South-South Cooperation and Policy Legitimation:
Brazilian Technical Cooperation in Africa

Adriana Erthal Abdenur¹

Abstract: Why do rising powers carry out South-South technical cooperation, and what are the implications of these practices for the current global governance system in the field of international development? Focusing on Brazil’s technical cooperation with African partner states, I argue that, although specific ministries and divisions of the Brazilian state bureaucracy have provided technical cooperation since the 1960s, it was under the Workers Party-led administration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003) and Dilma Rousseff that the federal government worked to harness this disperse cooperation so as to advance the broader goal of transforming Brazil into a global power. This instrumentalization of technical cooperation by the federal government means that, in addition to technical cooperation serving to legitimize the social policies implemented domestically by those state bureaucracy structures, those initiatives are now also used to legitimize the foreign policy priorities of this period, especially the option to expand Brazil’s influence regionally and globally by deepening South-South cooperation. Especially in light of Brazil’s deepening ties to other providers of South-South development cooperation, including the BRICS, this two-level legitimation process increases the stakes that Brazilian ruling elites have acquired in presenting Brazilian cooperation as fundamentally different from Northern aid, which in turn creates new dilemmas for the OECD-led efforts to codify the norms of international development through the aid effectiveness agenda.

Introduction

The international relations literature on the politics of international development has often explored why Northern states provide aid to developing countries, and the answers have ranged

¹ Professor at the Institute of International Relations, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio) and researcher at the BRICS Policy Center. Email: abdenur@puc-rio.br