
Democracy and South-South Cooperation in IBSA Countries: Emerging Legislative Debates



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The dynamics of legislative participation in SSC policy-making is particularly interesting in the case of IBSA countries as one of the possible entry-door to studying the ways in which democracy and SSC interact.

Introduction

India, Brazil and South Africa (also referred to as IBSA countries) are among the most active providers of South-South Cooperation (SSC) for development, not only in terms of material and financial flows but also for their political and symbolic leadership of this agenda. IBSA countries' governments and vocal civil societies have historically championed the right to development in global affairs (Westhuizen 2012). In the more recent years, however, IBSA countries have also featured in global politics as representing a particular sub-group among emergent economies, namely a group of "rising democratic powers" (Piccone 2016). Democracy and development have indeed been central elements in the international identity and foreign policy narratives for the three countries, albeit in different and particular ways. Democracy also became a defining element of the IBSA self-proclaimed identity as a political group since 2003, when this informal coalition was officially established. In a very recent joint statement on SSC by high representatives of the three countries, the first of its kind, the governments highlighted that "IBSA is bound together by a shared conviction in the universal values of democracy, plurality, diversity, human rights, rule of law and commitment to sustainable development, inclusivity of all communities and gender, and respect for international law".¹

While there is a broad recognition of IBSA countries' principled-based democratic claims, less attention has been paid to how democracy takes shape and is

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operationalised in IBSA countries' SSC policies and practices. Seeking to address this knowledge gap, this paper looks at one specific and very concrete dimension of the interplay between democracy and SSC policy-making, namely the Executive-Legislative interactions in the context of development cooperation policy debates in India, Brazil and South Africa.

In what follows, this paper intends to briefly explore some of the emerging dynamics of Legislative-Executive interactions in IBSA countries, through short vignettes of legislative debates focusing on development cooperation related matters in each of the IBSA countries. It argues that in the current SSC consolidation phase there are signs of increased participation by and engagement of the Legislative in SSC policy debates and policy-making. The paper further suggests that it is possible to distinguish three different and interacting types of legislative responses to the growing development assistance role IBSA countries currently play: calls on the Executive for "doing more", calls for "doing less" and calls for "doing better".

An important methodological caveat, however, needs to be highlighted before moving on to the vignettes. This paper is neither the result of a systematic study on law-makers' voting behaviour, political ideology or preferences in all three countries nor a systematic review of law-making or legislative debates (discourses or expressed agenda). Rather, this first qualitative approximation to the topic takes on the form of short-narrations on selected legislative debates. The selection of the cases, as well as the complementary analysis, was made through literature review, first-hand in loco observations and interviews with

academics and practitioners in India, Brazil and South Africa between 2015 and 2018. In the concluding section, the paper elaborates on the comparative aspects of the emerging legislative engagement in SSC-related debates in IBSA countries and suggests some points for future inquiry.

The domestic politics of South-South Cooperation

SSC for development, and even more so South-South relations, are not new to India, Brazil and South Africa and have shaped the foreign relations of the three countries throughout the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the degree and nature shift that took place in the early 2000s is undeniable, when SSC - and SSC for development - simply boomed, calling the attention of development scholars and practitioners from all around the globe. Following the first paradigmatic moment in the early days of SSC or "development aid by non-Western countries" during the Cold War until the early 2000s and the 'golden years' and the expansionary phase of SSC from the early to the mid-2000s, the current and third moment is one of consolidation of SSC (Mawdsley, forthcoming). Albeit provisional, this periodisation reveals waves of studies on SSC, with important shifts in objects and research questions, as well as on approaches and research methods. While the bulk of studies in the first wave focused on understanding flows, attempting to map emerging actors and their practices, and asking questions about the challenges and opportunities of an increasing fragmented and decentred "development cooperation field" (Mawdsley 2012; Esteves & Assunção 2014; Paulo & Reisen 2010), the more recent ones have started to critically assess practices (Bergamaschi,

Moore & Tickner 2017), investigate the effects of the shifting geographies of knowledge and power in global politics and changes in global developmental norms (Esteves 2017; Constantine & Shankland 2017). Recent studies are also opening the black-box of SSC governance, moving beyond flat accounts on foreign policy-making and looking at competing interests and ideas on domestic and external development, and the interplay between them (Leite 2013; Cabral et al. 2016; Gu et al. 2016; Bergamaschi, Moore & Tickner 2017; Farias 2018).

The closer look at the domestic politics of SSC benefits both from dialogue with the “bureaucratic turn of development studies” (Lancaster 2007; Yanguas & Hulme 2015), as well as a home-grown turn of foreign policy analysis in Southern powers, seeking to pay more systematic attention to domestic politics and policy coalitions shaping foreign policy-making (for instance in Brazil: Lima 2000; Cason & Power 2009; Oliveira & Onuki 2010; Milani & Pinheiro 2013; Lopes 2014; Farias & Ramanzini Junior 2015; or in South Africa: Nel & Van der Westhuizen 2003). Greater attention to domestic politics in the case of SSC is revealing of the current dynamics of institutionalisation of SSC, in several providers including IBSA countries, and thus better apprehends the shifting policy priorities and practices.

Previous research on domestic politics in major SSC providers has described policy-making as considerable dependent on presidential diplomacy, led by the Foreign Affairs, Trade and/or Finance ministries, and implemented in a rather fragmented institutional landscape, with limited societal and parliamentary awareness and oversight. Yet, in spite

of this burgeoning literature on Indian, Brazilian and South African development cooperation, few studies have actually systematically studied Executive-Legislative interactions.² Commentators on the role of the Legislative point that oversight of SSC policies and practices remains generally low or *ad hoc* in the three countries (Poskitt et al. 2016; Gu et al. 2016; Pomeroy et al. 2016; Mawdsley 2014). Studies do point, however, to the issue capturing law-makers’ attention nationally, either within the formal foreign affairs committees (such as in South Africa, cf. Westhuizen 2017) or through special sessions (such as in Brazil, cf. Leite et al. 2014), but those have been exceptions rather than the rule. Nonetheless, it seems that below the academic radars, there are interesting developments on that front that deserve to be better understood, as observed in the coming sections.

“Do it better”? South Africa’s Parliament Oversight over African Renaissance Fund

In August 2010, South Africa’s flagship development cooperation initiative, the African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund (ARF), became the object of an increased parliamentary scrutiny on efficiency grounds. The ARF was formally established through an act of Parliament in 2000 and started operating in the following year to provide cohesion to South Africa’s development cooperation initiatives. ARF annual appropriations are done through “money bills” by Parliament (Naidu 2017). The intensive scrutiny of 2010 came primarily from the opposition in the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on International Relations, and targeted operational shortcomings

in the ARF management, challenging the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) for the lack of proper monitoring and evaluation on how the funds were being spent in partner countries (Westhuizen 2017). Far from being a purely technical-operational debate, the incident led, in 2013, to an internal investigation into DIRCO's then General Director Jerry Matjila for "possible fraud, corruption and gross negligence". Since 2014, the Fund has 4-year strategic plans and annual performance reports. Moreover, the debates in the South African parliament have also impinged on the broader (and still inconclusive) negotiations on the creation of an autonomous development cooperation agency by South Africa, SADPA, shedding light on the divisive nature of political and financial responsibilities sharing between national agencies on issues concerning development cooperation, namely DIRCO and Treasury.

In one of the few studies on this matter, Westhuizen (2017, p. 3) argues that despite civil society organisations and think-tanks as much like the opposition parties not having "fundamentally questioned South Africa's role in development cooperation", the 2010 parliamentary debates on the ARF and DIRCO responses to it, combined with the constraints arising from the larger political-economic context in South Africa in the past years, have contributed to shape country's current approach to development cooperation and its alignment with a public mood of "seeking demonstrated benefits back home". Still according to the author, the way in which South African elites, and DIRCO, decided to sell development cooperation to domestic audiences since

has been through emphasising a counter discourse of interdependence with the African region, the need to "align development cooperation initiatives more strategically with the country's own economic interests and more rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes with the creation of a fully fledged development cooperation agency". Due to the particular arrangements that sustain the ARF, and the standing that South African parliament has on approving annual appropriations, the Portfolio Committee has indeed become a locus and a voice for advocating institutional reforms for the ARF, such as for the creation of a permanent secretariat for the Fund or, preferably, a migration towards the new SADPA.³ Such role is increasingly supported by research and advocacy groups, including think-tanks and civil society organisations, which provide law-makers with supporting evidence of projects and policies, as well as training on broader foreign policy issues.⁴

This brief vignette from debates in South Africa sheds light into one particular manifestation of the "doing better" call vocalised in Parliament that illustrates the mounting results-efficiency pressures coming from members of the Legislative and a growing need to demonstrate benefits also at home, particularly during economic downturns. Those pressures are framed and remain localised in the more technical-management realm and do not threaten the existing (societal and cross-partisan) consensus on South Africa's role in international development.

"Between doing more and doing better"? India's Parliamentary Debates on Development Assistance

The features of India's development

assistance are contested in its domestic political domain. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs (Lok Sabha 2017, p. 21), in their appraisal was 'peturbed to note a sizeable reduction in aid and loans to countries in [India's] immediate neighbourhood such as Maldives, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Bangladesh'.⁵ The Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs recommended (recommendation no. 21) enhancing budgetary allocation in consonance with India's "neighbourhood first" policy. The Ministry of External Affairs acknowledged the concerns of the Standing Committee, and noted an additional allocation of INR 600 crore towards Indian assistance in its neighbourhood (Lok Sabha 2017, p. 22).

Parliamentarians also voiced concerns over the shortage of funds allocated by the Executive for the MEA potentially compromising India's foreign policy objectives and country's international standing, particularly in light of the sharp increase in official commitments made by high-level officials and India's soul-seeking quest in the Indo-Pacific region, in light of a growing China. Another set of budgetary concerns were again raised in 2018, in the Committee on External Affairs 21st report concerning demand for grants for 2018-2019 (Lok Sabha 2018). In light of India's "burgeoning foreign policy goals", the report highlights the challenges and mismatches in budget allocation and expenditures related to development programmes, 'technical assistance and development cooperation schemes, projects and programmes being implemented abroad where certain extraneous factors come into play which are beyond [MEA's] control' (Lok Sabha

2018, p. 11). The 2018 report devotes a whole chapter to India's development engagement, found also in previous reports since 2015, where it analyses several countries and projects in some detail. In its recommendations, the Committee suggested the Ministry to consider granting the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) the financial autonomy of a fully-fledged development agency.

Beyond appropriation debates, it seems that Indian Parliament remains at large supportive of Indian development cooperation and largely delegating to the Executive power (both the MEA and the Prime Minister Office) most of the content decisions, including sectorial and geographical priorities. Still, in a brief commentary of India-Africa relations, Dye (2016) suggested an emerging role for the Indian parliament in shaping Indian development cooperation institutional mechanisms. According to the author, the recent expansion of the Indian foreign loan programme, mostly through the Lines of Credit (LOC) by the Indian Exim (Export-Import) Bank, are generating an increased need of justification "to an often sceptical Indian parliament and the public wanting development 'at home', which could in turn explain some of policy and management headways, such as the adoption of the 2015 Exim Bank Guidelines to improve LOC's delivery. If and whether the pressures came from Parliament or from foreign policy reputation needs to boost India's image among developing partners, or both, remains an issue for further research.

Equally important in India's case, is the rapidly growing visibility of Indian international role and its emerging

implications for the politicisation of the topic at home as well as pressures (coming from the Legislative, the Prime Minister Office, the foreign policy experts' community in Delhi and partner countries) on the existing structure to improve delivery, mostly on the DPA/MEA and on the Exim Bank.

Brazil: from international solidarity to "do it less"?

There is relatively more detailed discussion available on the Brazilian National Congress engagement with Brazil's development cooperation, including a comprehensive panoramic analysis by Leite et al. (2014), in their State of the Debate study. There, the authors map some paradigmatic debates in the Brazilian Congress concerning engagement in international cooperation, namely on the new statute of Embrapa (the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation) authorising its international operations and debates concerning the legality of Brazilian food aid, mostly in 2010 and 2011. While the influence of particular law-makers, lobbies and groups concerning the areas and countries of allocation for Brazilian development cooperation were not assessed by the authors, their analysis is revealing of the disputes between the government coalition (in that occasion led by the Workers' Party) and the opposition, in a highly fragmented party system, like the Brazilian one.

Leite and colleagues suggest that while the Embrapa debate was brief and low in public participation, the second has generated longer debates and wider participation from a series of domestic groups. According to the authors, the main contention was between national

needs (including food needs and securing food prices at home) and international solidarity. In 2010, positions raised did not challenge the need for international solidarity, but rather how to balance those apparently competing goals. Still according to the authors, despite the opposition concerns with the political use of food aid by the incumbent party at the time (the Worker's Party), "the deputies have considered solidarity as a principle that goes beyond the Workers' Party's foreign policy, mirroring international, religious and moral principles as well as values held by the Brazilian parliament and society as a whole" (Leite et al 2014, p. 57).⁶

These tensions between solidarity, Brazilian global leadership goals and national development priorities have actually set the tone of several of the legislative debates in Brazil. Other authors, however, show that those conflicting views were already present in 2004, when the Congress discussed the participation of Brazilian troops in the United Nations-mandated peace mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), led by Brazil from 2004 to 2017, based on the constitutional requirement of the Legislative power having to formally authorise Brazilian troops to be sent to Haiti (Feliu & Miranda 2011; Waisbich & Pomeroy 2014). In 2004, discussions touched not only the discomfort of congressmen with having little say in the process, as well as conflicting views on how Brazilian engagement in Haiti fitted Brazilian larger foreign policy goals and whether sending troops abroad was appropriate considering Brazilian security needs at home. Feliu and Miranda (2011) state that budgetary issues were seldom

raised in 2004, but become more important in the national debates, including in the press, as Brazilian participation extended to several years. Another use of solidarity-based defences of Brazilian international engagements by law-makers were also found in more recent humanitarian debates, namely in global migration and refugee crisis (Waisbich 2016), even as the domestic environment in Brazil was already evolving from the “golden emerging power mood” under Lula da Silva to the more pragmatic tone under Dilma Rousseff (Suyama et al. 2016, Marcondes & Mawdsley 2017), as the first signs of the political-economic turbulences started to unfold. However, far less supportive voices have gained room in Legislative debates in the last years, either on the humanitarian and refugee crisis in Venezuela or the international operations of the Brazilian National Development Bank (BNDES) in Latin America and Africa. In both cases, partisan politics and the increased political polarisation also within the Legislative are an important factor in understanding congressional behaviour.

Interestingly, unlike the Indian Lok Sabha grants’ review, a more comprehensive review of Brazilian development cooperation agenda, or the workings of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC), was never object of a Legislative review. This could be the case if the long-awaited bill on development cooperation – being drafted and negotiated within the Executive for several years now - finally reaches the National Congress. Foreign Minister Aloysio Nunes (2017-2018) publicly announced his commitment to do it before the end of his tenure, but could not keep with this promise.

Based on the existing studies, it appears that the Brazilian National Congress is still mainly reactive to the agenda set by the Executive. There is not specific caucus or organised group on international development cooperation, but the historical initiatives (such as the 1999 Parliamentary Group on Brazil–Africa) and the growing contemporary debates on development finance, food aid, peacekeeping, migration and asylum could be signs of the Legislative “slowly, but steadily, acting as a check-and-balance force on cooperation issues” (Leite et al 2014, p. 9) with a potential to both polarise and build constituency around development cooperation in Brazil.

Final discussion

Legislative oversight on foreign policy and development cooperation has been growing in all IBSA countries, despite its still marginal formal role in the overall policy process. Debates happening in Legislative houses are signs of increased public attention to the subject not only among law-makers, but also the media and civil society. This critical gaze on the dynamics of legislative participation in SSC policy-making is particularly interesting in the case of IBSA countries as one of the possible entry-door to studying the ways in which democracy and SSC interact, not only at the diplomatic level, but also in policy-making. The vignettes presented here are merely illustrative of some of the recent debates, but they already point to some interesting leads for future research.

First, the centrality of debates focusing on resource-allocation to law-makers’ participation in development cooperation policy. Due to the very formal checks-

and-balances and competencies sharing arrangements in foreign policy matters in the three countries (which formally call for legislative oversight on this kind of matter), resources and budget discussions emerge as a major arena for Legislative participation. Rather than purely technical matters, budget debates are a fertile ground to assess competing policy narratives and priorities (Roe 1994). Considering the emerging middle-classes in all three countries, one could speculate a rise in this kind of resource-related debates in parliaments, together with some sort of tax-payer conscience among citizens, shaping both electoral politics and beyond-elections citizen mobilisations around foreign policy and development cooperation.

Second, the role of think-tanks as supporting and mediating parliamentary policy debates in both India and South Africa. Although the centrality of this kind of actor in foreign policy debates, particularly in the Indian case (McGann 2018) goes beyond the specific case of legislative participation, their role of knowledge-producer actors (equally shared by other civil society organisations, like advocacy non-governmental organisations) in supporting and qualifying law-makers participation remains key to understanding the themes that will emerge in the agenda, as well as the quality of parliamentarians' inputs into the policy process.

Third is the growing politicisation of development/SSC debates, including in the Legislative. Far from been a surprising finding, considering the very nature and role of legislative bodies in democracies, the vignettes here open future research avenues for confirming or challenging

Lancaster's (2007, p. 20) findings that Parliamentary systems tend to support incumbent governments' aid policy, applying her framework to the case of IBSA countries. Brazil, a Presidential regime unlike the other two, has a longer track record of plural (and divisive) congressional debates. Both the debates on contributions to peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts as well as the discussions on operations of BNDES are signs of the growing politicisation of SSC taking place in legislative debates in the South American country. Whether and how a more vocal National Congress actually shapes Brazilian development engagements abroad, moving away of the traditional abdication and delegation positions of the Legislative power in foreign-policy matters, also remains an open-ended question.

Finally, "do it better", "do it more", "do it less" are expressions of conflicting preferences by members of the national Legislative (and by other social forces) in all three IBSA countries, which coexist and fluctuate in tandem with the shifting domestic political environments. Those expressions are signs of development cooperation in IBSA countries slowly but steadily entering the realm of politics: principles, institutional frameworks, and policy designs are increasingly questioned and disputed, including in legislative debates. Insofar IBSA countries' development cooperation engagements remain intrinsically linked to foreign policy-making, they might be subjected to similar Executive-Legislative patterns of interactions found in other foreign relations-related matters, including the so-called broader bipartisan support. Nonetheless, SSC policy debates are also shaped by the particular nature of

development cooperation, as a (incipient) policy field, which (unlike many other arenas of foreign relations) cuts across several sectorial policy domains⁷ and has a clear budgetary dimension, thus opening formal and/or ad hoc opportunities for democratising SSC policy-making through Legislative participation, and consequently broader participation from outside the state, including civil society at large.

Endnotes

- ¹ Ministry of External Affairs, India. (2018). *IBSA Declaration on South-South Cooperation*. June 05. Retrieved from: https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29955/IBSA_Declaration_on_SouthSouth_Cooperation
- ² Within the field of foreign policy analysis, the relationship between the Executive and Legislative power – both in Parliamentary regimes such as India and South Africa or in Presidential regimes, such as Brazil – has also become a promising research avenue. For Brazil, see for instance, Lima 2003 and Fares 2005. However, less evidence is available on the contours of this interaction when it comes to SSC.
- ³ Du Plessis, C. (2018) “Plans to implement humanitarian aid projects in Africa stalled in a state of promises, not delivery”, *Daily Maverick*, 24 October 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-10-24-plans-to-implement-humanitarian-aid-projects-in-africa-stalled-in-a-state-of-promises-not-delivery/>
- ⁴ Interview with South African academic, Cape Town, July 2018.
- ⁵ News18 (2016) “Shortage of Funds Affecting MEA Functioning: Parliamentary Panel”, News18, 2 May. Retrieved from: <https://www.news18.com/news/politics/shortage-of-funds-affecting-mea-functioning-parliamentary-panel-1237910.html>

⁶ A more detailed analysis of the legislative debates on both cases can be found in Costa Leite (2013).

⁷ In Brazil, an illustration of those domestic politics shaping and being shaped by development cooperation engagements can be seen in Brazilian agricultural cooperation with Africa. See, for instance, Pierri 2013, Cabral et al 2013, Cabral et al 2016.

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MEKONG-KOREA COOPERATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Diplomats and government officials from the Mekong Region and Republic of Korea (ROK) met for sixth Mekong-ROK Business Forum on 13 December 2018, in Seoul. Ahead of the inaugural of the Mekong-Republic of Korea Summit and ASEAN-Republic of Korea Commemorative Summit in 2019, the countries of the Greater Mekong Sub region covering Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, and Korea are taking initiatives to tackle development challenges.

The forum focused on “Promoting Co-prosperity Through Eco-friendly Innovation among SMEs in Mekong Countries and Republic of Korea,” was jointly organised by the ASEAN-Korea Center, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Start-ups and governmental certification agency Innobiz.

The focus was to engage all stakeholders towards adopting eco-friendly technologies and associated best practices should change and adapt their ways of using resources, energy and waste for higher efficiency. It was noted that ‘cooperating on ecological and environmental protection will be an important part of building an ASEAN-Korea community of a shared future’.

Source: Lee, J. (2018). ‘Mekong-Korea Cooperation spearheads Sustainable Development’. The Korea Herald. December 24. Retrieved from: <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20181224000254>

TEN PILLARS” OF INDIA-CHINA CULTURAL COOPERATION

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited India from 21-24 December, 2018, to hold the first-ever meeting of India-China High-Level Mechanism on Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges with External Affairs Minister (EAM) Sushma Swaraj.

The meeting aimed to strengthen bilateral relations between India and China. The two countries agreed upon ten pillars of cooperation including cultural exchange, cooperation in films and television, cooperation in museum administration, cooperation in organising sports, exchanges between the youth of the two countries, cooperation on tourism, exchanges between states and cities, cooperation in traditional medicine, cooperation in yoga and cooperation in education. This High-Level Mechanism brings all the existing bilateral cultural and people-to-people engagements between India and China under one umbrella, adding a new facet to the expanding India-China ties.

The decision to establish the India-China High Level Mechanism on Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges was taken during the Informal Summit between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping in Wuhan in April 2018.

Source: PTI. (2018). India, China agree on ‘ten pillars’ of cooperation’. The Hindu Business Line. December 21. Retrieved from: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/india-china-agree-on-ten-pillars-of-cooperation/article25798743.ece>