cooperation model to a more dynamic international cooperation system.

Regarding traditional donors, at the beginning of the century, OECD members established the current principles that characterized NSC initiatives in the 2005 Paris Declaration. These principles are ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability (OECD, 2021b).

Furthermore, the Busan Partnership underscored fundamental principles for enhancing effectiveness in development cooperation. These include ownership of development priorities by developing countries, a focus on results, partnerships for development, and transparency and shared responsibility (OECD, 2011). South countries participated in the Busan Partnership negotiations. This situation caused China to request the underlining of the voluntary nature of compliance with the principles in the final declaration (Gonzalez, 2011).

Despite traditional donors sharing more ideas due to their adherence to OECD-DAC standards than Southern countries, Lancaster (2007) showed how, e.g., while Japan and France shared a similar idea related to the obligation of the rich to help the poor, the US cooperation, on the other hand, has been shaped by the conception of the US as great power and leader of the Western liberalist alliance against socialism.

Consequently, principles and ideas adopted by Southern countries through international agreements are broader (Bandung Declaration, BAPA, regional organizations' principles) than traditional donors (OECD-DAC principles). However, when including these principles in foreign policy, both groups selectively promote the ones that best fit their official narratives, government plans, and national identities.

### **Institutions/Political Systems**

South countries encompass a vast heterogeneity that emerges from differences in size, their membership in global governance structures, and their historical role vis-à-vis the rest of the Global South (Kragelund, 2019).

Making generalizations about predominant political systems in the Global South is challenging. For instance, according to McManus and Gulcin Ozkan's classification (2018), Brazil follows a Presidential system, while India and South Africa have parliamentary systems. China could be theoretically considered a semi-presidential system. In their study, 13 out of 24 African countries are categorized as presidential, seven as semi-presidential, and four as parliamentary.

Despite this situation, it is possible to observe similarities among Southern countries in the South American region, where the presidential model has been generally adopted. Nowadays, all twelve countries in South America work under a presidential model.

However, it is necessary to consider the nature of their political regimes and practices to avoid overlooking Southern countries' political systems and gain a deeper understanding of them. In this regard, evaluating BRICS countries using reports such as the Freedom Report and Democratic Index by the Freedom House (2023) and the Economist Intelligence Unit (2023) reveals diverse national political developments.

For example, Brazil is known as a democracy with competitive elections but faces challenges such as polarization, high political violence, lack of transparency, and widespread corruption. South Africa is a constitutional democracy that emphasizes human rights but struggles with corruption at the highest levels. India, also a democracy with a multiparty system, has faced criticism for discriminatory policies, particularly against the Muslim population, in recent years.

In contrast, Russia and China are categorized as authoritarian regimes in which the power is concentrated in the figure of the Head of State. In these countries, the government controls the state bureaucracy, the media, universities, businesses, and civil society associations.

Political systems in traditional donors are also diverse. Lancaster (2007) showed that the US follows a presidential model. Japan has a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament, France operates a hybrid presidential/parliamentary system, Germany is a parliamentary democracy, and Denmark has a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system. Despite these differences, they share common democratic

practices such as alternation of power, respect for the rule of law, and participation of various political sectors.

### **Interests**

Countries in the Global South vary in economic strength and political ambitions. Brun (2018) and Santander and Alonso (2018) illustrated how, e.g., governments in Latin America pursue diverse interests through their foreign policies. Nevertheless, a shared trait is the promotion of SSC to garner support in global forums and enhance its international image. Santander and Alonso (2018) also demonstrated how, e.g., Chile seeks international integration and appears to be a reliable partner to Northern countries, while Brazil aims for regional leadership and extra-regional alliances for economic interests.

Other interesting cases are the two most anti-U.S. countries in the Western Hemisphere, Cuba and Venezuela. Venezuela, under Chavez and Maduro's administrations, has pursued interests such as promoting a multipolar world, regional integration, reducing US influence, and ensuring protection for the government (Zavarce, 2023b). In contrast, Cuba focuses on generating economic revenue to circumvent the US embargo through medical programs and tourism while enhancing its soft power to maintain international presence and prevent isolation (Bustamante & Sweig, 2008).

Another significant example is portrayed by India, which promotes SSC to safeguard critical geopolitical influence, especially in Southeast Asia and Africa, where China



has been gaining preponderance in recent years (Choudhury & Nagda, 2019).

Regarding China, its promotion of cooperation aims to achieve diverse interests, including garnering support for global policies and reforms, safeguarding against external criticism of human rights, accessing natural resources and agricultural commodities, advocating for the One-China policy, and projecting soft power (Gallagher & Irwin, 2015; Schuman & Shullman, 2022).

Moreover, China's white paper on development cooperation (2021) highlighted the importance of the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) for its foreign policy, stating that through this platform, China aims to enhance policy coordination with its international partners, strengthen infrastructure connectivity to connect China with the world through air, land and sea, promote trade, deep financial integration, and foster closer people-to-people ties.

Additionally, South Africa actively engages in SSC to position itself as a norm entrepreneur in global affairs, advocating for reforms in global governance, reinforcing trade and economic relations with other African partners, and serving as the voice of the continent in the international arena (Lucey & O'riordan, 2014; Bradlow, 2020).

The complexity of interests among Southern countries is also observed in international organizations/forums, e.g., at the 15th BRICS summit in 2023, the member countries announced the group's expansion, inviting Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates to join the bloc.

The expansion of the BRICS, seemingly an agreement among the original five members, also reflects a competition of interests. Naidu (2023) suggested that while China aims to institutionalize its global influence, India sees an opportunity to counterbalance China and assume a more significant role in the Global South. For Russia, the expansion allows for deepening its power in the Eurasian economic corridor, while Brazil and South Africa aim to reduce fragmentation within the Global South.

Taylor (2018) underlined that political elites in the Global South often hold interests divergent from their constituencies. While this paper focused on government-promoted interests, it is important to recognize that other stakeholders, such as civil society, the private sector, and universities, also have stakes in cooperation dynamics.

Traditional donors are not a monolithic unit either. Lancaster (2007) showed how the US, Japan, France, Germany, and Denmark pursue different goals in the diplomatic, commercial, and developmental fields based on the interests promoted by internal forces and the national interest of the donor government in the recipient country.

Consequently, evidence suggests that Southern governments are no different from traditional donors in pursuing their states' interests, and not all consider themselves part of a broad-based Global South group (Ero, 2024).

### **Organizations**

Nowadays, governments of the Global South are establishing aid agencies, cre-

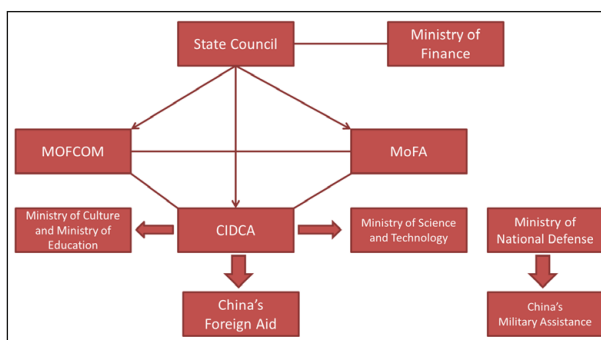
ating Export-Import banks, expanding their representation abroad, building new embassies, and engaging in international summits (Kragelund, 2019).

Kragelund (2019) also emphasized that development cooperation in the Global South is diverse, and a single entity does not monopolize the efforts at the national level. Instead, central, regional, and local government entities, state-owned enterprises, think tanks, and banks are involved in the planning and execution of SSC.

Despite complex organizational architectures, after a period of expansion, there has been an increasing focus on establishing dedicated cooperation agencies in recent years (Mawdsley, 2019). Examples of this trend are the creation of India’s Development Partnership Administration (2012) and China’s International Development Cooperation Agency (2018).

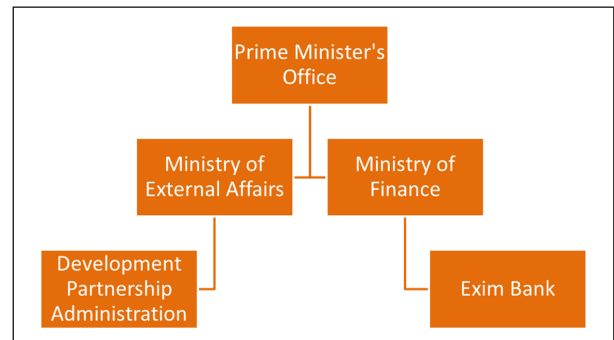
Figures 6 and 7 show some examples of internal organizations for the promotion of SSC:

**Figure 6 : China’s Aid System**



Source: Azis and Basen (2023)

**Figure 7: India’s System for International Cooperation**



Source: OECD (2023b)

Similarly, Stuenkel (2013) showed how, at the regional and international levels, different SSC initiatives are promoted by different organizations like the AU, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the New Development Bank, the OPEC, MERCOSUR, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA-TCP).

Braveboy (2009) explained that the beginning of the century marked the revitalization of old global organizations, like the NAM and OPEC, and the flourishing of new ones at the regional level, such as the AU and CELAC, even in regions such as Asia where cooperation has until now been limited by inter-state political rivalries. It is important to note the persistence of traditional organizations and the emergence of new ones, which, while opening more spaces to nurture ties of collaboration and understanding, could also generate overlapping and diffuse cooperation initiatives.

In contrast, despite differences and, in some cases, fragmentation among traditional donors, the NSC tends to be more uniform in organizational structure at national and international levels. Traditional donors concentrate their development initiatives through unitary agencies, typically linked to their MoFA. For example, the US promotes development cooperation through USAID, affiliated with the State Department. Japan channels its initiatives primarily through JICA. Denmark integrates its aid agency (DANIDA) within its MoFA, while Sweden implements cooperation projects through a unitary agency called SIDA (Lancaster, 2007).

At the international level, for over 60 years, the OECD-DAC has grouped the world's leading donors, defining and monitoring global standards in key areas of development (OECD, 2022a).

### **Vectors/Schemes**

SSC encompasses various schemes and fields beyond ODA. Kragelund (2019) listed various vectors through which SSC is provided: aid, humanitarian assistance, trade, investment, education, and global governance.

Similarly, according to UNOSSC (2021a), SSC has recently taken various forms, including increased trade, FDI, regional integration, technology transfers, sharing of solutions and experts, and other forms of exchange.

In this context, Gallagher and Irvin (2015) emphasized that there is no easy way to measure development cooperation provid-

ed by countries like China since its cooperation combines resources categorized as aid with political, social, cultural, judicial, and military cooperation. However, China has been increasing the availability of statistical data regarding cooperation initiatives, e.g., in the information published in the White Paper on Development Cooperation (2021).

Similarly, official information from the Indian government stated that:

Depending on the priorities of partner countries, India's development cooperation ranges from commerce to culture, energy to engineering, health to housing, IT to infrastructure, sports to science, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance to restoration and preservation of cultural and heritage assets (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2023).

The cases of China and India portray the wide variety of vectors implemented by Southern countries, which cover larger scopes and fields than NSC.

In contrast to SSC, which usually goes beyond technical and economic approaches to encompass political, cultural, social, and even military cooperation, NSC, while disbursed to different areas like health, education, and infrastructure, is primarily based on economic cooperation, focusing on ODA and its three central schemes: grants, loans, and technical cooperation.

Nonetheless, this cooperation modality has also been promoted in recent years using other official flows (OOF). The OECD

(2022b) defines OOF as official sector transactions that do not meet ODA criteria.

Furthermore, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda introduced the concept of Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD), which is defined as “an international standard for measuring the full array of resources to promote sustainable development in developing countries” (TOSSD, 2024).

This innovative methodology encompassed ODA, OOF, South-South and Triangular Cooperation, support to international public goods, and private finance mobilized by official interventions.

Therefore, given the broad spectrum of SSC initiatives and the absence of a unified definition, many activities undertaken by Southern countries, although not fitting within ODA scope, may still fall under the definitions of OOF and TOSSD utilized by traditional donors and international organizations. These activities include FDI, trade, energy cooperation, cultural exchanges, and scholarships, which do not fall under the ODA umbrella but can be measured through OOF and TOSSD.

However, it is important to highlight that SSC, as demonstrated in this paper, relies heavily on political aspects, including the political scheme. Evidence points to creating political platforms like the NAM, the G77, and the OPEC, among others. Since the beginning of the century, the political imprint has been perceived in forums such as the BRICS, CELAC, and ALBA-TCP.

This political scheme comprises bilateral or multilateral political coordination be-

yond developmental goals. It aims to reduce the influence of traditional donors, shield governments from external criticism and collective actions, enhance soft power, and even reshape or contest the global governance system.

To summarize the contents explained in this section, Table 1 presents an approximation, without exhaustion, of the main features of NSC and SSC.



**Table 1: SSC vs NSC**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>South-South Cooperation</b>	<b>North-South Cooperation</b>
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bandung principles.</li> <li>- BAPA principles.</li> <li>- Nairobi principles.</li> <li>- BAPA+40 principles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- DAC principles for effective aid.</li> <li>- Paris Declaration.</li> <li>- Busan Partnership.</li> </ul>
Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presidential, semi-presidential, and parliamentary systems.</li> <li>- Democratic, hybrid, and authoritarian regimes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presidential, semi-presidential, and parliamentary systems.</li> <li>- Democratic regimes.</li> </ul>
Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic benefits.</li> <li>- Political leverage.</li> <li>- Regional integration.</li> <li>- Capacity building.</li> <li>- Diplomatic solidarity.</li> <li>- Commercial interest.</li> <li>- Transformation of the international system.</li> <li>- Sustainable Development</li> <li>- National Interest.</li> <li>- Others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National Interest.</li> <li>- Sustainable Development.</li> <li>- Economic Growth.</li> <li>- Political Transformation in recipient countries.</li> <li>- New Markets.</li> <li>- Securitization of natural resources.</li> <li>- Others.</li> </ul>
Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multiple overlapping organizations at the national level.</li> <li>- Multiple organizations at the international level (NAM, OPEC, ASEAN, MERCOSUR, BRICS +, NDB, etc.).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Governed by a clear institutional framework.</li> <li>- OECD-DAC as a rector entity at the international level.</li> </ul>
Vectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foreign aid.</li> <li>- Humanitarian assistance.</li> <li>- Trade.</li> <li>- Investment.</li> <li>- Political coordination.</li> <li>- Military cooperation.</li> <li>- Others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ODA.</li> <li>- OOF.</li> <li>- TOSSD.</li> </ul>

Source: Elaborated by the author (2023)

## Conclusion

Since its inception at the 1955 Bandung Conference, SSC has evolved through various phases, influencing the involved actors' rhetoric, interests, approaches, and policy focus.

Therefore, while the SSC promoted in Bandung was inspired by political demands, the BAPA 1978 adopted a more technical approach. In the 2000s, SSC resurged, partly because of the rapid economic growth of the BRICS. Additionally, the MDGs and SDGs have promoted SSC as a catalyst to promote sustainable development.

Despite ongoing evolution and extensive debates, a universally accepted definition of SSC still needs to be achieved. This situation has led to challenges in defining the scope of SSC activities, difficulties in acquiring precise data, and a pressing need for further analytical and empirical scrutiny.

There is an increasing trend in defining operationalizing frameworks, as seen in the case of Indonesia (Adjani, 2023) and enhancing transparency through the publication of official data, exemplified by China's 2021 White Paper. However, there is still work to obtain standardization and efficiency.

In theory, SSC aims to break with the donor-recipient dynamic, emphasizing principles like solidarity, equality, complementarity, sovereignty, non-intervention, and non-political conditionality. However, some SSC providers have, to some extent, replicated traditional donors' practices, promoting cooperation to fulfill commercial and financial goals based on national rather than

collective interests. The most visible example is China, which, through the BRI, explicitly pursues interconnectivity to promote trade and financial cooperation with its partners.

Moreover, rather than challenging the established global governance structure, some Southern countries are capitalizing on it to assert a more significant role. For instance, certain SSC providers, such as Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Türkiye, opted to join the OECD and align with its standards. Even more, Argentina, known for its extensive history of SSC, decided to join the OECD and declined an invitation to join the BRICS in 2024.

Similarly, other important actors, like Brazil, China, India, and South Africa, have established partnerships with the OECD, opening possibilities for future convergences between traditional and emerging donors.

Nowadays, South countries advocate different approaches. While some, like Cuba and Venezuela, seek to overhaul traditional North-South relations and propose alternative governance structures, others, like Brazil and South Africa, aspire to amplify their role within existing frameworks. Countries like India engage in SSC to safeguard their critical geopolitical interests, whereas others such as Chile and Colombia prioritize maintaining strong ties with traditional donors.

Based on these dynamics, it can be argued that currently, SSC practitioners aim to seek support for their positions in international forums, increase their role in the international system, project their values and ideologies internationally, explore new market opportunities and access to natural resourc-

es, consolidate anti-hegemonic power blocs, or serves as a link between the North and the South. Sometimes, it is even a combination of these intentions.

Among these developments, three main approaches within the Global South stand out:

The first aims to break traditional donor-recipient relations, alter the current global governance system, and reinforce SSC based on common claims and principles.

A second and middle position attempts to strengthen SSC and maintain selective collaborations with traditional donors while increasing its presence and influence in the current international system.

On the other extreme is a group of countries that want the best possible relations with traditional donors, sometimes even adhering to traditional standards imposed by the OECD-DAC.

Amidst this reality, relaunching the BRICS+ could represent a new phase of this cooperation modality, bringing a broader consensus among the strongest developing economies.

Nowadays, the BRICS+ challenges the G-7's preponderance in the global financial system, attempts to maximize the Global South's leverage power, which can be more diffuse in larger groups like the G77 and the NAM, and works to create a more diversified and multipolar market.

However, although the BRICS fundamentally aims to reform the Global Governance system and overcome the dollar's domination in the international monetary architecture, dissimilar interests among its

members will also deepen with its expansion. Furthermore, numerous BRICS countries collaborate with the OECD-DAC, making the development landscape more diffuse and complex than ever.

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