

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# ‘It Takes Two to Tango’: South–South Cooperation Measurement Politics in a Multiplex World

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## Funding information

Cambridge Commonwealth, European & International Trust; Newnham College, University of Cambridge

## Abstract

This paper examines whether and how the imperatives of measuring Official Development Assistance (ODA; or development aid) are being translated to the policy world of South–South cooperation (SSC). Through a historical and political ethnographic account of a decade of global policy debates on Southern-led development cooperation between 2009 and 2019, the paper argues that growing conversations on ‘SSC effectiveness’, and how to measure it, reflect both prevalent ‘measurementalities’ in the field as well as ‘traditional/Northern donor countries’ continuous will to socialise and integrate ‘(re)-emerging Southern providers’ into existing aid norms and practices. The paper also demonstrates Southern powerhouses—such as Brazil, China, and India—agency in these accountability-related debates and their will to integrate differently into the ‘aid system’ by proposing alternative tools to measure SSC flows and initiatives in their own terms. Finally, the paper argues that unfolding negotiations over quantifying, reporting, and evaluating Southern-led development cooperation reflect the politicised consolidation of SSC in the second decade of the 21st century. Current impasses at the multilateral level, moreover, reveal unsolved North–South disputes over power, status, and responsibility in international development and international affairs, more broadly.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In a seminal paper, Amitav Acharya (2017, p. 277) characterised the current world order as a multiplex world: ‘A world of multiple modernities, where Western liberal modernity (and its preferred pathways to economic development and governance) is only a part of what is on offer’. A world, he added, of interconnectedness and interdependence: ‘not a singular global order, liberal or otherwise, but a complex of crosscutting, if not competing, international orders and globalisms’ (ibid). The field of global development provides a fertile ground

for unpacking some of the ongoing complexities of the current multiplex world. It allows for examining how the increased material, political, and symbolic competition between ‘old’/‘Northern’ and ‘new’/‘Southern’ development cooperation providers has created policy and normative diffusion and convergence, but also disputes and friction (Esteves & Klingebiel, 2021; Mawdsley, 2017).

The notion of a multiplex world is indeed productive to understanding the current discussions, and impasses, surrounding international responsibilities, including development-related ones. In the field of global development, debates on responsibilities have

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expanded, intertwined with a growing need to account and measure development and development cooperation flows (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019; Mitchell, 2002; Rottenburg, 2009). Rather than being static, understandings of responsibility and measurement in the field are currently being disputed and (re)negotiated in light of the major geopolitical shifts in the past two decades and the changing geographies of development across the North–South divide. The ‘rise of the South’ and of South–South Cooperation (SSC) is a major element in this changing landscape (Eyben & Savage, 2013).

This paper provides an empirically based account of the ongoing disputes over whether and how to measure SSC. It examines two United Nations (UN) High-Level Conferences on South–South Cooperation (in 2009 and 2019) and treats them as ‘diagnosis events’<sup>1</sup> for investigating how the imperatives of measuring Official Development Assistance (ODA; or development aid) are being translated to the policy world of SSC.<sup>2</sup> By doing so, it also examines the effects of growing ‘international development measurementalities’, as labelled here, on North–South power relations and on broader disputes over responsibilities in the field of global development.

The paper makes three major contributions. First, it argues that growing conversations on ‘SSC effectiveness’, and how to measure it, reflect both prevalent ‘measurementalities’ in the field as well as ‘traditional donor countries’—members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC)—continuous will to socialise and integrate Southern countries into existing aid norms and practices. Second, the paper demonstrates ‘Southern providers’—particularly rising powers such as Brazil, China, and India—agency to negotiate their *differentiated integration* in the ‘aid system’ by proposing alternative tools to measure their development cooperation flows and initiatives in their own terms. Finally, the paper argues that unfolding *measurement battles* over quantifying, reporting, and evaluating SSC reflect the ‘politicised consolidation’ of SSC in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Waisbich & Mawdsley, 2022). These measurement battles and impasses at the multilateral level reveal unsolved North–South disputes over power, status, and responsibilities in international development and international affairs, more broadly.

## 1.1 | Responsibility, accountability, and effectiveness in global development

Responsibility, accountability, and development effectiveness are key themes in global development politics. Responsibility in world politics refers to the ways in which the international community negotiates how a range of international actors (states, international

### Policy Implications

- Finding ways to expand global policy conversations about whether and how to measure South–South development cooperation (SSC) flows and its overall impact is paramount in the context of Agenda 2030 and the COVID-19 green and inclusive recovery.
- Policy makers should acknowledge that SSC is different from, but not contrary to, traditional Official Development Assistance (ODA) and that Southern providers will have to come up with their own policy and methodological solutions to the need to count and account their development cooperation.
- Policy makers should acknowledge that Southern providers’ critical diplomatic resistance to the need to measure SSC using existing DAC tools and standards has been accompanied by a series of more accommodating stances and initiatives. Southern countries are not monolithic, and both governments and knowledge actors are increasingly willing to measure their development efforts in their own terms.
- Policy makers should foster policy and methodological debates on SSC measurement that engage with the particularities of this vast set of Southern-led development cooperation exchanges and value Southern-led efforts. This is a necessary step to update and operationalise the common but differentiated responsibilities principle in the 21st century.

organisations, transnational nongovernmental entities) should behave and be answerable for their acts. It is also about how power is (or should be) exercised and tamed in world affairs (Grant & Keohane, 2005). International responsibilities can be positive or negative, historical or prospective, productive or preventive, moral or legal, general or special, formal or informal (Bukovansky et al., 2012). In some issue-areas, they materialise in specific policy norms, such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in the security domain or the Common But Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR) principle in global environmental negotiations. In other cases, discussions around responsibility remain at the discursive level, without an explicit policy translation (Vetterlein & Hansen-Magnusson, 2020).

Global development is a field largely ruled by ‘soft law’ (Paulo & Reisen, 2010). There discussions on responsibilities have been shaped largely by persistent hierarchies, which assigned different roles and duties to ‘rich Northern donors’ and ‘poor Southern

recipients' taking part in the 'development dance' (Swedlund, 2017). Donor countries are expected to fulfil a duty to alleviate poverty 'in the South' and comply with a range of DAC-led standards and 'best practices'. This includes meeting the internationally agreed 0.7% ODA/GNI target and account for overall progress on promoting development abroad. Throughout the 2000s, as the so-called 'Aid/Development Effectiveness Agenda' progressed, donorship responsibilities became more and more responsive to management and performance-based understandings of 'development accountability'. Under this paradigm, donor countries are expected to follow DAC-led standards and tools to quantify and report ODA flows and evaluate the impact of development aid on the ground (Clemens & Moss, 2005; Eyben et al., 2015). Measuring (quantifying, assessing, and reporting) development cooperation is, therefore, an essential component of what 'good donorship' means.

## 1.2 | Prevalent development measurementalities and the growing need to measure South–South cooperation

International development is a field governed by expertise and by numbers (Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007; Mitchell, 2002). The language of numbers articulate global development norms, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019), and shape 'good donorship' practice of measuring international development flows (Eyben et al., 2015; Paulo & Reisen, 2010; Rottenburg, 2009).

The politics of measuring development and development cooperation has gained new contours in the 2000s, the geographies of power and poverty kept changing within and across the North–South divide. These shifts prompted new debates on how to measure national development, growth, and inequality under a new 'universal' Agenda for Sustainable Development. New debates also emerged around how to better measure development cooperation, both in the need to 'modernise' the concept of ODA and its metrics (Sumner et al., 2020) as well as new measurement politics around whether and how to count and account for development cooperation flows coming from 'Non-DAC' countries—or 'Southern providers'—such as Brazil, China, India, Turkey, Mexico, and many others.

To look at these emerging measurement politics, I employ the notion of 'measurementality': a concept that draws on Michel Foucault's notion of 'governmentality'—widely employed by critical development scholars (e.g., Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007)—as well as on social science scholarship on the power of quantification in public and social life (Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Porter, 1995; Scott, 1999). When discussing 'measurementality' in environmental politics, Turnhout et al. (2014) characterise it as a form of neoliberal governance that emerges

from privileging scientific techniques for assessing and measuring that renders the measured world commensurable and exchangeable. Measurement, therefore, functions not only to generate knowledge and comparisons but also to shape power relations. In the case of development, over-reliance on targets and indicators generates perverse incentives, distortion, and governmentality effects (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019; Mitchell, 2002). Development-related measurement artefacts and tools, moreover, contribute to boundary-making and to generating and reiterating hierarchies between 'donors' and 'recipients' (Eyben et al., 2015; Jensen & Winthereik, 2013; Mosse, 2011; Rottenburg, 2009), as well as between 'old'/'Northern' and 'new'/'Southern' donors.

As the global footprint of Southern powerhouses kept expanding materially and politically, questions around 'SSC effectiveness', and how to measure it, became central to international development politics and policy debates. Like DAC donors in preceding decades, Southern providers—particularly rising powers such as Brazil, China, and India—were subjected to multiple pressures (by global and domestic constituencies) to quantify and justify their development cooperation flows. At the global level, this became visible throughout the 2010s in the growing attempts by the OECD-DAC and its members to integrate—or 'socialise'—Southern providers into existing development aid norms and practices, along the lines proposed by the OECD-led 'Aid/Development Effectiveness Agenda' in the early 2000s (Esteves & Assunção, 2014; Kim & Lightfoot, 2011). Although these attempts managed to initiate a conversation on 'SSC effectiveness' and how to measure it, they have also left many unsolved issues.

## 2 | NAIROBI (2009) AND THE BIRTH OF THE SOUTH–SOUTH COOPERATION MEASUREMENT PARADOX

The growing efforts to measure SSC and the particular governance and boundary-making effects it has generated can be distilled from a decade of global policy debates that took place between the 2009 and the 2019 UN High-Level Conferences on South–South Cooperation. The first one took place in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2009. The conference was held to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the historical landmark 1978 Buenos Aires Plan of Action on the promotion of technical cooperation for development among the then Third World. In a (post) post-Cold War setting, SSC narratives in Nairobi were somewhat updated to fit a global landscape marked by the Millennium Development Goals and by the 'Aid/Development Effectiveness Agenda' (Esteves & Assunção, 2014; Pino, 2014).

The Nairobi Outcome Document clearly reflects the already shifting North–South dynamics at the time.

The document featured Southern providers' major 'differentiation claims' of SSC being different but also better than traditional Northern-led development aid.<sup>3</sup> It also reiterated frequent G77 + China stances at the UN based on the Common But Differentiated Responsibility principle that SSC was 'not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North–South cooperation' (UNGA, 2009, para. 14). It introduced, nonetheless, an intra-South differentiation between 'small and large' Southern countries and between the traditional technical cooperation among developing countries and other forms of South–South exchanges (including development finance, trade, and foreign investments) practised by so-called 'rising or emerging powers' (Bracho, 2017). In Nairobi, UN members 'recognize[d] the solidarity of middle-income countries with other developing countries with a view to supporting their development efforts, including in the context of South–South and triangular cooperation' (para. 7). More importantly to the issue under discussion here, Nairobi marks the first formal mentions of 'SSC effectiveness' and measurement in an intergovernmental negotiation at the UN. The document featured an explicit mention of the need to enhance the 'development effectiveness of SSC' by strengthening its alignment with national development priorities on the ground as well as fostering SSC transparency, accountability, and overall result-based management (para. 18). This was followed by a paragraph on measurement that encouraged 'developing countries to develop country-led systems to evaluate and assess the quality and impact of South–South and triangular cooperation programmes and improve data collection at the national level (...) while bearing in mind the specific principles and unique characteristics of South–South cooperation' (para. 20, c).

Undeniably Nairobi constitutes a first attempt—at the intergovernmental level—to introduce SSC partnerships into what Zoccal and Esteves (2018, p. 135) called the 'donorship doxa': the set of norms and standards created by the OECD-DAC to guide the community of 'traditional' ODA donors. As mentioned before, numerous aid-related (soft) norms revolve around measuring and reporting development cooperation flows and their impact. Although seeking to achieve some kind of normative convergence between SSC and ODA, and between 'Northern' and 'Southern' development cooperation providers, the Nairobi agreement was, nonetheless, insufficient. Not only was the effectiveness-related language in the text vague (Pino, 2014), but the years following Nairobi were marked by a series of unsuccessful OECD-DAC attempts to fully 'socialise' rising powers and bring them under the 'Effectiveness Agenda' tent. This became clearer during and in the aftermath of the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan (2011), when rising powers such as Brazil, China, India, and South Africa kept resisting full integration into existing ODA measurement and reporting frameworks

and never formally joined the 'equator-less' Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (Eyben & Savage, 2013; Mawdsley et al., 2014). Rising powers also refrained from committing to any financial target for their SSC engagements and remained sceptical about the efforts to devise new accounting and/or reporting tools in the context of Agenda 2030, including metrics such as the Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (Besharati, 2017; Bracho, 2017).

Nonetheless, having 'effectiveness and measurement-related language' in Nairobi's Outcome Document was in itself a sign of the persistent measurementalities in the field and more importantly a sign of an increasingly visible *measurement paradox* for Southern providers. On one hand, practitioners within the most active SSC champions believed some sort of measurement could indeed bridge the knowledge gap around their development cooperation flows and results. More information could either debunk overly negative narratives about SSC or even help Southern countries to demonstrate a positive and 'unique' development impact on the ground. In the words of the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB), measurement helps to strengthen the overall political narratives around SSC and 'validate the political discourse that proposes this method as a low-cost, direct-impact, effective, efficient, and beneficial way for cooperation' (PIFCSS, 2016a, cited in Escallón, 2019).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, measuring SSC could also open this very political project to challenge and contestation. Measuring could reveal spending and flows, as well as shortcomings and tensions, notably on the ground.

Ultimately, as a pervasive form of governmentality, the growing efforts to measure SSC not only inserted South–South partnerships into existing development evidence politics (Eyben et al., 2015)—of what counts as evidence, impact, or change—but added an additional geopolitical layer as SSC became the object of external estimates by 'traditional/Northern' development actors and with their tools and standards (Besharati & MacFeely, 2019). Indeed, in the past decade, OECD reports started to include estimates on development cooperation flows of 'Non-DAC' providers, including Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Qatar, and South Africa (OECD, 2015). Although some countries were happy to join the list of donors and send their data voluntarily to the OECD to be reported according to existing ODA standards, others such as Brazil, China, and India openly resisted OECD-DAC outreach.

The geopolitical implications of this measurement paradox only grew in the aftermath of Nairobi and as debates on Agenda 2030 progressed. For some development experts within large Southern providers, there was an opportunity and a pragmatic need to capture the SSC-specific 'contributions to the SDGs' (Corrêa, 2017; Esteves, 2018). More and more, being able to tell an



‘impact story’ could serve rising powers’ status-seeking and reputation-building strategies by internationally showcasing their ever-growing efforts, generosity, and successes. Concurrently, experts also showed signs of uneasiness with the measurement agenda. There was a principled-based opposition to applying ODA metrics and tools to measure what was seen as different forms of development exchanges among developing countries. There was, for instance, a fear that measuring what was more easily quantifiable, namely South–South development finance, could/would underplay, and even undermine, other intangible dimensions of a broader SSC agenda, which includes knowledge and policy transfers as well as political solidarity and coalition-building. As framed by Marcio Corrêa, from the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC): ‘developing countries have been witnessing other international actors trying to quantify horizontal/South–South flows based on criteria conceived for other realities and purposes. The consequences of this process are: under-accounting, unilateral segregation of data, or inaccurate classification of horizontal/South–South cooperation’ (ABC, 2015; also Corrêa, 2017). Similar concerns were voiced by Milindo Chakrabarti (2019, p. 49) from the Ministry of External Affairs-affiliated think tank Research Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), when arguing for ‘the idea [of SSC] not be caged into some defined templates and lead to potential death by strangulation’.

Less openly discussed but equally important from a domestic policy perspective, there were also concerns with an over-reliance on existing ODA metrics that could somewhat rank Southern countries ‘too low’ among existing development providers while already revealing ‘too much’ information to domestic constituencies. Finally, in a context of SSC consolidation at the domestic arena, Southern development practitioners often saw the measurement agenda as a somewhat less urgent management issue for their already overworked and understaffed ‘SSC bureaucracies’ (Waisbich, 2020).

### 3 | BAPA+40 (2019) AND THE EVOLVING SOUTH–SOUTH COOPERATION MEASUREMENT BATTLES

Most of the uneasiness with measurement accompanied large Southern providers throughout the following decade and became even clearer during the Second UN High-Level Conference on South–South and Triangular Cooperation (or BAPA+40) held in Buenos Aires in 2019. For those leading the BAPA+40 preparation efforts, namely the UN Office for South–South Cooperation (UNOSSC), the key conference goals were to ‘institutionalise’ and ‘revitalise’ SSC across the UN system (UNGA, 2018). More than before, SSC

needed to be ‘modernised’ and fully integrated into the results-driven, data-rich, SDGs agenda. In this regard, the UN preparatory note highlighted the need to enhance ‘reporting on South–South cooperation and triangular cooperation on the national and regional levels on a voluntary basis and in accordance with their national capacities’ (UNGA, 2018).

Such ambitious agendas coexisted, nonetheless with a wide recognition of the ongoing North–South politics in the field as well as of the current fragile state of UN multilateralism (Zoccal, 2020). In a strategic move, the conference organisers defined that the BAPA+40 Outcome Document would be prenegotiated in New York between December/2018 and February/2019, thus ahead of the high-level meeting in Buenos Aires.<sup>5</sup> The Argentinian government and the UNOSSC led the negotiations cautiously, proposing an initial draft containing only what was perceived as ‘non-controversial topics’ around SSC: ‘scaling-up’, ‘institutionalisation’, and ‘best practices’. Effectiveness issues were explicitly not included in the first draft.

#### 3.1 | From ‘responsibilities’ to ‘methodologies’

In Buenos Aires, countries did agree to somewhat align SSC narratives at the UN with the broader development-related paradigms of the 21st century: the SDGs agenda, the growing emphasis on infrastructure building, the role of private sector in development cooperation, and the so-called triangular cooperation (when traditional donor countries and multilateral organisations facilitate South–South initiatives). Yet, when it comes to issues of commitments, responsibilities, and accountability in/of SSC, BAPA+40 offered no diplomatic conceptual-normative advances in a decade. During the negotiations, an entire section on ‘monitoring and reporting SSC’ was proposed and received wide support from OECD-DAC members (EU, 2019) but failed to galvanise support among most Southern countries and was subsequently dropped. In the end, much of the language around ‘effectiveness’, ‘mutual accountability’, and ‘impact assessments’ (in paragraphs 25 and 29) was an *ipsis litteris* copy of paragraphs 18 and 20 from Nairobi. Meanwhile, Northern donors were able to secure no explicit mention in the final document of their historical international aid commitment, the 0.7% ODA/GNI target.

Although responsibilities were off the negotiating table, the issue of measurement (and particularly how to measure SSC) found its place in paragraph 26, which reads:

In this regard, we invite interested developing countries to engage in consultations, within the regional commissions of

the United Nations, relevant intergovernmental fora on South–South and triangular cooperation, or regional organisations, as appropriate, on non-binding voluntary methodologies, building upon existing experiences, taking into account the specificities and different modalities of South–South cooperation and respecting the diversity within South–South cooperation and within national approaches. In this regard, we take note of the efforts of certain developing countries that have developed methodologies for planning, monitoring, measuring and evaluating South–South and triangular cooperation in their regions on a voluntary basis and acknowledge the interest of some developing countries in order to establish a methodology for accounting and evaluating South–South and triangular cooperation.

(UNGA, 2019, para. 26)

This paragraph echoes Southern providers' persistent unease with the topic, already visible in a series of episodic and geopolitical battles around measuring SSC in global arenas (further discussed in the next section). In a sign of Southern power in UN-wide negotiations, paragraph 26 also reiterated fairly stable diplomatic stances on the matter, as discussed above, emphasising: (i) the autonomy of Southern countries to develop SSC-specific evaluation and assessment systems; (ii) the respect of the uniqueness, plurality, and diversity of SSC and SSC partners; and (iii) the demand-driven, Southern-led, flexible nature of any accounting and reflection exercise. Terms such as 'autonomy', 'plurality', 'diversity', and 'flexibility' are easily traced in other diplomatic statements and scholarly reflections on the topic. India's official statement during the Conference also featured these terms. In Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin's words:

More and better South–South Cooperation now is on account of the global South enjoying more rapid and sustained economic growth. Yet, South–South Cooperation retains its distinct nature and values, as well as diversity of forms and flows. It defies easy categorization. (...) The trajectory of global growth and the declining share of ODA during the past decade or so has seen attempts to subsume South–South cooperation in the international aid architecture. Such efforts are not helpful. They do no justice to either its historical heritage or its future potential. Let us not venture to strait jacket South–South cooperation into a format that it cannot fit into.

(GOI/MEA, 2019)

A careful analysis of the language employed in paragraph 26 reveals, however, another divide, this time within the South. The final lines refer to 'ongoing national and regional experimentation', recognising (without naming) measurement efforts and experimentation 'from the South' already taking place. Indeed, throughout the 2010s, the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, China's Ministry of Commerce, the Colombian Presidential Agency of International Cooperation, and the Mexican Cooperation Agency have all put in place their own official surveys to count and account for SSC flows. Latin America, in particular, has been an important hub for both national and regional innovation, under the umbrella of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and SEGIB (Chaturvedi, 2018; Esteves, 2018; Silva et al., 2016). Efforts in Latin America have also inspired African stakeholders, who have also engaged in similar mapping and (ac)counting efforts alongside the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB; UNDP/NEPAD, 2019). So far, no similar mapping has taken place in Asia. Sachin Chaturvedi (2018), from RIS in India, justifies this absence by arguing that the 'Asian ways of doing SSC' (which puts greater emphasis on economic rather than technical cooperation) make the measuring and reporting of South–South exchanges less possible or desirable (a similar argument is found in Kim & Lim, 2017).

### 3.2 | Diplomatic and paradiplomatic reluctance to measurement during and after BAPA+40

More than a 'pan-Asian affair', India, in particular, has been a major critical voice in this debate. Insiders to BAPA+40 negotiations largely credit Indian diplomacy for resisting stronger global commitments on SSC measurement at the UN level. India's blocking does not come as a surprise considering its historical stances on the CBDR principle, its intellectual leadership within the G77, and India's own statement during BAPA+40. Indian-sponsored side events in Buenos Aires, all led by RIS, also clearly echoed these concerns. RIS sits in a parastatal capacity, and its thinking has historically backed Indian governmental stances on development cooperation (Chaturvedi et al., 2014). RIS has also been a vocal critic of the SSC accountability and measurement agenda, although in a pragmatic and adaptive way, simultaneously embracing and resisting the debate. During BAPA+40, RIS led, in partnership with other research institutions from the Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST), parallel events on 'The Plurality of South–South Cooperation' and on 'Exploring Asian Narratives on South–South Cooperation'. The notions of 'plurality' and 'diversity' in the side events' names (as well as in India's official statement, as shown above) have also been

strategically mobilised by RIS scholars to justify India's opposition to common standards for SSC and single metrics to count SSC flows (Chakrabarti, 2018; Chaturvedi, 2019).

A few months after BAPA+40, another open demonstration of diplomatic resistance appeared in a communiqué by the G77 + China, in a clear move away from the more consensual language featured in the Outcome Document. In the statement, the Group emphasised its opposition to the adoption of DAC tools or any UN top–down measurement of SSC (G77, 2019). Backing this rejection, there was an emphasis on the autonomy of Southern countries to define whether and how to measure their development cooperation efforts and a denunciation of a perceived 'double standard', because North–South ODA measuring frameworks were historically crafted and continuously negotiated by Northern countries only (inside the OECD-DAC) rather than in wide UN forums.

### 3.3 | The thin (and possible) consensus

Many 'traditional' development cooperation actors and some Southern experts (notably from Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa) hoped that the BAPA+40 process would generate the right conditions for Southern countries to agree on an unambiguous definition of SSC and on goals, targets, and means to financially commit to achieving Agenda 2030 (Esteves & Klingebiel, 2018). This also meant reaching a minimum agreement on how to measure SSC and its results (Besharati & MacFeely, 2019). Such agreements were, nonetheless, not achieved. BAPA+40 only secured a thin compromise.

On one hand, the Outcome Document reflected the fragmented state of North–South global development politics and the increasingly fragile state of multilateral affairs, dominated by a growing China–US rivalry and important domestic shifts and turmoil in several of the 'SSC champions' from the previous decade (e.g., Brazil, South Africa, and Venezuela). Across the North–South divide, there was a widespread recognition of the constraints that a multiplex world imposes on multilateral negotiations and a broad agreement with the idea that 'diversity within the South' makes it politically difficult, and in some ways undesirable, to craft common frameworks for SSC and common narratives around responsibility in/of SSC at this point. On the other hand, it also reflected the multiple geopolitical and domestic political tensions embedded in the measurement agenda. India's vocal resistance and China's less vocal but rather dismissive stances toward reaching an agreement on SSC measurement in Buenos Aires are examples of this unresolved unease.

## 4 | MEASURING FROM THE SOUTH: DIFFERENTIATION POLITICS AND UNFINISHED NEGOTIATIONS OVER EFFECTIVENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

The 10-year journey from Nairobi to BAPA+40 provides an entry door into the politics of measurement in the context of SSC. It reveals the ways in which effectiveness and measurement concerns have entered multilateral negotiations at the UN as well as the multiple, and varied, reluctance and resistance stances by large Southern providers to the agenda. At the same time, beyond formal UN negotiations, the past decade has witnessed Southern countries, and especially rising powers, addressing the issue of measurement (as well as the issues of development effectiveness and responsibility) in other smaller or less formalised global diplomatic and paradiplomatic arenas. There, Southern development experts (governmental and nongovernmental) have critically engaged with existing ODA norms, metrics, and ways of measuring development flows and proposed alternative 'Southern-grown' tools to measure SSC flows and results.

In a sign of growing Southern agency and a pragmatic will to *integrate differently* into existing measurement norms and standards, development practitioners within Southern providers became innovation actors. At the governmental level, innovation has taken place through growing policy and institutional experimentation—by 'SSC bureaucracies' within Southern providers and by intergovernmental organisations—with measurement methodologies, tools, and systems, as recognised in the BAPA+40 Outcome Document. Examples include Brazil's COBRADI report led by the governmental think tank IPEA and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, China's Ministry of Commerce foreign aid white papers and statistics, the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation quantification tool (RENCID), and the multicountry reports on SSC by SEGIB, UNDP, and IsDB, mentioned above. In addition to the government-led initiatives, experimentation with counting and accounting methodologies has also happened 'from below', led by knowledge actors and SSC watchdogs, in parallel or even filling the official gaps left by reluctant Southern governments. This is the case of the Network of Southern Think Tanks-led evaluation framework to assess SSC in 2015 (NeST, 2015) or the quantification efforts of civil society organisations in Brazil and India using publicly available budgetary information systems (Lopes & Costa, 2018; Mitra, 2018).

Navigating the politics of differentiation, these growing SSC measurement efforts (governmental and nongovernmental) relied on both nationally or regionally relevant methodologies and on a certain degree of convergence with existing ODA metrics and standards. At the operational level, this meant cautious and not always straightforward processes of policy experimentation to

find measurement frameworks and tools suitable for Southern providers' own contexts and (management, geopolitical, and status) needs. At the same time, at the multilateral level, this meant that, despite the numerous measurement initiatives being developed 'in the South, by Southern actors', no normative and epistemic agreement among Southern countries (and between them and 'traditional/Northern' donors) on frameworks and on how to count (and account for) all development cooperation flows and their impact has been reached.

#### 4.1 | Unfinished negotiations

In this renewed version of the 'development dance', borrowing from Swedlund (2017), Northern/Western development actors (DAC members, UN agencies, and the broader *Aidland* epistemic community) kept exerting pressure on Southern providers to quantify and evaluate SSC, while accepting that Southern countries, and particularly rising powers, will lead on efforts and put forward their own solutions. In what could be seen as a win-win situation, certain UN agencies and Northern knowledge actors, such as the German Development Institute (DIE) or the Oxfam confederation, have in the past decade commissioned and published papers giving voice to Southern-based experts and CSOs to present their own 'Southern ways' to measure SSC (see Ali, 2018; Esteves, 2018; Lopes & Costa, 2018; Mitra, 2018). UN agencies in particular have facilitated measurement initiatives acting as brokers of intergovernmental exchange processes, offering technical support for Southern partners on measurement issues and/or fostering measuring mechanisms in joint triangular development cooperation projects. This has been accompanied and reinforced by bilateral traditional donors' (notably the UK, Germany, Japan, and Australia) own diplomatic efforts to foster measurement initiatives within major Southern providers (such as Brazil, Mexico, China, and India). These efforts included funding studies, policy dialogues, and direct assistance to strengthen what traditional donors often referred to as the 'management' and/or 'knowledge' areas within 'SSC bureaucracies', as fuel monitoring and evaluation of existing SSC initiatives.

In turn, Southern providers have expanded their own efforts to engage with issues of development cooperation effectiveness and measurement while consistently emphasising their autonomy in deciding how to do it. They have demonstrated greater preference for 'country-led', 'non-binding' measurement frameworks and tools and demonstrated no sense of urgency to institutionalise measuring mechanisms domestically or forging any cross-regional consensus on the matter. There is, nonetheless, variance in the ways SSC protagonists have projected their preferences. Although projecting their 'Southern identity', Mexico and Turkey

have largely aligned with OECD-DAC measurement standards. Brazil adopted a critical-conciliatory diplomacy while investing in crafting its own accounting methodologies and designing its own nationally appropriate tools and frameworks to quantify and report SSC. China has favoured a more pragmatic (if not disinterested) approach at the global level while also investing in finding measurement solutions 'with Chinese characteristics' and putting them in place at home. India, alternatively, has adopted more critical-resistance stances and did not put in place any specific initiative or tool to measure its SSC flows (Esteves, 2018). Indian stances are marked by a will to assert the country's identity in opposition to both a 'Northern/Western' paradigm and to alleged Chinese or Latin American models. However, rather than acting as a complete blocker, Indian paradiplomatic moves demonstrate a complex mix of resistance-innovation stances aligned with country's broader pragmatic will to navigate existing international norms and standards and carve a more favourable space in the world (Miller & Sullivan de Estrada, 2017).

Ultimately, ongoing negotiations around whether and how to measure SSC (alongside the North-South divide, but also within the South) reveal complex and unfolding bargains around power, status, and responsibilities in international development. These have led to dead ends at the multilateral level, as illustrated in the BAPA+40 process, and at the same time an array of conceptual and methodological experimentation and innovation within certain large Southern providers, not uncommonly in partnerships with multilaterals and in triangular development cooperation initiatives together with 'traditional/Northern' development actors.

At the same time, Southern countries have not reached a political agreement on the importance and the means to measure SSC. There are many reasons behind this. The first one relates to the diversity of diplomatic and paradiplomatic stances on the legitimacy and appropriateness of the measurement agenda, including persistent unease (and even open resistance stances) from key Southern providers, such as Brazil, China, and India (Waisbich, 2021). Rather than purely technical motives, political concerns with power hierarchies and structural inequalities in the field, as well as overall geopolitical, geostrategic, and status concerns, are key to the different forms of reluctance to SSC measurement.

In addition to measurement-specific concerns, there is also a persistent reluctance—notably from key large Southern providers—to set up a DAC-like space to devise common standards and frameworks for SSC, including measurement ones. Unwilling or unable to create their own autonomous SSC intergovernmental policy spaces, as demonstrated by the short-lived Core Group of Southern Partners at the UN (which only ran between 2013 and 2015), little progress was made



at large, formal multilateral forums such as the UN Development Cooperation Forum or the BAPA+40 process. After more than a decade of debate on SSC effectiveness and how to measure it, the South still asks for more time and space to carry on discussions and move them forwards, while remaining strongly divided on the matter. Whereas for some countries more time means a commitment to keep building a genuine ‘Southern-led agreement’ on the issue of measurement; for others, this is a way to achieve a (perhaps welcome) adjournment, based on irreconcilable stances on what global development and global development responsibilities are and should be.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

In recent years, SSC effectiveness and how to measure it have become an unmistakable feature of the global development landscape. This paper unpacks global policy debates—at the UN and beyond—around measuring Southern-led development cooperation in the past decade and examines the growing political salience of the issue of measurement of SSC as a lens into contested responsibilities in the field of international development cooperation.

The paper locates ongoing *SSC measurement battles* as signs of persistent ‘development measurement-mentalities’ as well as signs of changing power dynamics and changing aid donorship politics in the field of development cooperation. The paper also illuminates enduring power, status, and recognition struggles in international development embedded in the current impasses observed in UN development negotiations. Regarding the measurement-mentalities, the gap between high hopes to achieve common normative and methodological agreement between ‘old/Northern’ and ‘new/Southern’ providers and Southern countries’ (rising powers or not) hesitations reflect a historical distrust of the aid effectiveness/accountability/measurement agendas. For most Southern actors, these agendas are plagued with contradictions: the promotion of ‘good governance’ neoliberal policy reforms in the South, creation of reporting requirements for ‘aid recipients’ in already asymmetrical and stigmatising North–South dyads, as well as perverse incentives of aid reporting tools that prioritise counting over accountability and bypass national mechanisms on the ground (Eyben et al., 2015; Jensen & Winthereik, 2013).

As for power dynamics, current negotiations are not only bargains between ‘old’ and ‘new’ development cooperation providers on how best to share the burden and tackle common global developmental challenges. They speak to and reflect a partial, incomplete, normative convergence of the so-called rising powers, such as China as well as India, Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, South Africa, and many more, with the existing (but

also rapidly shifting) global development landscape. Negotiations further illuminate unsolved North–South reparation, identity, and recognition issues, and their new instantiations in a multiplex world. Southern providers’ will to integrate differently, it is argued, reveal both Southern agency and contested understandings of responsibilities in the changing field of global development and their uncertain translation into what kind of scrutiny and tools are deemed required and legitimate in Southern-led development cooperation.

Southern agency is visible in major Southern providers’ unwillingness to abide by norms and practices they were not invited to draft, their growing global development reformist ambitions, and their unwillingness to adopt standards that would either limit their autonomy to use SSC as a multidimensional policy instrument or generate extra justification pressures on their conduct. Their diplomatic stances on measurement, however, unavoidably reflect their multilayered stances on global responsibilities. Countries such as Brazil, China, and India are vocal defenders of the idea of the ‘historical debt’ industrialised countries have with poorer nations in the South and the development-related responsibilities they entail. They have equally avoided portraying themselves as ‘fully developed’ and completely ‘mature’ or ‘ready’ to take on greater global responsibilities, what Santos et al. (2019) called a ‘Peter Pan Syndrome’. Across different policy issues, ‘SSC champions’, and in particular rising powers, have carefully selected the responsibilities they wished to take on and those they would relegate to developed countries. This is backed by a strict adherence to the original formulations of the CDR principle (as originally proposed for environmental negotiations and subsequently applied in global development debates) and a hesitancy to update it to a new formula of ‘concentric responsibilities’, where ‘differentiation within the South’ also applies (Esteves et al., 2019). Their reluctance to take on certain responsibilities is not only a matter of irresponsible behaviour or unwillingness to cooperate and contribute to global public goods. Their ambivalence is also strongly informed by the dilemmas embedded in the rising powers’ position in international social rankings. As ‘developing-and-rising’ and ‘providers-while-still-recipients’, Southern powerhouses simultaneously renegotiate—domestically and globally—their own rising power status and subalternity (van der Westhuizen & Milani, 2019).

For most of the past two decades, rising powers’ cautious stances found resonance among other Southern countries, as governments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have also kept ‘SSC effectiveness’ issues off the ‘global tables’ or behind closed doors. Promises of solidarity, horizontality, and more equitable win–win relationships were celebrated, at least by some governments and elite groups brokering the South–South partnerships (Mohan, 2014). Rather than calling for

transparency, accountability, or responsible behaviour in SSC, several Southern countries denounced the 'double standards' used against rising powers, arguing that the debate about them was often 'partisan and paternalistic' (Chenoy & Joshi, 2016, p. 107) and that some sort of 'development cooperation competition' was actually welcome (Moyo et al., 2019). Those overly optimistic and acritical days are long gone. More and more measuring the quantity and, even more so, the quality of Southern-led development cooperation matters to many actors in the South, particularly under the double-crisis of the climate emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic. Although several of the proposed Southern-grown measurement, transparency, and accountability mechanisms remain works in progress, the will to innovate and invest in SSC-specific policy and methodological solutions to render SSC flows and impacts more intelligible is here to stay.


### FUNDING INFORMATION

Cambridge Commonwealth, European & International Trust, Cambridge International Scholarship. Newnham College, University of Cambridge, Research and Travel Grant.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Similar analytical efforts have been conducted in other landmark global development meetings, namely the 2011 Busan Conference (Eyben & Savage, 2013; Mawdsley et al., 2014). For more aid-related diagnosis events, see Jensen and Winthereik (2013).

<sup>2</sup> The reflections draw upon a review of the two official Outcome Documents and its negotiated drafts; opinion articles and commentaries on the Nairobi and BAPA+40 conferences; and other written documentation, including meeting agendas and reports. It also draws upon the authors' participant observation of BAPA+40 meetings and events, including the preparatory ones (between 2017 to 2019); the diplomatic and paradiplomatic debates in Buenos Aires; and other meetings that took place immediately after BAPA+40, during 2019. This analysis also benefitted from data collected through semistructured interviews with a range of diplomats, development practitioners, and experts in countries such as Brazil, China, France, India, Mexico, South Africa, and the UK, between 2017 and 2020. The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available owing to privacy or ethical restrictions.

<sup>3</sup> On differentiation-based claims, see, for instance, Doucette (2020) and Zoccal and Esteves (2018).

<sup>4</sup> SEGIB is an international organisation that gathers the 22 countries that make up the 'Ibero-American community' (the 19 Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries in Latin America and those of the

Iberian Peninsula, Spain, Portugal, and Andorra). See <https://www.segib.org/en/who-we-are/> (last access: 21/10/2020).

<sup>5</sup> Negotiations took place within the UN General Assembly in New York between December 2018 and February 2019. They produced a zero draft (dated 22 January), a second draft (dated 11 February), and a final draft transmitted on 6 March to the President of the General Assembly, two weeks before the actual conference in Buenos Aires (UN, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

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**How to cite this article:** Waisbich, L.T. (2022) 'It Takes Two to Tango': South–South Cooperation Measurement Politics in a Multiplex World. *Global Policy*, 00, 1–12. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13086>