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South-South Ideas

Institutional frameworks for South-South Cooperation in Latin America:

Lessons from Argentina,
Brazil and Mexico

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABC	Brazilian Cooperation Agency
AMEXCID	Mexican Agency of International Cooperation and Development
BAPA+40	Buenos Aires Plan of Action plus 40
BID	Inter-American Development Bank
BNDES	National Bank for Economic and Social Development
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CAIXA	Brazilian Public Housing Finance Institution
CAF	Development Bank of Latin America / Andean Development Corporation
CELAC	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
CLA	Latin American Council
CNAT	National Council of Technical Assistance
COBRADI	Brazilian Cooperation for International Development
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCGIN	General Direction for International Cooperation
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EMBRAPA	Brazilian Agriculture Research Corporation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FIOCRUZ	Oswaldo Cruz Foundation
FOAR	Argentinian Fund of South-South and Triangular Cooperation
FONCID	National Fund for International Cooperation and Development
IDC	International Development Cooperation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPEA	Institute of Applied Economic Research
ISAGS	South American Institute of Health Governance of UNASUR
LATAM	Latin America
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MERCOSUR	Southern Common Market
MLIDC	Mexican Law of International Development Cooperation
MRE	Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NeST	Network of Southern Think Tanks
NIEO	New International Economic Order
NSC	North-South Cooperation
OAS	Organization of American States
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OEI	Organization of Ibero-American States for Education Science and Culture
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PFICSS	Ibero-American Program for the Strengthening of South-South Cooperation
PROCID	International Cooperation for Development Program

RENCID	National Registry for International Cooperation for Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEGIB	Ibero-American General Secretariat
SICID	Information System for International Development Cooperation
SSC	South-South Cooperation
SSTrC	South-South and Triangular Cooperation
TrC	Triangular Cooperation
TCDC	Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries
UN	United Nations
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNOSSC	United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation

Executive summary

Goals and methodology

NeST LATAM, the Latin American chapter of the Network of Southern Think Tanks, currently made up of representatives from Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, conducted the research to assess the lessons learned from national contexts regarding institutional frameworks for South-South Cooperation (SSC) in the region and devise possible ways forward, proposing a project combining desk review and outreach activities. In the early stages of the implementation of the project, the team realized that COVID-19 was also a necessary topic, and thus it was added to the original proposal in the form of a survey designed to gather experiences from the first months of the pandemic in the region. The main objective of the present report is to understand whether and to what extent national SSC institutions can provide valuable lessons to foster stronger dialogue and coordination at the regional level.

Conclusions

In the three countries under analysis, institutional frameworks for SSC have been in existence for decades in different formats and before the outbreak of the pandemic, had been experiencing a recent spur. During our study's specific time frame, 2010 to 2020, it may be said that some level of resistance has been on the rise in all three countries to the use of the term "South-South Cooperation" and a preference for the adoption of a looser conceptual framework while maintaining SSC distinguishing principles such as horizontality and mutual benefits. SSC is perceived as a narrative asset to be either adopted or dropped in official narratives as the situation warrants. Despite the general acceptance of SSC as a "broad framework of collaboration", other SSC modalities have had fewer opportunities to engage in regional dialogue and exchanges, including humanitarian assistance and disaster risk reduction. Regarding the perceived impact of COVID-19 on SSC, there is a general expectation that SSC will help meet the key challenges that have arisen in the current situation: improving cross-border epidemiological surveillance, strengthening human resources training and fostering mutual learning, knowledge production and innovation for tests, vaccine and pharmaceuticals. In a wider perspective, SSC has been referred to as playing an important role in tackling the structural causes of the pandemic and advocating for different development models.

Recommendations

1. There is an opportunity for regional organizations and/or for national SSC authorities to build trust and foster dialogue as to how to implement the principles of horizontality and mutual benefits into SSC experiences.
2. Initiatives aiming to foster dialogue concerning SSC in the region should connect with the already established networks of technical cooperation as an entry-point to the understanding of and engagement with the full range of SSC modalities, and not necessarily as a stand-alone representative for SSC.
3. National authorities in charge of SSC should invest in SSC M&E systems and evidence-based SSC documentation in order to build stronger and better-informed constituencies at the national and international levels.

4. National authorities in charge of SSC and regional organizations aiming to engage in SSC dialogue must increase their efforts to include stakeholders responsible for humanitarian cooperation and for disaster risk reduction in SSC initiatives, by leveraging existing networks at the technical level to coordinate the establishment of easily triggered joint protocols to manage the risk of current and future outbreaks.
5. National SSC authorities, regional and international organizations, think tanks and academia should create relationships of trust with national stakeholders and encourage SSC science and technology research, addressing the pandemic through a multidisciplinary approach and tackling the structural causes of the health crisis.

1. Introduction

In 2019, NeST LATAM¹ proposed a study, in response to UNOSSC/UNDP call for research proposals, to address the topic of institutional frameworks for South-South Cooperation in Latin America through a combination of desk review and outreach activities. Initially, the plan was to assess the lessons learned from LATAM national contexts and devise possible ways of furthering the institutional settings for SSC in the region. Starting with an overview of the three countries currently represented within NeST LATAM, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, the initiative would update the narratives and identify the enabling and disabling factors that impact the stronger institutionalization of SSC in the region.

However, by the time the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in March 2020, the team of participating researchers had only been able to hold a first in-person meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and begin desk-based research. The pandemic struck the participating countries at different periods and with different levels of intensity. Its impact on project implementation has been twofold. First, like most people at the time, participating researchers had to reassess their priorities and adjust to the new conditions imposed by the COVID-19 crisis. Programmed activities were delayed and some, particularly the in-person meeting that was to be held in Brazil to discuss findings and agree on conclusions, ultimately had to be cancelled. Secondly, the team realized that COVID-19 was in fact a necessary subject for the programmed outreach activities, and it was therefore added to the original project proposal in the form of a brief survey designed to gather experiences from the early months of the pandemic in the region. In this way, although there is a high degree of uncertainty as to how the global pandemic will evolve, the team was able to adapt its initial workplan and methodology to reflect on the early lessons learned from the pandemic and develop recommendations accordingly.

Objectives and analytical framework

Multilateral coordination at global and regional levels are key factors in promoting a more integrated system of development cooperation. Integration, however, has become problematic, particularly since the re-emergence of SSC in this century.

In the 1960s, the creation of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) at OECD was a milestone for the institutionalization of a system of aid designed and driven by developed countries. For almost 60 years, that system has determined the norms, rules and procedures for development cooperation. However, changes in the international power structure that have increased the influence of a group of emerging countries, the failure of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to achieve results, budgetary restrictions on foreign aid in the context of the global economic crisis and the growing relevance of non-state actors – NGOs and private sector – have pushed traditional donors to expand the scope of the system. A more inclusive architecture to manage international development cooperation was pursued during the four High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness and culminated in the Busan forum in 2011. The process has been a watershed for designing a new governance mechanism (Kern and Pauselli), but key players such as China, Brazil and India, among other middle-income countries, have not been willing to join it, preferring to maintain their own margins of manoeuvre.

¹ NeST LATAM stands for the Latin American chapter of the Network of Southern think-tanks (NeST). Currently formed by representatives from three countries, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, membership in NeST LATAM is open to think-tanks, research institutes, universities, NGOs and networks from the South that are engaged in research, policy debate and analysis of South-South Cooperation and international development cooperation. Inquiries should be sent to nestlatam@bpc.org.

As part of their foreign policy goals, the so-called *non-DAC donors* “have created an alternative development model that serves their normative and foreign policy agendas, while challenging many of the assumptions and practices of the ODA regime” (Hook and Rumsey, 2016, p. 13).

In fact, SSC criticism of the aid system highlights the demand for more inclusive governance, which will require revising previous consensus and admitting more flexible agreements. Southern countries have exerted pressure over established governance structures, ideas and concepts, but their will, or at least their ability, to pursue a new governance mechanism is not clear. Some scholars argue that in this context, SSC generates a more fragmented system. It worsens the lack of coordination among donors and reduces the standards for aid giving which were established in order to guarantee development objectives and transparency (Kharas, 2011; Ladd, 2010; Meyer and Schulz, 2008).

At the regional level, SSC in Latin America offers a case in point that enables us to explore these factors. Kern and Pauselli (2017) consider the relationship between the narratives at the global and the regional levels as one of the dimensions that can serve to analyse SSC governance in South America. The authors argue that SSC has configured a dynamic political arena to contest the changing global governance of development cooperation and particularly of foreign aid. As a result, most regional narratives of SSC have been constructed in a way that contrasts with the concept of ODA, while some countries have built narratives “that question the principles, norms, rules and procedures of an old aid regime that is not able to adapt to a different international context” (Kern and Pauselli, 2018, p. 195).

In light of this situation, the central question here is: what are the factors that make coordination difficult in Latin America? One such factor is the multiplicity of competing political objectives of the countries in the region. Prado Lallande (2016) points out that the complexity of SSC in the region may be explained by the vast diversity of goals, capacities and procedures of Latin American countries. Another factor that impacts coordination and should be explored further is related to concepts and narratives. Unlike North-South Cooperation (NSC) wherein OECD criteria define what is ODA and what is not, SSC lacks a unified definition or set of objectives. Therefore, “the lack of a widely accepted definition of SSC, its fragmentation and dispersion has conspired against the emergence of a regional governance system and the constitution of a unique global governance system” (Kern and Pauselli, 2018:197).

The main objective of this report is to understand whether national SSC institutions can provide valuable lessons which may serve to foster stronger dialogue and coordination at the regional level, and if so, to what extent.

Using the above ideas as a departure point, the main objective of this report is to understand whether national SSC institutions can provide valuable lessons which may serve to foster stronger dialogue and coordination at the regional level, and if so, to what extent. Institutions are formal and informal ‘rules of the game’ that influence human behaviour in economic, social and political life. Although they do not necessarily determine human behaviour, they do play an important role in linking citizens and the decision-making organs of the state. (North, 1990; Rodrik, 2007). According to Leftwich and Sen (2010), although institutions embody the rules of the game, “formal and informal organizations and individuals (...) may play the game according to the rules or they may seek to evade and avoid the rules, thereby undermining it; and they also seek to shape or influence the rules” (p. 9). They are, nonetheless, important to an understanding of SSC as public policy. According to Milani (2017), building institutions for SSC in the field of development “is a sine qua non condition for transparency, accountability in terms of results, and a sensitized public opinion”. In this sense, analysing SSC institutions also implies tackling its conceptual framework and identity, and this seems especially true in the case of SSC.

Table 1: Key questions

Narratives	<p>How have foreign policy ideas and interests shaped the concept and goals of SSTRC?</p> <p>How do state agencies influence the narrative?</p> <p>How are these narratives linked with regional and global ideas?</p>
Institutional frameworks	<p>What is the bureaucratic structure of SSTRC?</p> <p>What are the main regulations that govern SSTRC development?</p>
Coordination mechanisms	<p>What are the formal and informal mechanisms that promote coordination among state agencies?</p> <p>What are their strengths and weaknesses?</p> <p>How are monitoring and evaluation carried out?</p> <p>Are there non-state actors involved in SSTRC? In what way? What roles do they play?</p>

The present report is divided into two main sections. The first section focuses particularly on SSC official narratives and conceptual frameworks at the national level, and then proceeds to analyse SSC processes and instruments, including its legal and regulatory frameworks and administrative and bureaucratic structures, in the three selected countries. The underlying assumption is that these are important factors in identifying common features and entry points for dialogue. The second section is the result of the project’s outreach activities: two webinars organized by NeST LATAM and a brief survey conducted to gather initial perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 SSC in the region. The outreach activities were designed to reflect on the bottlenecks and priorities for SSC in the current – albeit constantly changing – context. Finally, the last section organizes the inputs collected throughout the study into final considerations and recommendations. We believe that Argentina, Brazil and Mexico can provide valuable lessons for think tanks, governments, CSOs and academia towards building a more enabling environment for SSC in the region.

2. Institutional frameworks for SSC in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico

Narratives and conceptual frameworks

The term South-South Cooperation has been interpreted in different ways across the decades, alternating between broader and narrower definitions. The 1955 Bandung Conference is often referred to as its initial landmark: for the first time, leaders from newly-independent countries distinguished cooperation within the Asian and African regions from cooperation between themselves and developed countries. The group of countries assembled in Bandung was strengthened by others that identified with them, including Latin American countries that had won their formal independencies more than a century earlier but were still facing economic and political constraints in their international agendas.

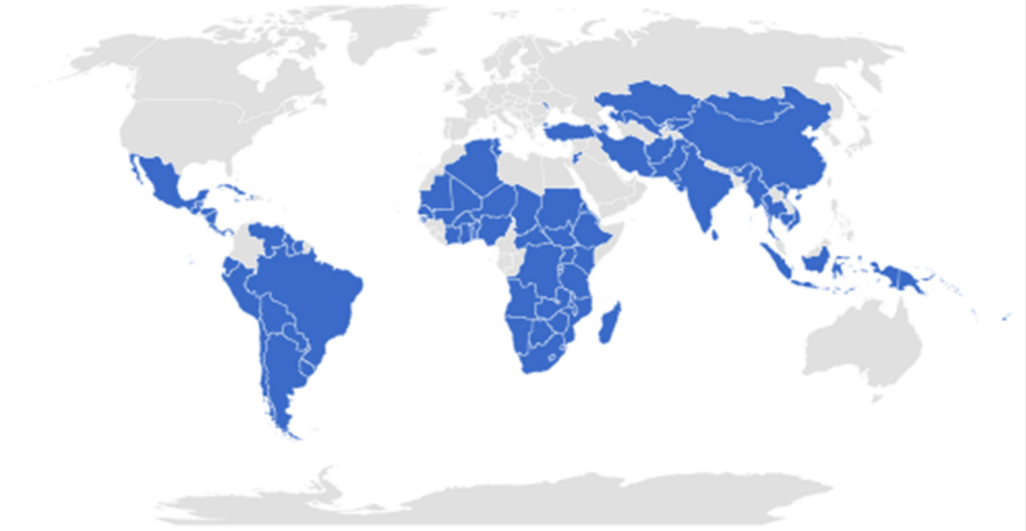
Combining as it did political and economic cooperation with coalition-building for collective self-reliance, the concept of SSC formulated at the Bandung Conference was broad and multidimensional. Over the next decades, it was followed by the creation of a number of different organizations and coalitions, responsible for addressing the economic dependence that quickly followed formal political independence and for tackling the international systems that hindered the development of the former colonies, including trade (mainly within UNCTAD and WTO) and the foreign aid system, led in large part thus far by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC).

Despite common narratives of Third World solidarity and reparation for colonial and neo-colonial exploitation, the Bandung Conference hosted a rather heterogeneous group of countries, and international demonstrations of the concertation inaugurated in Indonesia were diffuse and diverse. Similarly, the vocabulary used to refer to this model of cooperation has changed over the decades, but since the end of bipolarity in the distribution of world power, developing and underdeveloped countries have been increasingly identified as the *Global South*, heightening the use of the term “South-South Cooperation”, especially since the early 2000s.

At the multilateral level, a search for the term “South-South Cooperation” in 136 current cooperation frameworks established by agreement between the United Nations and each host country, known collectively as the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), results in 75% mentioning SSC. UNSDCF is the most important instrument for planning and implementing UN development activities at country level. Previously known as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), it has recently been reformed to reposition the United Nations development system for achieving the 2030 Agenda². The map below shows the countries that have included SSC in their cooperation agreements with the United Nations:

² The new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework replaces the former UNDAF and is at the centre of United Nations reforms. Our research encompasses all currently active United Nations frameworks, as per the United Nations official website (<https://unsdg.un.org/resources/cooperation-framework>), including those that have been extended from previous versions. Each individual document was searched for the following terms: South-South cooperation; South to South cooperation; South-South exchanges; South-to-South exchanges; South-South initiatives; South-South partners; South-South learning; South-South collaboration. The search was subject to limitations due to documents that were: (a) only available in formats that are not machine-readable; (b) under annual humanitarian response plans; (c) not available in the UN online repository. Cooperation frameworks that refer to SSC activities using different phrases and terminologies, such as the excerpt “... strengthen the capacity of all countries, particularly developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction, and management of national and global health risks”, from Georgia UNDAF, were not included in this assessment.

Figure 1. Countries in which current UN Development Cooperation Frameworks mention SSC.



Source: compiled by the authors from United Nations public documentation

In Latin America, only Colombia, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador fail to include SSC in their current UNSDCF documents. Although mentioning SSC does not mean that it will necessarily lead to implementation, it does suggest a significant normative adherence to the term in the relationship between the United Nations and its partner countries in different regions.

The broader understanding of SSC, also referred to as South-South *relations* (Hirst, 2011; Lechini, 2009, 2014), encompasses a narrower interpretation of the concept, related to technical cooperation. Technical cooperation gained international visibility in the late 1970s and has remained a key modality for understanding SSC. Among developing countries, previously known by the acronym *TCDC*, technical cooperation received special attention from the United Nations in the early 1970s within the broader scope of SSC. In 1972, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2974 (UNGA, 1972) recommended the creation of a working group within UNDP to “examine and make recommendations on the best way for developing countries to share their capacities and experience with one another with a view to increasing and improving development assistance”, which resulted in the establishment of a special unit within UNDP to promote TCDC.

In 1978, the Special Unit on TCDC, which would later become the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), was responsible for organizing the conference in Argentina that resulted in the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) for Promoting and Implementing TCDC. Both the conference and its resulting plan of action focused on TCDC. Technical cooperation was considered *instrumental* to fostering broader SSC and to precipitating changes in approaches to development assistance in order to advance towards a new international economic order (NIEO) (UNDP, 1992).

At the same time, the 1978 BAPA agreement affirmed the complementary nature of SSC in regard to North-South Cooperation: “TCDC is not an end in itself neither a substitute for technical cooperation with developed countries” (UN, 1978). The Buenos Aires Conference was an important milestone in the evolution of SSC concepts and praxis and consolidated the concept of TCDC as a pillar of SSC, encompassing transfer of knowledge and experience among developing countries.

Forty years later, the BAPA+40 outcome document hardly mentions TCDC and defines SSC as a “broad framework of collaboration” between countries of the Global South, “including but not limited to the economic, social, cultural, environmental, and technical domains, that can take place in a bilateral, regional or interregional contexts” (United Nations, 2019). In this way, TCDC has become part and parcel of SSC, together with political dialogue and economic and financial cooperation, shaping a wide range of exchanges through programmes, projects and initiatives.

Within this broad framework, some authors find it useful to apply the concept of South-South *Development* Cooperation (SSDC), arguing that this narrower approach would allow us to “differentiate this specific dimension from South-South relations, as a specific policy area that includes promotion and/or collaboration in capacity-building between developing countries” (Malacalza, 2020). Different from trade and investment flows, SSDC would encompass resources invested with some kind of “grant element” as well as those of a *concessional* nature. The distinction between SSC and SSDC is far from attaining consensus among scholars and practitioners, chiefly because the latter echoes the ODA definition, and from the outset, SSC has defined itself in contrast to OECD practices and narratives. As the report of a preparatory meeting organized by UNDP for the BAPA+40 Conference concluded:

(...) academics within the South continue to debate the relationship between development cooperation (DC) and SSC. (...) Some have argued that SSC is too broad and rather put forward the term of South-South Development Cooperation (SSDC) to define the specific ‘development cooperation’ coming from other Southern partners. Others oppose the term of SSDC, claiming that it has emerged out of the OECD-DAC circles as a way to bring SSC closer to ODA approaches (UNDP, 2019).

Colleagues from Global NeST have argued that SSC should be conceived of as a “development compact” that would include five pillars – capacity-building, concessional finance, preferential trade, investment and technical cooperation – and centre on the concept of mutual gain, blurring the dualistic division between donor and receiver countries put forward by OECD³. Such diverse understandings of SSC, alternating between broader and narrower conceptions that may often coincide with closer or more distant relations with the industrialized world, are also present at the national level in the three countries analysed in this study. In each of these countries, SSC narratives have shifted over time, impacting SSC institutions differently.

In order to understand the official SSC narratives at the national level, our analysis draws on a corpus of documents made up of cooperation agency statements and guidelines, technical and implementing institution reports, legal and regulatory documents and guidelines. More specifically, as regards Mexico, the analysis of official narratives is based on the reports of the National Registry of International Development Cooperation (RENCID) and the Program of International Development Cooperation (PROCID). For Argentina, the main sources of information are documents from the Argentine Fund for Horizontal Cooperation (FO.AR) and for Brazil, the series of Brazilian Cooperation for International Development (COBRADI) reports. Although there are references to earlier periods relevant to the institutionalization of SSC, our analysis in this section focuses on the period from 2010 to 2020.

³ Chaturverdi, S., South-South cooperation: a theoretical and institutional framework. *South-South Ideas*, UNDP, 2019.

In order to understand the official SSC narratives at the national level, our analysis draws on a corpus of documents made up of cooperation agency statements and guidelines, technical and implementing institution reports, legal and regulatory documents and guidelines.

In Argentina, a first narrative may be identified with the creation of FO.AR. in the early 1990s. FO.AR was initially conceived as a foreign policy instrument to facilitate the economic insertion of the country in the international system. Instead of using the term “South-South”, the name of the fund refers to “horizontal cooperation”. This is key to understanding the original narrative of Argentine cooperation: the concept of horizontality characterized a specific kind of relationship between countries with similar development indicators and avoided the label “South” (Kern and Weisstaub, 2011). At that time, the ruling elites, ideologically aligned with the principles of neoliberalism, perceived the post-Cold War international system as an opportunity for economic insertion. The aim was to create a new state identity based on clear alignment with the United States, strengthening ties with other major international powers, aspiring to join OECD and withdrawing from the Non-Aligned Movement. This identity moved away from and contrasted with that of the “South”, presenting Argentina instead as a country that had successfully implemented the reforms called for by the Washington Consensus, and thus a model for the developing world. Relationships with Latin American countries prioritized its economic and commercial agenda, particularly within the framework of the MERCOSUR integration process.

It was not until the beginning of the present century under the administration of President Néstor Kirchner that Argentina experienced a different narrative, adopting a more autonomous foreign policy orientation following the economic crisis of 2001. More closely identified with the Global South and in a clear shift away from the automatic alignment of previous administrations, this more autonomous foreign policy continued after the death of Néstor throughout the presidency of Cristina Fernandez (2007-2015). The Fernandez administration pursued a policy of active participation in efforts to democratize the international system (Morasso, 2015), recognizing the growing role of domestic factors in the aftermath of the economic crisis (Busso, 2016). Latin America became a political and economic priority, while relations with the major powers tended to be more confrontational. The integration process was extended and reformulated, oriented towards social and productive integration and was no longer primarily commercial. Foreign policy was once more guided by identification with the countries of the “South”, particularly in international cooperation. As a result, SSC recovered its political characterization in Argentina as an alternative model to the ODA system (Kern and Weisstaub, 2011). It became “a matter of principles and ideology” (Morasso, 2015). According to former Foreign Minister Héctor Timerman, SSC is “the emergence of an awareness of Southern countries regarding the need to share a common destiny, to help ourselves, to cooperate, to work together” (cited in Morasso, 2015, p. 113). During this administration, the name of FO.AR was changed to *Argentine Fund for South-South and Triangular Cooperation*, reflecting the choice of a broad symbolic identity as the “South” (Kern and Weisstaub, 2018), as well as the search to expand resources through triangular cooperation.

In late 2015, under the government of Mauricio Macri, foreign policy took a new turn. At that time, the international context was characterized by economic recession, the declining power of BRICS, a growing crisis in multilateralism and the expansion of liberal governments in Latin America. Foreign policy began to reflect the position that Argentina should “go back to the world”. In concrete terms, this meant that external alliances should be reconfigured to seek external support for economic recovery. Within this framework, SSC was seen as a means to achieving that goal. According to statements by the former Director General of Cooperation, SSC was a way of “maintaining an active presence in other global scenarios” through the “help that is given to other developing countries”⁴.

⁴ “Cooperación argentina con naciones de tres continentes”, La Nación, 12 April 2018. Available at <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/cooperacion-argentina-con-naciones-de-tres-continentes-nid2124770>. Accessed in August 2020.

Brazil

A new government came into office in December 2019 and it is expected that the SSC narrative will recover its political content at least partially. However, foreign policy is still a work in progress and this kind of narrative can hardly find an echo in the current regional and global context. It is expected that the government's commitment to the 2030 Agenda will be a relevant component of its foreign policy and will also be part of a new SSC and TrC narrative.

To a certain extent, Brazilian cooperation for international development can be related to the “China effect” between 2002 and 2008, also known as the “commodity boom”⁵, which played an important role in increasing export earnings for Latin America in general and for Brazil in particular. In this context, Brazil was able to develop and implement a number of policies concerning income distribution, conditional cash-transfer and universal access to public health that were responsible for societal change and for attracting international attention. On the external front, an audacious foreign policy was put in place, firmly committed to multilateralism and encouraging developing nations to advance a constructive agenda based on forward-looking proposals (Amorim, 2010). As a result, the country experienced a sharp increase in requests for SSC cooperation and experience-sharing from other developing countries.

Although Brazil was regarded as an eminent “emerging donor” during the 2000s (Mawdsley, 2012), it was also the object of criticism, in large part due to its lack of accountability and the documented instances of rather top-down practices that contrasted with the principles of horizontality and solidarity that were constantly emphasized in official narratives (Cabral and Weinstock, 2010). Until 2010, there were no open or comprehensive reports on Brazilian cooperation and no agreed-to methodology to account for SSC projects.

In this context, COBRADI (the official report on Brazilian cooperation for international development) represents a relevant initiative in order to address some of those gaps. In 2010, when the first COBRADI report was published with data referring to the 2005-2009 period, the term “South-South Cooperation” is rarely used. The report instead refers to the “Brazilian contribution to international development”, understood as:

[T]he total funds invested by the Brazilian federal government, entirely as non-repayable grants, in governments of other countries, in nationals of other countries in Brazilian territory or in international organizations with the purpose of contributing to international development, understood as the strengthening of the capacities of international organizations and groups or populations of other countries to improve their socioeconomic conditions.

Both the preface and the body of the report reinforce the position that this modality of cooperation balances sovereignty and self-determination with the principles of solidarity and non-indifference that are the foundational elements of what the report terms ‘horizontal cooperation’ or ‘horizontal cooperation for development’ (COBRADI, 2011, p. 33). Although the term SSC is not mentioned, the first COBRADI report constitutes the federal government's first effort to define and account for its contribution to international development. Two years previously, at the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana, the Brazilian delegation had delivered a bold declaration, denouncing a “rigid vision of the global development system” in which countries “could only be classified as either donors or receivers”⁶, and emphasizing the differences between South-South Cooperation and North-South Cooperation (NSC), as represented by Official Development Assistance (ODA).

⁵ The rise in commodity prices (i.e. oil, metals, etc.) due the growing demand on the part of emerging markets. See <https://blogs.imf.org/>

⁶ Final statement delivered by the Brazilian delegation at the Third High Level Forum in Accra, September 2008 (MRE, 2008).

Although the COBRADI definition was adjusted in the following editions, it is interesting to note that the first official definition of the Brazilian contribution to international development only considered funds with a 100% grant element. The categories under which COBRADI was assessed were also adjusted across the published reports, but in the first edition it was divided into four modalities: humanitarian assistance, technical cooperation, scholarships for foreigners and contributions to international organizations. Later on, in-country expenses relating to support for refugees in Brazil and the expenses incurred by the country's peacekeeping operations were also included in COBRADI, although the latter was not considered a net national expense since it is eventually reimbursed by the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

In 2016, the official narrative reduced the use of the term "SSC", focusing on the broader term "technical development cooperation" to cover all initiatives coordinated by ABC, as may be seen from the government's official website and in social media. The shift reflected the views of ex-President Michel Temer's administration, a tendency that gained in strength during 2019, the first year of President Bolsonaro's term of office. SSC is seen as politically and ideologically charged and identified with a left-wing foreign policy.

Thus, the 2016 COBRADI report seems to brush-off the term SSC as simplistic, affirming that:

(...) the Brazilian experience portrayed in modalities such as scientific and technological cooperation (chapter 3) requires reflecting on the predominant discourse, which tends to limit Brazilian cooperation to a political reading, associating it with South-South Cooperation (SSC). This is not about deconstructing such a discourse, but just recognizing that, due to its diversity, its scope and its complexity, COBRADI goes beyond the limits traditionally imposed by political discourse - which tends to summarize it to SSC (COBRADI, 2016, p. 172).

In their report published in 2018, the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) and the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) affirm that "the term 'South' is used since most of the partner countries are in the southern hemisphere, although there are several of them whose territory is partially or wholly located in the northern hemisphere" (COBRADI, 2018, p. 310), thus reducing the definition of 'South' to the result of geographical similitude. Implementing partners, however, continue to use SSC terminology. If we examine the four principal implementing agencies involved in Brazilian technical cooperation – Fiocruz (health), SENAI (professional training), CAIXA (financial and housing policies), and EMBRAPA (agriculture) – a number of interesting nuances can be found although those agencies work within a common framework through ABC. In the realm of health, for instance, Fiocruz emphasizes the concept of "structuring SSC", aiming to strengthen institutions and enable greater autonomy⁷. The concept of "structuring cooperation" can be observed in a number of areas of Brazilian technical cooperation, such as EMBRAPA and SENAI cooperation activities. It refers to projects that foster greater sustainability by prioritizing institution-building or strengthening, aiming to create a more significant impact in partner countries in terms of policy continuity, scaling up and tackling structural issues⁸.

Mexico

The definitions and vocabulary used by Mexico appear to have remained relatively stable over the same period, which is likely related to the establishment of the Mexican Law on International Development Cooperation (MLIDC, 2011) and the system that developed from it. Originally, the term SSC does not appear as such in MLIDC: the Law refers instead to

⁷ Fiocruz (Oswaldo Cruz Foundation) is a research institution working in conjunction with the Health Ministry of Brazil and is the main partner in the implementation of Brazilian South-South cooperation in the field of health. See <https://portal.fiocruz.br/cooperacao-sul-sul> and FERREIRA, J. R., FONSECA, L. E., 2017.

⁸ ABC - Agência Brasileira de Cooperação – Ministério das Relações Exteriores (ABC/MRE). See <http://www.abc.gov.br/Gestao/ProjetosEstruturantes>.

International Development Cooperation (IDC) as a general priority. The Law provided for the establishment of institutions such as the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID), and the development of instruments to programme, coordinate, implement, monitor, report and evaluate development cooperation⁹.

In its 2014 Program of International Development Cooperation, Mexico defined IDC as consisting of the transfer, reception and exchange of resources, goods, knowledge and educational, cultural, technical, scientific, economic and financial experiences between governments as well as with international organizations, for the purpose of promoting sustainable human development. In the same way as the law, PROCID states that “horizontal cooperation” is a type of cooperation for economic and social development in which the provider's resources are complemented by counterpart resources provided by the recipient. Furthermore, both costs and benefits are shared, regardless of the percentage of the provider's participation in terms of financial, human and technical resources.¹⁰ The principle of mutual benefits and responsibilities appears to be a crucial aspect of SSC as practised by Mexico.

It should be noted that of the three countries analysed in the present study, only Mexico is a member of OECD, which may explain its preference for the broader definition of IDC instead of openly adhering to the term SSC. Mexico, however, does not belong to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC/OECD) and thus does not report ODA. Moreover, like Brazil and Argentina, it is officially considered to be a dual cooperation actor, both receiving and providing cooperation in different fields. The country is known for having a robust legal framework for SSC thanks to the law enacted in 2011 that established the Mexican System for International Development Cooperation, as well as its system of institutions for the management and implementation of and accountability for the national resources dedicated to development cooperation. The system is managed by the Mexican Cooperation Agency (AMEXCID) and from its inception included four pillars: a financial pillar, the national fund for international development cooperation (FONCID)¹¹, an information system (SICID), a programmatic pillar (PROCID) and a monitoring and evaluation pillar (RENCID).

Processes and instruments

This section addresses the processes and management instruments for international cooperation in the three countries under study. Our research used a comparative approach to examine their legal frameworks, institutional and administrative systems and monitoring and evaluation methodologies¹². It should be noted that all three have a common institutional framework for both bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and most of the results, especially as regards their legal frameworks and administrative systems apply to the dual role – both as provider and recipient – played by all three countries in international development cooperation. Beyond those features, however, they have few other elements in common. On the contrary, they are a sample of Latin America's heterogeneity. Although Mexico, Brazil and Argentina are middle-income countries with the biggest economies in the region, their positions and interests in the global arena vary greatly. Their foreign policy orientations have engendered very different histories of international cooperation and have had quite different impacts on how they implement SSC.

⁹ See more at <https://www.oecd.org/dac/dac-global-relations/mexicos-development-co-operation.htm>.

¹⁰ See http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LCID_061120.pdf.

¹¹ The Mexican Fund for Cooperation, along with 108 other funds from different sectors, became extinct through a reform in October 2020 (see Fund 101 on the list at <https://www.efinanciero.com.mx/nacional/estos-son-los-109-fideicomisos-y-fondos-que-se-extinguiran>).

¹² Previous studies by Prieto (2016a) and (2016b), documented the efforts to value SSC in the Latin-American region, and particularly focused on the three countries which were the most advanced on the subject at the time of the research: Brazil, Chile and México. In this case, the review conducted is broader and more related to monitoring and evaluation processes and instruments, rather than to a particular methodology to ascribe a monetary value to SSC. However, there are some points of convergence, such as the review of normative frameworks and the inclusion of the topics of SSC and TC valuation.

Mexico has the most structured system for coordinating international cooperation which it has updated and improved over the last four decades as it strengthens its institutional and technical cooperation capacities more strategically, resulting in a consolidated legal framework for international cooperation. It is the only country in our study where international cooperation is regulated by law. The Mexican Law on International Development Cooperation (MLIDC) was finally approved in 2011 after many decades of negotiation and further updated in 2015. The MLIDC is the crucial instrument that sets out the basis, rules, tools and mechanisms to manage and implement Mexican development cooperation and establishes clear mechanisms, channels and obligations to work with governmental actors and the way to collaborate with non-governmental actors. (Pérez-Pineda, 2015, Bracho and Pérez-Pineda, 2015).

Conversely, Brazil and Argentina, although they are among the most active SSC players in the region, lack an integrated legal framework for SSC, which means that they have to resort to international organizations to support SSC management and implementation.

The evolution of Mexican development cooperation is in line with the influence of the international context, and the country has been working on the development of its own tools, methodologies and systems to make its cooperation more accountable, effective and transparent. The existence of a law regulating ICD in Mexico was the result of several years of advocacy, with previous attempts having been made before its final consolidation in 2011, as Figueroa (2017) states. The law provides a different status and scope for Mexican cooperation at national level, protecting the institutional framework it created to manage international development cooperation, whether SSC, NSC, Triangular or Bilateral, etc. Prior to the enactment of the 2011 law, the office that was in charge of Mexican cooperation would change with each change in government, by mandate of the president in office. Sometimes it would be an administrative unit, sometimes a deputy directorate general, and sometimes it would disappear altogether. However, it was perceived mainly as a branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Today, Mexican cooperation has its own house and the tools needed to coordinate and monitor not only the cooperation provided and/or coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but everything contributed by all the national ministries. A change of president can no longer put the current infrastructure at risk, since Congress must approve any modifications, thus guaranteeing Mexican international development cooperation more continuity (Bracho and Pérez, 2015).

Brazil has developed a number of guidelines at the institutional level, such as manuals and technical instruments, to manage SSC and TrC under the coordination of ABC. However, there is no specific legislation to regulate cooperation *provided* to developing countries. A study carried out in 2010 noted at the time that “Brazil currently provides development cooperation within the legal framework of a recipient country” (Cabral; Weinstock, 2010) and 10 years later, this affirmation is still valid. Brazilian SSC depends on a mechanism negotiated with multilateral organizations, mainly UNDP but also FAO and others, to circumvent this impediment, in which international organizations serve as executing agencies for project implementation.

Argentina has an even more diffuse legal framework for international cooperation. The so-called Law on Ministries empowers the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take the lead in defining Argentinian policies and strategies regarding development cooperation. Despite that broad mandate, the extent of its coordination capacity is limited to South-South Cooperation, which is governed through complementary administrative decisions and ad hoc institutional agreements. What little cooperation Argentina receives is done in agreement with the specific ministries or agencies.

SSC has been a permanent feature of the foreign affairs of Argentina since the 1990s. The country was one of the first three Latin American countries to deliver bilateral cooperation in the region (SEGIB, 2020). An internal evaluation carried out in 2019 of a sample of 15 FO.AR projects shows that these projects were executed effectively and constituted a relevant contribution to capacity development. The evaluation also highlights the key role of DGCIN country and regional “desks”. Based on the expertise of their human resources, the desks perform multiple functions: identification of local counterparts, feasibility analyses, design support, travel logistics support and coordination, etc. In light of these characteristics, a wider perspective regarding how SSC is designed, organized and effectively delivered is required here. According to Gurlajani (2015), the success or failure of donor policies and programmes is always mediated by diverse organizational variables such as structures, goals, motivations and cultures, which define the fundamental pieces of a bureaucracy and highlight the role of the individuals that constitute that bureaucracy.

As Carol Lancaster (2007, p. 22) points out in her analysis of DAC donors:

[G]overnment agencies are important political actors in their own right—advocates or lobbyists for their own mission and interests ... Once established, the organization of a government’s aid system institutionalizes the interests within government and, thus, the purposes of aid. Even where political leaders wish to change those purposes, the stickiness of government organization makes such changes very difficult.

“Stickiness” to government purposes and internalized SSC values in the DGCIN contribute to explaining the continuity and success of SSC in Argentina. Within the region, Argentina is one of the countries that established a specific area dedicated to SSC early on, which was to be responsible for executing FO.AR. The early organization of this area, even with low levels of formalization, as well as the stability of its technical experts, enabled a process of specialization and accumulation of technical capacities to take place. These capacities led DGCIN to develop inter-bureaucratic networks with other government agencies that make SSC projects possible and also acquired knowledge and experience in project development. In this way, an informal but effective institutional network developed. However, it is still a challenge to move the relationship between cooperating countries from the level of project implementation to a more fruitful and integral political dialogue contributing to policy design.

Legal frameworks have a direct impact on institutional designs for managing SSTRC. In Mexico, the legal framework has organized the whole national system, both for providing and receiving cooperation, into five pillars: a leading institution (AMEXCID), a policy (PROCID), financial resources (FONCID) and management instruments (RENCID and SICID). The following table schematizes the Mexican system of development cooperation:

Table 2: The five pillars of the Mexican system of development cooperation

	Pillar	Scope
1	AMEXCID (Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation)	The main institutional tool for the coordination of Mexican cooperation activities with local and foreign actors.
2	PROCID (Program for International Development Cooperation)	A tool to set agendas, as well as thematic, sectoral and regional priorities and planning, for the implementation of Mexican cooperation and to serve as the basis for Mexican international cooperation policy.
3	RENCID (Registration and Information System for International Cooperation for Development)	An AMEXCID tool to register, account for, evaluate and assess the activities, actions, projects, agreements, and resources, financial or not, involved in Mexican cooperation, both as recipient and provider. In short, a database of Mexican cooperation.
4	FONCID (Fund for International Development Cooperation)	A financial mechanism to operate Mexican cooperation and to cover particular costs linked to the main objectives of MLICD (Article 35), funded by national and international resources.
5	SICID (Information System for International Cooperation for Development)	Powered by RENCID, it maintains updated and transparent information related to Mexican cooperation projects implemented by AMEXCID, and particularly to cooperation provided by public institutions.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the MLICD

MLICD provides coherence and visibility to Mexican cooperation activities and also renders them more accountable both to society and the international community. Consistent with its highly structured architecture, the Mexican system places AMEXCID as a leading actor but also takes other voices into account. Under the provisions of MLICD, the main body of AMEXCID is the Consultative Council (Article 15), composed of the most relevant ministries (18) and two sectoral councils (science and technology and indigenous people). It meets twice a year and enables coordination and communication with federal bodies and the units responsible for executing development cooperation programmes and projects. Concurrently, the Consultative Council may receive advice from specific sectoral Technical Committees, made up of civil society organizations, academia, private sector and other actors, which support AMEXCID decision-making processes. This mechanism leverages coordination work with the key Dependencies and Entities of the Public Federal Administration that report their cooperation actions through RENCID, the national registry.

As has been mentioned, the Brazilian agency ABC was created in 1987 with technical support from UNDP, and its operational structure currently comprises seven boards: four are responsible for developing the Agency's SSTRC activities according to geographic regions, including humanitarian assistance, one is responsible for cooperation received from developed countries and two oversee budget, planning and management¹³. Although ABC was created in the late 1980s, it came as the replacement for previous institutions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that dealt with *technical assistance* (as the term was then known¹⁴) received from developed countries and from international organizations such as the National Council of Technical Assistance (CNAT), created in 1950. CNAT also managed a traditional modality of cooperation provided by Brazil in the form of grants for foreign students. The “double role” of Brazilian international cooperation, as both receiver and provider, has thus been present ever since the first attempts to institutionalize it were made within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹³ See <http://www.abc.gov.br/SobreABC/Direcao>

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly resolution 1383, passed in 1959, formally changed the term “technical assistance” to “technical cooperation”, considering that “it would more accurately describe the nature of the assistance provided by the UN and specialized agencies”, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Expanded Program of Technical Assistance (EPTA), which would later become the United Nations Development Program.

What has changed is the *emphasis* of one profile over the other: if CNAT was mainly dedicated to cooperation *received*, and cooperation *provided* was considered almost exceptional, ABC was in large part dedicated to managing *received* technical cooperation, although it did have a small internal division dedicated to TCDC, as it was then known. The change in emphasis became clearer in the early 2000s, when SSC was gaining political momentum and ABC began to adjust to the growing requests for Brazilian technical cooperation.

ABC is a coordinating agency that plays a mediating role between agents, visions and interests (Milani, 2017). It coordinates complex mechanisms involving not only cooperating countries but also national institutions acting as implementing agencies and UNDP in budget management. The participation of line ministries and national public institutions such as EMBRAPA, the national leader in agriculture research, Fiocruz in the health sector and Caixa, the public housing bank, as well as universities and others is one of the main features of Brazilian SSC, with important impact over its measurement and *valuation*. Since SSC implementing agents are public servants that do not – and cannot, under Brazilian legislation – receive additional remuneration, there are no costs related to their time and expertise. Typically, the main costs related to Brazilian SSC are related to tickets and per diem allowances. This specificity makes it easy to underestimate Brazilian SSC, since the volume of resources allocated is far from OECD standards, and there are several proposals made to correct this bias in measuring Brazilian SSC, although none have been applied in official reports thus far.

In this regard, another challenge faced by ABC is that there are no specific career paths for technical cooperation analysts, although their creation would further strengthen the institution. Currently, diplomats are seconded to ABC and UNDP provides support for hiring personnel for specific projects (Almino, 2017, p. 25). Also, as highlighted by Marcondes and Mawdsley:

When it comes to the Brazilian civil servants who are actually sent on missions abroad, sometimes in order to handle complex initiatives, such as the Fiocruz office in Africa, the main problem is that their own secondment is not very clearly defined and mandated under existing Brazilian legislation. Each government ministry, and sometimes each unit within a ministry, has different norms regulating its staff, including the circumstances in which they can be seconded overseas. These differences in legislative framework, and the lack of a career path explicitly centred on development cooperation, can have surprisingly profound repercussions. For example, the Fiocruz representative in Maputo was not legally empowered to be away from Brazil for more than three months at a time, making it impossible for the representative to establish a permanent presence in Mozambique. This in turn compromised his capacity to oversee the projects that were being implemented in the country, to interact with other donor representatives and to expand Brazilian health cooperation with other African countries, as initially intended (Marcondes and Mawdsley, 2017, p. 690).

Brazil also has a number of mechanisms to enhance coordination. Nationally, ABC has approximately 120 partners, both in the public and private sectors, and provides cooperation only in response to requests from other countries presented to Brazilian diplomatic posts abroad or by their representatives in Brasilia. When such a request is received, ABC is responsible for contacting the institutions that have the specific required expertise and ascertaining the interest in and possibility of providing cooperation. All the Ministries have international advisory offices, headed either by diplomats or a director nominated by the Minister, which are also mandated to facilitate political dialogue and sectoral cooperation. Requested projects are developed after a technical assessment

and in partnership with the requesting party and all partner institutions. Projects are then submitted to the MRE and the respective partners' juridical advisories, with established deadlines, costs, phases and expected outputs. Finally, throughout their implementation, initiatives are monitored and evaluated¹⁵, although it is worth mentioning that evaluations focus largely on outputs --there are virtually no impact evaluations available -- and they are not always public or independent.

Argentina, on the other hand, has a number of channels to communicate and coordinate SSTRC with other actors. Inside the country, the Federal Program gathers a network of provincial officers that exchange news provided by DGCIN and inform it of cooperation activities carried out in the provinces. Other national actors are addressed in an ad hoc way, on a case-by-case basis. This set of organizations, composed of national ministries and national agencies but also including civil society organizations, is quite heterogeneous and is involved in the design and implementation of projects, in large part through their experts. These organizations are not formally involved at the level of political discussion, but do take part in political negotiations in some cases. Outside the boundaries of the national territory, DGCIN has the support of the Diplomatic Missions of Argentina in all countries. Embassies play a substantial role in fostering international cooperation opportunities for Argentina. They offer national capacities and alert the government when they detect a need in another country. However, ambassadors do not always appreciate the benefits of stimulating international cooperation activities and so the role embassies and missions play can vary widely, depending on the personal interest of diplomats and officers.

During our study time frame, the structure of AMEXCID has undergone modification. At its inception, AMEXCID was made up of five internal general directorates (see Bracho and Pérez-Pineda, 2015, p. 175; Piefer and Vega, 2014, pp. 88-89; Borbolla, 2014, pp. 58-59): (1) cultural and education cooperation; (2) international economic promotion; (3) bilateral economic relations; (4) scientific and technical cooperation; and (5) the Mesoamerican project¹⁶. Such a structure has influenced the way the different public federal administrations and agencies currently report to RENCID and INFOAMEXCID respectively. However, it must be noted that this does not mean that the country previously failed to register or produce annual reports on their activities. It is true, however, that that information had limitations and principally captured the cooperation activities carried out under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this regard, as Prieto (2016b, p. 45) notes, "In Mexico, the quantification experience started in the 1980s, with different systems and applications (SISTECOP, Access Oracle, and SICOI)". Nowadays, RENCID gathers information on cooperation activities registered by Mexican federal institutions. RENCID has published annual reports since 2011, with changes and improvements in 2014, classifying the data from 2013 to the present under the following categories: grants and scholarships, financial cooperation, technical cooperation, humanitarian aid, and contributions to international organizations¹⁷. Under the presidency of Peña Nieto (2012-2018), all the elements considered as part of the M&E system were finalized or improved, as required by law. RENCID has been updated and SIMEXCID has been replaced by INFOAMEXCID.

¹⁵ See <http://www.abc.gov.br/>

¹⁶ By 2013 AMEXCID had updated the structure of its directorate due to the need to conduct its work more efficiently. It carried out a restructuring, taking apart areas such as education and adding others such as planning: 1) development cooperation policy and planning; 2) international cooperation for development; 3) cooperation with Mesoamerica and the Caribbean; 4) promotion of culture and tourism, and 5) cooperation and economic relations (see Borbolla, 2014). More recently, as noted by CAD, AMEXCID and GIZ, (2018, p. 343), the directorate structure was modified once again to include three themes from the original setting: cooperation and bilateral economic relations, educational and cultural cooperation, and technical and scientific cooperation.

¹⁷ See Bracho & Pérez-Pineda (2015, pp. 173-178) and <https://www.gob.mx/amexcid/es/estructuras/amexcid-directorio-ampliado>, <https://infoamexcid.sre.gob.mx/amexcid/ccid2017/index.html>

RENCID and INFOAMEXCID are currently the main components of the Mexican information system for international cooperation for development, SICID. However, one of the main challenges has been to ensure that the information in both databases is equivalent and comparable (Pérez-Pineda and Huitrón, 2019).

Argentina's SSTRC is coordinated by the Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGCIN), under the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship. Under current regulations (Administrative Decision 308/2018), DGCIN's primary responsibility is to "define national policies and strategies for Argentinian development cooperation. This includes the programming, allocation of resources, establishment and execution of management control methodologies and the evaluation of all inherent activities." For this purpose, DGCIN must "coordinate and reconcile sectoral interests"¹⁸. The same regulation names DGCIN as the "national focal point for coordination, management control and systematization, and for the evaluation of international cooperation actions" that are carried out at all levels of the state, whether bilateral, multilateral, triangular or decentralized.

The main instrument for delivering technical cooperation is the Argentinian Fund for International Cooperation (FO.AR). Created in 1992, it aims to strengthen capacities through the exchange of knowledge, technologies and best practices, and enhance development processes through technical cooperation. FO.AR's official objectives are:

- To establish and consolidate development partnerships with other countries in line with their national strategies and priorities, seeking the participation of all stakeholders;
- To create and support mechanisms to promote the exchange of knowledge, technologies and best practices between Argentinian organizations and their counterparts in other countries, aiming for the sustainable strengthening of their own capacities for development;
- To develop methodologies and instruments that make technical assistance processes more dynamic so as to maximize the impact of human and financial resources.

In general devoted to technical cooperation, FO.AR-financed SSC can take place through sending Argentinean experts to assist and collaborate with technicians from foreign institutions in their development strategies, receiving study visits from foreign professionals to Argentinian institutions so that they can gain first-hand knowledge of the process, practices and concrete experiences, and supporting SSC seminars¹⁹.

FO.AR is financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Argentina and serves to facilitate the mobility of Argentinian experts, receiving foreign professionals in Argentina and organizing international workshops. As is the case for most SSC in the region, experts are usually civil servants involved in cooperation in the name of their organizations and do not receive any extra salary for the activity. Even in the cases of experts from universities or well-known NGOs, incentives to take part on SSC are symbolic: prestige, solidarity or other personal or professional spurs.

The regulatory framework for FO.AR is based on an agreement between IOM and DGCIN to support implementation. From a formal perspective, it may be observed that FO.AR's level of institutionalization is relatively low when compared to the status that similar initiatives have acquired in other countries in the region. But as previously mentioned, such flexibility might also be an asset. FO.AR is managed through a coordinator and a system of "desks" responsible for cooperation with specific regions or countries. In addition, a small team is responsible for administrative issues such as managing payment

¹⁸ Translation ours.

¹⁹ FOAR Fondo Argentino de Cooperación Sur Sur y Triangular, available at <http://www.foargentina.cancilleria.gov.ar/>

orders to IOM, processing the requirements for each mission, such as medical insurance, per diem allowances, etc., and budgetary accounting, among other mission-related tasks.

FO.AR projects are agreed between Argentina and its partner countries or international organizations. Formally, the project cycle begins with a request made by another country: public or private non-profit organizations submit a form that is then channelled through the heads of cooperation of their own countries for a first evaluation. The request is then referred to the embassy of Argentina which carries out a second evaluation before sending it to DGCIN for a feasibility analysis. DGCIN is responsible for approving the proposal. Once received and approved, DGCIN contacts national institutions with expertise in the proposed topic and a professional is appointed to execute the project. With the support of DGCIN, national institutions and their counterparts work together to prepare the definitive workplan, and put in place the corresponding operational arrangements for the mobilization of the experts needed (such as medical insurance, tickets, per diem allowances). Monitoring is carried out through mission reports, which may be drawn up individually or in conjunction with both partners. It should be mentioned that the process of putting a new methodology in place to monitor and evaluate SSC was begun in Argentina, but had to be interrupted due to the current COVID-19 crisis.

As a follow-up to the recommendations of the final BAPA+40 Declaration, DGCIN committed to review the FO.AR evaluation mechanism. A study was commissioned to conduct an in-depth analysis of the available SSC evaluation methodologies, their strengths, weaknesses and adaptability to the specific characteristics of Argentinian cooperation. The study also evaluated a sample of 15 FO.AR projects on the basis of a set of 10 criteria stemming from both traditional methodologies and South-South Cooperation principles. The final outcome was the Modular Evaluation Methodology (MEM), a flexible, participatory and multi-institutional approach that enables DGCIN to gather qualitative and quantitative information to measure their SSC processes²⁰ at a glance. MEM testing and implementation had to be interrupted due to the COVID-19 crisis which brought other priorities to the fore in daily SSC activities.

Although international cooperation in Argentina is characterized by multi-institutional, multilevel and multi-stakeholder participation, DGCIN is the main institution responsible for designing policy and strategies of development cooperation in Argentina, working under the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As such, narratives concerning SSC in Argentina are mainly driven by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other government ministries either adhere to that narrative in their SSC development or do not follow a clear narrative at all. The only other ministry that actually mentions SSC when listing its international objectives is the Ministry of Social Development. No other mentions of SSC were found on Ministries' web pages or programming documents. The Ministry of Education, for example, uses the previous concept of horizontal cooperation related to regional integration strategies while the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Employment frame their cooperation as bilateral, without differentiating between NSC and SSC. The Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity, the Ministry of Sports and Tourism, the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Productive Development do not mention international cooperation in their official narratives. In this regard, official narratives on SSC in Argentina seem to remain closely linked to the government's political and ideological orientation. Nevertheless, a narrow concept of SSC has prevailed in the discourse promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, creating an umbrella that enables FO.AR to continue and even increase SSC actions and projects under diverse administrations.

²⁰ More information on the methodology may be found in Weisstaub et al., 2019.

Section conclusions

The three countries under analysis have different institutional frameworks for SSTRC, and far from seeking to assess their effectiveness, our goal here is to understand their variations and identify entry points to build stronger connections at a regional and/or subregional level.

From Mexican, Argentinian and Brazilian official narratives, it was possible to draft the general comparative framework below in Table 3. Technical cooperation is the only modality that is present in the official narratives of all three countries. The modalities that are unique within our sample of countries: for Brazil, expenses related to the support for the integration of refugees in the country and the participation in United Nations-mandated peacekeeping operations and for Mexico, financial cooperation. Besides technical cooperation, Mexico and Brazil share three other modalities: humanitarian assistance, student grants and scholarships and contributions to international organizations. In the case of Argentina, these kinds of activities are also carried out by a range of Ministries and public agencies, but have not been reported as SSC actions.

Table 3: Conceptual frameworks according to official reports: Argentine, Brazil and Mexico

Country Sources	Modality(ies)	Cooperation arrangements	Principles
		Main thematic areas	
ARG FO.AR reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical cooperation 	North-South South-South Triangular Decentralized <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agro-industry • Technological and Productive Innovation • Health • Human Rights • Environment • Public Management • Justice and Security 	Horizontality Solidarity Mutual benefits Non-conditionality
BRA COBRADI and ABC reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical cooperation • Humanitarian cooperation • Scholarships • Contributions to international organizations • In-country support for the integration of refugees in Brazil • Participation in peacekeeping operations 	South-South Trilateral with developed countries Trilateral with IOs Trilateral+1 <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • Environment • Science, technology and innovation • Agriculture • Human rights • Water and sanitation • Public management. 	Solidarity Non-indifference Horizontality Mutual Benefits Non-intervention ²¹

²¹ It should be mentioned that in the case of COBRADI reports, there has been a declining emphasis across the different editions on principles and the latest report, published in 2018, does not mention several of the principles that were emphasized in the first edition of the report. However, institutional guidelines from ABC, especially the Agency's 2016 strategic document, clearly establish horizontality, mutual benefits and others as principles of Brazilian technical international cooperation. Document available at <http://www.abc.gov.br/imprensa/mostrarConteudo/684>

Table 3: Conceptual frameworks according to official reports: Argentine, Brazil and Mexico

<p>MEX</p> <p>RENCID</p> <p>Mexican Law IDC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical cooperation • Humanitarian assistance • Grants and scholarships • Contributions to international organizations • Financial cooperation 	<p>South-South (horizontal)</p> <p>North-South (vertical)</p> <p>Triangular</p> <p>Decentralized</p>	<p>Ownership and Alignment</p> <p>Harmonization</p> <p>Results-based management</p> <p>Mutual responsibility</p> <p>Transparency and accountability</p> <p>Gender perspective</p> <p>Human Rights</p> <p>Inclusion</p> <p>Complementarity</p> <p>Sustainability</p> <p>Co-financing</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • Social Development • Education • Disaster Risk Reduction • Economic Development • Science and Technology • Infrastructure • Environment and Climate Change 	

Despite differences in the terms used in their official narratives, as regards the principles of SSC there are considerable convergences among the three countries. SSC principles are in sharp contrast with the principles, norms, rules and procedures for NSC which were not adaptable to a different international context (Kern and Pauselli, 2018, p. 195). Latin American countries have been active in strengthening regional political platforms, such as the Ibero-American Program for Strengthening South-South Cooperation (PIFCSS) or the CELAC Working Group on International Cooperation, which sustain alternative discourses and give visibility to their particular practices (Kern and Pauselli, 2018, p. 191).

However, it is still unclear whether these countries are willing or able to pursue a new governance structure or prefer instead to maintain their development cooperation actions under their own foreign policy frameworks. The relative decline of the Global North vis-à-vis the Global South in the first 15 years of this century does not seem to have translated into a greater governance structure in development cooperation among Latin American countries. Apart from SEGIB reports, there are only limited spaces for dialogue and exchange in the region for the purposes of grasping SSC diversity and potential or interacting with other regional perspectives and methodologies. SSC governance in the region is still a work in progress, and is fundamentally linked to the shifting global governance of development aid (Kern and Pauselli, 2018, p. 200).

In terms of processes and instruments, the Mexican system of development cooperation consists of a comprehensive framework that includes legislation at the federal level as well as robust accountability and information systems. It includes SSC (termed *horizontal cooperation*) but is not limited to it. Among the three countries under analysis, AMEXCID was the institution that managed the most diverse set of SSC modalities, ranging from technical assistance to humanitarian and financial cooperation. Neither Brazil nor Argentina, on the other hand, possess federal-level legal frameworks that encompass SSC, and both resort to international organizations to circumvent this.

Despite the persisting challenges of a legal framework that is mostly suited to the role of *receiver* of international cooperation, Brazil has recently developed reporting tools (the COBRADI reports, in the main), management instruments, and guidelines at the technical level (ABC manuals and recent evaluations) that have strengthened SSC practice even when the general political context is less favourable to it.

In contrast, since the beginning of the 1990s, Argentina has developed a specific area for SSC that evolves within an institutional framework with a low level of formalization. That area is DGCIN, a division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the main decision-making and coordinating body for SSC and responsible for implementing FO.AR. It has loose, non-standardized M&E practices but has recently begun to develop new M&E methodology.

A looser institutional framework is not necessarily a disadvantage. In the cases of Argentina and Brazil, it allows for greater flexibility and adaptability to the rapid, dynamic evolution of development cooperation issues (Milani, 2018). The diversity of these cases shows that the relationship between complex, formal institutional frameworks and the configuration of a sustainable SSC policy and processes require deeper analysis. Such diverse factors as “stickiness” to the goals and values of the national bureaucracy, history, accumulated knowledge and experience, as well as networking capacity, among others, have to be taken into account. Nonetheless, within this diversity of experiences there are lessons that can be learned by the countries in the region as to how to address similar challenges.

It may be concluded from this first exercise that Argentina and Brazil have less robust institutional frameworks for SSC than Mexico, which has specific legislation and a set of tools for international cooperation. That difference enables Mexican SSC to better withstand shifts in foreign policy agendas. It also means that Mexican cooperation is closer to being a public policy in itself, while in Argentina and Brazil, it is regarded as an instrument of foreign policy. Furthermore, although Argentina, Brazil and Mexico have used different terms to refer to SSC in the past decade, terms such as “horizontal cooperation” have allowed the three Latin American countries to avoid political disputes over their national preferences, relatively speaking, making SSC an asset to be either adopted or dropped in official narratives when necessary. Currently, there is a certain resistance in official narratives in the three countries to the use of the term “South-South Cooperation” and a preference for a looser conceptual framework, while maintaining SSC characteristic principles such as horizontality and mutual benefits.

If we consider the impact of the different narratives on policy changes and institutional stability, the absence of a robust legal and regulatory framework in Argentina and Brazil may have contributed to rendering SSC more susceptible to governmental and administrative changes, although it has not prevented the continuity of its activities. At the same time, while the existence of a regulatory framework in Mexico, including a national law, has not prevented policy changes in different political contexts, it has enabled IDC to be perceived of as public policy²², and more than a foreign policy tool.

²² For a discussion of foreign policy as public policy from a Brazilian perspective, see Milani, Carlos R. S., and Pinheiro, Leticia, (2013) and Milani, Carlos R. S. “Brazil’s South–South Co-operation Strategies: From Foreign Policy to Public Policy”, (2014).

3. SSC under COVID-19: early lessons from the region

The COVID-19 crisis has affected every political field. But what about SSC? How is COVID-19 impacting SSC activities? What opportunities are there to apply SSC in Latin America to the fight against and prevention of health crises? What were the first reactions of the region’s national departments and agencies that work in SSC?

To answer these questions, two strategies were followed. First, a webinar was held on 21 May 2020 on *Institutional frameworks and governance for South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Latin America: Early lessons from COVID-19* with panellists from Argentina, Brazil and Mexico²³. The idea behind the first webinar was to promote an open dialogue between representatives from the three countries and approach a number of different aspects of the crisis, ranging from a holistic view of planetary health to issues relating to social security and regional inequality. A second webinar was held on 21 September, this time with representatives from the three NeST national chapters, to exchange views on the results of our report. The latter also included the special participation of Aña Patricia Muñoz, our colleague from South-South Global Thinkers and a representative of ILAIPP²⁴, a Latin American think tank based in Quito, Ecuador. Both webinars provided valuable insights that have been incorporated into the conclusions and recommendations of this section of our study.

Second, a survey study was carried out in June 2020. The survey questionnaire was sent to 37 public officials of the national organizations responsible for international cooperation in 19 Latin American countries participating in the Ibero-American General Secretariat’s Ibero-American Program to Strengthen South-South Cooperation, as listed in Table 4.

Table 4: *Ibero-American Program to Strengthen South-South Cooperation*

Country	Organization
ARGENTINA	General Directorate for Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
BOLIVIA	Ministry of Development Planning / Vice Ministry of Public Investment and External Financing
BRASIL	Brazilian Agency for International Cooperation (ABC)
CHILE	Chilean Agency for International Development Cooperation (AGCID)
COLOMBIA	Presidential Agency for International Cooperation of Colombia (APC)
COSTA RICA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
CUBA	Ministry of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment

²³ The first webinar featured the following speakers: Paulo Buss, Center for International Relations in Health (CRIS), Fiocruz, Brazil; Santiago Lombardi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Argentina; Markus Gottsbacher, UNODC & Veronica Martinez-Solares, Fundación para el Estudios de la Seguridad y Gobernanza, Mexico. Speakers were invited in their individual capacities and the opinions expressed during the webinar are not to be considered as the official position of their respective host organizations. The video recording of the webinar can be accessed at https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?extid=zSNpqt3kUpclCE8&v=622637858431684&ref=watch_permalink.

²⁴ The acronym stands for *Iniciativa de Iniciativa Latinoamericana de Investigación para las políticas Públicas* (Latin American Initiative for Public Policy Research).

Table 4: Ibero-American Program to Strengthen South-South Cooperation

Country	Organization
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Development
ECUADOR	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility
EL SALVADOR	General Directorate for Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
GUATEMALA	Presidential Secretariat of Planning and Programming (SEGEPLAN)
HONDURAS	Secretary of State for Foreign Relations and International Cooperation
MÉXICO	Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID)
NICARAGUA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PANAMÁ	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PARAGUAY	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PERÚ	Peruvian Agency for International Development Cooperation
URUGUAY	Uruguayan Agency for International Development Cooperation
VENEZUELA	Vice Ministry for Multilateral Issues

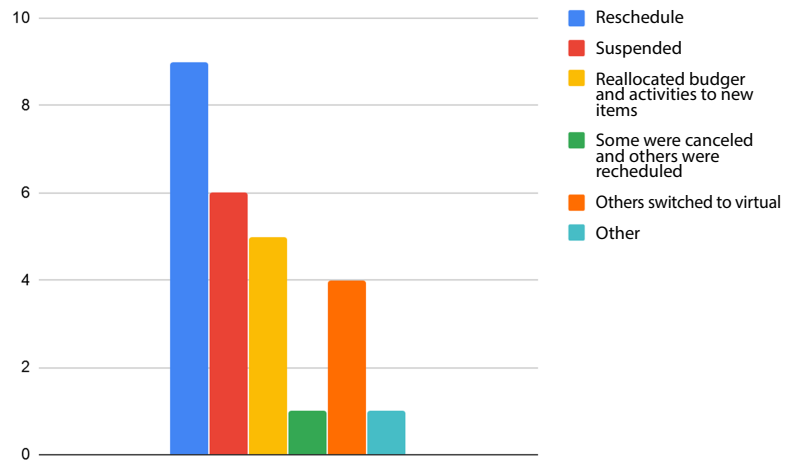
The survey questionnaire was completed by 10 public officials from 10 Latin American countries: Argentina, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay. The names of the participating officials have been omitted for reasons of confidentiality. The respondents' level of responsibility varied from country to country: only three were high level officials, while the others were specialists or sub-area directors. Due to the heterogeneity and low representativeness of the sample, the conclusions drawn from the results are limited in scope. However, the answers provide a preliminary picture based on individual perceptions and experiences from these 10 countries.

Survey findings

The survey addressed two main topics: (i) the impact of COVID-19 on regular SSTRC, and (ii) SSTRC activities carried out or planned in response to COVID-19. Regarding the first topic, we asked how COVID-19 was affecting current SSTRC projects, what the limitations faced by SSTRC were and what opportunities the pandemic context brought to light. In the second topic, we differentiated between SSC and TrC and asked whether countries were conducting SSC and TrC activities related to the COVID-19 context, and if so, in what thematic areas (health, education, security, economy, humanitarian assistance, migration or social policy), and by what means (training, policy coordination, experience exchange, financial support, supplies). We also asked whether any difficulties had arisen in coordinating policy and about the role played by regional organizations.

In all cases, both SSC and TrC activities had either been rescheduled (9) or cancelled (6). In five countries, survey respondents also said that SSTRC budgets had been redirected to meet other demands. Half of the respondents mentioned that they were using virtual means to carry on the activities programmed.

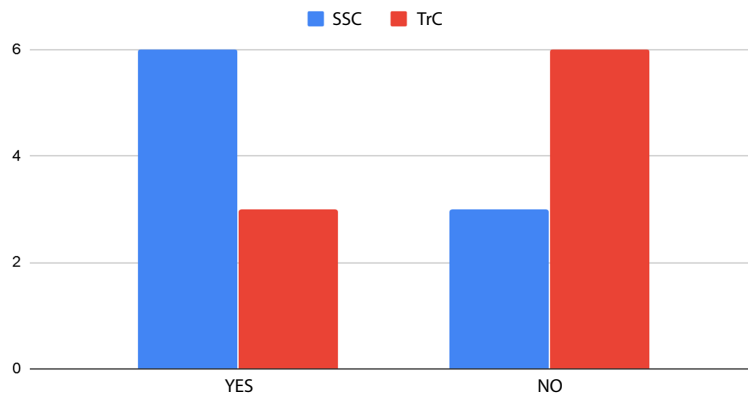
Figure 2: Impact of COVID on SSC and TrC activities



At the same time, six respondents answered that their countries had begun to plan for or were carrying out SSC activities related to COVID-19. One example given was the creation of a specific budget within the framework of the Chile-Mexico Cooperation Fund to deal with COVID-19. Other examples from Argentina: coordination of humanitarian aid with SSC and an exchange of best practices among ministries as to how to respond to the health emergency.

Given that TrC activities related to COVID-19 were indicated in four responses, it suggests that SSC has the capacity to respond more quickly. An example of TrC given by a respondent is the cooperation between Mexico and Japan that enabled the delivery of medical supplies to hospitals in 11 countries in Latin America in response to COVID-19. Another example mentioned was a proposal for triangular cooperation between Argentina and Germany to contribute to food security in a post-pandemic scenario in Africa.

Figure 3: Plans to carry out SSC and TrC activities

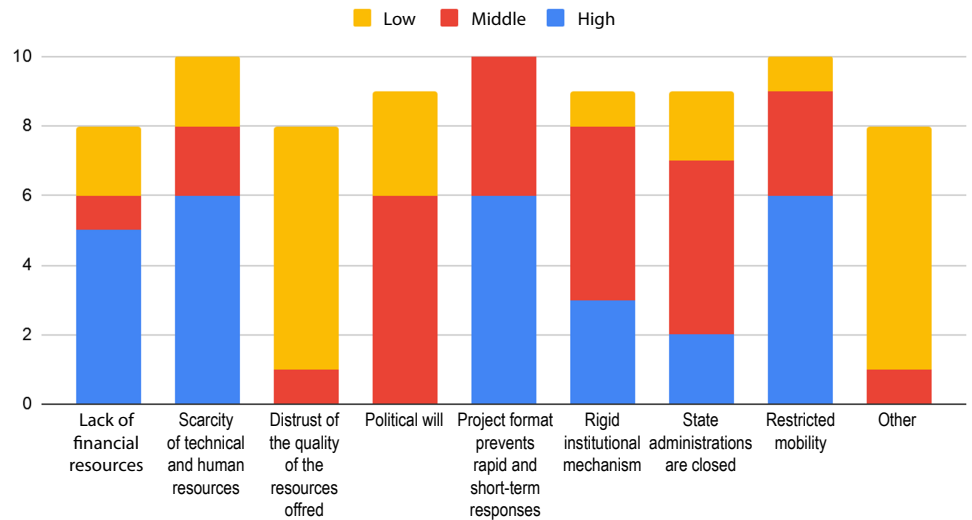


The information gathered in this survey also shows that current and planned SSC activities related to COVID-19 do not only focus on health issues.

The information gathered in this survey also shows that current and planned SSC activities related to COVID-19 do not only focus on health issues. Education and social policy, as well as economic, migratory, humanitarian and even security issues were also being addressed or were planned to be addressed through SSC within the framework of the pandemic. The exchange of experiences and training are the main instruments mentioned by the respondents in all these areas. Four respondents also noted that policy coordination was taking place in the areas of health, social policy, economics and humanitarian affairs.

The following graph shows the main constraints for SSC during the pandemic, according to the personal perceptions of the respondents.

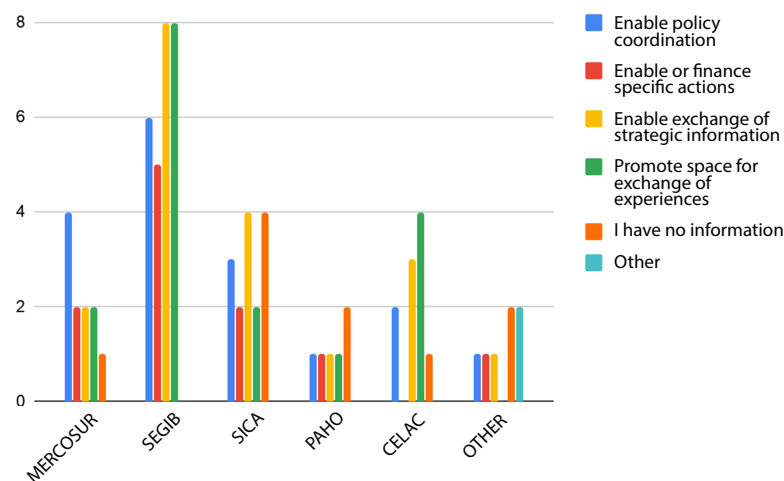
Figure 4: Main constraints for SSC during the pandemic



As can be seen from the graph, the rigidity of institutional mechanisms and project formats are perceived as major barriers to providing a rapid response to the pandemic. This would suggest that although SSC is considered to be flexible, the logic of a rational-legal administration may impose restrictions on it in this particular emergency context. Answers also indicate that the low availability of financial and human resources and the restrictions on international mobility are limitations for SSC in this context. Regarding this last point, the potential of new technologies was seen in some cases as a way to deal with travel restrictions.

From a theoretical perspective, multilateral platforms may serve as relevant instruments for policy coordination: that is why the survey asked how respondents perceived the role of the following regional institutions in the framework of the crisis.

Figure 5: Role of regional institutions in the framework of the crisis



SEGIB was recognized in all cases for its role in enabling and promoting information exchange. The majority of respondents also recognize its role in facilitating policy coordination. These perceptions may be explained in part by the characteristics of the sample, as respondents work in countries that belong to the Ibero-American Program to Strengthen SSC (PIFCSS), but also because of the actions taken by PIFCSS itself. The program organized a first regional meeting to exchange experiences²⁵ and also adjusted its annual operation plan and instruments to facilitate knowledge and experience exchange through a digital platform that it made available for multi and bilateral activities.²⁶

The General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System (SICA) has key relevance in Central America and has been mentioned for its capacity to enable information exchange and policy coordination. MERCOSUR has been recognized for enabling policy coordination. Half of the respondents perceived CELAC as a forum that was mainly useful for information exchange. As was also mentioned in the study's conclusions concerning the webinar, PAHO is perceived by some respondents to have played a minor role, and to be “punching below its weight” during the current pandemic.

Section conclusions

In the last section of the survey, an open question was included concerning the main lessons learned from this recent experience. Although the answers once again reflect the respondents' personal views, they may shed light on certain features of SSTRC and add necessary elements to our preliminary picture of the role of SSTRC in Latin America in the COVID-19 context. What follows is a summary of the answers respondents provided:

- The pandemic has shown that today more than ever, the exchange of experiences and best practices between countries with similar development levels is essential to addressing common challenges. Overcoming this multidimensional crisis will require a very broad perspective on all sectors.
- Latin America had already become an adverse environment for SSC before the pandemic, characterized by both internal (political-ideological tensions) and external dynamics (crisis of multilateralism, trade disputes between the USA and China). COVID-19 seems to aggravate those previous tensions.
- Actors involved in SSTRC were pushed to increase the use of remote digital platforms, testing the social capital and trust built during previous face-to-face interactions;
- The increased use of digital solutions for remote work may ultimately reduce operating costs, including the carbon footprint generated by international mobility, but they may also limit vulnerable groups' access to SSC.
- The current context highlights the importance of flexibility, innovation and the search for new SSTRC mechanisms.
- At the national level, health systems were weakened and proved insufficiently equipped to cope with the crisis, a situation that was aggravated by the high levels of poverty and inequality that characterize the region.
- Although the pandemic has impacted the implementation of SSC in the region, which is reflected in the postponement and cancellation of activities, the agencies and departments responding to the survey quickly resorted to online solutions. The

²⁵ <https://cooperacionsursur.org/es/noticias-del-programa/2129-respuesta-de-la-css-iberoamericana-al-contexto-actual-reunion-del-consejo-intergubernamental-del-pifcss.html>

²⁶ Interview with Belen Bogado, President of the Intergovernmental Council of PIFCSS.

See also <https://cooperacionsursur.org/es/noticias-del-programa/2130-convocatoria-mecss-02-2020-socios-frente-al-covid-19.html>

transition to web-based tools and processes is testing the social capital and trust built during previous face-to-face interactions and is likely to raise additional challenges.

- Some agencies and departments in charge of technical cooperation in the region reported that they had managed both the donation of health equipment and supplies to mitigate the pandemic and reception of such inputs from both South-South and North-South Cooperation initiatives.
- The United Nations, in particular PAHO/WHO, was perceived to be focused in large part on providing emergency responses at the national level, and less on coordinating regional action. However, both organizations are considered to play key roles in promoting principles and collective action to strengthen global health governance.
- Institutions are being pressed to innovate and be creative so as to respond effectively to the health and social crisis that the pandemic has engendered.
- There is a demand for flexible SSC frameworks, such as open Mixed Commission Acts, that allow for the inclusion of new projects in cases such as the current emergency.
- There is an urgent need to promote SSC projects to strengthen national public health systems.
- The situation opens the door to a discussion on the need to create a special fund to deal with regional and cross-border emergencies and promote projects with short-term impact that may be replicable in other countries.

4. Conclusions and final considerations

The initial objective of the present report was to address the subject of institutional frameworks and governance for SSC in Latin America. However, in order to deliver relevant information for interested stakeholders, the team decided to incorporate the subject of COVID-19 into the original proposal, albeit in a limited way, through the impressions and reflections of a number of actors in the field regarding the impact of the first months of the pandemic on SSC.

In this section we will attempt to use the main findings of this exercise to propose recommendations for national, regional and global stakeholders, based on the conclusions below.

As has been described in the first section, institutional frameworks for SSC in the three countries under analysis have been in existence for decades in different formats and, before the pandemic struck, had experienced a recent spur in growth. The update of MLIDC in 2015, further strengthening the already robust institutional framework for SSC in Mexican policy, is one such example. The recent development of an M&E system for SSC in Argentina, the COBRADI reports in Brazil, as well as ABC institutional guidelines and project evaluation, are also illustrative of recent advances, although their breadth and scope vary across the three countries.

Furthermore, during our study's specific time frame, 2010 to 2020, it may be said that there has been certain level of resistance on the rise in all three countries to the use of the term "South-South Cooperation" and a preference for adopting a looser conceptual framework, while maintaining its distinguishing principles such as horizontality and mutual benefits. SSC is perceived as a narrative asset to be adopted or dropped in official narratives as the situation warrants.

Technical cooperation is central to the three countries' conceptual frameworks, and the institutions responsible for it play a significant role in regional SSC forums and dialogue, including SEGIB.

Technical cooperation is central to the three countries' conceptual frameworks, and the institutions responsible for it play a significant role in regional SSC forums and dialogue, including SEGIB. Despite the general acceptance of SSC as a "broad framework of collaboration", other SSC modalities have had less opportunity to engage in regional dialogue and exchanges. In the diverse SSC institutionalities of the region, as illustrated by the three countries under analysis, regional institutions have proved thus far to be weak spaces for its promotion. In light of the situation, the role of a platform such as the Ibero-American Programme for Strengthening South-South Cooperation has particular value. The PIFCSS offers a specific space for experience exchange and political coordination regarding SSTRc that is well recognized among public officials in the region.

Despite the generally inhospitable environment surrounding SSC at the political level over the last decade, initiatives at the technical level have continued to be developed "under the radar" of major shifts in foreign policy orientation. A number of factors were found to contribute to the continuity of SSC initiatives in the region: (a) national-level legislation that include specific budgetary allocations; (b) documentation and development of

guidelines and instruments at the institutional level that foster evidence-based processes of decision-making based on results and are thus less vulnerable to shifts in political orientation; (c) adoption of a flexible vocabulary to refer to international cooperation and exploration of alternatives for conceptual and theoretical frameworks that are not OECD-referenced; (d) development of highly qualified technical bureaucracies.

Regarding the perceived impact of COVID-19 on SSC, it would seem fair to say that there is a general expectation that SSTRC will help meet the key challenges that have arisen in the current situation: improving cross-border epidemiological surveillance, strengthening human resources training and fostering mutual learning, developing knowledge and innovation regarding tests, vaccines and pharmaceuticals. SSC practitioners also recognize the role played by the agencies in charge of coordinating SSTRC that are searching for alternatives and adaptations in order to maintain their country's commitments. The value of SSC institutionalization has been recognized and the coordination of South-South humanitarian cooperation is receiving renewed attention in the context of the pandemic, highlighting the need to strengthen the development-humanitarian continuum and integrate health and disaster risk reduction into SSC

5. Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Stakeholders implicated: National SSC authorities; regional and international organizations.

Time frame: Medium term.

Regardless of the variations in the use of SSC vocabulary, the three countries' official narratives seem to converge around SSC principles rather than terminology and vocabulary. In particular, the principles of horizontality and mutual benefits are generally seen as distinctive traits of SSC in the region. These principles are difficult to operationalize, raising a common challenge for SSC in the region but also an opportunity for regional organizations and/or national SSC authorities to build trust and foster dialogue on how to transform SSC principles into SSC experiences.

Recommendation 2

Stakeholders implicated: regional and international organizations; think tanks and academia.

Time frame: Medium term.

Technical cooperation is both a common feature and a possible entry-point for increased regional or subregional institutionalization, with SEGIB as the main reference, but it needs to be considered within the broader framework of SSTRC mechanisms and modalities. Initiatives aiming to foster dialogue concerning SSC in the region should connect with the already established networks of technical cooperation focal points and institutions as an entry-point to the understanding of and engagement with the full range of SSC modalities, not necessarily as a stand-alone representative of SSC. The United Nations and regional institutions should learn from and build alliances with SEGIB's PIFCSS, developing joint programmes to expand the scope and effectiveness of its action in the region.

Recommendation 3

Stakeholders implicated: National SSC authorities; think tanks and academia.

Time frame: Medium term.

The research has shown that although SSC continuity and accountability can be significantly strengthened by a robust legal and administrative framework such as the Mexican system, SSC can also thrive within looser institutional and conceptual frameworks. This flexibility ensures a certain "room for manoeuvre" for SSC, allowing it to survive in different political contexts and foreign policy orientations. Developing guidelines and promoting SSC evaluation at the institutional level have proven their value in improving SSC practice. Therefore, national authorities in charge of SSC should invest in SSC M&E systems and evidence-based SSC documentation in order to build stronger and better-informed constituencies, at the national and international levels.

Recommendation 4

Stakeholders implicated: National SSC authorities; regional and international organizations.

Time frame: Short term.

National authorities in charge of SSC and regional organizations aiming to engage in SSC dialogue, must increase their efforts to include institutions and stakeholders responsible for humanitarian cooperation and disaster risk reduction in SSC concertation and policymaking, emphasizing the role played by South-South humanitarian cooperation in existing frameworks and negotiations, highlighting the development-humanitarian nexus and integrating the dimensions of health and disaster risk reduction in the region. For short-term responses to and prevention of health-related crises, existing networks should be leveraged at the technical level to coordinate the establishment of easily triggered joint protocols, based on scientific evidence, to manage the risk of current and future outbreaks. Once this has been agreed to at the technical level, gaps at the policy level should be identified and strategies for coordinated advocacy and sensitization campaigns put in place.

Recommendation 5

Stakeholders implicated: National SSC authorities; regional and international organizations; think tanks and academia.

Time frame: Medium to long term.

Stakeholders aiming to increase SSC dialogue at the regional level should create relationships of trust with national stakeholders and encourage SSC science and technology research, addressing the pandemic through a multidisciplinary approach. This could be achieved by creating spaces for joint learning from past SSC experiences while also encouraging the development of innovative approaches to tackle the structural causes of the pandemic, integrating human, animal and environmental health.

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