

Toward a Common Standard for Aid Transparency: Discourses of Global Citizenship Surrounding the BRICS

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The impact of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and other emerging economies on the field of international development has seen traditional donor nations wrestle with fundamental shifts in the geometry and makeup of the donor community. This has resulted in asymmetrical power relations in organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) finding new modes of expression, as the one-way flows of cultural imperialism have given way to the multidirectional uncertainties of globalization. We question how the traditional aid donor community has taken this new geometry into account using discourses surrounding South-South cooperation as a focal point for analysis. The analysis engages with evolving discourses of indifference, skepticism, fear, integration, and conciliation, revealing complex tensions between the OECD's Development Assistance Committee membership, BRICS, and the motivations for aid effectiveness debates.

Keywords: aid effectiveness, South-South cooperation, OECD, BRICS

Introduction

In keeping with the recognition of BRICS nations—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—as global actors, we explore how the traditional aid donor community conceptualizes the ways these actors participate in international development. Development issues concern not only strategic intervention within nations and communities but a complex exchange of resources across nations through bilateral foreign aid and multilateral contributions to United Nations agencies. This exchange of resources takes place within geopolitical geometries that perpetuate discourses surrounding different approaches to

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social change. The contribution national governments make to development in countries other than their own helps to create particular identities about themselves in relation to their sense of citizenship in a global community. The case of BRICS nations complicates traditional geometries of development in which a select few wealthy Northern, Western countries dominate development agendas.

Understanding the importance of BRICS and other bilateral agencies beyond the scope of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) builds on an emerging conceptualization of development geometry (Shah & Wilkins, 2004). Geometries of development refer to conceptualizations of development practices that configure actors and resources in structural arrangements that not only articulate transfers of assets but demonstrate ideological assumptions about who deserves what, and in what interests donors allocate resources to recipients. Furthermore, they underscore the possibility of challenges to accepted traditions and modalities of aid donorship tied to Western behavior, for which the behavior of BRICS requires new terminologies and interpretative frameworks.

An emerging geometry is set against a previously dominant Cold War articulation of development that juxtaposed North and South, East and West, and First and Third Worlds as conventional wisdom. In Cold War-era development circles, the world was neatly divided along political (communism in East vs. democracy in West), economic (industrialized North vs. agricultural South), cultural (modern vs. traditional), and hierarchical (First = West; Second = East, and Third = South) lines.

At the time this framework emerged, the idea that development could be strategically planned and stimulated was notable for shifting away from the concept of intransitive social change (Rist, 1997). Underdevelopment became seen as a traditional stage from which an inevitable, linear process would lead toward national economic growth. This development--underdevelopment continuum promoted the idea that wealthy countries were engaged in humanitarian missions rather than colonization or imperialism.

Many of these basic principles still serve as the foundations for development practice. However, a critical distinction in current conceptualizations moves us away from the (Northern) West-to-rest geometry of development, with the rise of BRICS not only in the global economy but also as significant actors in development work. The interests of domestic elites in the global South can be quite similar to those of policy makers in the so-called North. However, the practices through which regionally powerful Southern nations conduct international development can be so radically different from OECD prescriptions that an entirely new terminology is required.

Many critics have pointed to the ethnocentrism inherent in the dominant geography that highlights "Third World development" (Escobar, 1995; Mohanty, 1991). The validity of these First, Second, and Third World, or North-South categorizations are indeed in question given a rapidly shifting structure of global political-economic contexts involving changing vectors of political and economic dominance among nations and other spatial actors, the strengthening of regional institutions and identities, the globalization of economic and communication systems, and the privatization of industries.

Although attention has been paid to the diversity within recipient communities in ways that problematize assumptions about the development process, little recognition has been given to the distinctions across donors, who are typically assumed to represent one monolithic approach to development work. Indeed, a major focus of this study is upon a series of debates that sought to further homogenize the donor community. Building on Nederveen Pieterse's (2001) recognition of development as a heterogeneous rather than unified approach, we believe that understanding development practice necessitates opening up recognition to include an increasingly diverse set of donors (Wilkins, 2003, 2005). Recognizing diversity among donors is not meant to suggest that power has become decentralized within the development industry, but rather to articulate newer points of negotiation within that power elite.

Instead of focusing on a geometry that limits development categories to national settings within North/South and East/West references, we advocate visions of development that focus on access to resources and expertise, seen broadly as a capacity to activate power through economic, political, social, and cultural means. Discussions of social, cultural, and other forms of capital emphasize that access to valuable resources is mediated by one's connection to certain sociopolitical groups, whether they be formal institutions or informal configurations, according to class, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other social dimensions. This means that it is imperative that we consider BRICS and other emerging actors as critical agencies in development work.

The impact of BRICS and other emerging economies on the field of international development coincided with efforts by traditional OECD donor nations to increase their collaboration over aid funding. Since the first High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Rome in 2003, attempts to create an encompassing "common standard" for aid reporting have wrestled with fundamental shifts in the geometry and makeup of the donor community. In this context, discourse matters. For example, these debates have seen the asymmetrical power relations engendered in organizations such as the OECD finding new modes of expression; aid "recipients" are now "partners," and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) have earned a seat around the negotiating table. The one-way flows of cultural imperialism have given way to the multidirectional uncertainties of globalization on the basis that a proliferation of "boundary-spanning actors" challenge traditional structures (Hocking 2002). This new geometry has opened up to more diverse, more numerous donors, including emerging powers from the South. We question how the OECD community has taken this new geometry into account, using the term South-South cooperation (or SSC), and discourses surrounding its definition and purpose as a focal point for analysis.

Specifically, we question how BRICS have emerged as providers of an alternate donor model in dominant development discourse over the past decade. Has the presence of SSC been articulated as a threat or potential point of collaboration with the OECD donor community? To what extent are new modalities of development recognized and engaged with? Does the Northern aid donor community accept these practices or seek to restructure them within the existing aid architecture? We situate this discourse over time within development discourse on effectiveness in development practice—efforts that have sought to standardize (Northern) donor behavior to establish shared norms for the community between 2003 and 2011, a period that simultaneously witnessed the emergence of BRICS as significant

international development actors in their own right. SSC emerges as an alternate model of development during these negotiations, and we investigate how this has been conceptualized.

Curiously, the term *BRICS* is not used in any of the official documents analyzed here; other terms such as *middle-income countries* (MICs) and *South-South cooperation* frame the main issues related to the emerging economies. Therefore, it is important to note that official discourse surrounding these actors is often muted, indirect, and rarely explicit in any criticisms. They represent, in other words, the negotiation of BRICS—and other nontraditional actors'—entry into the OECD aid donor community, and consequently of the conditions of global citizenship established between these new regional powers and the existing Northern powers in the sphere of international development.

Under the framework of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for reducing global poverty, High Level Forums (HLFs) in Rome (2003), Paris (2005), Accra (2008), and Busan (2011) have pursued an aid effectiveness agenda. The High Level Forum promised a radical series of benefits for partner countries, such as transparency over future aid spending, timely updates on programs and their results, clear codes detailing aid by sector, and management trails from donor headquarters via NGOs/CSOs and field offices to national budgets. These aid effectiveness debates gave a voice to the South in relation to their status in the development process, in the sense that the global South should not simply be the target of development, but should be an active partner in development. At the Busan forum in 2011, a “common standard” for aid reporting was finally agreed upon, with the intention to “implement a common, open standard for electronic publication of timely, comprehensive and forward-looking information on resources provided through development co-operation” (Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, 2011, para. 23c). This came at the demand of aid recipient countries, who wanted greater oversight of aid programs, flows, and financing; however, it also met with domestic Northern concerns over the efficacy and transparency of aid expenditure. A significant corollary to the demand for greater transparency and assimilation among the aid donor community was, therefore, the standardization of aid donor practices (Pamment, 2015). It is within this context that the emerging practices of SSC must be considered.

An interesting aspect of this discourse surrounding BRICS nations is their identification as a threat to the new order, which was carefully negotiated during this period. This sees BRICS identified as competition to an emerging global consensus rather than simply benevolent actors sharing the burden of supporting the world's poor. They are competing—undoubtedly, though, without explicit mention in the official documentation—over the influence that aid financing brings. Although the figures for conditional (or “tied”) aid have reduced from 50% at the turn of the 21st century to less than 20%, it is notable that the United States still engages in this practice. Criticisms against tied aid point to inefficiency, corruption, and higher prices. However, the activities of countries such as China in Africa include long-term loans, trade credits by providing laborers and raw materials for building projects, opening schools, and backing exploratory mining for strategic resources (Davies, 2010). This does not necessarily meet the criteria for official development assistance, and it enforces different styles of conditionality, and thus represents a major challenge to the development packages offered within the OECD framework.

Data on the BRICS nations' contributions to the international development community is sketchy, due in part to the refusal of BRICS governments to participate in the OECD-DAC framework. In 2013, DAC member countries channeled US\$59 billion of their official development assistance into multilateral aid organizations, out of total donations of US\$145 billion. The largest non-DAC providers (including the BRICS) together contributed US\$1.2 billion to multilateral aid organizations—a significant increase from previous years, but still a relatively modest sum (OECD-DAC, 2015). China has been the most active of the BRICS in international development and has been a major player in supporting alternative regional investment banks for Asia. Although no formal figures are available, one study suggests that China committed US\$73 billion to international development between 2000 and 2011, of which US\$15 billion was equivalent to official development assistance (Strange, Parks, Tierne, Fuchs, & Dreher, 2015). Such figures suggest that, although the BRICS remain fairly small aid providers in the OECD-DAC-defined sense, they are nonetheless major players in international development, particularly in areas where they can act outside of what the OECD considers to be the norms of the international community.

Greater cooperation within the OECD framework hinges on the notion of a common standard of data formatting when allocating, delivering, and accounting for aid. Multilateral donors, bilateral donors, NGOs, and CSOs have become integrated into this framework, and partner nations such as Ghana, Rwanda, Colombia, and Honduras have acted as pilot countries, opening their own economic planning systems to the same standard. All of this supports the legitimacy of the aid effectiveness agenda at the same time as it standardizes accounting procedures and behavior surrounding aid, including at the level of recipient nation domestic budgeting. Hence, despite the inclusive nature of the negotiations, there remains the sense of the imposition of exogenous standards associated with modernization theory. BRICS are ultimately expected to join the process—and hence lose their perceived advantages as bilateral donors acting in their best interest—or to be crowded out by the attractiveness of a transparent, compliant, and fully compatible bloc of Northern actors and Southern partners.

We chart the rise of the common standard and the evolution of discourse surrounding the South-South cooperation with the BRICS within these processes. Building on a body of theory that begins with cultural imperialism and modernization discourse and has now headed toward accountability and standardization agendas, this essay explores the functions of collaboration and self-interest, cooperation and competitiveness, and standardization and exclusion within aid transparency projects. The formation of national identities and global citizenship is explored through these functions; for example, in the deradicalization of CSO, NGO, and recipient nation transparency movements, in the realignment of OECD members with an extended Northern CSO bloc, and in the formulation of the BRICS as a threat or credible alternative to the established order. By focusing on discourse within key official documents related to the HLF outcomes, this supports a stronger understanding of the geopolitical imaginary surrounding development cooperation.

The analytical framework used in this article focuses on three key themes represented in the evolving discourse. The first is the degree to which SSC is *recognized* in the debates, in the sense of how it is acknowledged, formulated, and explained in the context of the development community. The significance of this theme is in how an emerging disruptive practice is integrated into Northern discourses, with potentially profound consequences for the legitimacy and power of different actors. The second

theme is the ways in which SSC's *roles* are explained. This is important because it articulates SSC as a series of actions based upon resources and expertise, and thus helps to establish the extent to which recognition at the political level is understood as a valid development practice. Finally, this article assesses the theme of *global citizenship*. This complements the other themes by analyzing the ways in which providers of SSC are positioned in the global development order. This analytical framework is then used to further consider the challenges the BRICS have provided to the international development community through SSC practices to better understand the geopolitical imaginaries at work within OECD aid discourse and the position of the BRICS within those imaginaries.

Data Description: The High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness

The First High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF1, held in Rome in 2003) led to a joint declaration by donor institutions and recipient countries promoting the principle of harmonization. The idea was that efforts should be made to harmonize and streamline donor procedures to enhance the role of recipient countries in directing, delivering, and reporting on development assistance, in support of UN Millennium Development Goal 8. This agreement makes no mention of South-South cooperation, BRICS, or of nontraditional donors (OECD-DAC, 2003). However, a DAC document unpacking best practice for implementing the *Rome Declaration on Harmonisation* makes reference to "North-South delegated co-operation," which occurs between DAC donors "and emerging non-DAC donors" (OECD-DAC, 2003, p. 97). Such activities were framed as "delegated," suggesting that the power and agency resided within Northern countries, which permitted Southern actors to deliver limited aid activities on their behalf. As may be expected, discourse surrounding the role of BRICS in development was muted at this point, because there was only limited awareness of South-South cooperation and no real vocabulary to conceptualize these agencies within this group.

The Second High Level Forum (HLF2, held in Paris in 2005) established a road map and a series of commitments developing the principles established at HLF1. These were defined as (1) ensuring that developing countries take ownership of strategies for poverty reduction; (2) aligning the objectives of donors with local strategies; (3) simplifying and harmonizing coordination; (4) establishing a system for measuring results; and (5) establishing mutual accountability (OECD, 2005, 2008b). These goals were to be measured by 12 Indicators of Progress, which were a series of targets to demonstrate their implementation (OECD-DAC Secretariat and World Bank, 2005). Ninety-one countries, 26 multilateral organizations, and 14 civil society organizations endorsed the Paris Declaration, including the BRICS (OECD, 2008b). Documentation from the period demonstrates an awareness of the principle of South-South co-operation, which it considered mainly through terms of the provision of technical support (OECD-DAC, 2005). In this sense, Southern countries could provide operational support to aid delivery on the basis that they had direct experience of implementation as aid recipients. This demonstrates the beginnings of a conceptualization of SSC, but still at a relatively simplistic—and possibly patronizing—level.

The Third High Level Forum (HLF3, held in Accra in 2008) focused on implementation of the Paris Declaration and broadened the stakeholders involved in the agreement to civil society representatives (OECD-DAC, n.d.). Three areas received particular focus: strengthening recipient ownership over

development, building more inclusive partnerships, and results and accountability (OECD, 2008b). Agreement was reached to try to plan aid donations three to five years ahead, for recipient countries to improve their capacities for reporting aid, for donors to base aid on need, and for relaxing restrictions preventing developing countries from choosing from where they buy goods and services. Senior officials from 124 countries, 8 multilateral development banks, and 11 other multilateral institutions were present (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008a). Within these discussions, Accra represents a major shift in discourse toward BRICS.

At this time, chair of the Working Group for Aid Effectiveness, Jan Cedergren, suggested that the aid effectiveness agenda was directly threatened by the BRICS. He argued that Northern donor countries would have to cooperate with one another since the BRICS had the potential "to alter the power relations between donors and recipients." Greater cooperation and integration of DAC budgetary markers would provide services with which BRICS donors could not compete (Swedish Government Offices, 2008). In effect, he branded the DAC membership (extended by additional nations, NGOs, CSOs, and foundations) as transparent and inclusive while positioning South-South cooperation as the competition. Cedergren continued:

Previously, the OECD countries had a monopoly on aid. Now they have competition from other actors. The partner countries can choose China in preference to the OECD or the World Bank. We have a totally new situation. The time is therefore appropriate to show that the donor community in the OECD is an attractive alternative. (Swedish Government Offices, 2008, para. 15)

As an outcome of Accra, a Task Team on South-South Cooperation was set up to deliver policy recommendations, and the accord included a clause to "promote the provision of technical co-operation . . . including through South-South co-operation" (OECD, 2008b, p. 17). Furthermore, the agreement includes an explicit "welcome" to "all development actors . . . including those engaged in South-South co-operation." It continues, "We recognise the importance and particularities of South-South co-operation and acknowledge that we can learn from the experience of developing countries. We encourage further development of triangular co-operation" (OECD, 2008b, p. 18). This latter point is interesting, because it seeks to integrate, rather than simply support, such activities within the traditional framework. As with previous analyses, this was limited to technical support, as the "triangular" extension of Northern initiatives via Southern "implemeters." This is further supported by a statement of intent for South-South cooperation, which defines its aims and scope as a secondary form of aid:

South-South co-operation on development aims to observe the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, equality among developing partners and respect for their independence, national sovereignty, cultural diversity and identity and local content. It plays an important role in international development co-operation and is a valuable complement to North-South co-operation. (OECD, 2008b, p. 18)

The Task Team subsequently met in 2010 and produced the *Bogota Statement Towards Effective and Inclusive Development Partnerships*. The statement built on the drafting of 110 South-South

cooperation case studies, which had been collected to form a body of knowledge about these practices (Schulz, 2010). The Task Team was particularly looking for “synergies between the principles of aid effectiveness and the practice of South-South Cooperation” (Task Team on South-South Cooperation, 2010). Thus, discourse around SSC was inherently bound to the goals and motivations of the aid effectiveness agenda. The Bogota statement opened with formal recognition of South-South cooperation, now formally termed SSC. It argued:

SSC is gaining momentum. Partner countries, particularly middle-income countries, are increasingly contributing to cooperation, generating important changes in the global development architecture, opening a window of opportunity for all development actors to work together towards a more inclusive, effective, and horizontal global development agenda. (Steering Committee Members of the Bogota High-Level Event on South-South Cooperation and Capacity Development, 2010, para. 3)

Drawing upon the Accra mandate, the Task Team set about adapting the agenda principles “for SSC” as well as bringing the “practices and experiences of SSC” (Schulz, 2010, pp. 7–8) into effectiveness debates. Framed as a learning exercise, the transparency agenda was integrated with SSC in an attempt to fold SSC into subsequent HLF agreements. The extended Accra process therefore sees BRICS donor activities conceptualized as SSC, its purpose and intentions defined, research conducted into its practices, and efforts made to integrate these practices within the aid effectiveness agenda. Interestingly, the notion of competition was used as a way to boost support among DAC donors, apparently with the aim of isolating BRICS/SSC countries if they did not accept the aid effectiveness consensus. This would support their eventual assimilation into traditional development geometries.

The Fourth High Level Forum (HLF4, held in Busan in 2011) acknowledged a changing context for development work in the years since the Millennium Development Goals were established. Prior to the meeting, the agenda for HLF4 was set out in a short document detailing the key issues. This noted the proliferation of private, bilateral, and multilateral donors; intensified levels of South-South cooperation; and persistent questions regarding the sustainability of aid outcomes. The focus was on making aid funding more “effective, transparent and inclusive.” Although progress had been made toward the Indicators of Progress, it was clear that many of the Millennium Development Goals would not be met by 2015 (Killen, 2010; OECD, 2010). In summarizing changes in the field since Accra, Busan aimed to “reform the architecture” to deal with the problem of proliferation in the aid field:

Non-DAC aid providers . . . tend to follow their own rules and . . . add to transaction costs; [. . .] more needs to be learned about SSC modalities and practices; [. . .] Aid delivery agencies have proliferated multilaterally and bilaterally, causing more competition and greater specialization, but also making aid management more complex and costly. (Killen, 2010, p. 1)

The notion of competition, and the sense that some non-DAC aid donors were competing by their own rules, provides an interesting discursive critique of BRICS behavior. Most notable is the suggestion that SSC was somehow making things more difficult for the traditional donors rather than sharing their

burden. Consequently, SSC was criticized for raising costs and acting outside the community's rules at the same time as it was praised as a "noticeable achievement . . . based on sharing development experience, transferring knowledge and strengthening horizontal partnerships" (Killen, 2010, p. 3). Yet in the following six pages of lists of issues to be resolved by Busan, SSC was barely mentioned except as a vaguely positive development, which should be encouraged. The cooperative development architecture to be developed at HLF4 should, however, "take due note of the potential for SSC and triangular co-operation in contributing through horizontal partnerships to supplement North-South co-operation" (Killen, 2010, p. 9). In other words, it was still poorly integrated into Northern discourse and considered as a supplement to DAC donor activities that should be integrated and harnessed. The document demonstrates uncertainty with regard to how SSC should be handled; flirting with the notion of unfair competition when rallying traditional donors, but careful not to criticize too directly.

In contrast to the muted and somewhat conflicted discourse surrounding BRICS prior to the meeting, they were very much part of the fanfare surrounding its finalization. The agreement reached at Busan was announced as a "turning point" for international development cooperation. Representatives of more than 80 countries and organizations—including "traditional donors, South-South co-operators, the BRICS, CSOs and private funders"—signed. The agreement produced four foundations for cooperation: (1) ownership of development priorities by developing countries; (2) a renewed focus on results and outcomes; (3) inclusive development partnerships based on openness and trust; and (4) increased transparency and accountability to one another (Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, 2011). At the outset of the agreement, in the second paragraph, South-South cooperation was given unique status as it was formally recognized and welcomed into the community but retained its independence from any binding commitments.

The nature, modalities and responsibilities that apply to South-South co-operation differ from those that apply to North-South co-operation. At the same time, we recognise that we are all part of a development agenda in which we participate on the basis of common goals and shared principles. In this context, we encourage increased efforts to support effective co-operation based on our specific country situations. The principles, commitments and actions agreed in the outcome document in Busan shall be the reference for South-South partners on a voluntary basis. (Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, 2011, para. 2)

This statement provides a substantial shift both in profile and in discourse. SSC was granted unique status at Busan, with little in the way of commitments from the BRICS, which seemingly defended their independence from the OECD-DAC community successfully. Subsequent statements included a critique of how earlier agreements had handled SSC: "The Paris Declaration did not address the complexity of these new actors, while the Accra Agenda for Action recognised their importance and specificities." Most significantly, discourse surrounding competition and integration into North-South models was reduced. These newer forms of South-South cooperation were still seen as "complementing North-South forms of co-operation," but the "opportunities presented by diverse approaches to development co-operation, such as South-South co-operation," were also acknowledged. It argued, "While North-South co-operation remains the main form of development co-operation, South-South co-operation

continues to evolve, providing additional diversity of resources for development" (Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, 2011). This suggests an acknowledgement that existing DAC frameworks had been unable to adapt successfully to SSC in earlier meetings; in effect, BRICS behavior was innovating so quickly that the aid effectiveness agenda could not integrate its activities in a common framework. SSC was finally recognized as a pluralistic contribution to development.

The agreement therefore undertook to "broaden support" for SSC on its own terms, with only a voluntary commitment to the aid effectiveness and transparency agendas. The agreement concluded by creating a narrative of SSC's trajectory—further evidence of the importance of discourse to integration of SSC into Northern aid structures:

Today's complex architecture for development co-operation has evolved from the North-South paradigm. Distinct from the traditional relationship between aid providers and recipients, developing nations and a number of emerging economies have become important providers of South-South development co-operation. They remain developing countries and still face poverty at home. As such, they remain eligible to benefit from development co-operation provided by others, yet they have increasingly taken upon themselves the responsibility to share experiences and co-operate with other developing countries. (Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, 2011, para. 14)

A decade of debates therefore ended with recognition of the SSC phenomenon, culminating in the formalization of the exceptional status of BRICS to act outside of the DAC framework, but voluntarily within the wider tenets of the donor community.

Beginning with the notion of BRICS providing incidental technical support as a tangent to North-South geometries, the HLF agreements demonstrate emerging discourses of integration into the aid community—but also of a perceived threat to the established order due to unfair competition. Consequently, there is a strong sense in which cooperation is seen as a means of legitimizing and delegitimizing competing approaches to aid, first, within the Northern bloc and gradually also toward BRICS. In the period between Accra and Busan, this evolves further due to the collection of case studies and the wider inclusion of participants in shaping aid effectiveness agreements. Subsequent discourse was keen to acknowledge diversity and difference of practices and needs based on contextual differences. Perhaps most interestingly, it conferred a dual status to BRICS as *developing* and *developers*, permitting them to have one foot inside the aid effectiveness community and one foot outside. Little can be said about their voluntary observation of the community's shared norms without further empirical evidence; however, this discourse is significant, because it fails to resolve the central problem of the aid effectiveness agenda, which is the commitment of all aid donors to collaborate in the use of common standards to standardize and improve aid delivery.

Analysis

Discourse surrounding BRICS in aid transparency agreements evolved substantially between HLF1 in 2003 and HLF4 in 2011. The aid effectiveness forums provide a series of important zeitgeist

moments demonstrating the ways in which basic conceptualizations of aid's purposes and practices evolved under the weight of challenges from nontraditional donor activities (see Table 1).

Table 1. Trajectory of SSC Discourse.

	Recognition	Role	Global citizenship
HLF1: Rome (2003)	"emerging non-DAC donors"	"delegated co-operation"	supporting the work of Northern donors
HLF2: Paris (2005)	need for partnership and alignment	technical support	sharing experience as aid recipients
HLF3: Accra (2008)	"important changes in the global development architecture"	"triangular co-operation"; alternative to OECD community; case studies	"a valuable complement to North-South co-operation"
HLF4: Busan (2011)	"tend to follow their own rules and . . . add to transaction costs"; "The nature, modalities and responsibilities that apply to South-South co-operation differ from those that apply to North-South co-operation"	"additional diversity of resources for development"	"The principles, commitments and actions agreed in the outcome document in Busan shall be the reference for South-South partners on a voluntary basis"

In terms of *recognition*, the sense of an evolving discourse is clear. Between Rome and Accra, there is a shift from observing an emerging practice toward observing fundamental changes in the structures and geometries underpinning the aid community. A strongly associated discourse is of how these changes affect aid effectiveness initiatives, in the sense that recognition of SSC also involves recognition of plurality in the donor community. As the OECD community pushed for harmonization and standardization, recognition of SSC also involved recognition of its threats to North-South structures, and to the political and theoretical differences in motivation and approach. In other words, recognition of SSC involved recognition of the essential plurality of development, something which the aid effectiveness agenda was diminishing. At the heart of this evolving discourse was, therefore, a fundamental contradiction related to power in the geometry of development.

It is notable, however, that discourse surrounding the *role* assigned to SCC did not evolve as quickly as may perhaps be expected. Although there was a major shift in seeing SSC as delegated by the North rather than motivated by the interests of emerging powers between Rome and Paris, the view of SSC as a form of technical support remains pervasive. Arguably, this could be considered part of an imaginary around the capabilities of Southern donors; that their strengths lie in providing support in implementation rather than at strategic levels. Nonetheless, the role was recognized as distinct and separate from Northern development, which demonstrates a significant modification in discourse.

The formulation of SSC providers within the donor community is significant and reveals an indisputable power shift between the established North and emerging Southern powers, particularly following Accra and Busan. Earlier discourse considered SSC a “good neighbor” policy, in which the more powerful developing nations shared their technical know-how of the development process with those in greater need. This follows a linear trajectory of development, in which the more “advanced” developing countries could support the lesser, within the framework of the North’s blueprint for development. Busan reveals, however, an understanding of the distinctness of SSC, in which the Southern powers were able to negotiate their exceptionalism from any common rules asserted for the (Northern) donor community. This reflects a major concession from the North that points to the power and influence of the major emerging Southern powers, of which the BRICS represent the most powerful bloc.

What does this teach us about the BRICS? First, this example demonstrates that the BRICS have the power to act unilaterally, utilizing their own preferred methods and goals and shaping their own geopolitical exigencies. The distinct SSC practices of each emerging economy have been grouped into a single phenomenon by the OECD, which seems to conflate multidimensional practices into one kind. This misunderstanding provides substantial leeway for each of the BRICS to behave more or less as it wishes under the concept of SSC. As the OECD continues to struggle to establish an overarching definition and conceptualization for these practices, SSC practices can continue to evolve to the advantage of BRICS. Hence, the notion that the established geometries of development are purely negative for BRICS is false; on the contrary, they appear well placed to exploit the temporary advantages of generating their own geopolitical realities.

Second, the creation of a common standard for aid transparency, established between Northern aid donors and some Southern aid recipients, suggests a form of socialization that is more complex than simply representing transparency. In many respects, it aims to reinforce the geopolitical imaginary through political economic structures in a manner reminiscent of classic definitions of cultural imperialism as “the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system” (Schiller, 1976, p. 9). The question of what other values and ideologies are being institutionalized in the conduct of international development is hardly novel, but these additional layers of integration between Northern and Southern economies under the aegis of aid effectiveness are certainly worthy of further investigation (Pamment, 2015). Furthermore, this must be placed in the context of the demands placed on recipient countries by Southern donors, and their complementary or conflicting relationship to the demands of the common standard. The assumption that one particular form of aid funding will always be the most attractive will undoubtedly relate back to the conditions attached to it, and to their position within wider international norms.

Finally, it is noteworthy how this case establishes an invitation to the BRICS for global citizenship. The concluding agreements make an offer of voluntary observance of international norms. Within this, BRICS are offered the temporary status of exceptionalism. Yet they have also been positioned as the reason why a common standard is necessary—as competitors, and as generators of uncertainty and higher costs. This curious ambiguity only makes sense if SSC is considered a short-term stepping-stone toward full integration into Northern development structures, if SSC’s future is merely as a complement to the status quo. It seems unlikely that the integration of SSC would involve the restructuring of OECD-DAC

norms, particularly since so much effort has been invested in the present common standard. In other words, it would seem as though Northern and multilateral donors envisage a world in which there is only one modality for aid distribution and that efforts to engage with BRICS behavior has the ultimate goal of assimilation. In this sense, it is questionable whether these new geometries of development are truly sustainable. If the BRICS accept the invitation to join the global community of aid donors, their options for new development modalities will necessarily—in the longer term—be limited. Global citizenship therefore has significant ramifications for the identities of these actors—and for their ability to create their own alternative geopolitical realities.

Conclusion

The conclusion based on this analysis of SSC discourses within the international development community is that the BRICS face a quandary. On the one hand, SSC provides a series of advantages to emerging powers based on their ability to redefine the purpose and goals of aid bilaterally, outside of increasingly standardized Northern donor frameworks and modalities. This may seem to represent the needs of the global South, because developing countries are able to support one another in determining their own development. However, it also represents regional powers exerting their influence over less developed countries, without the peer review checks and balances guaranteed by OECD membership and the transparency of the common standard. The downside of partial or “voluntary” status within the aid donor community is that the prestige of the SSC donors is damaged; being labeled nontransparent and a cause of higher costs for other donors is a reputational negative. In a fully transparent marketplace for aid, those withholding information appear to have something to hide. Thus, the pervasiveness of the norm of transparency provides a major long-term challenge to the alternative modalities, geometries, and structures of development implied by SSC.

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