

# South-South cooperation and foreign policy: Challenges and dilemmas in the perception of Brazilian diplomats

International Relations  
1–22

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DOI: 10.1177/0047117820920906

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## Abstract

Brazil's government has historically engaged with other developing countries to promote technical cooperation. Since the 1988 federal Constitution, different presidents have paid attention to this foreign policy agenda. However, it was particularly under the Workers' Party's administrations (2003–2016) that South-South cooperation (SSC) gained political ground, rooted in official principles of South-South solidarity, horizontality, non-interference in domestic affairs, and the defence of a multipolar world-vision. In this article, based on the argument that international development cooperation (IDC) is a key instrument of a country's economic diplomacy, we analyse the perceptions of Brazilian diplomats about SSC in order to understand Brazil's interests and motivations in this field. Methodologically, the article discusses the main results of a survey conducted between 25 August and 23 September 2016 among 349 Brazilian individuals, who correspond to approximately 22 per cent of Brazil's active diplomats. The survey results showed that Brazilian diplomats generally have a favourable perception on Brazil's SSC programmes, and that a great majority of them has already acted in SSC activities. Still, the issue of political conditionality brings in cleavages, indicating that there is a large group of Brazilian diplomats who openly support SSC as an instrument of national interests and not because of the official narratives related to a 'solidarity with the South' or 'the promotion of human rights'. As a consequence, with the exception of perceptions on political conditionalities and economic criteria, the majority of diplomats share commonalities that also correspond to the government's official rhetoric between 2003 and 2016. This article is structured around the following three sections: (I) South-

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South cooperation as a foreign policy agenda, (2) Diplomats as agents of Brazil's South-South cooperation and (3) Presenting and discussing the perceptions of Brazilian diplomats.

### **Keywords**

Brazilian Cooperation Agency, Brazilian foreign policy, diplomats' perceptions, South-South cooperation

## **Introduction**

Several scholars have analysed the historical role of Brazil's Ministry of External Relations (known as *Itamaraty*) in foreign policy, emphasising its leadership and expertise in coordination, or in more recent times, stressing the bureaucratic politics in which *Itamaraty* is embedded.<sup>1</sup> Others have studied its internal governance, the socialisation of young diplomats, the relevance of social capital networks in career development and the new challenges it faces under democratic rule.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, scholars have often analysed Brazilian diplomacy as either independent or dependent variable.<sup>3</sup> First, they have tended to take into account rising constraints upon diplomatic statecraft, such as regime change and democratisation, scholarship development and the emergence of new expert actors, the public opinion and the role of the media, thus focusing on how and why diplomatic practices cope with political pressures and adapt to these constraints. Second, studies which take Brazilian diplomacy as an independent variable have analysed if, when and how diplomats deploy strategies to regain their role in distinct foreign policy agendas at the domestic level, but also how they craft or uphold norms in order to affirm, strengthen or shape international regimes.

In Brazil, but also in other rising powers, very few scholars have analysed the perceptions of foreign policy actors on key international agendas.<sup>4</sup> Whereas diplomacy is a well-established field of research within Foreign Policy Analysis both in Europe and North America, there are still very few studies on emerging countries' diplomacy and the role of diplomats in foreign policy agendas.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, little is known about the actual perceptions of official agents concerning international issues, especially in the context of non-Western countries; most studies on perceptions are based on diplomatic messages, official reports or individual interviews. Therefore, by presenting the results of a survey conducted with Brazilian diplomats about foreign policy in the field of South-South cooperation (SCC), this article intends to contribute to fill in this gap and remedy this deficiency on their perceptions on Brazil's role as a rising donor.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Brazil's foreign policy demonstrated unequivocal political ambition for international prominence, and its diplomacy focused on regional integration, new power coalitions, interregional dialogue, but also on bridging the North-South security and development gap at the UN and its main agencies. This diplomatic activism produced changes in Brazil's engagement in international development cooperation (IDC) in Latin America and Africa. The main objective of this article is to describe and analyse the perceptions of Brazilian diplomats on the country's recent international activism in the field of development cooperation. Methodologically, this

article is based on a series of interviews with key informants and presents the main results of a survey conducted between 25 August and 23 September 2016 with 349 Brazilian individuals who correspond to approximately 22 per cent of Brazil's diplomats. The survey aimed at assessing their perceptions about Brazil's foreign policy in the field of SSC.

Our main research question is the following: what are Brazilian diplomats' perceptions on Brazil's foreign policy in the field of development cooperation? Our secondary research questions are the following: how do they evaluate Brazil's recent active role in SSC, particularly during the Workers' Party's (PT) government? How do they weigh the use of political conditionality and the application of economic criteria in defining priorities for Brazil's policy in SSC? How do they assess the existing institutional setting responsible for implementing SSC projects and activities?

In order to answer such questions, two assumptions have guided our work. First, we argue that perception is a significant if not a crucial component of the decision-making process, and that perception variations are undeniably relevant in foreign policy formulation and implementation. Decision-makers learn from history, and their attitudes change when their perceptions are affected, including the formation of ideas and misconceptions about the neighbours or the partners, and the very construction of who the nation's rivals, friends and enemies, or opportunities and threats, are in international politics.<sup>6</sup> Within the Brazilian academia, when researchers have analysed the role and the perceptions of diplomats in foreign policy-making processes, they have generally used documents, official speeches and individual interviews to produce evidence in support of their arguments. No systematic effort has ever been undertaken to survey Brazilian diplomats' perceptions on development cooperation and SSC. Because of their central role in the country's foreign policy and in negotiating cooperation projects with foreign officials, and thanks to the fact that diplomats occupy key posts either at local embassies or at the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC), we argue that it is fundamental to understand their perceptions on how Brazil's status as a rising donor fits in its political ambition at the regional and global levels.

Second, we argue that development cooperation is a key instrument of a country's economic diplomacy. In this sense, this article builds on previous explorations of the role of IDC in foreign policy and diplomacy, thus acknowledging the high symbolism and the political usage of technical cooperation and foreign aid.<sup>7</sup> Both North-South and South-South development cooperation differ in terms of historical trajectories, symbolic regime, global political architecture, involvement of domestic actors and institutional designs conceived by national governments to implement their strategies.<sup>8</sup> This does not mean, however, that State interests and political motivations contrast a great deal when it comes to trade and market access, investments and internationalisation of businesses, geopolitics and regional power strategies.<sup>9</sup> Understanding Brazil's interests and motivations associated with SSC through the analysis of perceptions of Brazilian diplomats is our main objective. To do so, the article is structured around the following three sections: (1) SSC as a foreign policy agenda, (2) Diplomats as agents of Brazil's SSC and (3) Presenting and discussing the perceptions of Brazilian diplomats.

## **South-South cooperation as a foreign policy agenda**

International Development Cooperation (IDC) can be defined as a political field that articulates a set of policies of states, international organisations and non-governmental actors, as well as norms and criteria that orient their actions, and the common belief that development cooperation is the best answer to mitigate contradictions and inequalities generated by capitalism. Whereas the institutionalisation of IDC began after the Second World War, it was only at the dawn of the twenty-first century that member-countries of OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) were confronted with an impressive expansion of emerging powers' political influence, development cooperation practices and the promise to avoid historical errors of Western partners. Despite these recent changes, which are acknowledged by international agencies, the history of technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC) is not new.<sup>10</sup>

TCDC and SSC as it has more recently been labelled by both states and international organisations, has its roots in the multilateral activism in the aftermath of the Bandung Conference in 1955, the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 and the First United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964. TCDC started in the 1960s: in 1961, Kuwait launched its Development Fund, and post-revolution Cuba began sending health agents and teachers to developing countries. In the 1970s, the Islamic Development Bank and the Arab Bank for Development were inaugurated. Multilaterally, the G-77 was created at the United Nations (UN) and the New International Economic Order (NIEO) was at the centre of North-South debates. In 1974, the UN created the TCDC Special Unit under the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). At the outcome of the Buenos Aires Conference in 1978, countries from the South agreed on the Action Plan on TCDC, and in the following years, some of them launched their own development cooperation agencies, such as Brazil (1987), Chile (1990) and Turkey (1992).

In the 1980s and 1990s most developing countries faced the external debt crisis and were subject to structural adjustment programmes, which made SSC loose political relevance in the international scenario. At the outset of the twenty-first century, boosted by the Chinese, Indian, Turkish and Brazilian economic reactivation, SSC and its narratives of solidarity and horizontal relations among developing countries were revitalised. In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 67/39 decided to upgrade the multilateral relevance of SSC and to strengthen the special unit created within the UNDP: the special unit to promote TCDC then became the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC). At the same time, rising powers championed the ideal according to which countries from the South should mutually cooperate to ensure political reforms of global governance structures and mechanisms, but also support each other in their common efforts to solve economic and social development problems. Built around historical commonalities and shared identities in the development field, this rejuvenated SSC diplomacy started to defend a new vision of state-led economic development, new multilateral alliances and coalitions of power, the principle of non-intervention, as well as the defence of horizontality and national ownership in cooperation programmes.

In its long institutional history, DAC has succeeded to build common policy norms and statistical criteria to orient its members' practices but has not been able to avoid

discrepancies and to sanction deviant behaviour. In the case of SSC, institutionalisation lags behind, practices are not homogeneous either, and the most powerful countries from the South have also established primacy in this field. China, India, Brazil, Turkey and South Africa, for instance, associate SSC with the promotion of their economic diplomacy, but also with their foreign policy interests, such as the building of multilateral coalitions of support, leadership in international agencies (WTO, WHO, FAO) and reform of global governance structures and mechanisms.

In the case of Brazil, its first experiences as a provider of cooperation date back to the transition between the 1960s and the 1970s, although Brasilia only signed in 1971 its first technical cooperation agreements Colombia, Guyana, Paraguay, as well as Trinidad and Tobago. Boosted by its so-called 'economic miracle', Brazil's military government started to act, albeit still very modestly, in the provision of technical cooperation and thus to use IDC not only as an instrument for the modernisation of its own institutions and domestic infrastructures, but also as a tool of its foreign policy. In multilateral forums, Brazil's diplomacy defended the importance of horizontal cooperation and sought UNDP's support for SSC actions. In May 1974, many developing countries, including Brazil, voted in favour of the UN General Assembly resolution for the establishment of the NIEO, whose article 4 explicitly mentioned TCDC. By means of its national agencies in the fields of health, agriculture and professional training, the Brazilian diplomacy aimed at improving the country's image, fostering the joint articulation of the Third World countries in international forums, promoting its exports and opening markets for its businesses. If the geopolitics of the Cold War and the US role in hemispheric relations prevented Brazil from engaging with international security issues, Brazilian trade and economic foreign policy succeeded in creating a more autonomous foreign policy narrative which supported Brazil's role in multilateral debates in the 1970s, including the diplomatic battle first to question the primary view of cooperation as 'assistance' between a donor and a passive beneficiary, and second, to push for the notion of 'international technical cooperation' within multilateral agencies such as UNDP, UNCTAD and the UN Industrial Development Organization, UNIDO.<sup>11</sup>

In the 1980s, Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds to Brazil dwindled due to the country's graduation as a middle-income country, according to international agencies' standards. In 1987, because of increasing links between TCDC and foreign policy interests, Brasilia decided to set up within Itamaraty the ABC. ABC replaced the old inter-ministerial coordinating structure, and its creation implied the transfer of technical cooperation management from the Ministry of Planning to the Ministry of External Relations. This institutional change brought to Itamaraty the challenge of building more direct interfaces between foreign policy and domestic public policies. All along its 30 years of existence, ABC has shown to depend very directly on the personal leadership and negotiating skills of its director, who has always been a diplomat, except for the case of Carlos Roberto Cristalli between July 1992 and February 1994. Since ABC's creation, TCDC has become the Agency's most strategic policy domain and the agenda in which its director himself/herself has tended to define priorities and methods. As recalled in the 1989 Annual Activity Report by Ambassador Guilherme Leite Ribeiro, then ABC's director, 'technical cooperation has been dealt with by governments as an auxiliary

instrument of their foreign policy, often to promote their economic-commercial interests, or as a contribution to the socio-economic progress of friendly nations'.<sup>12</sup>

Brazil's governmental interest in South-South relations and budget allocated to SSC have increased as the country developed in economic terms, but also as a result of its democratisation. Since the adoption of the 1988 Constitution, different presidents have paid attention to this diplomatic agenda. However, it was particularly during the PT's governments that SSC gained political ground. Irrespective of their differences in terms of rhetorical skills, public diplomacy and political and geographical priorities, both Lula da Silva (2003–2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016) emphasised autonomy, national development, regional integration, South-South relations, multilateralism and a multipolar world-vision in their foreign policy strategies. Their political ambition for international prominence, which did not have the support of all domestic political and economic agents, gave rise to a rejuvenated diplomacy rooted in building new coalitions (such as the G20 in the WTO negotiations, the India-Brazil-South Africa forum or the BRICS grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), promoting interregional dialogues (between South America and Arab or African countries), leading the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and proposing mediation (together with Turkey) over the Iranian nuclear programme.<sup>13</sup>

Brazil's governmental global expenses with IDC grew from US\$158 million in 2005 to approximately US\$923 million in 2010. According to its most recent official report, using data from 2011 to 2013, Brazil's total IDC expenditure amounted to almost US\$1.5 billion.<sup>14</sup> Fostering technical cooperation projects in partnership with multilateral organisations (such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme) was a way to gain legitimacy for some social policies that were not consensual in the domestic realm, or at least not among key members of the political elite, such as the food purchase programme, family agriculture support, school meals projects, aside from the well-known *Bolsa Família* programme.<sup>15</sup>

At the end of his term as executive director of ABC, Marco Farani stated in his management report that the 'period between 2008 and 2012 made explicit the role of international technical cooperation as an instrument of foreign policy', and considered that ABC's action in the coordination of Brazilian South-South technical cooperation allowed 'significant political gains for the country in bilateral, regional and multilateral forums'. The number of countries receiving Brazilian technical cooperation increased from 43 (in 2008) to 94 (in 2012). Farani noted, however, that the Brazilian government still had to face the challenge of establishing a comprehensive and modern legislation on IDC, thus increasing the budget and improving ABC's capabilities to manage it.<sup>16</sup>

The effects of the 2008 global economic crisis on the Brazilian economy were clear during the second-half of Rousseff's first mandate. Her government failed in its attempts to reduce the banking system's interest rates, stimulate growth through public and private investments, diversify the industrial infrastructure, and thereby, reorient the Brazilian macroeconomic development model. Moreover, Rousseff's political coalition was ideologically too broad, and party leaders did not agree on all the policies that Rousseff was trying to implement. Once the global commodity boom was over, Brazilian growth rates declined significantly, and the fiscal deficit made it impossible for Rousseff to maintain Lula's previous development pact of gains for the poor and for the wealthy at the same

time. According to Ambassador Fernando Abreu, ABC's director between August 2012 and July 2015, 'the main change has been a reversal of expectations between Lula's and Dilma's governments in the field of foreign policy and in the cooperation agenda'.<sup>17</sup> According to the 2016 Annual Activities Report, ABC's budget has been mainly used in cooperation projects in the areas of health, education, agriculture, social development, environment and public management. Latin America and Africa were Brazil's geographical priority for IDC activities. In the coordination of projects, ABC worked with 84 national executing institutions, including ministries, federal institutions and some partnerships at the federate-state level.

Diplomats are among the most important agents within the institutional structure of Brazil's development cooperation. They are the main (and sometimes the only) local operators in many of Brazil's partner countries in Africa and Latin America. They participate in identifying opportunities, negotiating projects, implementing activities, but also in evaluating results. Therefore, because of their engagement with this foreign policy agenda, diplomats' perceptions are important to analyse successes and failures of SSC practices, as well as the risks of continuity of this agenda in periods of domestic crisis. In some cases, the individual diplomat may be the only source of information about Brazilian SSC projects, being in direct contact with local authorities where such projects are implemented. Itamaraty is known for its well-organised bureaucracy, counting on a network of knowledge management through which diplomats send and receive evaluation reports and assessments. However, nowadays no survey of such a scope and degree of responsiveness covering diplomats' perceptions on a specific foreign policy agenda has ever been published. This is the main contribution of this article.

## **Diplomats as agents of Brazil's South-South cooperation**

According to the 1988 Constitution (articles 21 and 84), the executive power (the presidency and Itamaraty) are the main brokers of Brazil's IDC norms (normative dimension), and they cooperate with ministries (planning and budget, health, education, agriculture, defence, trade), federal agencies and international organisations (mainly UN agencies) in project implementation, including in tasks related to legal frames of action and working methodologies (legal-operational dimension). Brazil's SSC is highly dependent on civil servants' expertise and participation. However, in more recent times, particularly during the PT's governments, other stakeholders (such as civil society organisations) have increased their demands to participate in the conception debate, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Brazil's IDC practices. Moreover, they have also demanded greater transparency of this governmental policy.<sup>18</sup>

On the one hand, this increased interest in SSC and public debate around Brazil's IDC strategies can lead to a gradual process of policy monitoring and the emergence of an epistemic community with a myriad of visions and preferences. This not only challenges the historical hypothesis of Itamaraty's bureaucratic insulation, but it also sheds light into the preferences and interests of a plurality of actors: ABC's diplomats, technical supervisors and experts who have the coordinating role, but also public bureaucrats from 'domestic' ministries (health, culture, education, agriculture, etc.), deputies and senators (and their legislative advisors), mayors and governors, economic

operators, NGO leaders, social movements, media organisations and scholars. Actors who were traditionally kept invisible in IDC have gained voice in international and domestic scenes, both in favour and against Brazil's practices in this field; therefore, Brazil's IDC agendas are now subject to greater political scrutiny around the country's geographic priorities, sectoral budgets and types of partnerships.

On the other hand, institutionally, the executive branch tends to concentrate most of the decision-making power in the fields of economic diplomacy and IDC. Global and domestic transformations underway imply a reinvigorated perspective on the way foreign policy and diplomacy are defined and operated; however, in the Brazilian case, the bureaucracy of the foreign ministry still plays a central role: first, *routine information-gathering*, specially locally on places and issues of interest; second, *policy-making*, since politicians rely heavily on diplomats and experts in the foreign ministry; third, *memory*, since career diplomats serve as a collective memory of the country's international relations.<sup>19</sup> In Brazil, diplomats are not only foreign policy bureaucrats who follow top cabinet members' guidelines; in fact, they are capable of great influence in Brazil's international actions, and should also be considered as decision-makers who constantly interact with and influence elected representatives. Although Itamaraty has been able to develop certain institutional strengths, in much justified by the high quality of its personnel, and to build a reputational capital within the Brazilian society upon its self-reflected image as a technical body who would defend (together with the military) the national interests, indeed, diplomats are part and parcel of the democratic game and not mere executors whose responsibilities should be analysed far from the politics of foreign policy.<sup>20</sup>

This means that foreign policy at the same time reflects worldviews and produces its politics. Diplomacy and the role of Itamaraty must be analysed in the light of Brazil's democratic changes and their corollary for the ministry's institutional tasks and modernisation. For instance, responding to social and political pressures, in 2002 Itamaraty launched the Diplomacy Vocation Scholarship in order to provide greater equality of access opportunities and encourage ethnic diversity within the diplomatic staff. It has also changed its recruitment strategy with the opening of more vacancies and the increase in the number of competitors, from 2556 in 1999 to 8869 in 2010, then 6490 in 2013. Itamaraty has created 400 new posts of third secretaries in 2006, bringing the total number of posts from 997 in 1999 to 1397 in 2007. In September 2014, under the leadership of the diplomat Sonia Gomes, a committee was established to combat discrimination of gender and race. In addition, the ministry has also diversified its public diplomacy channels with YouTube, Facebook and Twitter accounts.<sup>21</sup> Scholars have not yet analysed if and how such institutional changes may have shaken Itamaraty's organisational culture and a certain sense of normative unity that many analysts still attribute to Brazil's official diplomacy.<sup>22</sup>

As a result, this survey was conceived to understand and analyse the perceptions of Brazilian diplomats on Brazil's IDC strategies and SSC practices. This does not mean that we ignore the key technical role played by experts in the actual implementation of ABC's projects and activities; indeed, as part and parcel of our research, we have interviewed all technical coordinators within ABC for our deeper understanding of the agency's historical development and institutional building since 1987. However, this survey

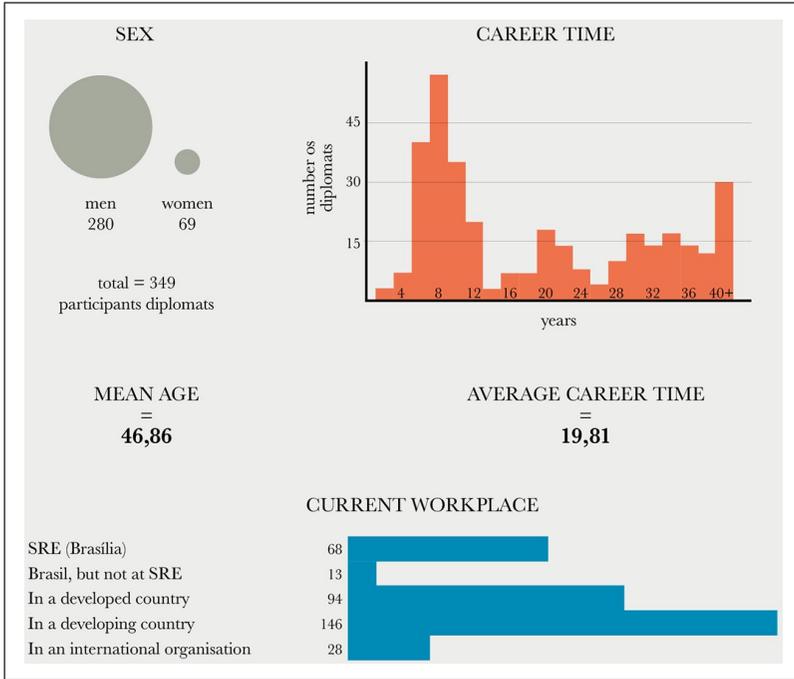
was focused on the perceptions of diplomats who, even though they in general do not work in project management, provide strategic political support and foreign policy guidelines in the field of IDC and SSC both in Brasilia and abroad. Moreover, as stated previously, SSC was one of Brazil's foreign policy key priorities during PT's governments, portraying a particularly critical discourse on North-South relations and the Western primacy over the global rules of the game. This survey was conceived with the assumption that new economic diplomacy priorities would have been met with resistance by diplomats, thanks to bureaucratic inertia and long-term internal cleavages. There would be at least two major world-visions among Brazilian diplomats: a group who would be in favour of an international identity rooted in regional integration and the South-South solidarity *versus* another school of thought portraying a more cosmopolitan and liberal world-vision.<sup>23</sup> Our hypothesis is that this binary division does not illustrate the very many heterogeneous positions that empirically one can find in the field, and that only a rigorous account of the diplomats' views would reveal a set of much more complex and varied stances, thus also reflecting the critical remarks many of them could have on the global alliances and SSC practices implemented by PT during its years of government.

## **Presenting and discussing the perceptions of Brazilian diplomats**

Methodologically, a preliminary draft of the questionnaire had been discussed with ABC's director before its final version was sent out to respondents.<sup>24</sup> The survey's main goal was to understand the perceptions of Brazilian diplomats about the country's IDC and SSC strategies and practices. ABC used Itamaraty's internal communication system to send diplomats the invitation to access and respond to the survey through Google-Forms platform. Figure 1 presents a profile summary of the diplomats who answered voluntarily and anonymously the questionnaire between 25 August and 23 September 2016. At that moment, there were 1590 active diplomats working in Brazil and abroad. This survey was answered by 349 individuals, that is 22 per cent of the total number of active Brazilian diplomats. The following four sections are organised around the diplomat's professional experience in IDC/SSC activities; the priorities of the Brazilian agenda; their assessment of ABC's practices; and analytical comments.

### *Professional experience with IDC/SSC activities*

The majority of Brazilian diplomats have worked in the IDC field, and most of them within Brazil's government. They consider that IDC is a relevant agenda on their daily work. Regarding their participation in IDC practices, many diplomats responded that they have already had some kind of involvement: 53.9 per cent on a diplomatic representation, 40.6 per cent on a division, department or under-secretariat within Itamaraty. Only 18.7 per cent of the diplomats who participated in the survey stated that they have had no involvement with this issue. Only 5.5 per cent of respondents have had previous professional experience with IDC outside the Brazilian government. Only 18.9 per cent of all



**Figure 1.** Profile of respondents.

Source: Made by the authors.

respondents consider that IDC is not a relevant agenda for their daily professional activities and other 23.5 per cent do not work on this agenda.

Among the greatest difficulties for the diplomat’s work on this agenda, respondents highlighted the following three key factors: the lack of financial resources (indicated by 84.8%), political priority problems (54.6%) and difficulties regarding human resources (34.5%). On the same subject-matter of difficulties, 8 per cent of the respondents chose the option *others*, explaining, *inter alia*, that there were also complaints about the lack of financial resources associated with other issues, such as the ‘lack of awareness of the importance of international cooperation at the highest levels of the Presidency and the Congress’. In his or her answer, another diplomat also suggested that ‘it would be best to set the number of possible projects that would fit the budget and channel most of the available resources to them’.<sup>25</sup>

When asked about how international partners assess Brazil’s IDC, many of the 212 diplomats who answered this open question were succinct by using one or two positive adjectives (positively, horizontal), negative adjectives (unsatisfactory, unpredictable) or neutral ones (adequate, well-meaning). This open question gave diplomats the opportunity to highlight his or her own experience with IDC/SSC, and some wrote long answers including criticisms or acknowledgments to the Brazilian practices, among which we underline the following:

When I dealt with the theme (sports cooperation), partners valued the differential of, as a rule, Brazilian cooperation not being linked or conditioned to a specific commercial or political interest. The impression I have is that Brazilian initiatives of low cost were highly valued, even when compared to initiatives that were even better funded, promoted by developed countries.

Brazilian cooperation is well received and has a positive image. However, it is at a much lower level than other countries and suffers from discontinuity, which affects its projection and utility as a foreign policy tool.

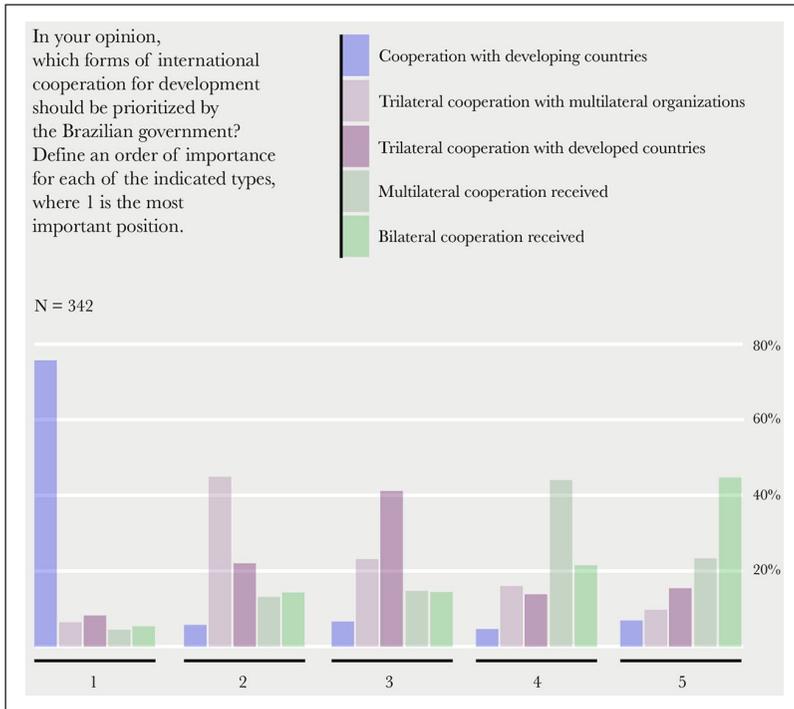
Unimportant in the global context (because of its relatively small size), sporadic, unprofessional, not based on rigorous studies, and reluctant to participate in major donor groups, which creates uncertainties and ignorance. There is, however, great interest, curiosity and hope in Brazil's potential in this area.

Quotations indicate that the cooperation carried out by Brazil, in a diplomat's perception, tends to be well-regarded by developing countries, but the lack of resources and political priority generate frustration (a common word in many comments), especially when noting the distance between promises and implementation, and the reduction of interest after the end of the Lula administration. Some comments point out that the lack of resources and an overemphasis on public policy transfer are not so well-regarded by the poorest countries, which are unable to carry out larger development projects alone (health equipment purchase, school construction and hospitals, etc.). For 67.13 per cent of diplomats, the international partners' view is predominantly positive; however, 23.32 per cent reported frustration with low resources or inconstancy. Due to the nature of their own professional activity, diplomats are perhaps more sensitive to perceptions about Brazilian cooperation that are directly related to their work routine in IDC activities, such as representation and initial project negotiation. Since they tend not to get involved in project implementation and evaluation, they may have downplayed other relevant opinions that would have referred to contradictions revealed by the actual implementation of Brazil's IDC activities.<sup>26</sup> Although local image of Brazilian cooperation needs to be better analysed through empirical research, recent case studies tend to point out the main perceptions of recipient countries according to the same standards expressed in this survey.<sup>27</sup>

### *The priorities of the Brazilian agenda*

Some questions on the survey sought to define the perception of diplomats about the main modalities of IDC (and technical cooperation in particular), the mandatory priorities, the use of political and economic conditionality, and the singularity (or not) of the Brazilian IDC/SSC in comparison with DAC members' practices.<sup>28</sup> When asked about the importance of IDC for a country like Brazil, 201 diplomats answered this open question positively, while only one diplomat simply replied 'no'. Many of the 201 diplomats emphasised the possibility of using IDC/SSC as a foreign policy tool:

No doubt. It broadens Brazil's international projection, creating a positive image for the country. This may help to garner support in multilateral negotiations (especially with regard to



**Figure 2.** Priority modalities of international cooperation and order of importance.

Source: Made by the authors.

Brazilian applications for important positions) and to facilitate the access of Brazilian products to new markets.

This is the main tool of Brazil's projection in regions such as Africa. Brazil would become an irrelevant partner in that continent if there was an eventual extinction of Brazilian technical cooperation programs in African countries.

With regard to IDC modalities, diplomats were asked to rank their priorities. The responses highlighted the importance attached to cooperation with developing countries among the Brazilian diplomacy: 75.7 per cent of the interviewees responded that it is the main modality to be adopted by the Brazilian government (Figure 2). As to political conditionality (related to human rights and democracy), 58.7 per cent responded negatively, 41.3 per cent said they would be favourable. The numbers are relatively similar in relation to the use of economic and commercial criteria in the selection of countries with which Brazil should cooperate: 57.5 per cent answered negatively and 42.5 per cent positively. Two open-ended questions were formulated on the use of political conditionality and economic criteria.

Concerning the use of political conditionality, diplomats were asked whether this practice could violate respect for national sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention on domestic issues. In this case, among 157 responses some stated that:

There are conflicting principles in a country's foreign policy, but human rights and democracy should be more important today for foreign policy than sovereignty and non-intervention when there is conflict between principles. In most cases, conflict does not exist. When there is a conflict, it is clearly a situation in which Brazil's cooperation should not be involved without conditionality, as in dictatorships that promote genocide, hunger and other forms of disrespect for human rights and democracy.

Yes, it hurts [these principles], but I find it unworthy for a country to cooperate with a recognized dictatorship, as did the 'lulopetista' regime by helping Cuban tyranny (and this was not aid, but a gift to dictatorship). Brazilian cooperation with Angola, for example, may be helping to strengthen one of the most corrupt and perverse regimes on the planet. I have no mental restriction in recommending strict conditionality. If there is to be cooperation with Angola, let it go directly to the recipient, but I consider this kind of aid a mere Band-Aid in a situation that is by itself indecorous: a very rich country like Angola has one of the most miserable populations on the planet, and this is directly produced by one of the most corrupt regimes that ever existed on the continent.

Regarding the use of economic and commercial criteria, diplomats were given the possibility in an open question to explain why Brazil should adopt (or not) such criteria. In this case, among 147 favourable answers (42.5%) some participants stated that:

Without relying exclusively on economic and trade criteria, some alignment helps to promote synergy between different foreign policy objectives, including trade promotion and better international economic integration. Too ostensive conditions, however, should not be employed.

Brazil cooperates using Brazilian resources; therefore, cooperation will be a legitimate tool from the viewpoint of the national interest only if the country has any benefit. These criteria need not always be present, but should not be prevented from being adopted.

Basic assumption: cooperation is not charity, it is business and long-term national interest.

Among 199 (57.5%) unfavourable answers, diplomats generally indicated that:

The primary function of technical cooperation is not to gain immediate economic and commercial advantages, but rather to increase Brazilian international prestige and influence.

Brazilian cooperation has been guided by the principle of ownership of the receiving countries and by demand-driven proposals, which would conflict with the imposition of economic conditionality. Attitudes of an interventionist nature would undermine the Brazilian cooperation differential (compared to the North-South model), bringing negative reactions from partner countries, jeopardizing the very outcome of the cooperation programme.

The defence of political conditionality took on multiple forms and world-views, being supported on liberal values ('human rights are non-negotiable') and on realist terms ('Brazil offers cooperation and has the right to define its terms' or 'receiving countries have the right to refuse'). Some responses cited the need to domestically legitimise IDC actions ('the Brazilian population wants to know if money is being well used'). The most

relevant argument in favour of political conditionality (144) was the primacy of human rights promotion in detriment of non-intervention (28.47%). The second most frequent argument in defence of political conditionality was that it belongs to the Brazilian government to choose its partners (20.83%). With variations of intensity, a relatively high number of diplomats favoured economic criteria as a means of greater convergence among foreign policy interests (70 diplomats of 147 diplomats who were in favour of the use of economic criteria). Many believe it would be natural for cooperation programmes to support Brazilian interests abroad. Another group, contrary to economic criteria, defends humanitarian values without strategic interests (51 individuals). A large group (35 individuals) claimed to be contrary to economic conditionality, but defended their point of view on a rational basis, stating that the absence of such mechanisms would imply benefits on other fronts in the medium and long run.

It is interesting to note that the great majority of diplomats (86% of 336 respondents) replied that Brazil's development cooperation should be distinct from the OECD-DAC model.<sup>29</sup> This shows great convergence with the recent practices and the official rhetoric during PT's governments. Some of the justifications for this defence reproduced criticisms of North-South Cooperation regarding the use of conditionality, lack of dialogue with beneficiary countries and low levels of effectiveness:

For several reasons: (i) it is important for Brazil to maintain its international identity as a developing country, including in terms of cooperation; ii) we cannot 'compete' with OECD countries in terms of resources available for cooperation; and iii) our model of horizontal cooperation (South-South) does not demand for compensation, it is more adapted to the perspectives and guidelines of Brazilian foreign policy.

Brazil should not reproduce the traditional North-South cooperation schemes, the limitations of which are known, under penalty of being just another 'provider' of cooperation. We must learn from the mistakes made by the cooperation of the North. Above all, we must value our solutions and the ability to define and design projects that meet the exact needs of the beneficiaries.

For those who do not advocate an innovative model of South-South Cooperation, North-South Cooperation would have accumulated qualities and know-how that should not be overlooked:

Even if we find a model adjusted to our conditions, the idea that South-South cooperation must be distinct needs a humble review to absorb what is positive from the decades-long learning of North-South cooperation. Based on our scarce experience in this field, we cannot reinvent the wheel; we need to better understand the existing experiences, including the North-South cooperation, and learn our lessons with what is useful and positive.

### *Assessing ABC and its practices*

The diplomats' overall assessment of ABC was close to 7 (out of 10), but 115 diplomats rated it below 7. The diplomats who participated in the research tend to know little about ABC's history and institutionalisation. However, when asked about ABC's major

milestones, some responses to the open question associated changes with presidential mandates, for example:

During Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government. Increased cooperation with third countries and international organizations. Triangular cooperation. Cooperation without ideological impositions.

I believe that the guidelines have remained relatively constant and consistent, but I would emphasize the period 2007-2010 (during Lula's second mandate), when technical cooperation coordinated by ABC reached its apex, in terms of available resources and thematic and geographical breadth.

Support for countries in extreme difficulties, such as Haiti after the earthquake. Change: Dilma's government and the shortage of financial resources, which made unfeasible several on-going initiatives and prevented new ones.

With regard to what could be done for ABC to improve its international image, the responses were mostly that budgets should be increased (81%), that ABC should reinforce its coordination capacity (61.7%), and that it should define priority sectors (49%). With respect to what ABC could do nationally to become better known and effective, partnerships with civil society (73.7%), with private companies (71%) and with states and municipalities (60.9%) were the main issues highlighted by diplomats.

### *Analytical comments*

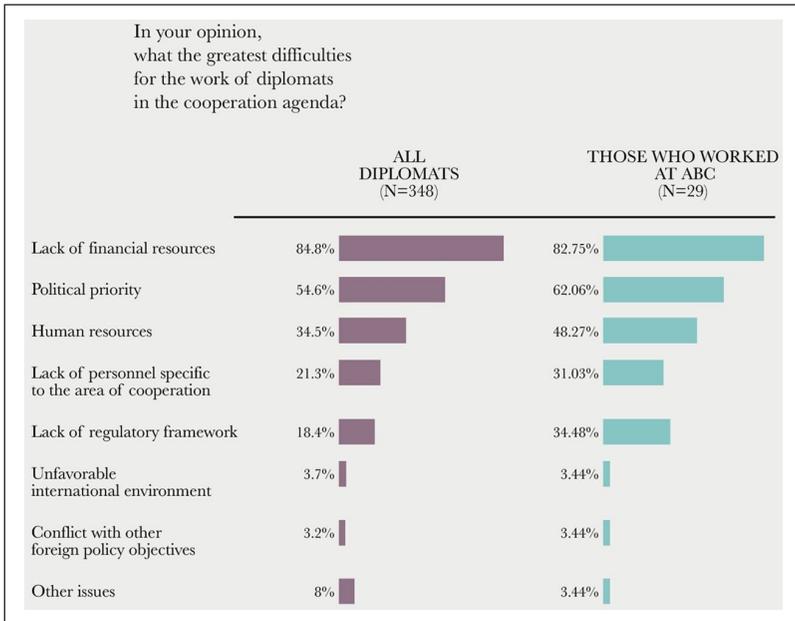
Further to this description of the research results, we hereafter present four analytical comments. First, are there commonalities among Brazilian diplomats currently working in developing countries? Are diplomats working in these countries more attentive and sensitive to Brazil's IDC? To answer these two questions, we analysed the pattern of the responses of diplomats working in developing countries. The results indicated little difference in the responses of this group in relation to the larger group of diplomats. The group of diplomats working in developing countries (such as embassies in African and Latin American countries) presented a higher average age (49.33 years, in comparison to 46.86 years) and longer diplomatic careers (22.03 years of career to 19.81 years). An almost identical proportion indicated that they had already worked on development cooperation initiatives (80.68%, in comparison to 81.26%). When asked which should be Brazil's most important modality of cooperation, there were also no differences: 75.34 per cent favoured SSC in the case of the first group and 74.21 per cent in the case of the second group. Regarding the use of political conditionality, the difference between the two groups is negligible: 39 per cent support it in the first group and 41.26 per cent in the second group. There is no variation in ABC's overall assessment: an evaluation of 6.96 over 10 on average for the first group of diplomats, and 6.98 for the second group. However, this difference increases with regard to the use of economic and trade criteria: only 36.98 per cent of diplomats working in developing countries defended such measures, while 42.12 per cent of the total number of diplomats participating in the survey

supported them. There is also some difference in their support of a 'Brazilian cooperation model' in comparison to a 'North-South cooperation model': 89 per cent of the diplomats of the first group support a 'distinct Brazilian model' (against 82.80% of the second group).

Second, we checked if diplomats who entered the career more recently, starting in 2003, had any more favourable bias towards development cooperation projects with other countries of the South. Our concern was whether the fact that PT's governments had emphasised South-South relations on Brazilian foreign policy could have influenced the perception of younger diplomats in their careers. The study looked specifically at the responses of the group of 162 diplomats who indicated career time of 13 years or less, which accounted for 46.41 per cent of the total 349 respondents. The result of the quantitative analysis indicates that this younger group of diplomats showed no significant difference in their views on cooperation compared to their colleagues. In reference to the job position, this group had a slightly lower presence in developing countries (37.03% to 41.8%) and in developed countries (27.16% to 26.9%), but higher in international organisations (11.72% to 8%) and at the headquarters in Brasília (22.22% to 19.5%). There were no significant differences in the pattern of responses, except for economic criteria: 36.41 per cent of the cohort advocated such measures, which were supported by 42.12 per cent of the total number of diplomats in this research. Therefore, our survey does not point out significant differences of perception between the younger and older generations of Brazilian diplomats.<sup>30</sup> It does not identify a direct influence of the TP's years on the perceptions and reaffirmed positions of diplomats.<sup>31</sup>

Third, we have analysed whether there would be any bias in responses from diplomats who have already worked at the ABC. A group of 29 individuals reported having already worked at ABC. This cohort has a mean age similar to that of the total group (47.72 years) and their average career time is the same (19.64 years). When questioned about what should be Brazil's main modality of cooperation, 86.20 per cent indicated cooperation with developing countries, well above the 75.7 per cent of the universe of diplomats in this survey. They tend to be less supportive of political conditionality (34.48%) and economic criteria (31.30%) when compared to the general set of diplomats. This cohort is slightly more favourable to a Brazilian distinct cooperation model (87.75%), and their assessment of ABC's performance is also slightly higher (mean score of 7.32 out of 10). Experience inside ABC seems to be an important variable in Brazilian diplomats' perception of IDC and SSC practices. Indeed, their main differences in relation to the universe of the research are located in the evaluation of the main difficulties for the diplomats' acting in the cooperation agenda, as indicated in Figure 3. These 29 diplomats emphasise problems related to human resources, political priority, the lack of a regulatory framework and proper staff to work in development cooperation projects.

Finally, would there be any issue related to SSC as a foreign policy agenda that could divide diplomats and provoke cleavages in terms of perceptions? In our analysis, the issue of political conditionalities and economic criteria reveals the least consensual of all survey responses. As discussed earlier, only 42.5 per cent of diplomats support economic criteria and 41.3 per cent are in favour of political conditionalities. This support is lower among diplomats with less than 13 years of career (36.4% and 38.9%, respectively). Support is also lower amid diplomats working in developing countries (37% and 39%,



**Figure 3.** Perceptions about the difficulties related to the technical cooperation agenda. Source: Made by the authors.

respectively). Brazil’s government, before and during the TP’s administrations, refused to apply economic criteria and political conditionalities as part of the country’s development cooperation narratives and programmes. However, Brazilian diplomats generally agree that political conditionalities could be more tolerable than economic criteria. In an open question, 28.5 per cent of the surveyed diplomats referred to the promotion of human rights as more relevant for Brazil than the principle of non-intervention in domestic affairs.

### Concluding remarks

This article presented the results of a survey conducted in 2016 with Brazilian diplomats on Brazil’s development cooperation practices and its normative role in the field of SSC. This was the first survey ever conducted on such a scale with Brazilian diplomats for academic purposes.<sup>32</sup> As we have examined in this article, diplomats’ perceptions on SSC as a foreign policy agenda suggested a need to improve accountability, sustain budgets, establish a proper regulatory framework, but also to foster ABC’s professional and operational capacities. The survey also indicated that Brazil’s SSC is based on national (mainly governmental) institutions, contributing to hammer out SSC programmes with a Brazilian twist.

The survey results showed that Brazilian diplomats generally have a favourable perception on Brazil’s SSC programmes, and that a great majority of them has already acted

in SSC activities. Those individuals who joined the foreign service before the 2000s are not less favourable to SSC. The issue of conditionality brings in cleavages, indicating that there is a large group of diplomats who openly support SSC for promoting trade interests and not because of the official 'solidarity with the South' narrative or the promotion of human rights. However, SSC as a foreign policy agenda is more consensual among Brazilian diplomats than one would have expected. With the exception of perceptions on political conditionalities and economic criteria, the majority of diplomats share commonalities that also correspond to the government's official rhetoric between 2003 and 2016. Their support to SSC is not limited to the youngest generations, to those working in developing countries or to the ones who engage more directly with SSC on a daily basis. This positive convergence around SSC covers different generations, indicating that SSC may be a constructive agenda for the bureaucracy itself that is closely related to diplomatic prestige. At least two hypotheses may be constructed to interpret this evidence. First, diplomats see themselves as gatekeepers of what they consider as more permanent foreign policy agendas. SSC was definitely strengthened under the Lula administration, but it was not crafted as a policy agenda by the TP. As we have previously stated in this article, Brazilian SSC practices date back to the 70s, and multilateral organisations have also fostered SSC as a policy priority. In this connection, there is some sense of policy continuity which comforts diplomats as civil servants who support long-term strategic interests of the state. Second, elite members such as diplomats may consider that SSC is a natural trigger for a high middle-income country which has often played the role of bridging between the industrialised countries of the North and developing countries of the South in multilateral debates and negotiations. Mediating and bridging are key diplomatic functions, an aspect that may have influenced their positive perceptions and support to SSC as a modality of niche diplomacy.

Brazil's political turmoil since Dilma Rousseff's re-election in October 2014, which reached its apex during her controversial impeachment process, had brought about serious economic and institutional effects in 2016 and 2017, and profoundly affects the future scenarios that one could trace to analyse Brazil's foreign policy agendas such as South-South development cooperation. At the outset of the twenty-first century, Brazil was internationally acknowledged for its policies in the fight against poverty and hunger, in the promotion of more inclusive social policies and advances in participatory democracy. However, in the aftermath of a very contentious electoral campaign in 2018, President Jair Messias Bolsonaro has since January 2019 shifted several foreign policy priorities and agendas, *inter alia* strengthening bilateral relations with the Trump administration, focusing on a much less progressive vision of human rights and gender issues at the UN, reducing Brazil's political commitment with climate change negotiations, and drastically cutting down Brazil's budgets allocated to SSC programmes. Whether or not the diplomatic bureaucracy will be able to keep SSC as a foreign policy agenda in the coming years is difficult to forecast; nonetheless, what current Brazilian policy makers must bear in mind is that SSC also involves competition for solidarity in the international scenario. If Brazil, ensnared in its national quagmire, offers less cooperation or is absent from certain regions, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa and mainly China might offer more projects and opportunities to developing countries in Latin America and Africa.

## Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Brazil's CNPq grant 304314/2019-6 and FAPERJ grant E-26/010.101191/2018.

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28. John Pender (2001, p. 399) states that

it was World Bank President Robert McNamara who in 1979 first proposed conditionality, which he described as the idea of encouraging economic growth and development by linking financial assistance to the adoption of a particular set of policies recommended by the World Bank.

See Pender 2001. John Pender, 'From "Structural Adjustment" to "Comprehensive Development Framework": Conditionality Transformed?', *Third World Quarterly*, 22(3), 2001, pp. 397–411.

29. The survey allowed for blank answers; therefore, we present the percentages referring to the actual number of diplomats who have expressed his or her opinion on each question of the survey.
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31. It is important to recall that the survey was conducted in August and September 2016, exactly around the time when Dilma Rousseff was impeached. Itamaraty's views and changes in its leadership at the time must have been present in diplomats' minds, which may have influenced their perceptions towards what was a relevant foreign policy agenda under the TP's government.
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