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MONITORING AND EVALUATION MECHANISMS FOR SOUTH-SOUTH AND TRIANGULAR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: LESSONS FROM BRAZIL FOR THE 2030 AGENDA



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Brazilian Cooperation Agency
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NeST	Network of Southern Think Tanks
OECD/DAC	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's / Development Assistance Committee
R&D	Research & Development
RBM	Results-Based Management
SSC	South-South Cooperation
SSDC	South-South Development Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TrC	Triangular Development Cooperation

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper provides an overview of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices from different institutions engaged in South-South development cooperation (SSDC) and triangular development cooperation (TrC) in Brazil, based on a literature and document review and semi-structured interviews with 13 Brazilian and international institutions.

The findings corroborate the initial hypothesis that there is no unified M&E system for Brazilian development cooperation but heterogeneous M&E practices. These practices are mainly focused on outputs and shaped by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency's parameters as well as those of the executing institutions.

The challenges and pitfalls identified by domestic and international institutions involved in Brazil's SSDC/TrC showed the growing awareness of the need to prioritize M&E. However, heterogeneous concepts of evaluation and diversified institutional contexts suggest that a broad and cross-sectorial debate could enhance construction of a unified framework for Brazilian development cooperation, working hand in hand with general discussions on South-South cooperation and international development governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past 15 years, South-South development cooperation (SSDC)¹ and triangular development cooperation (TrC)² have been growing in prominence as a result of an increase in resources, geographical reach and diversity of approaches to new forms of development partnerships. At the same time, demands for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are also being made by citizens, taxpayers and civil society that are engaged in SSDC endeavours.

Yet, the lack of a clear and common conceptual framework makes SSDC monitoring and evaluation challenging. This problem is compounded by the evidence gaps and the low quality of data on SSDC, which is generally incomplete and unreliable, owing to weak M&E systems and overall information management in Southern partners. Development agencies among Southern partners are relatively new and still lack the seasoned M&E experience of traditional donors. Moreover, Southern partners understand SSDC in different ways, compared with a more homogeneous understanding among traditional donors. Hence, Southern partners have no comparable conceptual and methodological framework to match the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (DAC/OECD) to guide and standardize their development cooperation M&E.

This paper aims to review M&E practices from different institutions involved in SSDC/TrC in a key Southern partner, Brazil, systematizing the main lessons, opportunities and obstacles for their improvement in a post-2015 context.

In particular, the paper aims to: (a) map out what has been done so far in M&E by the institutions executing SSDC/TrC in the country; (b) understand how the main stakeholders perceived Brazilian SSC/TrC M&E and particularly its conception and application of SSC principles, measuring process, results and impact, innovative approaches; (c) analyse lessons to inform policies and practices of the development community; and (d) contribute to global initiatives and debates that aim to build better M&E frameworks for SSDC/TrC, including efforts promoted by the Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST).

The main hypothesis tested in this paper is that Brazilian SSDC/TrC M&E systems and practices are heterogeneous, focused on outputs and shaped by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency's (ABC) parameters as well as those of the executing institutions (such as ministries, public-private enterprises).

In order to test such hypotheses, the methodology we employed was based on a literature and document review and conducting interviews with domestic and international institutions engaged in Brazilian SSDC/TrC provision.³ The literature review sought to map out Brazil's international development cooperation in general

¹ We have chosen in this paper to focus on South-South development cooperation, understanding it as a subset of South-South cooperation. While SSDC is aimed at tackling primary development challenges, SSC encompasses relations that are not all necessarily based on promoting developmental objectives (such as arms trade or language and cultural exchanges). According to this definition, SSDC may include technical cooperation, peacekeeping, debt relief, student scholarships, humanitarian aid/ cooperation and investment's facilitation and promotion (NeST, 2015).

² The Brazilian government refers to this modality as 'trilateral cooperation' to emphasize the horizontal character that guides all initiatives framed as SSDC. Triangular cooperation may, by contrast, imply asymmetries among partners, while 'trilateral cooperation' must promote horizontality and participation of all partners engaged in the initiatives. For this reason, we opted to use the term 'trilateral cooperation' when referring to the research findings regarding Brazilian practices.

³ We have interviewed 13 institutions, selected for their prominent engagement in Brazilian technical and humanitarian cooperation (five Brazilian executing institutions, the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, six trilateral partners and one civil society organization engaged in a technical cooperation project). Interviews were conducted in October, 2015. The first draft of this paper was shared with all interviewees and their comments, corrections and suggestions were incorporated in this final version. The research team assured confidentiality of the information gathered through interviews and refrains from making any reference to specific interviewees.

and acknowledge M&E SSDC/TrC initiatives developed by its government. The interviews were designed to ground our analysis on existing knowledge and practices of domestic actors engaged in Brazilian SSDC/TrC. As M&E efforts in SSDC and TrC are still incipient, a first step was to find the commonalities and challenges that these actors face.

The method⁴ employed aimed to describe and interpret interviewees' perspectives on M&E systems and practices within their institutions and amid the broader context of Brazilian development cooperation. The research team tried to identify a set of concepts and practices that could be assembled in different perspectives between sectors and/or institutional loci.

The paper proceeds as follows: In the next section, we give an overview of Brazilian SSDC and present the M&E approach of ABC for technical cooperation among development countries. This section is based primarily on a literature review. The third section presents and analyses our empirical findings, based on original interviews. The final section concludes by partly confirming our initial hypothesis and discussing the significance of these findings, particularly regarding the challenges in developing a functional M&E system and the possibilities of developing international benchmarks.

2. BRAZIL'S SSDC AND APPROACH TO M&E

2.1 *Brazilian SSDC: an overview*

The main guiding principles of Brazilian SSDC inform practices and, consequently, may influence M&E approaches. Like other SSDC partners, the Brazilian government's narrative emphasizes the principles of horizontality, non-conditionality and demand-driven SSDC. According to the official discourse, Brazilian SSDC is an instrument of foreign policy aimed to strengthen political and economic relations with other development countries. The variety of agents engaged in SSDC has been a subject of academic debates. While some researchers have supported the argument that Brazilian engagement in SSDC reflects its fragmented decision-making process in which many actors beyond the Ministry of Foreign Affairs pursue parallel, sometimes conflicting, interests and strategies (Leite et al, 2014; Pinheiro and Milani, 2013), other scholars have understood the heterogeneity of actors as a consequence of domestic policy networks' engagement in SSDC (Esteves et al. 2016). Yet, for some practitioners, Brazilian SSDC fragmentation refers only to the absence of synergies among its different modalities (technical cooperation, humanitarian cooperation, etc.). Nevertheless, from this perspective, a given modality follows a consistent strategy based on a common decision-making process.

Mutual benefits are also highlighted in the government's narrative. Economic and commercial benefits, rather than being stated as a condition, are seen as possible medium- and long-term consequences of closer ties. Brazil does not see itself as a 'donor,' preferring instead to refer to itself as a partner in/for development. It values the importance of the adaptation process, the recognition of local experiences and the existence of synergies between partners (Leite et al, 2014).

Brazilian SSDC presents some distinctive characteristics that may pose challenges for traditional M&E processes. Different Brazilian executing institutions use the concept of structuring cooperation, which aims at strengthening local capacities and institutions that are key for sustaining functioning systems of governance

⁴The proposed methodology and analytical approach builds on the Framework Approach (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Smith and Firth, 2011).

of public policies, mostly governmental, universities and research agencies, in order to increase their capacity to influence the development process.

Furthermore, the distinction between SSDC initiatives and profit-driven ones often blurred, making an evaluation effort more complex. Since Brazilian SSDC's objective is to strengthen relations with developing countries, it may be considered a natural consequence that the boundaries between commercial or investment strategies and technical or financial cooperation are unclear (Suyama and Pomeroy, 2014).⁵ This is particularly challenging because it increases the complexity involved in addressing wider strategies underlying the projects, since it often entails development gains for both partners. The fact that SSDC initiatives are framed as partnerships in pursuit of mutual benefits thus, criteria must be built horizontally and all countries involved should determine their own standards to measure their performances and results.

Brazilian development cooperation involves many executing institutions. On the one hand, this highly fragmented structure may impose serious challenges about the heterogeneity of data generated within its different modalities and the possibility of implementing a management model with unified monitoring, accountability and evaluation mechanisms. On the other hand – although not particularly concerning M&E systems and practices – it can be argued that the distinctive feature of Brazil's development cooperation is an international extension of domestic public policy communities. Technical cooperation initiatives of the many executing institutions can be seen as extensions of the programs and projects developed at home (Esteves, Fonseca and Gomes forthcoming; Esteves and Assunção, forthcoming).

Regarding total financial amounts, in 2010, the latest year for which data is available, the most significant modality were contributions to international organizations (IPEA, 2013). Mercosur was the key recipient, reflecting Brazil's focus on regional integration. This approach may also impose challenges concerning accountability, since the use of resources managed by different organizations is monitored through different procedures, instruments and frameworks.

There is also a lack of legal and consolidated institutional frameworks, including legal constraints for foreign disbursements. This could mean that initiatives are sometimes discontinued and impact assessments would become practically unfeasible.

2.2 The ABC approach to M&E

Brazilian development cooperation is guided by its cooperation agency, ABC. It was instituted in 1984 as a fusion between two former cooperation divisions and today is part of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its role is to foster cooperation projects to be executed by specialized agencies; therefore, Brazil's cooperation is understood as part of a broader framework of government strategies for public policy and international affairs.

⁵ Cooperation in agriculture is the sector that best exemplifies these dynamics. One Brazilian flagship programme in food and nutritional security links emergency humanitarian assistance with technical cooperation; another one, dedicated to the development of agribusiness, combines technical cooperation with foreign direct investment; a third one combines technical cooperation with concessional credits. Also, some projects directly relate to disputes in multilateral forums. For instance, the case of a drug factory in Mozambique responded to the battle on intellectual property rights of antiretroviral drugs; and the Cotton 4 Project, aimed at strengthening cotton production in four African countries, is partly financed with reparations funds from the United States secured in the aftermath of a World Trade Organization ruling.

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The South-South Technical Cooperation Management Manual, published in 2013 by the ABC, presents the 'Legal Framework for South-South Cooperation,' used for the implementation of projects for both a Basic Agreement on Technical Cooperation, as well as for the later stage – one focusing on 'Implementing the Arrangement and Executive Program.'

According to the South-South Technical Cooperation Management Manual, Brazilian technical cooperation is based on technical implementation and shared management of projects and actions, achieved through the direct and active involvement of the cooperating institutions in Brazil and partner countries, from the planning stage to the monitoring and evaluation of results (ABC, 2013, p. 13). The goal is to identify and systematize knowledge and skills of beneficiaries of cooperation so that these abilities are then applied in solving local problems.

Trilateral cooperation is organized and implemented by Brazil only if the other partner agrees with the principles and procedures of the country's approach to SSDC. For the Brazilian government, it

[i]s achieved through projects or thematic programs focused on training and technical assistance, sometimes combined with the construction of small-scale infrastructure and the provision of equipment essential to the activities being carried out (ABC, official website).

This perception is valid both in partnerships with other countries' agencies as it is with international organizations.

ABC indicates that monitoring should be carried out through the continuous collection and analysis of data and should occur concomitantly with the implementation stage in order to avoid problems and deviations. ABC defines monitoring as:

A continuous process of collection and systematic analysis of information to support the management of South-South technical cooperation initiatives. It is an exercise that allows checking whether the products and results are being achieved as planned, whether resources are being made available and applied as they should and whether previously identified risks have materialized. Its purpose is to provide support for the recognition of difficulties encountered along the way and for timely corrective action. Moreover, it is by monitoring that the strengths and potential areas of success of the Projects and Preparatory Actions are revealed (ABC, 2013, p. 101).

According to ABC, there should be an analytical framework for evaluating cooperation projects, composed of questions that should guide information gathering. The main designations used present five dimensions of evaluation: design and planning; performance; effectiveness; efficiency; and sustainability. It is important to note that effectiveness refers to whether the positive impacts produced by the project met the needs of the beneficiaries, in relation to the initial problem that guided the cooperation initiative (ABC, 2013). According to interviewees, other elements such as horizontality, participation and gender are being affirmed within ABC's M&E practices.

The South-South Technical Cooperation Management Manual has a section devoted to steps for 'Implementation and Monitoring,' which discusses these two interconnected and interdependent elements. These encompass two complementary dimensions: first, the technical, administrative and financial implementation of actions anticipated in the Project and Preparatory Action Document (ABC, 2013, p.99); and, second, the monitoring process of the previous progress stage. The goals of these additional steps would be to assess the products, obtain the results and contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the South-

South technical cooperation initiatives; manage available resources as efficiently as possible; and monitor and report the progress of initiatives to identify and perform adjustments.

Furthermore, monitoring occurs in two dimensions, Operational and Technical, which are mandatory for any SCC/TrC project and should be based on key questions/questionnaires to be applied by those in charge of the executing institution, especially the ABC. The information obtained from monitoring mechanisms should support future decisions during the implementation stage. According to ABC (2013, p.103), there are three types of instruments for monitoring:

Table 1 ABC's proposed monitoring instruments

Type	Definition
Report	Progress Report: A document where the progressive advances of the project in meeting its quantitative and qualitative targets should be reported. The Progress Report allows tracking and monitoring the impacts (changes brought about on behalf of direct and indirect beneficiaries), with emphasis on the latter.
	Various Management Reports: These are financial, budgetary and implementation reports used to show the progress of an initiative and serve to support planning and decision-making by the cooperation partners. The Management Reports are produced by an automated system of project management.
Mission	Sending technicians from Brazilian institutions in charge of technical coordination and implementation of the cooperation initiative for spot verification of the activities in the partner country as well as for conducting joint analysis of the degree of achievement of expected results
Monitoring Committee (CAP)	To review and discuss the progress of the project or the Preparatory Action as well as the occurrence of specific problems that require shared decisions between the parties. It is up to members of the CAP, during its mandatory periodic meetings, to analyze and occasionally approve (i) the Progress Report from the previous period (if applicable), (ii) the Work Plan for the next period and (iii) any revisions of the Project Document or Preparatory Action. CAP composition is defined on a project basis, but usually representatives from all partners' executing and coordinating institutions take part in it.

Source: ABC, 2013.

The monitoring-procedure steps are therefore the following: (i) the preparation and analysis of the progress report; (ii) the monitoring mission; (iii) reviews; and (iv) Monitoring Committee (CAP) meetings, composed of all partners. These procedures occur during the development of the project or a preparatory action. It is an ongoing review exercise for project progress, which occurs during the implementation stage. In addition, the elements/components/steps of monitoring and the project as a whole should not be considered closed structures. While this openness extends the possibilities of analysis, it also interferes with the predictability of the progress of a project. Obviously, subjectivity is inevitably present in each monitoring tool. On the one hand, it results from the flexibility needed to assess the specificity of each project; on the other, it may hinder objective analysis of certain results.

As to the promotion of capacity development, the South-South Technical Cooperation Management Manual states that it refers to 'a process of change, which occurs in four inter-related and interdependent levels: the individual, organizational, inter-institutional and contextual dimensions.' The inter-institutional dimension considers that the arrangements formed with organizations or groups of individuals have a primary role in

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promoting the shared objectives or fulfilling a common task with reference to an integrated sectorial system in which many entities – from public to private sector or civil society organizations – are engaged in the implementation of a public policy. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the main function of technical cooperation is to 'facilitate access, absorption and application of knowledge that enables the local agents to develop and strengthen their capacities, a process which involves learning in the individual, organizational and inter-institutional dimensions' (ABC, 2014a, p. 13).

The external evaluation of the Cotton 4 Project⁶ is the first publicly available external evaluation that builds upon the guidelines established by the South-South Technical Cooperation Management Manual. It combines (1) an evaluation of processes and results stated in the original project's document; and (2) a reflection on the applicability of SSDC principles included in the Evaluation Framework of 2013 (2015, p.17), established among partners in the Monitoring Committee, with support from the National School for Public Administration (Escola Nacional de Administração Pública, ENAP, in Portuguese). It encompassed a literature review, a systematization of the project's documentation, conducting semi-structured interviews and participatory observation in all countries. The document includes a transversal analysis of the project's results, according to the dimensions of ABC's Manual (performance, efficacy, efficiency and sustainability), as well as the applicability of the principles of horizontality, ownership and mutual benefits in practice. Additionally, it considers a set of quality dimensions concerning the strengthening of capacities and technology transfer. Table 2 synthesizes the main dimensions analysed. It is worth mentioning that the main driver for the external evaluation was the need to systematize lessons learned and obstacles faced in order to inform the project's second-phase planning and its scale-up to other countries (ABC, 2015).

Table 2 Evaluated dimensions of Cotton 4 Project

Approach	Dimensions
Processes and Results	Performance, efficacy, efficiency and sustainability.
Capacity Development	The effect of the project in capacity development: (i) individual – knowledge and abilities acquired and used in the project (ii) organizational – related to the strengthening of institutional processes and its capacities in providing goods and services; (iii) inter-institutional, related to the strengthening and structuring of sectors or policies.
Transfer of Technology	The success of the technology transfer is evidenced by the ability of the beneficiary to adapt it to its context and to maintain it after the end of the project.
SSDC principles	(1) Horizontality, related to the shared management; (2) ownership, which refers to the capacity of the exchange in generating endogenous sustainable solutions; and (3) mutual benefits to two or more partners, contributing to greater autonomy of countries' development.

⁶ Developed by the South-South Cooperation Research and Policy Center (Articulação SUL) and Plan Public Policies (Plan Políticas Públicas).

3. MAIN EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Overall, our findings are differentiated among accounting, monitoring and evaluation, since, according to stakeholders, accounting (focused on resource allocation/financial execution of technical cooperation projects/programs) and monitoring (accompanying of activities executed/implemented, broadly speaking) mechanisms are more routine practices in Brazilian SSDC/TrC M&E; whereas evaluation (measuring impact or an assessment of the quality of projects/programs) is less established within the ABC and other Brazilian institutions as well as in the trilateral arrangements. The main challenges highlighted by interviewees have also been registered.

First and foremost, our findings attest that there is no unified M&E system for Brazilian development cooperation. The Brazilian executing institutions or even the international organizations do not have a specific M&E policy for SSDC/TrC. The process is in its initial phase, after 15 years of (an intensified) experience in implementing projects and programs.

However, there are growing examples of systematization of practices and lessons learned among domestic institutions, which is an important step to detect evaluation objectives and criteria. In this sense, the necessity to develop M&E systems and practices is associated with the growth and emerging visibility of Brazil's development cooperation, which raises domestic claims for more accountability and, with that, management needs to better inform future projects and initiatives.

Nevertheless, interviews showed that there is little consensus on what should be evaluated, by whom and why. Although multiple perspectives might exist, no common vocabulary or discourse seems to guide these actors, particularly on the evaluation component. Agreement exists, however, on the necessity to face bottlenecks and improve M&E system(s).

For Brazil's bilateral SSDC, the main mechanism/instrument referenced is the South-South Technical Cooperation Management Manual. Nevertheless, dissemination within partner institutions (Brazilian and foreign) as well as within the agency itself is still critical. Even though many interviewees who represent executing institutions refer to the document, the research has not found examples of use among these institutions. This may be because the manual was recently published.

Within ABC, monitoring is seen as a usual practice. It is conducted mainly in regard to activities that are considered most important by the General Coordination divisions (bilateral and regional/country). Financial monitoring is conducted under supervision of the General-Coordination of Administration and Budget (Coordenação-Geral de Administração e Orçamento Geral da ABC, CGAO, in Portuguese).

Evaluation is less established in that it does not follow any clearly defined guidelines. All logical frameworks and ex-post evaluations' terms of reference are negotiated among partners. In general, they are impact/results-based (RBM). The same can be said for other Brazilian executing institutions: a monitoring cycle is set from the beginning of the projects; however, evaluation criteria and indicators are unclear or measured as functions of delivered outputs.

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Another factor cited in the interviews concerns the duration of the projects. Most programs/projects are designed to last two (2) years and foresee a mid-term evaluation after one (1) year and a final report with a particular focus on impact.⁷ Besides these reports, monitoring is promoted via joint workshops with project leaders and field visits/missions. The establishment of a Directing Committee (Comité Gestor) at the beginning of the projects with technicians from ABC, the Brazilian executing institution and the partner country, has been mentioned several times and was seen as a positive step by the interviewed stakeholders.

Despite these arrangements with ABC, each institution brought a particular reflection on M&E practices. Indeed, the institutions interviewed have their own domestic M&E practices, which are usually not formally incorporated into their development cooperation initiatives. Commonly, they have indicated that most analytical inputs are results of joint workshops or discussions that take place in the Monitoring Committee. These outputs are usually incorporated as adjustments during the project's implementation. This suggests that although not formally elaborated as an evaluation framework, projects are objects of constant participatory reflection among partners, and new projects are planned based on lessons learned by individuals engaged in previous SSDC experiences. Nevertheless, the results of the workshops and meetings are featured in the missions' reports, which are meant mainly to monitor activities' development. As far as this research has assessed, reports' information and analysis are not systematized and shared as part of a formal or structured learning process or evaluation methodology.

Furthermore, the institutions interviewed have shared some internal reflections over M&E's frameworks that would suit their engagement in cooperation. In this sense, some different objectives raised concerns to assure transparency; foster participatory learning among partners and beneficiaries; highlight risks and bottlenecks and improve the institution's performance as well as of the projects; assess impacts in institution building; and assess abilities.

Some challenges stressed by interviewees can be synthesized in seven points:

- Monitoring usually does not prove useful in feeding strategic decisions during execution, because of some perceived difficulty in relocating resources within the pre-approved budget items, which can delay the practical incorporation of some of the suggestions brought up during the monitoring cycles. Monitoring results are still poorly incorporated, and even if the seminars and workshops seem to be very productive, feedback lacks institutional leverage. As discussed, M&E is project-based and is not reflected in the institutional overall performance reviews.
- Lessons learned lack systematization, and there are no mechanisms to build institutional memory. Even though the mission reports include analytical information, ABC mainly uses them for monitoring the accomplishment of project activities. In addition, staffs involved in each mission do reports and deliver them to ABC. Although ABC has informed the existence of a virtual system that keeps record of all received and provided cooperation since 2006, there is no information on how this memory contributes to generate feedback from one

⁷On impact evaluation, see discussion below on socio-economic indicators (footnote 14).

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project to another. Overall, the analysis registered in the mission's report reflects individual positions and is not institutional. Until now, there are few facilitation mechanisms within the executing institutions to promote M&E systems or to transversally feed Brazilian SSDC with lessons learned.

- Regarding cost-effectiveness analysis, interviewees pointed out difficulties in quantifying previous R&D investment or the impact of technology transfers, skills, know-how and training that are meant to strengthen capacities. Brazilian SSDC therefore produces mainly intangible assets and long-term impacts and as such is difficult to assess. There is no consensual formula to calculate the institutional investment and the aggregated value that SSDC provision through public servants implies, making cost-effectiveness evaluations unfeasible. Furthermore, Brazilian official positions refuse to monetize their institutional investments in SSDC.
- The establishment of criteria to measure capacity-building and technical cooperation's impacts is another important issue to be tackled. Capacity-building was highly emphasized by some interviewees as the main component of Brazilian cooperation, and should therefore inform methods for M&E. Interviewees have indicated that qualitative improvements in policy frameworks, such as innovations in legal frameworks, greater coordination between government sectors or budget destination are not easily measurable; and most important, they vary greatly from one context to another. Measuring Brazilian development cooperation's impact on capacity-building seems to be the touchstone for an adequate M&E system, considering this is an important component of structuring cooperation's concept, which despite not having a consensual definition, is outstanding within Brazil's SSDC and hints towards Brazilian institutions' perception of their proposal within development cooperation.
- As to capacity-building and institutional strengthening, interviewees indicated that impacts transcend a project's time scope and therefore should be objects of longitudinal studies or evaluations that can keep track of changes generated after the project is finished.
- The costs of evaluation were also mentioned as an important challenge to SSDC evaluation. Considering projects' size, which are mainly based on knowledge exchange and technology transfer, how can one justify an evaluation process that may be expensive?
- There is little importance attributed to the participation of civil society on the process of evaluating cooperation projects. Independent evaluations can be expensive, and an active civil society has often the potential of contributing with qualitative data about projects, feeding thereby into the evaluation system.

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Trilateral Development Cooperation (TrC) projects can involve (a) two or more developing countries with participation of a developed country's development agency; (b) two or more developing countries and international organization(s); and (c) three or more developing countries.⁸ Interviews have demonstrated that M&E in TrC also present important bottlenecks. Nevertheless, the challenges are diverse.

It is important to stress that each trilateral partnership presents itself at a different stage; some are more harmonized and have common instruments and procedures more settled than others. Fluid communication and mutual respect for each partner's bureaucratic needs were mentioned as the main lessons of more harmonized partnerships. ABC is currently developing specific guidelines for Brazil's TrC. Brazil has established a strategic framework for trilateral arrangements with some partners, like GIZ, USAID and UNICEF (the Brazilian-German Trilateral Cooperation Operational Manual, the Strategic Framework for Trilateral Development Partnership and the Guidelines for South-South Trilateral Cooperation, respectively). These documents present common guidelines but contain little information on specific TrC M&E practices. Nevertheless, they register the principles and agreements reached between Brazil and the developed country's agency or international organization that should guide the negotiation of the project's M&E.

One important difference between trilateral arrangements with international organizations or other countries is financing and budget execution. In the case of trilateral cooperation with other countries' agencies, financing is usually shared and each agency is responsible for pre-determined budget lines. In the case of TrC initiatives with international organizations, financing is usually a responsibility of Brazilian government branches through earmarked contributions.

It is worth noting that trilateral partnerships put great emphasis on governance structures. Partnerships between Brazil and a developed country's agency or international organization usually rely on technical and high-level joint committees, which meet periodically to follow-up specific projects and the overall relationship. At a project level, this governance arrangement tends to be reproduced, and M&E must be negotiated and agreed between all partners (including the third or additional countries). It has been stated that within TrC every item has to be more thoroughly negotiated (the parties cannot afford not to do so), and the same can be said for the M&E component. Building trust between partners is considered crucial before project execution.

At the advent of designing the program/project, M&E is elaborated in a flexible manner according to the development activity and institutions engaged. It has been stated that during trilateral projects' negotiations, all partners' specific bureaucratic needs and procedures should be accommodated. In this sense, each project should generate unified instruments. Project reports must answer to all partners' needs regarding information for accountability purposes, while results or impact evaluation procedures should be agreed and reflected in the logic frame. All these instruments are within the description of the project. In this sense, M&E would also not constitute something arbitrary (each institutions follows its accountability mechanisms); however, no specific guidelines were mentioned regarding SSDC/TrC.

Our research has found that evaluation strategies agreed during project formulation and negotiation can take different forms. In some cases, the evaluation strategy is based on one partner's guidelines and adapted to eventual specificities identified by all partners. In other cases, evaluation strategy is built from the outset.

⁸ The research has not gathered enough evidence regarding trilateral cooperation among developing countries, since this is still an incipient modality.

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In all cases, the evaluation objectives and strategy must be approved by and count on the participation of all partners.

In general, interviewees have pointed out that M&E in TrC responds to different objectives, such as transparency, accountability and efficacy. Those objectives are usually consolidated in rigorous evaluation systems. All traditional donors interviewed follow DAC standards and its M&E components of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness⁹, impact and sustainability. Actors engaged in TrC with international organizations have put less emphasis on the 'effectiveness agenda,' just mentioning that evaluation should be guided by the measurement of results and impacts. Furthermore, interviewees engaged in TrC with international organizations have put great emphasis on the urgency to raise evidence of TrC arrangements' results and impacts.

Some specific challenges highlighted by interviewees engaged in TrC can be synthesized in five points, according to the nature of the trilateral arrangement.

Challenges regarding TrC with international organizations:

- In TrC cases in which Brazilian financial resources are allocated to be executed by international organizations, a challenge highlighted by one interviewee was the lack of information standardization delivered by these agencies (financial and technical). Each international organization has its own models and therefore requires additional monitoring efforts of Brazilian institutions and civil society. This lack of minimal criteria among international organizations was mentioned as an important stumbling block for the engagement of developing countries in TrC, since it imposes a risk for accountability under public servants' responsibility.
- Interviewees also mentioned the lack of an evaluation framework for assessing the role of country offices operating as SSDC facilitators. In this sense, country offices pointed out that even when the country programme includes an SSDC facilitation role as a strategic element, this is not translated into results or impact indicators. In other words, the interviewees highlighted the difficulty to evaluate the Brazilian Country Offices' contribution to the development results of other Southern partners.¹⁰

Challenges regarding trilateral cooperation with developed countries' agencies:

- Traditional donor countries have to meet the requirements of their M&E systems, and at the same time, TrC advocates for flexible and case-by-case negotiated M&E procedures. Therefore, some conflict arises concerning the accountability demanded by the donor countries' governments and the actual TrC M&E practices.
- Another disjuncture identified by TrC partners regards different fiscal years, which can make

⁹ Effectiveness here has a different connotation from the one in ABC's Manual, being directly linked to the main objective of rendering aid more effective and building on indicators established since the Paris Declaration (2005), while addressing the likelihood of the project's objective being achieved and identifying factors influencing those achievements (or non-achievements) (DAC, Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance). ABC, on the other hand, defines effectiveness as the positive impacts produced by the project in meeting the needs of the beneficiaries from their own perspective, in relation to the initial problem that guided the cooperation initiative (ABC, 2013).

¹⁰ However, all UN projects and programmes are guided by the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG).

financial monitoring and planning less harmonized.

- There is a common perception that the lack of internal legislation regarding Trilateral Cooperation and ABC's modest budget limit the scope in which the agency can act and therefore makes the whole enterprise of the TrC more difficult. This represents an obstacle for the construction of a robust M&E agenda for TrC in Brazil.

4. CONCLUSION

M&E criteria and practices are still incipient and figure as a considerable bottleneck in Brazilian institutions handling of SSDC projects. This delay is due to the factors reported in this study, such as lack of a legal framework and weak transparency and accountability mechanisms within the projects, as well as Brazilian cooperation's relatively short span of prominence. It is important to highlight that international and civil society pressure have played an important role in increased awareness on the need for transparency, especially because of the relevance acquired by Brazilian cooperation. Against this backdrop, interviews have shown a growing awareness of the need to raise M&E as a priority agenda, as well as of evaluation initiatives either stimulated by ABC or by executing institutions.

Our findings partly support our initial hypothesis. First, our research has shown that existing M&E practices are focused on outputs, mainly because ABC's existing M&E framework highlights the importance of monitoring outputs as a path to obtain results. Though the recently published South-South Technical Cooperation Management Manual establishes evaluation dimensions, it has not been extensively applied to ongoing technical cooperation projects.

Secondly, our findings show that Brazilian executing institutions, which present different concerns regarding M&E objectives and uses, still do not fully engage in M&E practices. That is because the research could not identify a common set of routine practices that are followed by the different institutions from the technical to the institutional level.

Nevertheless, our findings highlight existing heterogeneous conceptions of evaluation among executing institutions, as well as a diversified institutional context that, in light of the raising awareness around their engagement in cooperation, might present a complex kaleidoscope of objectives and approaches for Brazilian development cooperation evaluation.

Against this background, it is possible to affirm that many variables determine executing institutions' positions regarding evaluation, such as the nature and history of its engagement or its institutional position. Institutions that either have or aim for a consolidated engagement in technical cooperation (received and provided) have shown to be more proactive regarding evaluation; whereas those whose engagement is more recent and mainly guided to strengthen political positions at the international or the domestic level tend to rely more on ABC's guidelines. While the former have expressed the existence of internal reflections and initiatives aiming to build stronger frameworks for evaluation, the research has not identified any kind of propositions or urgency for the latter. This finding leads to an important disjuncture regarding future consolidation of evaluation frameworks. Considering the existence of different conceptions and concerns regarding evaluation, the

construction of a unified framework for Brazilian development cooperation would benefit if it were based on a broad and cross-sectorial debate.

Brazil's engagement in M&E debates might go hand-in-hand with general discussions on South-South cooperation (SSC) (and/or SSDC) and international development governance. Disputes around a consensual definition(s) of SSDC have a stake for constructing M&E frameworks. In other words, there might be a technical issue to settle M&E in Brazilian development cooperation, but it is intimately related to positions taken at the political level and as a result of the interactions among the actors involved in Brazil's SSDC.

From this analytical point of view and evidencing that in general monitoring seems to be less disputed in stakeholders' perceptions than evaluation, two interrelated issues have caught our attention: first, the search for adequate indicators and standards that face a variety of parameters and objectives; and second, the means to evaluate the structuring element of Brazil's SSDC.¹¹

Regarding the kaleidoscope of objectives and parameters, Table 3 attempts to categorize some positions regarding M&E. It does not intend to offer an exhaustive map encompassing all agencies engaged in SSDC; rather, it underlies the relationship between executing institutions' nature of engagement in SSDC and specific positions regarding M&E. It is noteworthy, though, that some agencies do not exactly fit into the suggested categorization.

Table 3. Main characteristics of executing actors and its relation with positions regarding M&E

Brazilian executing actors	Characteristics	Position regarding M&E
Ministry responsible for executing national policies and programs	Engagement mainly aimed at strengthening policies and positions at international and domestic levels	Tends to rely more on ABC's guidelines
Public-private enterprises that work on research and training of particular sectors to support national development	Established engagement in technical cooperation (received and provided)	More proactive attitude regarding evaluation have expressed the existence of internal reflections and initiatives aiming at building stronger frameworks for evaluation, mainly to assess effectiveness and efficacy
Institution linked to Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Responsible for coordinating Brazilian humanitarian cooperation	Seeks to establish an M&E system that allows for transparency, beneficiaries and civil society's participation and feeds strategic decisions
Institution created from partnership between Brazilian and international organization	Supports capacity-building related to a specific policy	Aims to understand what changes they have been supporting institutionally (capacity-building) as a South-South Cooperation facilitator

Against this background, a cross-sectorial debate on M&E, coordinated by ABC, could align executing institutions' needs and purposes with Brazil's foreign policy guidelines, avoiding the adoption of one-size fits all instruments that may be inadequate. Understanding how each executing institution conceives evaluation

¹¹ Note that the concept of structuring cooperation is in itself interpreted in diverse ways depending on the agency involved, and therefore suffers of conceptual dispersion.

CONCLUSION

and terms like effectiveness and impact is a crucial first step for building an integrated M&E system. Also, as with the mutual-benefit principle that guides SSC, the nature of its impacts in Brazilian executing institutions and domestic policies should also be addressed.

The second aspect relies on an understanding of the complexity of the actions involved in the promotion of public policies and sectorial systems abroad. What is implied in the 'transfer' or 'diffusion' of public policy models or experiences; and, more important in this context, how can these processes be measured and evaluated?

ABC's definition of capacity development highlights an inter-institutional dimension, which, in the context of Brazil's structuring cooperation,¹² could lead to potential avenues regarding SSDC M&E. To fulfil this potential, some stumbling blocks might involve: (i) how to translate the role of diverse actors in promoting a common task with reference to an integrated sectorial system and the implementation of a public policy into objective indicators of assessment; (ii) how to establish indicators that measure direct causality between the project's scope/objectives and socio-economic improvements in third countries;¹³ and (iii) how to address the consequences of the relations established between the professionals, which can be determinant for the sustainability of the whole project's cycle as well as an indicator of continuity after activities' conclusion under the cooperation agreement.

The findings clearly point towards the need to invest in M&E systems, materially and symbolically, with attention to the trade-off between the high costs of developing M&E frameworks and political costs of not having a functional system. This investment would have to be promoted individually per institution but also collectively, stimulating the development of capacity in this area, forming its own technicians and a network of independent evaluators, while at the same time constructing this set of capacity in M&E jointly with the partner countries and following international guidelines. Dialogues with other governmental and non-governmental institutions with M&E expertise on public policies could enrich this process.

We identified three elements as particularly promising in Brazilian institutions' M&E considerations. One is the appreciation of practices that are aligned with SSC principles, such as negotiated evaluations and participatory approaches among all partners, as proposed under the CAP. These seem to be established as a common procedure, which alludes to practices of partnership and horizontality.

A second element is the willingness manifested by key actors in associate M&E approaches with the 2030 agenda. While referring M&E processes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Brazilian SSDC agents might contribute to their implementation and to the debate about the need of broader monitoring systems beyond the North-South divide.

¹² Through structuring cooperation initiatives, a space of interaction is created and relations between executing institutions' personnel are strengthened. The creation of those policy spaces impact the sustainability of the policies in the partner countries while at the same time values these policies in the domestic sphere [in Brazil] (Esteves & Assunção, forthcoming).

¹³ Many stakeholders referred to impact evaluation as a necessary entry point towards evaluating Brazilian SSDC. There seems to be an understanding that impact should be measured by socio-economic indicators and capacity-development and institution-building. However, the verification of the effects on outcomes caused by an intervention that builds largely on structuring sectors, systems and/or policies in third countries is highly complex and demands "an integrated and coherent system of socio-economic statistics with a coordinated network of surveys and data collection processes, and higher data quality standards" (Wolfson, 1995:6). This is, however, a major challenge not only for Brazil's available datasets regarding the partner country, but can also be evidence of a major concern within North-South cooperation evaluations.

A third element is the inter-institutional dimension, a fourth dimension added by ABC when defining capacity development or its promotion. Could this dimension propel a valuable promotion of capacity development, built on non-interference and active/autonomous ‘transfer,’ also regarding M&E frameworks and conceptions?

Hence, a promising goal of future research could be to assess Brazilian actors engaged in SSDC initiatives and their understanding of the inter-institutional dimension and how this is operationalized into practice, with emphasis on the structuring cooperation character disseminated by different Brazilian institutions. This approach could assist in establishing bridges between the sectorial and the inter-institutional debate upon structuring sectors, systems and/or policies and their means of evaluation.

Against this background, a main contribution of strengthened Brazilian SSDC M&E practices relies on the potential of generating substantive evidence on how SSC contributes to sustainable development, as framed by the 2030 agenda. Even though current Brazilian SSDC practices are mainly focused on outputs and oriented by a results-based management (RBM) approach, Brazilian institutions are (i) concerned with their impact in developing partners’ capacities and, mainly, their contribution to partners’ development through sustaining functioning systems of public policy governance; (ii) are aware of the importance of associate M&E within the 2030 agenda; and (iii) propose a negotiated and participatory M&E approach that aims to inform partners’ decisions.

Such contributions may feed into Agenda 2030, complementing its measurement approach, as proposed by the 17 SDG indicators and 169 targets, with an evaluative approach that informs critical thinking in policymaking, enhances stakeholders’ learning and facilitates adaptive management. In particular, this would contribute to generate in-depth analysis regarding the implementation of SDG 17 (specially 17.9), but also provide qualitative information on SSC’s contribution to other sector goals.

However, a major pitfall and deficiency in Brazil’s SSDC initiatives is the lack of transparency in making information publicly available in a continuous and extensive way for domestic constituencies. The findings point towards significant holdups in the provision of information, which are also debatable more generally with regards to the conduct of Brazilian foreign policy. It is worth mentioning that, in general, bilateral agreements signed between Brazil and its partners include confidentiality clauses, which are claimed to contribute to horizontal relations. This pressing concern has the potential to slow down all parallel debates highlighted above. Although some relevant initiatives are underway, as exposed under the review of current M&E efforts developed by the Brazilian government (section 2.4), the systematization of activities and publication of flows still require major investments to be equitable with the right to information (Lei de Acesso à Informação, LAI, in Portuguese) and the justification for taxpayers of Brazilian initiatives abroad. M&E frameworks should approach the necessity of transparency vis-à-vis Brazilian law.

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