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Current and Upcoming Challenges in South-South Cooperation in the field of Social Statistics

Dimitri Della Faille, Valérie La France-Moreau

The prime development projects of the post-World War II period – those that impacted the lives and futures of the peoples of countries in what is referred to as “the South” – were mostly designed, driven and implemented based on an idealized conception of “Northern” history and an exalted vision of future economic, technical and political directions. Some authors have illustrated how this paradigm explains why development concepts and initiatives are in fact extensions of North American and European supremacy over nations of “the South.” For instance, Gilbert Rist contends that the very idea of development is in fact an imaginary tale perpetrated by Western countries in order to impose their own idealized trajectories (Rist 2003). For Arturo Escobar, the underdevelopment of the Third World is a discursive invention, a stratagem used by Western countries to perpetrate their global control (Escobar 1995). While less overt than territorial occupation and human exploitation, development has to be seen in continuity with this control maintained by “Northern” countries of “the South” through military force or physical, political, cultural, or economic coercion (Della Faille 2011a).

Numerous resistance strategies for counteracting this colonial “white man’s burden” paradigm, which attempts to legitimize these methods, co-opting solidarity, cooperation and development under the guise of benevolence, have been used since the beginning of what is commonly referred to as the development era, following the Second World War (Easterly, 2006). Accordingly, one of the practices that attempt to critique development – efforts towards social, cultural, territorial and physical transformation of “Southern” countries – is the promotion of exchanges among the nations of this marginalized, colonized or exploited world. This South-South development cooperation has the potential to generate a critique of “Northern” interventions in “the South.” This article attempts to reflect on the potential goals of South-South cooperation (SSC) and the methods for achieving them in large-scale development projects. More specifically, this article focuses on one facet of technical cooperation, SSC in the field of social statistics. The examination of this technical dimension of cooperation reveals already effective interactions that might differ from the more advertised and high-level political platforms. As a matter of fact, the production, analysis, and dissemination of statistics lie at the very heart of the policies and practices used to transform social and material phenomena. Examining cooperative praxis in these areas may yield information on the strategies used to claim ownership of the assessment methods and knowledge pertaining to the ideological dimensions of development.

The introductory reflections have been guided by a review of the literature and, more importantly, by our current research on the production, analysis, and dissemination of social statistics. In the course of this research, which started in 2011, 35 statisticians, demographers, and economists were engaged, working principally in countries in North and West Africa, Southeast Asia and Central America. They work in government bodies, multilateral agencies,

non-governmental organizations, and academia¹. The research, from which this article stems, aims at better understanding the contemporary issues they are called upon to confront. It used a qualitative interview methodology in which participants were directed through some very general questions from which they shared their own perspective and experience. Participants in this study spoke about global, regional and national processes related to social statistics and reflected on the current links among countries of “the South” and the ones they would like to see develop. Once transcribed, the interviews were analyzed with QSR NVivo, a computer software for qualitative data analysis. This software helped us to proceed with a transversal thematic analysis with an emphasis on comparing world views and social representations.

This article begins with a definition of SSC; of technical cooperation within this framework. Then, it looks at cooperative endeavours in social statistics used in development. Based on a literature review and the results of that investigative research, a number of general thoughts on the current portrait of SSC and its prospects for the future are offered.

Defining “the South”

Before going further, a brief definition of the term “the South” is required. Given that the idea behind fostering relations among nations of “the South” is rooted in a critique of global inequality, this definition takes on particular importance. Conventional wisdom uses “the South” to refer to any area of the world located south of Western Europe or North America that is perceived as extremely destitute. But clearly, this definition of “the South” is somewhat meaningless, given its premise of mistaken territorial realities and shared contexts and its dismissal of intra-national disparities. A multitude of northern regions and nations show traits of this “imagined” South. Examples such as Moldova or Mongolia spring to mind. In addition, most of the members of this imagined group of “Southern” countries are located north of the equator. Furthermore, nations of the “South” are assumed to share uniform contexts. This view attributes common paths and socioeconomic profiles to nations such as Afghanistan, Burundi, and Chile, which is completely illogical from a social science analysis perspective. Finally, the term “countries of the South” obliterates distinctions within these countries arising from socioeconomic disparities between categories such as urban centres and rural areas.

In this article, the use of the term “South” is based on the desire to simplify terminology and allow for a critical examination of the concept explored in this book.

A New South-South Cooperation?

The rise of regional economic and political players such as Brazil, China, India and Turkey, now known as “emerging powers,” may create the misconception that SSC is a recent

¹ For privacy reasons, the names of interviewees, their organizations, countries of origin, and countries of work or statistical study will remain confidential.

phenomenon. Some of these regional “emerging” powers actually are becoming the forces behind a growing and highly visible regional solidarity through platform such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), the IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) or the Next Eleven groups (Follér 2010:199-200). It is true that the current prominence of SSC is linked to the growing impact of these “emerging” powers, but it must be kept in mind that the foundations of SSC are in fact much older. In reality, SSC is neither new nor a twenty-first century innovation.

In 1955, a group of nations meeting in Bandung founded what was to become the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), laying the foundation for cooperative exchange among countries of what was then known as the Third World. Although not formally defined, this cooperation was planned as a relationship of mutual respect and common endeavour among partners with shared goals.² SSC was then commonly perceived as an innovation in relations between nations, but it is worth noting that this cooperation was conducted through multilateral institutions, notably the United Nations (UN), which initially facilitated North-South cooperation but also allowed for criticism of colonialism (Hansen 1975). During this period, SSC was built into decolonization projects managed by various UN agencies. In 1974, for example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) set up a special South-South cooperation unit (SU-SSC). Over the years, the unit has supported technical cooperation by providing funds for feasibility studies and facilitating projects (Machiori Buss & Ferreira 2010:92). Today, this unit continues to oversee numerous projects, providing financial, institutional and technological support based on the triangular cooperation model (UNDP 2012). For instance, in the recent years, Japan contributed to the Coalition for African Rice Development (CARD), a fund dedicated to research on the possible implementation of an African-Asian partnership to advise and transfer skills in matters of rice cultivation. Also recently, the Global Environment Fund allocated funding to research on biodiversity information and knowledge about agro-diversity.

Multilateral institutions continue to define principles of SSC. At a high-level UN SSC conference in Nairobi in 2009, delegates agreed on a definition of SSC based on the one outlined by John F. E. Ohiorhenuan and Amitav Rath (2000):

South-South cooperation is a common endeavour of peoples and countries of the South, born out of shared experiences and sympathies, based on their common objectives and solidarity, and guided by, inter alia, the principles of respect for national sovereignty and ownership, free from any conditionalities. South-South cooperation should not be seen as official development assistance. It is a partnership among equals based on solidarity. (ONU 2011:7)

As this definition adopted in 2009 illustrates, SSC is attempting to emerge as a remedy for the many macro-structural pitfalls associated with North-South relations. It has been

2 See the statements from the Summits of Heads of State or Governments of Non-aligned Countries: Belgrade, September 1961; Cairo, October 1964; Lusaka, September 1970.

conceived, structured and practiced with a view to rising above the difficulties inherent in aid from “Northern” countries, or even more radically, resisting imperialism and colonization. Some of these patterns include lingering practices such as the strings attached to aid requiring beneficiary countries to use suppliers from donor countries (Hickling-Hudson 2004:308). The SSC conceived and promoted by multilateral institutions would be conducted in a respectful way among nations with similar colonial experiences and equal access to political and economic decision-making platforms, and would facilitate breaking the chains of dependence on western colonial powers.

In actual fact, SSC has complemented most of the North-South cooperation rapport between the richest and poorest nations of the twenty-first century. According to some, SSC may contribute to political and economic stability but it also allows nations with similar trajectories to unite around common objectives (Abdelkader 2003:718-719). But, SSC has not replaced the North-South dynamic. The research this article stems from has also observed that many joint initiatives have operated outside the hopes of the empowerment of the NAM, its political will and formal framework. Unregulated, informal endeavours are generated by ad hoc partnerships that are not necessarily shaped in the spirit of the ideals outlined above.

South-South Technical Cooperation

SSC is not a recent phenomenon, nor is technical cooperation a new component of relations among countries of “the South” or technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC). In this article, technical cooperation designates exchanges of applied scientific knowledge, and skills or improvements in techniques for reflecting, handling, using, developing or transforming anything from the material environment, communities and methodologies to organizations and social institutions. Consequently, the definition of South-South technical cooperation in this article adopts and encompasses a disparate ensemble of realms and players. The diversity of SSC is as broad as the aspirations, economies, and political systems of the countries where it occurs. It involves government players, multilateral agencies, civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, unions, media, and the education sector. These stakeholders cooperate on projects across fields of industry and trade, ranging from finance, banking investment, agriculture and health to education (UN 2011:3-4). Although the technical sphere may appear incongruous with political, economic or even ideological concerns, techniques and, even more clearly, their material dimension, technology, are in fact closely linked to these realms. Techniques and technology are inseparable from societal patterns, ethos, and ultimately, ideology. The *raison d'être* of SSC remains to support economic growth, scientific research or improvements to living conditions. It parallels the dominant paradigm's view of the close bonds linking the key ingredients of economic prosperity: techniques, science and industry. This economic prosperity is then expected to generate sustainable, peaceful relations among cooperating regions (McEwan & Mawdsley 2012; Mukherjee 2012). If regional technical cooperation could be seen as a way of developing global competitive advantages, South-South technical cooperation also offers a way to envisage a world which does not revolve around “the North” and therefore weakens its superiority in technique, science and industry.

The components of South-South technical cooperation are bilateral financial assistance, the sending of advisors, training, loans, and material lending or purchase. But it also includes sharing experiences and industrial, technological and organizational know-how and procedures. For instance, in the 1990s the Food and Agriculture Organization supported an Asian Pacific collaborative network which shared knowledge and developed research on cotton. In the 2000s, China has increased its technical cooperation with Africa by sending agro-technicians, training local farmers on land management, cattle breeding, and food security. Thailand has helped training Egyptian technicians in matters of fish aquaculture. South Korea has dispatched experts and provided technical assistance to carry out a potato planting project in Algeria and supported sericulture in Tunisia. Although it holds strong potential as an alternative model of development, it can be contended that SSC is using the same sources of Western knowledge and sharing the same objectives as mainstream liberal industrial development which led “the North” to world domination.

SSC in Statistics

This article argues that a close look at SSC in the realm of statistics opens a window on endeavours that lie at the very heart of determining priorities and targets for change. To investigate the production, analysis and dissemination of statistics is to witness the processes used to achieve a vision of the world through its technical dimensions (della Faille 2011b; della Faille 2013). Techniques and technology are never neutral; they are infused with models of society and ideologies. In statistics, the choice to conduct a survey or census or to collect administrative data – not to mention their form, methodology, and data usage and analysis –encapsulate revealing elements of the ideologies that consistently shape them. For example, when the World Bank is supporting surveys on small enterprises, it does so in a way that reflects the institution’s views on social relations. Ultimately, its endorsement and its prestige provide such survey with arguments of authority and reinforce market ideology. When a national statistical office in “the South” has to implement a census, the questions will be decided, mostly, based on the country’s or the leader’s belief system. As it has been reported to us during our research, it is the case of the repeated resistance of many Muslim countries to include considerations for same-sex relationships in their census and national surveys. For some “Southern” countries, producing statistics involve struggles – often passive, restrained or disguised under other objectives – to challenge calculation methods or the components of international comparison indexes. Given that data and their availability involve major resource utilization and financial transfers in the form of loans or development assistance, the stakes can be high. This is particularly true in the case of monitoring the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Statistics appears, among the main fields of technical cooperation, to be an underdeveloped field of SSC. This may be precisely because it is bound by international comparisons. SSC in statistics is supported by the leading multilateral agencies. The World Bank, for example, created the Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building, which offers funding, seminars and workshops for data and statistics collection projects. However, the research on which this

article is based revealed resistance to the standards, methods and deadlines imposed by multilateral agencies. Many participants in the research feel that the workload generated by requests from the international system is too heavy. In their view, there is too much data to produce or provide given the local capacity to respond appropriately. A demographer working at the headquarters of a United Nations agency recognizes that “building statistical capacity is difficult, and we do not help when we set too many tight deadlines.” Alternative methodologies and comparative indexes are also emerging (Bend 2007:82-84).³ These new projects are seeking support within increasing SSC for exchanging specialized skills, training, experience and computer equipment (Paris21 2008:1). Nevertheless, cooperation of this kind remains, to this day, relatively rare. This is probably due to the high cost and the complexity of the operation. In addition, it requires political unison on goals and means on topics that are not the most urging matters of international relations between countries of “the South”. One can also hypothesize that such cooperation would send a message most multilateral organizations would be uncomfortable with. Alternative methodologies could antagonize major funding sources more than what countries of “the South” are currently ready for.

Cases of SSC in the Field of Statistics

Following the introduction to SSC in statistics, this section presents a few examples. Rather than providing an extensive list, we will consider some thumbnail sketches of current SSC projects in this domain. Many of the examples provided here are just emerging. Their evaluation is made difficult by the lack of independent sources that are publicly available thorough documentation. Social statistics are still mainly produced by countries for which the data and the process of its production are almost state secrets. Additionally, studies from social scientists assessing the effectiveness of SSC in the field of statistics are very scarce.

The current poster project in this sector is perhaps the cooperation between Brazil and Lusophone Africa. For the past few years, Brazil has been providing assistance to African nations conducting censuses of their populations, making it a forerunner in SSC and a leader in statistical cooperation. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE - *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*) has led these efforts, thanks to its 1980 goal of nurturing SSC (UNFPA 2012). It has focussed on sharing methodological and material tools. In its 2010 census, for example, Cape Verde took advantage of this cooperation with Brazil, which included the loan of personal digital assistants (PDA), financed by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). These handheld computer devices enabled field workers to complete questionnaires more quickly, and provided a geographic information system for locating data. This, then, was the material component of this exchange. As for the methodological dimension, the PDAs allowed workers to verify the conformity of

³ Several African and Asian countries have recently voiced criticism of the elements making up indexes such as the Human Development Index (HDI). Participants in the study this article is partly based on indicated that there is a need for recognition that the work of certain countries is not being accurately measured by the HDI. They maintain that the HDI reflects well on resource-rich nations such as Saudi Arabia or on tax havens, but poorly on countries that make “huge efforts.” In addition, the HDI does include some dynamic elements, but it still does not accurately reflect the scale of the work accomplished.

questionnaire responses in real time, while conducting the census. The success of this project led to requests for Brazil's methodological and material expertise from several countries. Senegal, for example, has been lent several thousand PDAs and the accompanying software for the census it has since then conducted (UNFPA 2012).

Elsewhere in Africa, Rwanda is sharing its experience in the funding of statistical technique improvement programs with Burundi, in collaboration with the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (Paris21), under an initiative co-sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank. Swaziland and Uganda have also set up a statistical information exchange network (Paris21 2011:8-9). Meanwhile, Bénin and the Democratic Republic of Congo have conducted program evaluations in Burundi, the Republic of Congo and Guinea (Paris21 2012:18-19). So far, very few elements of evaluation have transpired from these cooperation efforts. It is too soon to reflect on the results and the challenges met.

Currently, one of the most ambitious endeavours is the African Charter on Statistics. With the support of the World Bank and other multilateral agencies, this project fosters the sharing of statistical experience among members (World Bank 2013). It nurtures partnership among African Union members for cooperation and coordination in statistical endeavours within African states to ensure the quality and coherence of African statistics (African Union 2009:10-11). In another continental cooperation initiative, the National Statistical Office of Malawi sent experts to Liberia to assist with establishing new statistical policies, to Mozambique to assess progress with the national statistics development strategy, and to Ethiopia to share experience in establishing institutional statistical structures (Paris21 2012:14-15). These missions resulted in recommendations and helped the visited countries to better implement their national strategies for the development of statistics.

The treaty of Abidjan on statistics signed in December 1993 by 14 African states now encompasses 19 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, mostly from the Francophonie (Round 2012). This treaty generated Afristat, which receives financial management assistance from the *Agence française de développement* (AFD, French Development Agency) and aims to share knowledge and methodologies for capacity building in member countries (Balepa 2006). Afristat is working, through centralized training, methods and technologies, to integrate these countries into a common system (Azouvi 2001:342). It is also supporting the opening of training schools in Africa. In the words of one participant in our investigation, this work is essential to "avoid the need for countries to be continually assisted by foreign experts." Since its inception, Afristat has made notable progresses helping foster regional expertise and cooperation in the implementation of national strategies. But it has an important challenge. Afristat has yet to secure the needed recurring funding from its member countries to stop relying on multilateral or "Northern" aid.

In Asia, cooperation initiatives mirror those growing in Africa. Some members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), for example, are working together in development statistics production and analysis. The Singapore Department of Statistics

shares its official statistics with the Asian Development Bank, the Department of Statistics of Malaysia and several other agencies (Asian Development Bank 2002). By doing so, Singapore is helping to provide examples but also sources for data comparison. It also offers seminars and workshops in collaboration with multilateral entities such as the UN, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the OECD. Moreover, Singapore invites employees of statistical departments of other Asian nations to its events for sharing knowledge in economics, entrepreneurial surveys, statistical data banks, social and demographic statistics and statistical information technology (Statistics Singapore 2009:10-11). In that sense, Singapore has played a significant role in facilitating regional integration and statistical capacity building. But the role of regional cooperation between ASEAN countries in matters of statistics has still to be independently assessed.

In Central America, the Central-American Statistical Commission for the Central-American Integration System (CentroEstad - *Comisión Centroamericana de Estadística del Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana*) was created in 2003. This Commission's mandate is to facilitate the production, analysis and dissemination of statistics, plan for a regional strategy for statistics, and nurture regional integration (Vaglio Munoz 2011:9). But more than ten years after its creation, its effectiveness in fostering regional cooperation is still thin. Central American countries are mostly relying on bilateral technical assistance from North America and Europe. Meanwhile, in the Arab world, ArabStat, a regional cooperation body, is pursuing similar objectives, with the support of the OECD, the World Bank and the UNDP (OECD-MENA 2008). Only formally launched in 2013, after several years in the making, it is too early to assess its success.

SSC Viewed by Its Practitioners

If the previous outline of current examples of SSC in the realm of statistics is essentially based on information from the public domain, this current section presents some results of a sociological study on the international statistical system. During the multi-country research this article stems from, over thirty-five statisticians working in the field of social statistics were interviewed. This research focused on the viewpoints of the interviewees and their representations of the challenges in the production, analysis and dissemination of social statistics for development. This section attempts to render the international statistical system as it is experienced by its practitioners. The perceptions of the participants of this research are, for the most part, somewhat critical of the current praxis of international collaborations in the field of statistics for development purposes. The participants criticized both multilateral agencies and the current state of SSC.

The interviewees raised numerous problems with the current international system used to produce, analyze, and disseminate social statistics. One of the main obstacles identified is the fact that surveys, censuses and administrative data are shaped in a context that has generated approaches and methodologies which can be partially or totally foreign to the concerns of "Southern" countries. For example, specific conditions regarding the generation and origin of statistics have apparently been imposed across this international system, which has created its

own goals that may be somewhat remote, or even appear abstract to the issues of “Southern peoples.” One participant confided that the targets of these comparisons are much more useful to governments and multilateral agencies than to citizens. Another participant stated that UN agencies have forcibly introduced a virtually inescapable standardization across the board. It includes indicators and approaches that will reflect the worldviews and methodologies of the UN regimen for a long time. Many of our respondents felt that in the medium term, further SSC as a tool to counter this domination will be a futile effort. If desirable, SSC will not be able to radically challenge the system. Some participants feel that the system is too centered around “Northern” expertise and concerns that global disparity is embedded in many aspects of it. For example, many units of measurement and international comparison reflect an idealized nuclear family household and are biased towards middle class. Both of which are indicative of a biased and limited vision of society.

In addition, some respondents perceive the fact that multilateral agencies do not adhere to the transparency rules that they advocate, constitutes a serious problem and casts doubt on the legitimacy of many of these agencies’ rules. For example, one respondent recounted that some countries of “the South” are surprised, after supplying data to multilateral agencies, by the resulting figures they find in international summaries. When the “Southern” development agencies or governments request clarification or further details on these calculations, they often face major difficulties in obtaining them. The answer they are given is that the methodology is already well detailed. According to another participant attempting to explain this situation, he felt that the source of this problem is the fact that many indicators contain estimated data, which are beyond the control of “Southern” governments and depend on the standards of international comparisons.

One of the participants indicated that the design of surveys and of some census content has been turned over to agencies outside these countries, supposedly for reasons of efficiency. Another participant claimed that much of the content of the national surveys is actually developed by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the UNDP, purportedly for cost-reduction reasons. But in the end, it is felt that this intrusion exerts subtle control over governments of “Southern” countries. Still another participant observed that when bilateral development agencies such as the United States Agency for Development (USAID) and Department for International Development (DFID) provide financial support for capacity building in countries of “the South,” they enlist multilateral agencies as watchdogs to keep an eye on practices and progress in these countries. These multilateral agencies in fact become proxies for the United States and the United Kingdom for evaluating the disbursement of funding.

Another participant explained that some multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank, offer free training and access to software. But this training and software is designed for needs that reflect the ethos of these agencies. In other words, they come with strings attached. This, observes one participant, causes administrative problems, since so many requests are premised on the assumption that countries have strong centralized governments which produce and provide access to data on multiple socio-economic criteria at play throughout the

country. Yet many “Southern” countries are very much decentralized. Many are in fact federations or confederations of autonomous entities which produce their own administrative data and surveys according to their own needs and specificities. Others have a central government structure, but have ministries working in quasi isolation. This decentralization makes it very difficult for these countries to meet the requirements of multilateral agencies for standardized, coordinated national figures. There seems to be a paradox in the fact that the decentralization has been pushed by multilateral agencies. Yet, they appear to prefer data produced by highly centralized governments.

One of the participants in our study informed us that in his work, in a “Southern” country, his government agency is heavily pressured to meet deadlines for projects involving statistical input to international comparisons. This participant’s observation concurs with others’ perception of data collection processes. Data collection has been described to occur in an environment of tension between the statistical institutions of these countries and multilateral agencies. One figure that was given during this research illustrates the degree of pressure applied to these institutions. One participant asserted that in one West African nation, 80%-90% of the statistics currently generated for international comparison purposes is dependent on bilateral or multilateral funding. This, according to another participant, explains why these countries try very hard to meet international norms, but also feel they are betraying the “social reality” of their countries. As represented by some of its actors, the current system appears, with its co-dependences and regulations, to leave no room for dissidence or for any real, in-depth renewal through SSC.

Nevertheless, study participants all acknowledged that “Southern” countries with recognized expertise in the field of statistics are in the process of spontaneously building an interregional support and training network. This work is happening in both Africa, as exemplified by Afristat, and in Southeast Asia, as it is the case with ASEANstats. These modest and often one-time projects such as those outlined above feature knowledge and skill sharing that occurs in alternative ways. In one participant’s words, “It’s easier to talk to our peers, and easier to accept advice from a country of the South, since our exchanges have no colonial overtones.”

Many participants agreed that, in order to address the problems with the international system that they raised, alliances of “Southern” countries could offer some equilibrium, or at least raise awareness of these difficulties and grievances. It has been suggested that alliances could, for instance, be based on geography, faith, language, or similarities in economic trajectories. It seems that SSC does have potential, then, to create adequate critical mass that would lead to renewal of existing approaches and methods. The outcome of such alliance should offer, to its partners, real possibilities to challenge current methodological and political approaches to the measure of development issues. Yet, some participants do not believe that SSC will generate a review of the major surveys or the operating procedures for international comparisons. In their view, the key development indicators will require adjustment to reflect the specific needs of certain emerging regional groups, but they agreed that they themselves would describe the core values of some large-scale synergetic projects

such as the MDGs, education, poverty reduction – as universal. Few countries, they say, really oppose statistical measurement of these parameters. One of these participants viewed the felt universality of these core values as a reason to refute any accusation of ethnocentricity in the measurement of these social aspects of development.

Other participants, however, observed a desire to challenge certain components and measurements within these synergetic projects. One of them said that “Southern” countries feel they cannot afford to stand alone, and must eventually create alternative indicators. These countries need to seek alliances, consensus and potential compromises, all of which work against truly alternative initiatives. In other words, where there might be strength in numbers, partnerships tend to dilute creative, original ventures. In the words of this participant, there is a feeling that large alliances will not be effective to make radical decisions. Although he confirmed that critical discussions about indicators were taking place, another participant felt that these discussions are by no means restricted to “Southern” countries. Rather, they are replicas of those taking place in Western Europe and North America. This movement for change is thus not an exclusively “Southern” initiative. This is the case for instance of the Happy Planet Index created by a British think tank as an alternative to the Gross Domestic Product (Norberg 2010).

North-South bilateral support for SSC comes with strict conditions attached. And frequently, as told in the terms of the participants in this research, funders or “Northern” national statistics bodies exhibit colonial attitudes toward the “Southern” countries that receive their assistance for SSC projects. Commenting on this attitude, one participant explained that some bilateral development agencies promote the SSC projects they support in potentially troubling ways. In one example, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) responded to a group of African countries requesting funding for a SSC project by asking them to submit a business model that must include a request for a financial contribution from countries which were to receive expertise from another “Southern” country. This requirement flies in the face of the spirit of the proposed project.

Our study participants opened up to us about the multi-layered relationship between “Southern” countries and the international system. This complexity would make any cooperation initiative restricted to “Southern” nations that would bypass North-South ties very difficult, if not impossible. Among other things, said one of our participants, national statistics offices of “Southern” nations have been twinned with “Northern” counterparts for a long time. Given these conditions, a system that could circumvent these bilateral or multilateral working relationships appears unthinkable. And yet, as another participant indicated, there is resentment of certain policies and practices. This lead to questioning the role SSC will play in challenging the international system. The following section presents a projection of some of the upcoming challenges that SSC in the field of social statistics might meet.

Some Critical Thoughts on SSC

This research and analysis of South-South technical, and more specifically, development statistics cooperation offers a vantage point for critical reflection on current and future perspectives for “Southern” cooperation.

There are currently numerous signs leading one to believe that SSC has a place in a world where geopolitics is changing. Although it is not, as the participants in this research have demonstrated, a new challenge to North-South relations, it seems to hold unprecedented promise. Or is this type of cooperation simply more conspicuous? Is it having an increasingly important impact on interactions among nations, regions and societies in the global arena?

Social scientists can help to create a semblance of order that transcends the diversity of South-South exchange and its many approaches. The first step is to acknowledge that there is not just one, but many SSC models. The next is to recognize that the regional, political, and economic unity that is supposedly inherent in SSC does not necessarily exist. And when it does exist, this ostensible unity is usually temporary. The question is: does this “unity” obscure the contradictions and discrepancies between “Southern” countries? SSC views both China and Paraguay as “Southern” countries, when in fact their social, political, and economic realities are different. China is becoming a global power. The country has important access to international political platforms and a significant weight on economic globalization. Paraguay on the other hand, is a landlocked country with a population shy of seven million. Its economy relies mostly on the neighbouring powers of Americas’ Southern cone (Santander 2009:14). “Southern” cooperation projects may not necessarily share common objectives. There are, for instance, legitimate concerns about China’s intentions in Africa. But there are also ad hoc projects which are less likely to replicate patterns of domination. For instance, the Philippines is currently helping Myanmar and North Korea build their statistical capacity and assisting them with their census. It must be acknowledged that some cooperation projects are designed for empowerment, others are ad hoc assistance initiatives, and still others replicate patterns of domination.

The international community invested great hopes in the potential of SSC for the development of “Southern” countries. And yet, there is considerable scepticism about this potential (Iturre & Amado Mendez 2010; Jenkins 2012; Schoeman 2011). There has been criticism of the implementation and outcomes of this form of cooperation. Some authors have spoken of emerging patterns of domination by regional powers within South-South development cooperation. A number of “emerging” economic powers such as China are, in fact, currently directing several SSC projects which they claim are motivated by their desire for a harmonious world order based on nation-state sovereignty and mutual benefits (DeHart 2012:1372). Contrary to those claims, many observers have denounced the increasingly prominent role that China is playing in the national affairs of several African countries (Alden 2005; Brautigham 2009). Domination patterns may in fact be as much a part of SSC exchanges as they are in their North-South counterparts (DeHart 2012:1373). There is, then, a real possibility that technical cooperation is an alternate control method: the acceptance of a standard or a technique that creates potentially long-term dependency. Standards or techniques rely on procedures and equipment which must be updated according to a central

authority and expertise. With exigencies of compliance comes a non-egalitarian relationship with differential statuses.

Other authors even question the capacity of “Southern” states to create and maintain effective cooperation partnerships with other states due to institutional deficiencies. They point out that North-South cooperation functions thanks to years invested in building structures to manage international assistance and ensure its efficiency (OECD 2011). This bilateral and multilateral infrastructure connects governments, manages project communications and logistics, and adapts projects to the appropriate context. Still others suggest that current SSC is essentially providing moral support (Simplicio 2010). Under this hypothesis, SSC features a “no strings attached” approach, other than the specific commitments for each individual project. This contrasts to SSC’s North-South counterpart, which is based on contractual and legal obligations. But doesn’t this perspective idealize the international system? Are they not expressions of a kind of an inertia-tinged fear of change? Surely the twentieth-century world and its global power structures are now being challenged.

Technical exchange in South-South development cooperation does risk replicating the skewed aid relationships of the North-South model (Lemperi  re 1983:742-743). Would the solution not be to ensure that the South-South model incorporates mutual learning as a condition for its success? Let us recognize that two imperatives are fundamental if SSC is to fulfill hopes of empowerment and become the alternative that avoids duplicating the flaws of the North-South paradigm. Firstly, “developing” and emerging countries must be able to assist their peers. Secondly, they need to build reciprocal learning exchanges that foster mutual cooperation (Andrade 2009).

SSC is attempting to standardize itself with the support of multilateral agencies, creating triangular cooperation to assist states in regularizing their aid policies and developing their cooperation agencies (Andrade 2009). Many SSC initiatives are financed and monitored by multilateral bodies such as the UN, OECD, IMF and the World Bank. But this study has shown that that this framework jeopardizes empowerment. The funding, from these agencies, comes with predetermined conditions and standards that inhibit the scope of the cooperative rapport among “Southern” countries. While some voices claim with embarrassing paternalism that “Southern” countries are unable to set up cooperation programs without the benefit of the venerable experience of multilateral agencies, we reject this paternalistic thinking. We would tend more towards creating new structures for regulating and assessing SSC.

The analysis of these questions in development statistics has in fact been an opportunity to reflect on broader issues. We have come to the conclusion that a new model will still take a considerable amount of time to create – ten years or possibly more. South-South development cooperation is still enmeshed in a web of policies and practices that, in the end, perpetuate skewed relationships. Despite the unmet goals of early SSC to correct the flaws of the North-South model that are so damaging to “Southern” nations, it appears that SSC may still be an adjunct to that model. Could SSC in development statistics offer fertile ground for the

emergence of new regional powers and cooperation networks among so-called developing nations? The field of statistics does hold real potential, but it is unclear whether this type of cooperation actually offers a serious critique of North-South relations.

It must be recognized that SSC does not aim only at empowerment. It appears to us that it is not, as currently practised, in a position to challenge the global statistics regime and its attendant ideological flaws and obstacles to universalism. In our view, any serious attempt to promote independence, autonomy or a challenge to global inequality must include a radical critique of the system that produces and supports statistics and international comparisons. Without it, SSC in development statistics holds little hope for empowerment.

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