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Sharing Human Rights Policies through South-South Cooperation*

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◆ Presentation

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The practice of South-South Cooperation for the purpose of policy transfer has achieved great political interest and priority in recent years. However, some public policies have had greater success than others in getting transferred across countries of the geopo-

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◆ KEYWORDS

- South-South Cooperation

- Human Rights

- Policy Transfer

- Global South

- Brazil

litical South. In this framework, this is a comparative study of five South-South cooperation initiatives where Brazil tried to share (or transfer) its human rights policy experiences with other developing countries. The study was centered on one specific case: the failed cooperation attempt between Brazil and Guinea Bissau in the field of Human Rights Education. The idea was to better understand the variables that work as either barriers or as enablers to the sharing of human rights policies in a context of cooperation between governments of the South.

Five cases were compared where Brazil has cooperated with Haiti, Cuba, El Salvador and Guinea Bissau. Topics of cooperation included the promotion of the rights of people with disability (Haiti), of the LGBT population (Cuba), of children and adolescents (El Salvador), as well as the promotion of policies for human rights education and to assure the right to a birth certificate (Guinea Bissau).



Data collection involved interviews with 22 actors across the five countries, who were government officials, staff members of international organizations, consultants, and scholars. Project documents and administrative records were also analyzed. Attention was paid to the specific context of each case study,




particularly to the characteristics of the policy being transferred, to the role played by international organizations and by international human rights norms.

The study started out with the hypothesis that the characteristics of the policy being transferred matters and that does not necessarily have to do with the policy's impact or success. In particular, the study worked with the hypothesis that simple policies (simple in terms of implementation) may get more easily transferred between countries than complex policies.

✚ Political analysis

Human rights south-south cooperation initiatives developed by the Workers Party governments in Brazil were significantly marked by the perception that Brazilian public policies have emerged out of strong social pressure and mobilization and that it was important to create official communication channels between government and civil society in order to make





policies move forward. However, the participatory content of Brazilian policy experiences make them less appealing or interesting to partner governments of the South. Naturally, incumbents of the South are looking for solutions that will strengthen their political standing, rather than institutional changes that will have them share decision-making power with civil society. Even in Brazil, social participation is highly questioned as a method of government.

On the other hand, another characteristic of Brazilian human rights policies has been rather appealing: inter-sector coordination. Decision-makers of the South have been much more interested in this feature, as it empowers them, allowing them to “command” and oversee part of the work done by the several institutions that somehow have a bearing on the protection and promotion of human rights.

However, it should be noted that, with the current political and economic instability in Brazil, there is great chance that the opportunities and resources for the promotion of South-South cooperation in human rights may become further scarce. It is possible that a golden age may be over and that future south-south cooperation promoted by Brazil in the field of human rights may become more limited. Hence, it is crucial to look back in order to analyze past experiences.

One may say that Brazilian south-south cooperation reached its political peak during Lula's two terms and went through an inertial phase during Rousseff's first term, with the implementation of many projects that had been negotiated by the previous administration. Hence, the analysis herein presented could be a starting point for discussion and learning for future initiatives, as there will be an increasing need for priority-setting and the adoption of strategies that could raise the chance that south-south cooperation projects will lead to positive change.

* Proposals

Short-term proposals:

To international organizations and traditional donors:

To concentrate efforts in the following actions and roles for the promotion of South-South cooperation:

- i) To play the role of animators and enthusiasts of south-south cooperation, avoiding that involved actors may demobilize in the face of implementation challenges;

ii) To identify interesting experiences that may be shared through south-south cooperation;

iii) To follow-up on existing or concluded projects, hence contributing to the sustainability of achieved results;

iv) To act as a bridge between different institutions of the South, with a view to promoting dialogue and exchange between them;

v) To identify situations where the international organization or donor might represent a barrier or compete with south-south cooperation initiatives.

To Brazil:

i) To explicitly embrace the political choice for sharing policy experiences that involve social participation, including in the field of human rights;

ii) To incorporate social participation into the political discourse around South-South cooperation, which implies acknowledging its importance for the success of Brazilian public policies;

iii) To recognize the challenges that are likely to be faced in South-South cooperation projects that involve the sharing of social participation experiences;



iv) To develop strategies for the active persuasion of partner countries in the South regarding the importance of social participation for an inclusive and democratic development. Leaders of partner countries may come to recognize the value of social participation and how their own interests can be met by participatory practices.

To other countries of the South:

i) To identify characteristics that may be peculiar to policy experiences that will be shared through south-south cooperation and to analyze whether those features will empower decision-makers in the country that will learn from the policy;

ii) Whereas there is a traditional focus on the results that a policy has produced in country A, it is suggested here that one should also look whether that policy will be of interest of local actors in country B.

Long-term proposals:

To Brazil:

To resolve a paradox that is similar to that between the diplomatic principles of solidarity



and non-interference: how to raise the levels of social participation in countries of the South without interfering in their domestic affairs?

To Brazil and other international actors involved in the promotion of south-south cooperation:

- i) If south-south cooperation should be about bringing change and social justice to countries of the South, it should be embraced and owned by the local actors that are able to produce such change;
- ii) Follow-up, presence and “patience” are found to be equally part of positive south-south cooperation experiences which, in transferring genuine experiences conceived in the South, are able to produce transformation and development.



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