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IDOS DISCUSSION PAPER 15/2022

Partnerships for Policy Transfer

How Brazil and China Engage in Triangular Cooperation with the United Nations

Laura Trajber Waisbich

Sebastian Haug

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Partnerships for policy transfer

How Brazil and China engage in triangular cooperation with the United Nations

Laura Trajber Waisbich

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Bonn 2022

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Abstract

This paper offers a comparative analysis of Brazilian and Chinese partnerships with the United Nations (UN) as a mechanism and channel for policy transfer. In international policy travel flows, China and Brazil currently hold privileged places as hubs from which development-related policies travel and through which they circulate. Both countries have invested in systematising their development experience and transferring development policies within their regions and beyond – often through triangular cooperation, i.e. South–South cooperation supported by third actors such as UN entities. So far, however, this variegated engagement has remained under the radar of scholarly attention. To address this gap, we examine 35 policy transfer partnerships – 17 for Brazil and 18 for China – forged with different parts of the UN system over the last two decades. In order to offer a first systematic account of partnership trajectories, we provide an overview of partnership types (namely projects, programmes and policy centres) and transfer dimensions (including the policies themselves, transfer agents and transfer arrangements). Our comparative mapping presents an evolving landscape: while Brazil was first in institutionalising robust policy transfer partnerships with numerous UN entities and then slowed down, China started more cautiously but has significantly expanded its collaboration with the UN system since 2015. The partnerships analysed cover a substantial range of sectors, with a particular focus – for both Brazil and China – on agricultural policies. While Brazilian partnerships with the UN primarily engage with linkages between agriculture and social protection, however, China–UN partnerships focus more on productivity and market linkages. As the first comprehensive mapping and comparative analysis of Brazilian and Chinese policy transfer partnerships with the UN, this paper contributes to a better understanding of (triangular) cooperation schemes between international organisations and their member states, as well as debates about how policies deemed as successful travel around the globe.

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Abbreviations

ABC	Brazilian Cooperation Agency (*Agência Brasileira de Cooperação*)
ABRAPA	National Association of Cotton Producers, Brazil (*Associação Brasileira dos Produtores de Algodão*)
ANA	National Water Agency, Brazil (*Agência Nacional de Água*)
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CEAH	Center of Excellence Against Hunger
CGFOME	Department for Humanitarian Cooperation and Combat Against Hunger (*Coordenação-Geral de Cooperação Humanitária e Combate à Fome*)
CICETE	China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges (中国国际经济技术交流中心)
CIDCA	China International Development Cooperation Agency (中华人民共和国国家国际发展合作署)
CONSEA	Council for Food and Nutritional Security, Brazil (*Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional*)
CPDRC	China Population and Development Research Center
CPLP	Community of Portuguese Language Countries (*Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa)*
EMATER	Company for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension, Brazil (*Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural*)
EMBRAPA	Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (*Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária)*
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FNDE	National Education Fund, Brazil (*Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação*)
FOCAC	Forum on China–Africa Cooperation
FUNASA	National Health Foundation, Brazil (*Fundação Nacional de Saúde*)
GDI	Global Development Initiative, China
IBA	Brazilian Cotton Institute (*Instituto Brasileiro do Algodão*)
IBGE	Brazilian Central Statistics Agency (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*)
IBSA	India, Brazil and South Africa grouping
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPC-IG	International Policy Center for Inclusive Growth
IPEA	Institute for Applied Economic Research, Brazil *(Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada*)
IPRCC	International Poverty Reduction Center in China
MARA	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, China (中华人民共和国农业农村部)
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOFCOM	Ministry of Commerce, China (中华人民共和国商务部)

MRE	Ministry of External Relations, Brazil (*Ministério das Relações Exteriores*)
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission, China (中华人民共和国国家发展和改革委员会)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAA Africa	Purchase from Africans for Africa
PRODOC	Project Document
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEGIB	Iberoamerican Secretariat (*Secretaría General Iberoamericana*)
SENAI	National Service for Industrial Training, Brazil (*Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial*)
SSC	South–South cooperation
SSCAF	South–South Cooperation Assistance Fund, China
SSTC	South–South and triangular cooperation
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNOSSC	United Nations Office for South–South Cooperation
WFP	World Food Programme
WWP	World Without Poverty Brazil Learning Initiative

1 Introduction

Policy analysts have long explored how and why certain national policies migrate across jurisdictional boundaries and are adopted elsewhere (Graham, Shipan & Volden, 2013; Porto de Oliveira, 2021). Linkages between the global circulation of policies and cooperation for development – also referred to as development assistance or foreign aid – have been particularly prominent. The role of bilateral donor agencies and international organisations, notably multilateral development banks, in the diffusion of development models and policies to the so-called developing world has been widely documented and debated (Ferguson, 1994; Stone, 2004; Li, 2007; Bazbauers, 2018). These traditional North–South policy flows have often been understood as somewhat asymmetrical transfers due to the knowledge and power differentials that have guided traditional development cooperation from Northern "donors" to Southern "recipients".[1]

In the last decade, however, growing attention to South–South cooperation has provided a new impetus to the study of policy transfers (Porto de Oliveira & Pal, 2018; Stone, Porto de Oliveria & Pal, 2019).[2] The economic and political "rise" of different Southern powerhouses (Gu, Chen & Haibin, 2016), as well as the (re-)emergence of Southern-led development cooperation since the early 2000s (Mawdsley, 2019) are major factors behind a new wave of knowledge and technology circulation from, through and to the South. Indeed, Southern countries, notably the so-called rising powers, have accumulated knowledge, technology and resources that are often mobilised as "good practice" in the context of South–South development cooperation (Constantine & Shankland, 2017). All along, the United Nations (UN) system has accompanied these efforts by offering venues for exchange as well as operational and strategic assistance. UN support for South–South cooperation – including through what is known as triangular cooperation – has continued to grow in material, political and symbolic terms; and member states have agreed on the mainstreaming of South–South and triangular cooperation across the UN system as part of their attempts to achieve the 2030 Agenda (Haug, 2021 and 2022; see Zoccal, 2020).

Against this backdrop, unpacking the proactive strategies of Southern governments in "exporting" their policies has become a key research frontier in global policy research (Porto de Oliveira and Pal, 2018; Stone et al., 2019), and scholars have engaged with how policy transfer relates to foreign policy strategies, particularly in countries' quest for recognition, status and soft power (Faria, 2012; Urbina-Ferretjans & Surender, 2013; Muhr, 2017; Pomeroy, Suyama & Waisbich, 2019; Esteves, Zoccal & Fonseca, 2020; Porto de Oliveira, 2020).[3] However, the partnerships between Southern countries and the UN at the interface between policy transfer and development cooperation are still poorly understood.[4] Unveiling these dynamics is

1 On the categories of North and South in social science research, see Haug, Braveboy-Wagner and Maihold (2021); Waisbich, Roychoudhury and Haug (2021). On a recent discussion of (current challenges to) development cooperation in the age of sustainable development, see Chaturvedi et al. (2020); Klingebiel and Janus (2021).

2 The UN Office for South–South Cooperation (UNOSSC, s.a.-a) defines South–South cooperation as "collaboration among countries of the South in the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and technical domains. Involving two or more developing countries, it can take place on a bilateral, regional, intraregional or interregional basis."

3 See also Porto de Oliveira and Romano's 2022 edited volume on Brazil and China.

4 Exceptions include studies that focus on particular cases or collaboration aspects, such as how the former Brazilian Ministry of Social Development exported Brazilian social policies in partnership with international organisations (Leite, Pomeroy & Suyama, 2015); cooperation between rising powers and international organisations (Milhorance & Soule-Kohndou, 2017); or Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) involving multilateral development banks and UN agencies like UNDP (Morais de Sá e Silva, 2017).

important not only to make sense of the expanding links between the UN and Southern powers but also to better understand the particularities of policy transfer partnerships and what they reveal about shifting global cooperation dynamics.

In order to address this gap, the paper at hand examines how Brazil's and China's policy transfer partnerships with the UN have unfolded over the last two decades. We combine a detailed mapping with a comparative analysis of both countries' partnerships with entities in the UN development system in order to identify key features of triangular policy transfer arrangements and highlight challenges to their effective implementation. Alongside other countries self-identifying as developing, Brazil and China – as two emblematic Southern powers – occupy a special place in the global development system. As "countries in transition" (UNDP China, 2022), the two countries are both "receivers" and "providers" of international development cooperation. In many ways, they are also exemplary "Southern policy and innovation hubs" (Constantine & Shankland, 2017; Stone et al., 2019) and thus valuable sites for inquiring into global policy circulation dynamics. While Brazil and China share somewhat similar positionalities in current global development geographies, the ways in which these countries conceive, frame and operationalise their triangular cooperation partnerships with UN entities reflect the particularities of their developmental and foreign policy trajectories and priorities. As such, a comparative analysis of both countries is set to provide valuable insights into knowledge and power dynamics currently shaping the field of international development cooperation.

Our analysis focuses on partnerships with UN bodies that feature prominently in both Brazil's and China's triangular cooperation landscapes – notably the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – and also takes into account partnerships with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). We build on insights emanating from a detailed review of 35 partnerships – 17 in the case of Brazil and 18 in the case of China – most of which include a plethora of individual initiatives. Based on publicly available evidence, the analysis of these partnerships provides the most comprehensive picture to date of both countries' triangular cooperation dedicated to policy transfer with entities in the UN development system.[5]

Besides reviewing academic and policy literature on South–South and triangular cooperation as well as policy transfer, we have relied on two main strategies to identify and triangulate empirical data. On the one hand, we have analysed publicly available UN and governmental documentation including – often patchy – information on specific triangular cooperation initiatives. Evidence on funding flows has been particularly fragmented and often difficult to identify. In the absence of an exhaustive overview of the financial dimension of Brazil's and China's triangular policy transfer landscapes, we have included illustrative information for specific partnerships. On the other hand, we conducted 60 background interviews between January 2018 and October 2022 and engaged in email exchanges with UN staff and independent development experts – mostly from or working on Brazil and/or China – in order to corroborate findings and complement the sometimes scarce data available online.[6] Both data gathering and analysis processes have

5 While there are other UN bodies with relevant experience – such as the World Health Organization or the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – the eight entities we focus on in this paper arguably cover the most visible, long-term and substantive policy transfer partnerships Brazil and China have set up with the UN. Our mapping does not cover multi-country initiatives that may include policy transfer components, like the UNDP-managed IBSA Fund for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation (jointly set up by India, Brazil and South Africa). It also excludes the UN Peace and Development Fund, a partnership established by China together with the UN Secretariat (for details, see Section 4).

6 The datasets we have developed and worked with are available upon request.

benefited from our decade-long engagement with development cooperation issues involving Southern providers and the UN.[7]

By centring the analysis on Brazil and China and their respective interactions with the UN system, we do not engage with the outcomes of policy transfer processes or the perspectives of the Southern partners to whom these policies are transferred. Instead, we map key features of individual partnerships, unpack their design and examine how the broader partnership landscape has evolved. Our analysis builds on a comprehensive mapping of Brazilian and Chinese partnerships with policy transfer components set up with UN entities that have been formalised through Letters of Intent, Memoranda of Understanding, project documents or other official agreements. Based on this mapping, we have developed a heuristic centring on three partnership types (projects, programmes and centres) and three transfer dimensions (what, who and how) that help us disentangle how partnerships are designed and thought to function. With this, we provide a basic and systematic framework for analysing the main mechanisms put in place through triangular policy transfer partnerships.[8]

Overall, this paper contributes to a growing field of inquiry at the intersection of three sets of academic debates that all have strong links to policy-related questions. First, we contribute to the growing body of work on Southern powers in international development (Gu, Shankland & Chenoy, 2016; Mawdsley, 2019) by providing a detailed comparative mapping of a largely understudied dimension of Brazil's and China's development cooperation portfolios, namely their triangular cooperation involving the UN system. Second, our contribution to the field of policy transfer studies (Stone, 2004; Porto de Oliveira & Pal, 2018) centres on the implications of the expansion of South–South and triangular partnerships with UN entities for the global circulation of policies across and beyond the South, notably with regard to the kind of policies that travel and the means through which they do so. Third, we also speak to broader discussions about the evolving features of world politics (Stuenkel, 2016; Zarakol, 2019), using policy transfer partnerships as a seismograph for shifting power dynamics at the UN and beyond.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of how Brazil and China have engaged with UN entities through triangular cooperation. Section 3 introduces policy transfer as a central component of triangular arrangements and provides a general mapping of the 35 partnerships that stand at the heart of the analysis. The subsequent sections delve deeper into the workings of these partnerships by providing a systematic analysis of partnership types (Section 4) and an assessment of different policy transfer dimensions (Section 5). While Section 6 offers a comparative analysis of policy transfer insights stemming from Brazil's and China's partnerships with UN entities, Section 7 discusses (the need to know more about) some of the central challenges to triangular partnership processes. Our conclusion (Section 8) summarises main findings, highlights key contributions and points to concrete venues for future research on triangular policy transfer partnerships.

7 Laura Trajber Waisbich was engaged in external evaluation processes on Brazil–UN partnerships; Sebastian Haug used to work with UNDP in China and Mexico.

8 A more comprehensive analysis of how transfers unfold in practice (including transfer and adaptation dynamics and, even more so, their outcomes) should be part of future research endeavours; see Section 7.

2 Brazilian and Chinese triangular cooperation partnerships with the UN

As a modality geared towards supporting collaboration among Southern countries, triangular cooperation is a small but growing component of today's global development landscape. According to the definition adopted by the UN Office for South–South Cooperation (UNOSSC), "triangular cooperation is collaboration in which traditional donor countries and multilateral organisations facilitate South–South initiatives through the provision of funding, training, management and technological systems as well as other forms of support" (UNOSSC, s.a.-a; see OECD, s.a.).[9] This definition coexists with other understandings and approaches, including from Southern partners,[10] members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or the multilateral initiatives they engage with, such as the Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Cooperation (GPI) (Haug, in press; GPI, s.a.).[11] While Brazil and China have their specific operationalisations, both countries tend to approach triangular cooperation[12] as a modality to support their South–South engagement within the broader development cooperation landscape. The UN development system has historically been a major facilitator of South–South cooperation initiatives and an important triangular cooperation partner for Southern providers such as Brazil and China (Milhorance & Soulé-Kohndou, 2017; Haug, 2022). Through these partnerships, UN entities act as conveners and advocates; knowledge brokers; partnership builders; and/or analysts and progress monitors (Porto de Oliveira, 2017; UNOSSC & UNDP, 2021; Haug, 2021).[13]

While there is no authoritative reporting overview of triangular cooperation at the global level, available evidence – notably a triangular cooperation repository administered by the OECD and region-focused data provided by organisations such as the Iberoamerican Secretariat (SEGIB) – suggests that triangular cooperation has expanded considerably since the early 2000s. The OECD repository now counts more than 1,000 triangular cooperation initiatives, with the majority implemented over the last decade, and budgets of individual projects ranging from less than USD 100,000 to more than USD 10 million (OECD, 2022). As part of Official Development Assistance reporting at the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, some traditional donors started reporting on triangular cooperation in 2016; from 2016 to 2019, they reported

9 For a discussion on South–South and triangular cooperation terminology, see Haug (2021).

10 For a discussion on India's approach to triangular cooperation, for instance, see Chaturvedi and Piefer-Söyler (2021).

11 The definition adopted by the Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Cooperation, for instance, expands on different roles for partners in a triangular scheme. According to the Partnership, triangular schemes have: (i) a beneficiary partner, which has requested support to tackle a specific development challenge and which is an ODA-eligible country; (ii) a pivotal partner, which has relevant domestic experience of addressing the issue in a context similar to that of the beneficiary country and that shares its financial resources, knowledge and expertise; and (iii) a facilitating partner, that may help connect the other partners, and supports the partnership financially and/or with technical expertise (see GPI, s.a.).

12 On the specific terminologies used, see below.

13 Besides the much talked about "transaction costs" in triangular cooperation, there are important questions to be raised about ownership and horizontality (McKimm, Piefer-Söyler, & Hargovan, 2020; Zoccal, 2020), including power imbalances where certain partners dominate through the contribution of financial resources (Zhou, 2016). In other words, key questions centre on whose priorities and voice count when designing and implementing triangular initiatives. This is related to the concern that triangular partnerships primarily serve as a foreign policy tool for both Southern powerhouses and traditional donors and risk contributing little to effective development cooperation on the ground (Seifert & Renzio, 2014).

slightly more than USD 250 million as triangular cooperation expenditure (Haug, in press).[14] Existing data, however, is neither exhaustive nor necessarily comparable, as stakeholders have been reporting on a voluntary and often irregular basis. Brazil and China, for instance, have developed their own approaches to development – including triangular – cooperation reporting and do not contribute to OECD-led reporting exercises (Waisbich, 2022a). Reporting practices also reflect the heterogeneous engagement with triangular cooperation more generally. Critics highlight the high transaction costs often involved when more than two partners – notably from (very) different contexts – collaborate. Advocates, in turn, promote triangular cooperation as a modality that not only builds on the complementarity of different actors to contribute to better development results but also strengthens the partnership between stakeholders who do not usually engage in joint cooperation schemes (OECD, 2019; BMZ, 2022; see Haug, in press).[15] By focusing on a specific set of triangular cooperation partnerships, this paper contributes to a more in-depth understanding of triangular cooperation as an increasingly visible modality – both materially and ideationally – across the global development landscape.

2.1 Brazil's triangular cooperation partnerships with the UN

Brazil understands triangular cooperation as "partnerships between South–South/horizontal cooperation and foreign governments or international organisations to benefit third countries" (ABC, 2020, p. 10).[16] Brazilian triangular cooperation thus contributes to strengthening the country's South–South cooperation efforts.[17] The Brazilian government adopts the term "trilateral cooperation" to emphasise the horizontal nature of initiatives in which all parties involved work together to tackle issues affecting Southern countries, rather than "triangular cooperation", which is considered to have more hierarchical connotations.[18]

While Brazil's official foreign policy guidelines put a strong emphasis on bilateral South–South exchanges, partnerships with the UN have featured as a key component of Brazil's South–South cooperation (SSC) portfolio since the 1990s. UNDP has played a major and central role through its operational and management support to Brazilian SSC (Cabral & Weinstock, 2010; Milani, 2017; Leite et al., 2014; see Box 1). Under the UNDP–Brazil "umbrella partnership", UNDP and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) have engaged in a so-called "triangulation of resources": UNDP helps circumvent legal constraints for the Brazilian government to spend public resources on projects abroad and acts as the international implementing body for most of Brazil's bilateral technical cooperation with other developing countries. While doing so, it also

14 This amount is relatively small compared to overall ODA expenditure, also because of substantial levels of non-reporting or under-reporting by some of the larger members of the Development Assistance Committee at the OECD, including Germany and Japan (see Haug, in press).

15 While it would be helpful to have a more systematic overview of amounts spent on triangular cooperation globally, more robust financial resources alone would tell us little about the relevance and impact of the modality as triangular schemes usually act through alternative and often innovative mechanisms that enable and promote the use of synergies across development partners. As with other cooperation modalities, future efforts to provide more robust funding figures about triangular cooperation should thus go hand in hand with impact assessments of individual cases.

16 A similar definition can be retrieved from ABC's website, see ABC (s.a.-a). For reasons of consistency, however, we employ the term "triangular cooperation" throughout this text, except when referring to official names of initiatives.

17 Several Brazilian triangular initiatives are named in ways that combine both modalities, for example the "Brazil-UNICEF Trilateral South–South Cooperation Programme". Trilateral South–South cooperation is indeed the most frequently employed terminology by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency.

18 For more on the discussion of "triangular" and "trilateral", see Langendorf, Piefer, Knodt, Müller and Lázaro Rüther (2012). For why the Brazilian government prefers the term "trilateral", see Magalhães and Buani (2017).

assures the availability of funds for Brazilian development cooperation beyond budgetary and political constraints, imposed by fiscal years or set by high-level political decisions (Morais de Sá e Silva, 2021).[19]

Box 1: The position of UNDP in Brazil's development cooperation system

The Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) was created in the late 1980s to serve as the focal point for both "receiving" and "providing" cooperation. In the 1990s, given the shrinking aid flows from traditional donors and the administrative flexibility of projects with international organisations, Brazil started funding its own cooperation projects benefiting third countries in collaboration with UN entities based in Brasilia. These "umbrella projects", known by the acronym of PRODOC (project document), have since been the basis of the collaboration between the Brazilian government and several international organisations with offices in Brazil. ABC signed its first PRODOC with UNDP in 1998 (project 98/004) with the aim of funding and implementing SSC projects. As Brazil lacks an adequate legal framework for operationalising its development cooperation initiatives abroad, the partnership with UNDP has acted as an operational enabler of Brazilian bilateral SSC (Cabral & Weinstock, 2010; Milani, 2017; Leite et al. 2014; Morais de Sá e Silva, 2021; Puente, 2010). In the early 2010s, UNDP launched a New Strategic Partnerships initiative for large middle-income countries (MICs), in which Brazil and Mexico were chosen as pilot countries in Latin America (see Haug, 2016). According to UNDP, this was a "direct response to [the] changing development cooperation landscape and increasingly prominent role of MICs and emerging economies" (UNDP, 2013, p. 1). As part of this agenda, UNDP signed a Partnership Framework Agreement with the Brazilian government in 2010 to "strengthen the co-operation between the Participants to promote global development partnerships in particular through SSC, and contribute to addressing challenges of developing countries and accelerating progress on achieving the MDGs" (UNDP, 2013, p. 2). Under this first agreement, the main pillars of work were to (i) support Brazilian SSC and consolidate Brazil as a global player; (ii) strengthen multilateral initiatives (such as the UNDP-managed IBSA Fund for poverty and hunger alleviation); and (iii) enhance the profile of the Brasilia-based International Policy Center for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG). UNDP's role in partnering with Brazil on different initiatives and, above all, in enabling Brazilian SSC has continued to expand, with "South–South trilateral cooperation" occupying a central position in the 2017–2021 UN Sustainable Development Partnership Framework for Brazil. For UNDP, this partnership has been about allowing Brazil "to share with other developing countries the knowledge available in the country, part of which [has been] acquired by the contribution of the multilateral system" (UN, 2016, p. 7).

Besides its umbrella partnership with UNDP, Brazil's conceptual and practical engagement with triangular cooperation with other UN entities has intensified since the early 2000s during the "golden years" of Brazilian SSC under Lula da Silva (president from 2003 to 2010) and his Workers' Party (Suyama, Waisbich & Leite, 2016; Milani, 2017; Waisbich, Ramos Luiz & Pimenta de Faria, 2022; see also Figure 1). While most of Brazilian development-related spending goes to mandatory contributions to international organisations and multilateral development banks, as well as to UN peace operations, an important part also funds Brazil's technical cooperation (mostly bilateral schemes but also triangular cooperation with UN entities) under the coordination of ABC.[20] Indeed, partnerships between the Brazilian government and entities in the UN development system became one of the cornerstones of Brazil's technical cooperation portfolio managed by ABC from the mid-2010s onwards. Existing analyses suggest that triangular cooperation with UN entities jumped from 1.9 percent of the total federal government expenditure managed by ABC in 2009 to 73.8 percent in 2015 (IPEA & ABC, 2018;

19 On other dynamics, including strengthening the legitimacy of policies through UN-endorsed partnerships, see Section 3.

20 Between 2005 and 2018, Brazil spent USD 12.3 billion of its federal budget on international development initiatives (IPEA/ABC, 2018).

Milani, 2017).[21] Annual transfers from Brazil to UN entities intended to enable triangular initiatives expanded from USD 2.7 million in 2010 to USD 16.9 million in 2014. Between 2011 and 2014, the main partners within the UN system were FAO (USD 17 million), ILO (USD 9 million) and WFP (USD 7.6 million) (Suyama et al., 2016).[22] Agreements with these UN entities have also played an important operational and management supporting role for Brazilian cooperation, similar to Brazil's framework with UNDP. Due to the periodic transfer of funds to different bodies in the UN system, triangular partnerships have helped sustain and stabilise Brazilian development cooperation across different political cycles and notably throughout the political and economic turmoil that has engulfed Brazil since 2015 (see below; see also Suyama et al., 2016; Morais de Sá e Silva, 2021).

Given the central role of the UN in facilitating Brazil's international development cooperation, Brazil has adapted its administrative system to expand and strengthen its partnerships with UN entities. A special division within ABC, the General Coordination for Trilateral South–South Technical Cooperation with International Organizations was set up in 2015 to specifically deal with SSC involving UN entities.[23] This was accompanied by efforts to further institutionalise triangular cooperation within ABC through specific guidelines directed at steering Brazil's nascent triangular programme with UNICEF, and a guideline on South–South Trilateral Cooperation for ABC itself that was launched in 2017 (ABC, 2017; see Zhang & Waisbich, 2020).[24]

The focus of Brazil's triangular partnerships with UN entities strongly reflects the country's overall commitment to technical cooperation and capacity development initiatives (ABC, 2013) as well as the main geographical emphasis given to Latin America, Africa and countries of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) (ABC, 2016). Rather than providing grants and loans to partners, Brazil has had a fairly consistent South–South cooperation strategy focused on sharing Brazilian policy models and experiences with partner countries through what are usually short- to medium-term knowledge exchanges via seminars, trainings, study tours and hands-on technical assistance projects (Suyama et al., 2016; see Section 3).[25] Brazilian development cooperation strongly relies on its public institutions – and on the political authorities and civil servants within them – who serve as implementing agencies (or *cooperantes*) for the country's technical cooperation. While overwhelmingly governmental in nature, Brazilian SSC features a considerable institutional diversity, with over 100 governmental

21 The figures on triangular cooperation provided here cover what the Brazilian government refers to as "trilateral cooperation with international organisations", i.e. the voluntary contributions Brazil provides to entities in the UN development system to enable technical cooperation initiatives between Brazil and other countries in the Global South. Excluded is the amount the Brazilian government transfers to UNDP for management-related purposes (see Box 1).

22 Compared with average projects set up by traditional donors or the World Bank, these amounts are rather modest. While Brazil spent approximately USD 1 billion on international development – including contributions to multilateral bodies – in 2017, the total amount used in bilateral technical cooperation initiatives added up to USD 7.3 million, and USD 10.7 million were spent on triangular cooperation involving UN entities (IPEA/ABC, 2018). The case of Brazil's partnerships with UN entities – and the function the latter have played in facilitating Brazil's international development cooperation – illustrate why financial figures alone tell us little about the relevance of triangular cooperation.

23 A brief description of the General Coordination can be found on the ABC website, see ABC (s.a.-b). It has since been somewhat downgraded within ABC structures and is currently placed under another division, namely the General Coordination for Multilateral Technical Cooperation.

24 Around the same time, Brazil and Germany also launched the guidelines for their trilateral cooperation programme, which they have been jointly implementing since 2010; see GIZ (2015).

25 Brazilian SSC portfolio also includes more long-term capacity building and policy knowledge exchanges, notably with neighbours in South America as well as with Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa, in policy sectors such as food security and nutrition or health. Over the years, these initiatives have generated their own policy networks, which function as international extensions of existing domestic networks (see Esteves, Zoccal Gomes, & Moura Fonseca, 2016).

entities taking part in SSC-related activities.[26] Triangular cooperation partnerships with UN entities also follow this model, mostly encompassing knowledge sharing and technical cooperation activities such as hosting international seminars and study tours for decision makers, technical experts and political authorities in Brazil; as well as implementing hands-on projects in partner countries.[27]

Partnering with the UN was initially part of a strategy to improve the structure of Brazil's technical cooperation portfolio, at a time when it faced great pressure through both the amount of demands it received from external partners to share Brazil's domestic development experiences and the human and financial constraints in most of its implementing agencies (Morais de Sá e Silva, 2021; Waisbich, 2022b). Flagship programmes and line ministries like the former Social Development Ministry and its conditional cash-transfer programme *Bolsa Familia* generated substantive international attention and, according to official accounts, led to 455 delegations from 107 countries coming to Brazil between 2011 and 2016 (WWP, s.a.). Working with UN entities to share these experiences – and thereby "trilateralising" Brazil's SSC – was hence a pragmatic move towards efficiency, and in some cases a survival strategy by Brazilian "SSC bureaucrats" to protect this incipient policy field from domestic political pressure or institutional fatigue as well as political and budgetary downgrading or dismantling (Suyama, et al. 2016; Morais de Sá e Silva, 2021; Waisbich, 2020).

Partnering with UN entities was also part of a broader normative agenda led by several individual "policy ambassadors"[28] both inside and outside the Brazilian state who saw in SSC – and in working with international organisations – the possibility of setting global policy agendas related to rights-based inclusive development. Indeed, some UN agencies have used SSC with Brazil as a means to drive global attention to their rights-based work. FAO, for instance, made use of Brazil's experience to globally promote the right to food, whereas for UNICEF and UNFPA it was about promoting and enforcing rights of children, women and girls.[29] This is why Brazil's triangular cooperation with the UN has been characterised by strong (and openly discussed) advocacy goals and specific strategies and instruments to strengthen (create or reform) rights-based policy and legal frameworks in partner countries in the sectors of concern (Articulação Sul & Move Social, 2017; Articulação Sul, ABC, & UNICEF, 2020).

Compared to other Southern countries, Brazil was an early mover in developing partnerships with UN agencies. Indeed, entities like UNICEF, WFP and UNFPA consider Brazil as a "lab" for experimenting with doing South–South, technical or horizontal cooperation (see Articulação Sul, 2020).[30] For instance, Brazil played an important role in creating the first WFP policy centre, namely the Brasilia-based Centre of Excellence Against Hunger (CEAH), which is considered the first of its kind in the international food security system. Similar to what happened with UNDP policy centres, the CEAH has since become a model for WFP South–South transfer partnerships with other Southern countries, including China and Cote d'Ivoire (Lima & Santana, 2020; Marcondes & De Bruyn, 2015). The will to share domestic policies was backed by a perception

26 This is an issue we will come back to when analysing partnerships with the UN in Section 5.

27 See Section 6 for more details on the nature of Brazilian triangular initiatives.

28 For a conceptual discussion on "ambassadors" in the context of policy diffusion, see Porto de Oliveira (2017).

29 See FAO (s a.). On how WFP also expanded its mandate beyond emergency food aid to include a rights-based approach to zero hunger from 2009 onwards and Brazil's role in this paradigm shift, see Magalhães and Buani (2017). For UNICEF, see Articulação Sul (2020).

30 Interviews with UNDP senior leadership by Milani (2017) reveal that the Framework Agreement between UNDP and Brazil on SSTC was the first of its kind signed with a developing country. Articulação SUL-led evaluation on the Brazil–UNICEF Trilateral Cooperation Programme also narrates a similar story of the role Brazilian government played in fostering this area within UNICEF (Articulação Sul, 2020). In the case of UNFPA, official documentation also refers to Brazil as the first country to have a South–South Cooperation as an integral part of the jointly agreed UNFPA country programme (UNFPA/ABC, 2012).

that these kinds of initiatives could enhance Brazilian soft power, bring international recognition to domestic development experiences, and even offer possibilities for mutual learning and improving Brazilian capacities to refine its policies at home[31] (Leite, Pomeroy & Suyama, 2015; Faria, 2012). More generally, motivations on the Brazilian side matched the ongoing quest of UN entities to identify partners and solutions beyond traditional (i.e. mostly Northern-led) development partnerships. Brazil thus became a country where different parts of the UN system – including UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA – initiated their engagement with South–South and triangular cooperation, playing what many at the time called a "pivot country" role.[32]

However, things changed significantly under the presidency of Michel Temer (2016–2018) and even more so under Jair Bolsonaro (since 2019). Rhetorically, Temer and Bolsonaro have worked towards dismantling existing South–South and development cooperation agendas. Both the geographical emphasis on Latin America and Africa and the ideational framing that backed Brazilian social policies under the Workers' Party have come under severe attack. Yet, many cooperation arrangements have remained in place under the radar, even if under considerably harder political and economic circumstances and without high-level strategic backing (Morais de Sá e Silva, 2021; Waisbich, 2022b). Triangular cooperation has played an important role in securing continuity in times of uncertainty, which already began with fiscal austerity and political turmoil in the mid-2010s and got even tougher after Bolsonaro's election in 2018. Yet, overall institutional innovation in Brazil's triangular cooperation partnerships virtually stalled after Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) – Lula da Silva's successor from the Workers' Party – was impeached in 2016, as the new political coalitions in power showed little interest in fostering Brazil's standing as a South-South and triangular 'champion' (Casarões, 2020; Waisbich et al., 2022). Against this backdrop, existing triangular initiatives with UN agencies have moved to the margins of Brazil's foreign policy agendas.[33] The number of new initiatives has decreased since 2016 (Waisbich & Cabral, in press) and no new triangular partnerships with UN entities have been set up under Bolsonaro.

From 2023 onwards, however, the Workers' Party is set to govern Brazil again, with Lula da Silva taking over from Bolsonaro and serving his third term as president. In his victory speech in November 2022, Lula promised to lead Brazil back to a more proactive and constructive international position, including on development-related issues. While both global affairs and Brazilian domestic politics have changed significantly since Lula left power in 2010, his latest victory is likely to increase the prominence of South–South cooperation in Brazil's foreign policy and could initiate a new wave of triangular partnerships with UN entities. Informal talks on expanding South–South and triangular cooperation – on the nexus between climate change and food security, for instance – have already gained momentum in public debates (Chiaretti, 2022).

2.2 China's triangular cooperation partnerships with the UN

Even more so than Brazil, China has come to stand for the "rise of the South" and ongoing shifts across the global development landscape (Mawdsley, 2019; Xu & Carey, 2021). In general terms,

31 For an example of this discourse by the current ABC Director in a Brazil–FAO event in 2022, see FAO (2022b).

32 In 1995, 22 middle-income countries (Brazil and China included) were recognised by the United Nations High Committee on South–South cooperation as "better-placed developing countries" and "pivot countries" in South–South exchanges (UN, 1995). Many of these became, indeed, the major SSC champions in the following decades.

33 In many ways, ongoing triangular initiatives with the UN still echo the development cooperation agenda Brazil pursued in the late 1990s/early 2000s, with a strong focus on agricultural and social policies and a general alignment with traditional geographical priorities for Brazilian diplomacy, notably Latin America and Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa.

the Chinese government promotes the sharing of Chinese "wisdoms" through development cooperation (Gu et al., 2016; Cheng, 2020; Alves & Lee, 2022; see SCIO, 2021)[34] and sees triangular cooperation partnerships, including those with the UN, as "injecting new impetus into international cooperation" (SCIO, 2021, section VII).[35] Compared to Brazil's trajectory, triangular cooperation has – in relative terms – occupied a smaller part of China's development cooperation portfolio. During the Cold War and until the SSC "boom" in the early 2000s, China's development cooperation portfolio mainly developed through bilateral channels. Indeed, efforts to "multilateralise" China's global development footprint are quite recent. Since the 2010s, greater emphasis on multilateral channels has been particularly visible in China's development finance portfolio with Beijing's leadership in setting up new multilateral banks, among other major initiatives (Costa Vazquez & Zheng, 2021). As we show below, establishing and formalising triangular cooperation arrangements with traditional donors and even more so with UN entities has also been part of this trend (Gu et al., 2016; Zhang, 2017 and 2020; see Box 2).

Triangular development cooperation partnerships have been approached by the Chinese government as opportunities to learn from others and project a cooperative or benevolent image, in line with China's foreign policy priority of becoming a responsible global power that adheres to the principles of neutrality and impartiality (Zhang, 2017; Tang & Zhu, 2019; Zhou, Tang & Ericsson, 2020).[36] In its triangular engagements, the Chinese government has preferred to work with UN entities rather than Northern donors for a number of reasons.[37] First, the Chinese government believes that UN entities enjoy – or are perceived as having – greater neutrality and objectivity than traditional donors in how they cooperate; and, given China's status as a key member state, are also more likely to recognise and apply China's development practices (Han, 2017; Zhou et al., 2020).[38] Second, there is a recognition among Chinese international development experts that UN entities have relevant expertise and global networks that can be of use for expanding the reach of Chinese development cooperation (Zhou et al., 2020). Third, and similar to the situation in Brazil, partnering with UN entities also offers China a strong added value in terms of development cooperation management. By making use of the UN's global infrastructure, China can reduce costs and compensate for its "shortage of specialized foreign aid management and coordination agencies in the host country" (Tang & Zhu, 2019, p. 191). Finally, cooperating with the UN provides China's development cooperation with an additional layer of legitimacy. This is particularly relevant in a context shaped by increasing levels of geopolitical tensions that have also affected how Western audiences perceive China's SSC efforts, at the UN and beyond (see Brautigam & Rithmire, 2021; Haug, 2022).

In many ways, the UN has not only been a pioneer with regard to China's triangular development cooperation but also its major catalyst. According to a survey commissioned by the UNDP office in China, in approximately half of the 28 Chinese organisations engaged in triangular cooperation that were surveyed, collaboration in the past was initiated when Chinese institutions were approached by traditional development actors, including UN entities, proposing cooperation

34 The notion of "Chinese wisdom" is also mobilised by UN entities. The UNFPA Centre in China, for instance, qualifies its own work in China as "export[ing] Chinese experience" and "contribut[ing] Chinese wisdom by building a multi-party exchange platform, systematically organizing and sharing Chinese experience, and providing technical support and capacity training to developing countries" (CPDRC, 2020).

35 Like Brazil, China favours the term "trilateral" or "tripartite" over "triangular" due to what is perceived as the latter's hierarchical connotations.

36 On China as a "responsible power", see Yeophantong (2013) and Foot (2018).

37 As pointed out by a Chinese international development scholar during the drafting and review of this paper (2022), working with the UN has become even more important to Beijing in recent years, as the growing China–US rivalry and other geopolitical tensions have made it increasingly difficult for China and traditional Western/Northern donors to cooperate.

38 This was also corroborated by interviews with UN officials based in New York City (November 2020) and Rome (October 2021).

ideas or offering funding (Zhou et al., 2020).[39] More recently, this dynamic seems to have changed, with China becoming more proactive (see below). Overall, Beijing characterises its dialogue and exchanges with UN entities as based on an "open and pragmatic attitude" (SCIO, 2021, section VII), highlighting that "international organisations with the UN at the core should make full use of their strengths, extend information sharing and coordination with all parties, and actively promote international development cooperation through multilateral channels".

As with Brazil, UNDP has had a singular presence in China's development cooperation landscape. Over the past decades, UNDP has played a cross-cutting and management-related advisory role with regard to China's development cooperation, upon official requests from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chinese think tanks (Zhang, 2017). Development experts often refer to UNDP's engagement as assisting the Chinese government in "professionalising" its institutional development cooperation framework.[40] UNDP's support functions have included developing reports and research papers; assisting with the preparation of China's White Papers on foreign aid and international development; translating Chinese official documents; offering placements for Chinese experts in UNDP headquarters or country offices (for study trips and generating ideas for triangular projects); advising on the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC); and hosting international workshops (Zhang, 2017).

As part of this comprehensive support portfolio, UNDP's office in Beijing has also published discussion papers focusing on China's triangular cooperation. In a UNDP publication from 2020, China's triangular cooperation

> refers to any collaboration between Chinese institutions and international actors, including traditional development entities, in providing development assistance to other developing countries. The assistance provided by China and its partners may entail financial resources, technical expertise, knowledge, in-kind support or any combination of these (Zhou et al., 2020, p. 15).[41]

Unlike Brazil, China's overall development cooperation portfolio is strongly geared towards financing infrastructure and strengthening the productive sector in partner countries (Bräutigam, 2009; Gu et al., 2016). Compared to Brazil, China's approach is therefore much more business-oriented, with initiatives that fall both within and outside its "aid budget" (Yu, 2019; Alves & Lee, 2022). While Chinese development cooperation also includes technical cooperation and knowledge exchange on agricultural development, climate change and social (e.g. health-related) policies, the rationale of economic connectivity and production capacity has dominated development cooperation efforts. This is why, in terms of stakeholders, Chinese development cooperation initiatives involve not only governmental actors and official think tanks but also the business sector. China's triangular cooperation with the UN reflects this pattern by targeting economic development issues and involving business actors (see Section 3). Still, the rapidly evolving triangular cooperation landscape, as we will discuss below, serves as a telling illustration to the observation that China has moved from being just a development finance partner to also playing the role of a global development knowledge hub through creating and disseminating development-related theory and policy applications (Gu, 2015). Alongside

39 Such a view was advanced by a Chinese international development scholar during the drafting and review of this paper (2022).

40 Interview with UNDP China staff (Beijing, December 2018); phone interview with Chinese development cooperation and international relations scholars (August 2019).

41 A UNDP discussion paper from 2017 provides a longer definition, stating that trilateral cooperation is a "development cooperation projects that aim to transfer Chinese hardware, share technology and technical expertise and promote mutual learning, closely involving Chinese institution(s), traditional or international development agencies, and host country institution(s) throughout the project cycle, from project initiation, design and implementation, to management and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), with each party contributing financial resources and/ or technical expertise and/or in-kind support." (Han, 2017, p. 3).

"harder" dimensions of development cooperation, such as infrastructure investment, "softer" dimensions have recently been expanding as part of China's cooperation efforts. UN entities have played a key role in this regard by promoting the inclusion of soft(er) development issues into transfer partnerships, from labour and industrial skills development to social policies. Examples include UNICEF's efforts since 2015 to integrate maternal, newborn and child health issues into FOCAC dialogues. This led to a new agreement in 2017, using Chinese funding to assist UNICEF's work alongside eight African countries on these matters (UNICEF, 2018).

For most of the last two decades, China has adopted what Zhang (2020, p. 232) calls a "cautious and incremental approach" to triangular cooperation, including with the UN. This has meant experimenting with or piloting triangular cooperation without proactively leading it. For those primarily in charge of development cooperation in China – namely MOFCOM and, since 2018, the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) – triangular cooperation has long remained a somewhat "new modality". A result of this rather cautious engagement has been an absence of clear policy guidance, resulting in each initiative being managed on a case-by-case basis (Zhang, 2020). More recently, however, the rapid expansion of China–UN partnerships suggests that caution has given way to a more confident approach. An important shift has been observed since 2015 – when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established – with a growing number of line ministries working with their UN counterparts, and the Chinese government setting up new initiatives or reforming and boosting existing ones (see Box 2).

Box 2: The 2030 Agenda: a new era for China-UN relations[42]

China's commitment to and enthusiasm towards global development issues has augmented significantly since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Chinese engagement with the UN system reflects a growing consensus within China's international development community that "multilateral institutions hold global networks and resources, and extensive expertise in areas such as capacity building" (UNDP China, 2022, p. 19; see Mao, 2020; Haug, 2021). China's South–South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF), announced in 2015 and operating since 2017, has become a major channel for China's development cooperation, notably work with UN agencies (Zhou et al., 2020). SSCAF is co-managed by China (through the China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges, CICETE, under MOFCOM) and UNDP and works through pooling resources mostly from the Chinese government – who initially committed USD 2 billion to the fund – but also from traditional development partners, including Northern donors and the UN system. Since its launch, the fund has established agreements with several UN entities – including UNFPA, UNIDO and UNICEF – to carry out both bilateral South–South technical cooperation and humanitarian assistance initiatives, and increasingly also more narrowly defined triangular cooperation projects.

According to the Chinese government, SSCAF provides support for activities in a wide range of issue areas, including humanitarian aid, agricultural development and food security, health care, poverty alleviation, disaster preparation and mitigation, education and training, sustainable industrial development, eco-environmental protection, trade promotion, and investment facilitation (SCIO, 2021, Chapter II). By the end of 2019, China had launched 82 projects under the SSCAF framework in cooperation with 14 international organisations (SCIO, 2021, Chapter II). More recently, the fund has enabled China and UNICEF, for instance, to jointly provide humanitarian assistance to African countries, including nutrition treatment for children and their families in Somalia, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe (UNICEF, 2019). It has also enabled projects like "Learning from China's Experience to Improve the Ability of Response to COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific Region", a triangular partnership launched in 2021 involving UNDP, China, Cambodia, Lao, Nepal, the Philippines, and Myanmar (UNDP China, 2021). In September 2022, China announced the transformation of SSCAF into the Global Development and South–South Cooperation Fund, with an additional commitment of USD 1 billion. The new fund is geared to implementing initiatives under China's Global Development Initiative (GDI) and, beyond collaboration with UN entities, has a broader and more ambitious scope of action (People's Republic of China, 2022).

42 For more details, see UNICEF (2019); UNDP China (2021). For the initiatives with UNFPA, see Hu (2020).

Collaboration between China and FAO is particularly enlightening with regard to institutional change over time. The partnership has evolved significantly since China's participation in FAO's first global SSC programmes in the mid-1990s, namely the Special Programme for Food Security between 1996 and 2008 and the National and Regional Programmes for Food Security between 2008 and 2012 (see Mao, 2020). At the time, China joined FAO-led initiatives, sending its nationals to serve as experts alongside a pool of technicians working in FAO projects in other developing countries (FAO, 2019). Through a trust fund, this partnership evolved into a China-funded initiative in the early 2000s and has developed into an even more robust programme since the mid-2010s. Indeed, FAO's 2016–2020 Country Programming Framework for China is the first official document that explicitly includes a line of work related to "Facilitating China's regional and international agriculture cooperation" (FAO, 2017, Strategic Priority 4). In 2019, the Netherlands and China jointly co-funded "the first triangular cooperation project [with a Northern donor] under the FAO–China SSC Programme". [43] As part of the 2016–2020 planning, the FAO office in China announced the intention to "explore the possibility of establishing a Center for Agriculture Partnership and Innovation which aims to facilitate agricultural collaborations among the Belt and Road countries in addition to improve[ing] national agriculture production and capacities" (FAO, 2017, p. 7). As of September 2022, FAO and the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences have cleared the implementation agreement of what is now referred to as an "innovation platform" that also figures as part of an action point under China's Global Development Initiative (GDI) (see CGTN, 2022).[44]

Importantly, for some UN entities such as FAO, IFAD, UNIDO and UNOSSC, China – and not Brazil – has actually been the pioneer and thus in many ways a "lab" for their global engagement with South–South and triangular cooperation. In the case of IFAD, the China-IFAD South–South and Triangular Cooperation Facility was established in 2018, as the organisation's first facility dedicated to these modalities. This was followed by the creation of two additional South–South and Triangular Cooperation and Knowledge Centres – as they are called at IFAD – in Addis Ababa and Brasilia in 2019 (IFAD, 2020).

China's current more confident approach with regards to triangular cooperation mirrors the country's grand strategy for SSC in the making. Unlike Brazil, China appears to have a clearer idea of how SSC relates to other foreign policy goals (SCIO, 2021): it has integrated SSC into its main high-level geopolitical and geo-economic initiatives, including FOCAC and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). [45] SSC is also a central pillar of China's Global Development Initiative – announced in 2021 – through which Beijing hopes to boost global efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda (Cheng & Wang, 2022; see Baumann, Haug, & Weinlich, 2022). While the extent to which the GDI will complement and reinforce other China-led global development efforts remains to be seen, its focus on contributing to expedite the implementation of the 2030 Agenda certainly aligns with Xi's current thinking on promoting "small and beautiful" projects of "high-quality" under the BRI (SCIO, 2022).[46] Against this backdrop, there seems to be a growing intention – by both UN entities and the Chinese government – clearly to align triangular initiatives

43 We employ the term "triangular cooperation" in a broad sense, building on the UN definition outlined above, meaning that all kinds of SSC supported by multilateral bodies – including the UN – count as triangular cooperation. At times, both Brazil and China might follow a slightly different understanding by referring to these partnerships as "SSC partnerships" and only use the term "triangular cooperation" when Northern partners are involved, as in the China–FAO case. See also the discussion in Section 4.

44 Written exchange with FAO representatives, October 2022.

45 For a broader discussion of UN entities' evolving engagement with BRI, see Haug (mimeo).

46 According to China's Assistant Minister of Commerce, Sheng Qiuping, such a focus seeks to promote "tangible benefits to the economic development of host countries and improvements in people's livelihoods" and to "enhance the sense of gain among people in host countries". Among the policy areas the Chinese government seeks to explore in the context of its new batch of "small and beautiful" and "high-quality" projects are agriculture, poverty reduction, sanitation, and health (SCIO, 2022).

with the BRI or the GDI. These broad umbrellas, moreover, might provide impetus for accelerating the programming dimension of China's partnerships with the UN. Moves in this direction are already visible in partnerships with several UN entities, including those with UNFPA, WFP and ILO, as discussed below.

As this brief overview indicates, Brazil and China have both expanded their triangular cooperation engagement with the UN over the last two decades, albeit in different ways. Whereas Brazil–UN partnerships started and evolved into more formalised programmes in the mid-2000s and early 2010s, China–UN triangular partnerships have diversified and gained traction more recently, with a significant political commitment by the Chinese government to keep expanding this area of collaboration.

3 Policy transfer with the UN: putting triangular cooperation partnerships to use

South–South cooperation can centre on all kinds of collaborative relations between developing countries, from capacity building and technical support to financial or in-kind assistance. As the relevance of (development) experiences of one Southern country for other Southern spaces is one of the key motivations behind South–South cooperation, the exchange and transfer of policies has played a particularly central role for both South–South efforts and triangular cooperation arrangements set up to support them.[47] Policy transfer research examines the "process[es] in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting" (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, p. 5). When discussing policy transfer partnerships in this paper, we conceive of both "policy" and "transfer" as umbrella terms. When referring to *policy,* we are not only talking about the formal (i.e. institutionalised) contours of policies that travel but also the policy ideas and instruments – i.e. the types of knowledge and technologies – that conform them. Likewise, our understanding of *transfer* here echoes recent policy scholarship that has tried to bridge the research streams on policy transfer, diffusion, circulation and mobility (see Porto de Oliveira, 2020) to encompass the different ways in which policies travel from one jurisdiction to another, unfolding across a continuum from voluntary proactive adoption to practices of coercion.[48] While building on this diverse body of literature, we subscribe to the idea that – paraphrasing Stone (2004, p. 547) – studying policy transfer means to directly engage "with the contested politics of who shares what policy".

As mentioned in the introduction, the role of international organisations in sharing development policies and technologies across the Global South has been widely studied by policy, development and international relations scholars. Stone (2004) argues that transnational actors and networks, including those conforming with entities in the UN development system, are engaged in both hard and soft forms of policy-related transfer. While hard(er) forms of policy

47 While not all South–South and triangular cooperation efforts include policy transfer components, many of them do, also and notably in arrangements that include the UN; see Waisbich et al. (2021); Waisbich (2022b).

48 We do not intend to ignore the different research traditions related to each of these terms; and we acknowledge the value of this diverse take on policy travel also for how it informs the research questions and methodologies policy scholars have explored so far. For a detailed explanation on each stream, as well as a discussion on their differences and overlaps, see Porto de Oliveira (2021).

transfer are characterised by different degrees of imposition,[49] softer ones can include the diffusion of policies, institutions, ideologies or justifications, attitudes and ideas, or negative lessons. International organisations – including the OECD, multilateral development banks and UN agencies – have long been engaged with disseminating "the development/underdevelopment dialectic generating institutionality and fostering values, practices and symbolisms" (Morasso & Lamas, 2020, p. 5) in line with the status quo of the development cooperation field. More generally, their policy transfer efforts have contributed to generating the "theoretical and technical knowledge that substantially contributes to formulat[ing] the concept of development and the policies and actions that must be implemented to achieve it" (Morasso & Lamas, 2020, p. 5).

Porto de Oliveira (2017) further highlights the "screening function" international organisations play in their quest for "policy solutions" and "best practices". That focus on screening can be traced back to decades of development-related policy advisory services provided by organisations like the World Bank or the OECD under a global neoliberal paradigm (Pal, 2014; Hadjiisky, 2017). However, the screening for "best practices" has gained new contours and a new momentum in the context of what is often described as trends towards a "Post/Beyond Aid World" (Janus, Klingebiel & Paulo, 2015; Mawdsley, Savage & Kim, 2014; Eyben & Savage, 2013). Indeed, many international organisations in the development sector, including UN entities, have dedicated considerable energy to reviewing "Southern solutions" – notably those emanating from countries like Brazil and China[50] – to identify innovative policies for the fulfilment of global development goals (Morais de Sá e Silva, 2021; Porto de Oliveira, 2017). This has been part of their attempt to reposition themselves in the evolving geographies of global power and escape from an enduring funding and legitimacy crisis in traditional *Aidland* (Milhorance & Soulé-Kohndou, 2017; Lima & Santana, 2020; Constantine & Shankland, 2017; Abdenur & Fonseca, 2013). While (support schemes for) South–South policy transfers are not immune to, and often reflect, some of the longstanding power asymmetries in development cooperation,[51] they often come with an additional layer of legitimacy vis-à-vis more traditional North–South transfer practices that have long been criticised for their often colonial-like assumptions and practices.[52] Taking these dynamics on board for the examination of policy transfer through triangular cooperation means

49 The often-cited examples of more coercive forms of policy and knowledge transfer are the structural adjustment policies led by the International Monetary Fund, notably in the 1980s and 1990s, or the policy conditionalities embedded in World Bank policy lending. Another example is found in the case of the European Union, with countries willing to join the EU having to "adapt" themselves and adopt the so-called "acquis communautaire" in order to be accepted in the club. For a discussion on the EU, see Dunn (2005). For a conceptual discussion on the four main mechanisms for spreading public policy (learning, competition, coercion, and imitation), see Marsh and Sharman (2009).

50 India has also set up partnerships with UN entities, which include the IBSA Fund (set up in 2003 alongside Brazil and South Africa) and the India–UN Development Partnership Fund (established in 2017), implemented through UNOSSC to fund projects related to all SDGs. Yet, the participation of India in the global circulation of policies through its partnerships with the UN system has been less important when compared to both Brazil and China. The same goes for other large middle-income countries such as Indonesia, Mexico and Turkey.

51 Although the idea of a horizontal transfer of knowledge might resonate strongly with SSC principles, policy transfer and SSC can actually be said to have a somewhat uneasy relationship, regarding both the very notion of "transfer" and the motivations behind the sharing and exporting of policies (Waisbich et al., 2021). Such uneasiness can be located in SSC's own emphasis on its 'differential nature' vis-a-vis traditional development aid, which made SSC practitioners wary of referring to their presumably demand-driven and horizontal "sharing" exercises or "exchanges" as what were often seen as top-down – or even coercive – North–South "transfers" (Hickey & Mohan, 2008; Stone, 2004).

52 However, there have indeed been concerns that certain policies might be travelling between developing countries less out of an autonomous desire (or voluntary choice) to learn from and emulate a policy solution tested elsewhere in the South, and more out of different forms of intra-Southern (political and economic) pressure that differ from traditional policy conditionality in North–South assistance schemes. For a critical appraisal of the different forms of pressure in South–South policy exchanges, and of South–South cooperation more broadly, see, for instance, Moyo, Jha & Yeros (2019) and Waisbich et al. (2021).

paying attention to who is demanding, offering and/or receiving what. It also means unpacking what guides policy travel, as well as which policies are being shared, and why.

3.1 Policy transfer as an expanding feature of Brazil's and China's cooperation with the UN

Starting in the early 2000s, the UN's quest for "Southern solutions" to be replicated elsewhere resonated strongly with attempts by Brazil and China to expand their technical cooperation and promote domestic policy experiences. Both sides involved – UN entities and their Brazilian and Chinese counterparts – thus found in each other somewhat ideal partners to further their respective agendas through triangular partnerships for policy transfer. UN agencies have acted as multilateral loudspeakers to market Brazilian and Chinese home-grown solutions abroad (Constantine & Shankland, 2017; Milhorance & Soulé-Kohndou, 2017), at least indirectly contributing to foreign policy objectives, from geo-economic and geostrategic interests to soft power and status building (Suyama et al., 2016; Esteves et al., 2020; Tang & Zhu, 2019; Porto de Oliveira & Romano, 2022). In both cases, transferring policy knowledge through the UN has also functioned as signalling to both domestic and international audiences the ability to overcome domestic development challenges and take on the position of a policy role model or, for China, a constructive global leader.

This natural alliance of sorts has been built on a long trajectory of UN entities working with Brazil and China domestically through the implementation of development projects in a range of policy sectors, starting in the 1960s (for Brazil) and the late 1970s (for China). As UN entities themselves had previously supported the transfer of (usually Northern) knowledge and technologies to both countries, they were able to rely on their understanding of local policy dynamics inside Brazil and China in their emerging support for both governments' expansion of development cooperation beyond their borders. This "dual" engagement has been a defining feature of partnerships with the UN entities analysed in this paper. UN in-country work in both countries has been changing in line with growing institutional capacities in Brazil and China; and UN support for the transfer of Brazilian and Chinese development experiences abroad thus coexists with UN support for domestic development challenges (see Table 1).

Table 1: China, Brazil and UN entities: in-country and international development work[53]

Country		Organisation							
		FAO	IFAD	ILO	UNIDO	UNDP	UNFPA	UNICEF	WFP
Brazil	Domestic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
	International	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
China	Domestic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	International	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Source: Authors' own compilation, based on publicly available evidence (as of 2022).

53 From the seven entities surveyed in this paper, the relationship between WFP and Brazil is the only one where the UN entity is no longer working domestically. While Brazil has not fully overcome its internal food security problems, WFP terminated its operations in Brazil in 1996. As early as 2000, WFP began discussing with the Brazilian government – alongside other middle-income developing nations in Latin America and elsewhere – how to foster its role as a "food-aid donor". For Brazil, this "donor role" matched a renewed governmental priority to fight hunger in the country and globally – through the Zero Hunger Programme – and forging an emerging identity as an "agri-food power" (Lima, 2020).

The strong link between domestic and international engagement has also been reflected in another rationale behind expanding policy transfer partnerships with the UN, centring on the need for Brazil and China to identify new allies and policy arenas for domestic policy battles and create resonance with their evolving global positions (Stone et al. 2019). Brazil, in particular, has made its public policies – and in particular social policies – the core of its SSC efforts (Faria, 2012; Milani & Lopes, 2014). Public bodies such as the ministries and specialised agencies in charge of health, agriculture and education hold the policy knowledge that is shared through development cooperation initiatives and thus act as policy transfer agents.[54] The case of Brazilian SSC on social protection and food security is perhaps a classic example of how domestic and international policy debates were officially framed as interacting in the context of development cooperation (Leite et al., 2015; Waisbich, 2020).[55] As the former Director of ABC, João Almino, put it:

> The growing demand by developing countries to get to know successful Brazilian public policies has equally had the effect of strengthening the legitimacy of those policies at the domestic level. This kind of acknowledgment validates the results and the strategic choices that were made in the elaboration and implementation of innovative policies in the country. (Almino & Lima, 2017, p. 23)

Based on a comprehensive review of institutional arrangements set up over the last two decades, we have identified 17 policy transfer partnerships between Brazil and the UN (Figure 1) and 18 policy transfer partnerships between China and the UN (Figure 2).[56] According to publicly available evidence, these partnerships provide a comprehensive overview of Brazilian and Chinese formalised arrangements with the eight UN entities under consideration that are exclusively or primarily dedicated to supporting the transfer of domestic policy experiences through triangular cooperation.[57] In line with Brazil's general focus on sharing domestic development experiences (see above), policy-related questions have always played a central role in Brazilian transfer partnerships with the UN. Despite many political fluctuations, the Brazilian government has generally had a proactive approach to – and has often sought to expand – its collaboration with the UN on policy transfer, notably from 2009 onwards (see Figure 1). Building on a more than 15-year trajectory of designing and implementing different types of initiatives with UN entities, Brazil has seen some long-term and robust partnerships for South–South policy transfer (see Section 4).[58] As the timeline for Chinese policy transfer

54 On transfer agents, see, for instance, Stone (2004).

55 For more on the "international-domestic nexus" and the "graduation dilemmas" faced by rising powers in the context of their (re)emerging global development engagement, see Milani, Pinheiro & Soares de Lima (2017) and van der Westhuizen & Milani (2019).

56 As there are no overall numbers on Brazilian and Chinese triangular cooperation arrangements with the UN, it is difficult to gauge numerically how these policy transfer partnerships relate to broader triangular cooperation patterns. The analysis in this paper thus provides an important step towards a more systematic and comprehensive overview of both countries' triangular partnership landscapes with the UN.

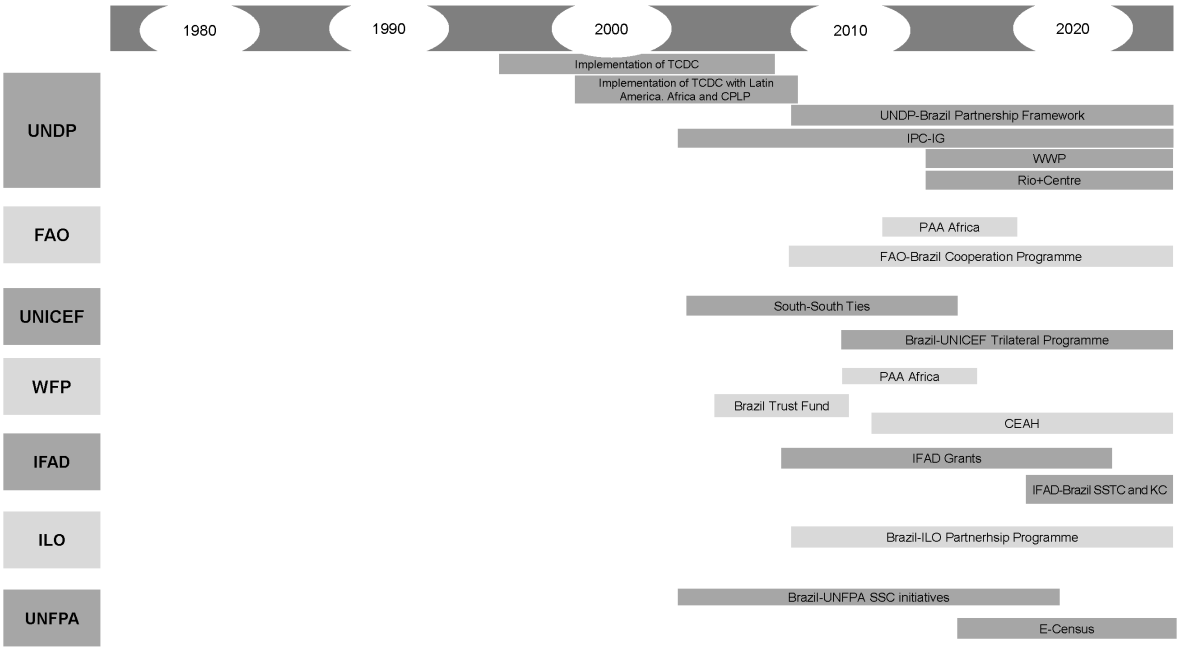
57 This means we cover only those triangular cooperation arrangements set up by Brazil and China together with entities in the UN development system that have an exclusive or primary focus on supporting (the capacity for) the transfer of domestic policy experiences, excluding, for instance, agreements or components that were exclusively set up to improve the management of development cooperation more broadly (see Section 4) or other types of multilateral collaboration under the umbrella of a UN body.

58 In some initiatives, traditional donors have joined Brazil–UN policy transfer partnerships under what is known in Brazil as "TDC+1", i.e. trilateral development cooperation with a UN entity and a Northern donor. Examples include the United Kingdom's early support to Brazilian triangular initiatives with FAO and WFP, such as the Purchase from Africans for Africa (PAA Africa) and the Centre of Excellence Against Hunger, under UK aid-funded programmes such as the Building Brazilian Impact in Low Income Countries. UK support to Brazil–UN collaboration, notably to the partnerships with initiatives in Africa started in the early 2010s and expanded quite significantly before losing steam due to broader (political and policy) changes in the development cooperation landscape in both countries. Since 2018, both countries have been engaged in designing a new Strategic Partnership, which includes TDC+1 initiatives; see Wilton Park (2019).

partnerships with UN entities in Figure 2 shows, China had early SSC-related experiences of partnering with UN entities – including UNDP and FAO – for policy transfer purposes already in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During most of the "South–South cooperation boom" from the early 2000s until the mid-2010s, however, and unlike Brazil, China adopted a slower pace when partnering with the UN to develop formal triangular initiatives with policy transfer components.

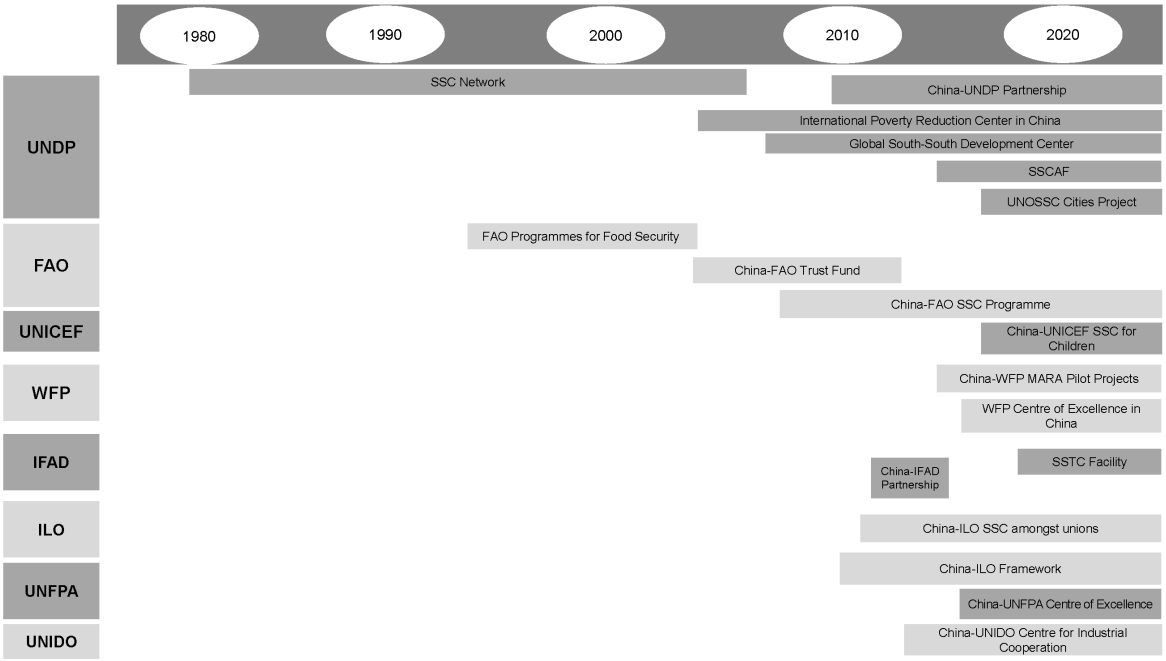
As we discuss below, collaboration between UN entities and these two major Southern hubs has unfolded broadly in line with their respective development (cooperation) trajectories, approaches and policy priorities. Despite obvious differences, the increasing number of partnerships over time, as well as the broad range of issue areas covered, suggests that there has been a substantial and sustained interest by both Brazil and China to develop triangular partnerships for policy transfer with UN entities.

Figure 1: Timeline: Brazil–UN triangular cooperation partnerships with policy transfer components



Source: Authors' own elaboration, based on publicly available documents. The full names of partnerships and additional details are provided in Table 3 (see below).

Figure 2: Timeline: China-UN triangular cooperation partnerships with policy transfer components



Source: Authors' own elaboration, based on publicly available documents. The full names of partnerships and additional details are provided in Table 4 (see below).

3.2 The UN's role in policy transfer partnerships with Brazil and China

In their support for the global circulation of development-related policies, UN entities have come to play a number of different and often overlapping roles in triangular policy transfer partnerships with Brazil and China. Overall, these roles can be clustered according to four broad aspects: brokering transfer processes; mobilising funds; implementing or monitoring projects; and strengthening the capacity of national institutions. First, and arguably most importantly, UN entities *broker* the transfer of Southern policies. As mentioned above, this includes "scanning" promising policies emanating from Southern contexts as well as assisting – i.e. both encouraging and funding – knowledge production about what is seen as "successful" domestic experiences, good practices, solutions, and lessons learned to be disseminated to other Southern countries. UNICEF, for instance, sees itself playing "a broker and a convener role, enabling access to relevant policy knowledge under its mandate" in the context of its partnership with Brazil (Articulação Sul et al., 2020, p. 7).[59] A similar self-description is found in the context of China–UNICEF partnerships. There, UNICEF is said to work to "expand upstream support on

59 Brazil–UNICEF guidelines for joint cooperation initiatives, published in 2017, state that UNICEF: i) supports the identification, documentation and upscaling of successful Brazilian experiences and emblematic cases of public policies and social technologies in the areas of the UNICEF mandate for exchange through trilateral South–South cooperation; ii) serves as the main interface between UNICEF headquarters, regional and country offices involved in trilateral South–South cooperation initiatives with Brazilian and partner countries' counterparts and other interested parties in the process of identification, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such initiatives. This includes providing technical input to preparation and assessment of requests for Brazil–UNICEF trilateral South–South cooperation, preparation of knowledge sharing and learning materials, organization and execution of activities (UNICEF & ABC, 2017, p. 14).

policy development and share transparently[60] the best practices in child development to China and from China to developing countries under the framework of South–South cooperation" (UNICEF, 2021, p. 4).

The term "broker" is also used by UNIDO in its partnerships with China. According to the organisation, in its work with China UNIDO "serv[es] as a matchmaker, catalyst and neutral broker" (UNIDO, s.a.). In a similar vein, IFAD sees itself as "a SSTC facilitator". Under what IFAD calls a "provider-led model" of SSC initiatives, the Rome-based UN entity "supports the capturing, packaging and sharing of country-led experiences" from large Southern economies (IFAD, 2017, p. 49). Similar framings are found in UNFPA accounts about the organisation's work in Brazil. UNFPA characterises its "added value" as a "facilitator" of SSC as well as a promotor of "'scanning' exercises on a regular basis: articulating technical needs of recipient countries with high level providers of developing countries" (UNFPA & ABC, 2012, p. 12). FAO equally frames its work on SSC as part of a broader "global knowledge transfer" strategy that strongly relies on expertise coming from Southern powerhouses such as Brazil and China (FAO, 2018).

While playing this policy and knowledge broker role, UN entities work on both sides of the supply-demand equation. Brokerage often relies on the workings of UN country offices located in Brazil or China as well as in partner countries. These structures play an important "bridging" – also referred to as "facilitation", "match making" or "catalyser" – role for the cooperation requests directed to Southern powers. Again, UNICEF is a good example. For partnerships with China, UNICEF emphasises its longstanding work with national counterparts in other Southern countries (UNICEF, 2018). In UNICEF's partnership with Brazil, in turn, existing guidelines highlight that:

> Over the past years, developing nations from all regions of the globe have requested UNICEF Brazil Country Office (BCO) to provide advice on how to engage in trilateral SSC arrangements with the Government of Brazil in areas of the UNICEF mandate. The motivation behind these requests is the interest to explore ways to learn from and adapt Brazilian successful practices in the national contexts of the requesting countries. (UNICEF & ABC, 2017, p. 10)

Another dimension of this bridging role – often performed by experts in UN country offices – refers to translation work at multiple levels: translation of cooperation requests into workable development cooperation projects, language translation during exchanges, as well as translation of developmental policy knowledge from one context to another (Porto de Oliveira, 2017; Articulação Sul, 2020).

Second, and besides brokering Southern knowledge and experience, UN entities *mobilise* Southern funds and supplies for global development, including in-kind support and policy exchanges. The UNICEF–China partnership illustrates this dynamic. According to UNICEF, "these are innovative models of South–South cooperation in which UNICEF acts as a broker leveraging China's aid resources for the benefit of children in Africa. China's funding, skills, knowledge, and services related to health could also be critical to the improvement of health conditions in many other Southern countries" (UNICEF, 2018, p. 21). UNICEF's most recent China country programme explicitly mentions this goal, highlighting "the leveraging of resources; and the increased availability of high-quality supplies from China to benefit child development elsewhere" (UNICEF, 2021, p. 5).

Third, UN entities *implement* and/or *monitor* projects on the ground and thus act as "implementing partners", potentially accompanied by national institutions from Brazil or China.

60 Interestingly, the ideas of "transparency" and "neutrality" found in UNICEF's (here) and UNIDO's (below) own characterisation of their collaboration with China can be seen as speaking directly to a long-standing critique by Chinese diplomats and development experts of North–South transfers and the diffusion of particular policy models (described as "best practices") through traditional aid relationships.

Examples of UN entities carrying out activities on the ground can be found in partnerships like China's South–South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF) co-administered with UNDP, the FAO–WFP–Brazil Purchase from Africans for Africa (PAA Africa) initiative, or the Brazil–FAO Programme (see below).

Fourth and lastly, UN entities also focus on *strengthening capacities* of national institutions in Brazil and China, enhancing their ability to act – or socialising them into acting – as providers of international development cooperation, and buttressing their standing as global policy hubs. In practice, UN entities provide technical assistance to Southern powers such as Brazil and China to assist them in "becoming" development cooperation providers. As mentioned in the previous section, this is a function UNDP has had in both countries over the past decades. As part of its capacity-building support for Chinese institutions working on global development issues, UNDP has also invested in bringing the very international policy centres it has helped create to so-called "international development cooperation standards", also referred to as "professionalising" processes. For instance, when discussing its work alongside the International Poverty Reduction Centre in China, UNDP underlined that following the initial set-up phase (2005–2009), for the second phase of the partnership (2009–2014), the priority was the "professionalization of the Centre with a strong international character to ensure that the objectives and practices of the centre meet international standards" (UNDP, s.a.).

The following sections provide a systematic analysis of Brazilian and Chinese triangular cooperation partnerships for policy transfer with different parts of the UN system. We examine partnership patterns as well as the transfer instruments and policy areas they encompass, and spell out the different ways in which policies from Brazil and China are being transferred through these partnerships. We do so by first examining main *partnership types* (i.e. projects, programmes and centres) in Section 4 and then focusing on key *transfer dimensions* (i.e. the policies themselves, transfer agents, as well as transfer processes, instruments and arrangements) in Section 5.

4 Partnership types: making policies travel

The policy transfer partnerships Brazil and China have developed with UN entities over the last two decades cover a considerable range of issue areas and institutional forms. In order to better understand the key characteristics of this partnership landscape, we develop a typology that allows us to assign each partnership to one of three partnership types. Based on a review of official documentation as well as academic sources, each transfer partnership is classified as a (i) project, (ii) programme, or (iii) centre. This typology is intended to provide a basic heuristic for analysing broad partnership patterns while capturing the most important variations across a continuum of institutional forms. The first category – *projects* – encompasses simpler initiatives, often launched as pilots, that are strongly dominated by operational concerns and rely on one-off financial resource allocations. It also covers initiatives that, while remaining constrained and focused, have been renewed several times, as well as funding facilities under which a substantial number of sub-projects are nested. The second category – *programmes* – adds a stronger policy transfer component to the operational dimensions through a more explicitly defined programmatic arrangement that also relies on more sustainable long-term funding streams. The third category – *centres* – seeks to cluster initiatives that have both operational and programmatic features by adding an explicit commitment to "knowledge sharing" and/or "policy learning", contributing to the institutionalisation of a centre's identity as a joint long-term investment in policy transfer capacities (see Table 2).

While a useful first step in systematising partnership types, this heuristic – as any other clustering exercise – has its limitations. One is simplification: those setting up and involved in the partnerships under discussion have used many different labels to name their initiatives, including

"fund", "facility", "programme", "initiative", "agreement", "framework", "centre, "policy centre", "centre of excellence", or "reference centre". In order to add analytical value to the examination of empirical phenomena unfolding behind this plethora of framings, we have clustered partnerships under the three proposed overarching categories while acknowledging, first, variation within and potential overlap across categories[61] and, second, that the "naming" or "branding" of initiatives is part of a technical as much as a political exercise. As such, not all initiatives end up functioning or performing according to what their names might indicate.

Table 2: Types of triangular partnerships for policy transfer

	Projects	**Programmes**	**Centres**
Operational			
Programmatic			
Institutionalised identity and long-term capacities			

Source: Authors

A second issue relates to the often-complex nature of triangular cooperation arrangements involving UN entities. What we refer to as "triangular" partnerships for policy transfer in line with established definitions mentioned above – taking the UN entity as a third (facilitating) element in a South–South scheme – is not always how actors themselves define their collaboration with the UN system.[62] The China–FAO Programme, for instance, is understood and framed as a South–South programme, which can include "triangular projects" involving other bilateral – usually Northern – "donors".[63] We have also come across "umbrella-like" long-term agreements, such as the Brazil–UNDP PRODOC signed in 2009 (see Box 1 above); the UNDP–China Partnership; or the China-funded South–South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF) co-managed with UNDP. While these broad frameworks primarily function as general UN support for Brazilian and Chinese cooperation management, they contain initiatives with a more explicit triangular cooperation focus. The Brazil–UNDP and China–UNDP initiatives considered in our mapping and analysis are thus those with a clear triangular cooperation focus, in which UN entities are part of the policy transfer process as active "knowledge brokers" or with implementation-related roles rather than a predominantly institutional support role to assist them to "become better development cooperation providers". [64]

61 A programme or a centre might encompass or harbour one or more sub-projects under its umbrella, for instance.

62 On how UN entities and officials approach these framing questions, see Haug (2021).

63 As mentioned above, FAO and China describe a 2019 project with Ethiopia and the Netherlands as the "first triangular project" under the programme.

64 As such, when referring to the Brazil–UNDP "Corporate Partnership Framework/Strategic Partnership", we examine sub-projects in which Brazil and UNDP join forces to promote triangular capacity development in third countries and exclude UNDP's administrative support for the management of Brazilian SSC. A similar logic is applied to China, excluding UNDP China activities geared towards "modernising" or "professionalising" the Chinese development cooperation landscape and strengthening China's own capacity to engage in development cooperation. China's UN Peace and Development Trust Fund, established in 2016 through a pledged contribution of USD 200 million from China over a ten-year period, has not been included in our mapping since it is a partnership set up between the Chinese government and the UN Secretary-General, managed by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. While most projects funded through the Trust Fund's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund are traditional development assistance initiatives implemented by UN entities, some involve policy knowledge transfers from China to other Southern countries. Until 2020, the total budget for these development-related projects added up to over USD 41 million. For a list of projects under the Trust Fund's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund, see UN (s.a.).

A final point of caution relates to the importance of considering policy and institutional change dynamics over time. As mentioned above and discussed in more detail in the following sections, many initiatives have changed their form and shape over the course of their existence, such as moving from a project-like intervention to a programmatic framework initiative. Such dynamics often fall outside clustering exercises but are, nonetheless, important elements in the characterisation of partnerships and in understanding where they might be heading.

These (potential) limitations notwithstanding, we suggest that the proposed characterisation provides a useful first step in analysing a complex and under-studied field. The three-pronged heuristic allows for an understanding of the diversity of partnership patterns over the last two decades and the variance of general partnership types in terms of institutionalisation, longevity, identity, intentionality, and/or strategic value.

Based on the typology outlined above, Tables 3 and 4 categorise the different policy transfer partnerships Brazil (17) and China (18) have developed with UN entities over the last two decades. This mapping points to some general patterns and also highlights the particularities of individual initiatives. In terms of temporal trajectories, the tables – together with the timelines presented in the previous section (see Figures 1 and 2) – suggest that joint formalised policy transfer efforts have seen at least three stages of collaboration between UN entities, on the one hand, and Brazil or China, on the other. Building on earlier UN South–South cooperation support schemes with policy transfer aspects since the 1980s (China) or late 1990s (Brazil), the first stage of more explicit efforts to promote policy transfer included the setup of the first centres with UNDP, notably the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) in Brazil and the International Poverty Reduction Center in China (IPRCC) in the early 2000s (see UNDP s.a.). Both institutions were at the vanguard of and provided a model and modus operandi for the creation of centres – dedicated to the promotion and transfer of particular policies – that would later be taken up by UNDP elsewhere,[65] as well as adopted and/or refined by other UN entities. Towards the end of the first decade of the 2000s, the second stage saw the emergence of several policy transfer projects and of a first round of triangular cooperation programmes dedicated to policy transfer, with more sustainable funding schemes coming from Brazil and China (see Section 5). The programmes set up in the late 2000s either replaced or coexisted with other project-based arrangements that had previously been set up. FAO pioneered this wave of more robust thematic programmes with both countries around 2008/2009. This was also the time when – building on UNDP's policy centre experience – the first WFP "Centre of Excellence" was launched, namely the Brazil-based WFP Centre of Excellence Against Hunger (CEAH). Finally, the third stage corresponds to the post-2015 era, with China starting to significantly expand its triangular agreements with UN entities to transfer policies to other developing countries. Formats for these transfers have included the WFP Centre of Excellence in China, and the partnerships with UNOSSC/UNDP, UNFPA, IFAD, UNICEF and others. Many of these initiatives are still in their early days, with both UN entities and their Chinese counterparts "learning on the move". [66]

65 In the 2010s, UNDP also started partnering with other countries such as Turkey, Singapore and South Korea to establish similar structures. In the case of South Korea, UNDP closed its country office as Korea joined the OECD's Development Assistance Committee in 2010. The following year, the South Korean government and UNDP opened the UNDP Seoul Policy Centre as a facility to share Korea's development experience with other developing countries.

66 Interview with UNDP China staff (Beijing, December 2018).

Table 3: Brazil–UN triangular partnerships for policy transfer: projects, programmes and centres[67]

Early UN–Brazil South–South cooperation support schemes		
Organisation	**Partnership name**	**Duration**
UNDP	Implementation of TCDC Programmes and Projects (BRA/98/0004 and BRA/04/043)[68]	1998–2008
UNDP	Implementation of TCDC Projects and Activities with Latin America, Africa and CPLP (BRA/04/044)[69]	2004–2008
PROJECTS		
Organisation	**Partnership name**	**Duration**
UNICEF	South–South Ties Network	2004–2015
UNFPA	South–South Cooperation initiatives in Brazil	Since 2002
UNFPA	Reference Center Project – Electronic Data Collection[70]	Since 2014
WFP	Brazil Trust Fund	2007–2010
IFAD	IFAD Grants to Brazil	Since 2008
FAO-WFP	Purchase from Africans for Africa (PAA Africa)	2012–2016
PROGRAMMES		
Organisation	**Partnership name**	**Duration**
FAO	Brazil-FAO International Cooperation Programme[71]	Since 2008
UNDP	*Partnership Framework**	*Since 2009*
ILO	Brazil–ILO Partnership Programme to Promote South–South Cooperation to Prevent and Eradicate Child Labour	Since 2009
UNICEF	Brazil–UNICEF Trilateral South–South Cooperation Programme	Since 2011

67 Each partnership mapped under the three clusters (*Projects*, *Programmes* and *Centres*) can (and often do) harbour several initiatives, which are often referred as *projects* or *sub-projects* following the traditional "project-based" approach adopted in international development cooperation. For a critical discussion of the "project-based" approach, see UNOSSC (2021).

68 Earlier Brazil–UNDP umbrella agreement to support Brazil`s bilateral SSC (at the time called horizontal cooperation or technical cooperation among developing countries – TCDC). Later replaced by the UNDP–Brazil Partnership Framework.

69 Earlier Brazil–UNDP umbrella agreement to support Brazil`s bilateral SSC (at the time called horizontal cooperation or technical cooperation among developing countries – TCDC). Later replaced by the UNDP–Brazil Partnership Framework.

70 Although named a Centre, this initiative with UNFPA de facto functions as a project, following our characterisation.

71 Previously called the Brazil–FAO Trilateral South–South Cooperation Programme on Food Security and Nutrition.

Table 3 (cont.): Brazil–UN triangular partnerships for policy transfer: projects, programmes and centres

CENTRES		
Organisation	**Partnership name**	**Duration**
UNDP	International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)	Since 2002
UNDP	The Brazil Learning Initiative for a World without Poverty (WWP)[72]	2013–2018
UNDP	Rio+ Centre[73]	2013–2018
WFP	WFP Centre of Excellence Against Hunger	Since 2011
IFAD	South–South and Triangular Cooperation and Knowledge Centre (SSTC and KC)	Since 2019

* This partnership is an umbrella-like agreement mostly comprised of "management-support" sub-projects and bilateral SSC projects. Under these two kinds of projects, UNDP works alongside ABC mostly to support Brazilian bilateral SSC (as explained above) rather than in a knowledge-broker-role triangular cooperation arrangement. Very few triangular cooperation initiatives have been implemented under this broader partnership framework umbrella.[74]

Source: Authors.

72 Never formally extinguished but no longer active.

73 Never formally extinguished but no longer active.

74 Interview with Brazilian South–South cooperation experts (June 2022). One flagship SSC project under the UNDP–Brazil Partnership is the BRA/12/002 Strengthening the Cotton Sector through South–South Cooperation (*Apoio ao Desenvolvimento do Setor Algodoeiro por meio da Cooperação Sul-Sul*). Alongside this bilateral SSC project with African peers under the UNDP umbrella, Brazil implements triangular cotton-related projects with FAO and Latin American countries (named *Mais Algodão*/More Cotton and focusing on food systems for cotton producers); with ILO, Latin American and African partners (on decent work in cotton production) (see ILO, 2019a); and with WFP/CEAH under the name of *Além do Algodão*/Beyond Cotton on the nexus between cotton production and school feeding (see WFP, s.a.).

Table 4: China–UN triangular partnerships for policy transfer: projects, programmes and centres

Early UN–China South–South cooperation support schemes		
Organisation	**Partnership name**	**Duration**
UNDP	South–South Cooperation Network[75]	1980s–2007
FAO	FAO Special Programmes for Food Security (1996–2008) & National and Regional Programmes for Food Security (2008–2012)[76]	1996–2003
PROJECTS		
Organisation	**Partnership name**	**Duration**
UNDP	*China South–South Cooperation Assistance Fund*[77]	*Since 2015*
FAO	China–FAO Trust Fund[78]	2003–2014
ILO	China–ILO South–South and Triangular Cooperation Framework	Since 2012
ILO	South–South cooperation amongst unions	Since 2013
IFAD	China–IFAD partnership	2013–2015
WFP	SSTC MARA Pilot projects	Since 2015
UNOSSC	UNOSSC Cities project	Since 2017
UNICEF	South–South Cooperation for Children	Since 2017
UNIDO	UNIDO Centre for South–South Industrial Cooperation[79]	Since 2014
PROGRAMMES		
Organisation	**Partnership name**	**Duration**
FAO	China–FAO South–South Cooperation Programme	Since 2009
UNDP	*UNDP–China Partnership*[80]	*Since 2010*
CENTRES		
Organisation	**Partnership name**	**Duration**
UNDP	International Poverty Reduction Center in China (IPRCC)	Since 2005
UNDP/UNOSSC	Global South–South Development Center	Since 2008
UNFPA	Population and Development South–South Cooperation Centre of Excellence	Since 2017
WFP	WFP's Centre of Excellence for Rural Transformation in China	Since 2016
IFAD	China–IFAD SSTC facility	Since 2018

Source: Authors.

75 The Network subsequently evolved into the Global South–South Development Center.

76 FAO changed its approach towards South–South and triangular cooperation, with "enhanced institutional support and innovative partnerships" (FAO, 2019, p. 3).

77 As discussed in Box 2, the China South–South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF) features both bilateral SSC operationalised with the support of UN entities as well as triangular cooperation initiatives.

78 As a fund, this partnership also harboured several smaller initiatives.

79 Although named a centre, this initiative with UNIDO de facto functions as a project.

80 The UNDP–China Partnership is an umbrella-like agreement mostly comprised of bilateral SSC projects in which UNDP plays a management support role rather than a knowledge partner role and provides technical assistance to China to strengthen its capacity to act as a "development provider" (see Section 2).

When comparing both countries, we observe that the landscape in Brazil has been one of early institutionalisation of programmes and centres and of fewer projects. China, in turn, exhibits a larger number of projects compared to programmes or centres. In the Chinese case, the project category showcases an important number of trust funds and facilities (in which UN entities, namely UNDP, work as co-managers such as in the case of the South–South Cooperation Assistance Fund), something that is less frequent in Brazil. Yet, as the temporal analysis indicates, partnerships between China and UN agencies have headed – or are likely to head – towards increased programmatic institutionalisation. They are transitioning from comparatively simpler funding facilities that harbour a range of potentially unrelated small projects to more financially robust and coherent programmes and even more hands-on policy centres.

Under the more robust structures of programmes, technical cooperation or knowledge exchange projects feature as part of a larger jointly defined transfer strategy to use policy knowledge and expertise in Brazil or China to inspire, exchange and pilot solutions on the ground. In the case of Brazil–FAO and China–FAO food and nutrition security programmes, for instance, trust funds were set up to enable the functioning of more robust projects and programmes; a similar dynamic occurred with the Brazil-based WFP Centre of Excellence Against Hunger. As alluded to above, in China, growing efforts to expand programme-like initiatives reflect increasing economic and political backing for South–South and triangular initiatives. This has been followed by larger financial commitments by the Chinese government, mirroring the evolution of China's participation in triangular arrangements with the UN system moving beyond solely acting as a "pivotal country" or a capacity building provider (Tang & Zhu, 2019; Zhang, 2020).[81]

The partnerships with FAO illustrate the increasing funding role played by China. After taking part in FAO-led (but often Northern-donor funded) SSC initiatives in the early days, China agreed on setting up a programme for China–FAO SSC activities in third countries in 2009, for which Beijing initially mobilised USD 30 million. This was followed by an additional financial commitment of USD 50 million in 2015 (FAO, 2019; see Mao, 2020). A new impetus has been seen in recent years under China's flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (SCIO, 2021). A considerable number of UN entities have signed agreements with China on BRI-related processes to expand their strategic engagement (Haug, mimeo). While the extent to which closer alignment with BRI affects policy transfer dynamics in the context of triangular arrangements with the UN is yet to be assessed, many UN entities have been explicit about their intention to deepen their partnerships with Beijing in alignment with the broader BRI umbrella.

The China–ILO partnership, for instance, has been transitioning from projects to a programme framework related to the Decent Work Agenda, maritime labour, and work safety (ILO, 2019b), which is explicitly aligned with the BRI and the Maritime Silk Road. The three Memoranda of Understanding signed between the Chinese government and ILO in 2019 constitute the basis for this enhanced partnership. Likewise, linkages with BRI and other Chinese frameworks for cooperation in the Mekong region and Africa are also explicitly mentioned as shaping the future of the China–WFP partnership, both in terms of policy priorities and cooperation arrangements (WFP, 2021b). A similar discursive alignment is observed in the UNDP/UNOSSC Cities Project, which is taking "advantage of the strategic opportunities offered by the BRI in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals" (UNOSSC, s.a.-b) and in UNFPA's Population and Development Centre, which was conceived as "building on shared interest and mutual benefits within existing international and national cooperation frameworks and strategies of Chinese Government and developing countries such as the Belt and Road Initiative, China-Africa Cooperation and Healthy China 2030" (CPDRC, 2017). An even more concrete example stems from IFAD. Among the first batch of projects funded through the new China-IFAD SSC Facility,

81 A similar dynamic has been observed in the context of triangular cooperation with Western/Northern countries. See Prantz and Zhang (2021).

the "Inclusive agriculture and agro-industrial value chain development as an enabler of poverty reduction in Bangladesh" project is characterised as "responding to opportunities created through BRI" in the country,

> where BRI investments include the construction of the Padma Bridge and the Dhaka Jessore railway. Such investments will link southwestern parts of the country to Dhaka and beyond, creating new opportunities for farmers in these districts to engage in markets, reduce poverty and achieve prosperity. (IFAD, 2019)

At the same time, changes in a partnership's institutional setup can also be observed in the opposite direction, i.e. towards downsizing and decay.[82] Examples include the UNDP–Brazil Rio+ Centre for Sustainable Development, created right after the 2012 Rio+20 Conference, as one of UNDP's Global Policy Centres "to bolster South–South Cooperation and facilitate the participation of the Global South in international efforts on sustainable development" (Rio+ Centre, 2016). However, the joint intention to create and sustain a flagship centre dedicated to sustainable development as a rising policy frame failed due to the lack of political backing and funding in the context of Brazilian turmoil that led to the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff.[83] As of today, the Centre only plays a minor and low-profile mobilisation role in localising SDG-related agendas in Brazil, no longer exercising its intended role of a hub for South–South policy exchanges on this matter.[84]

Another example of a downscaling initiative is the World Without Poverty (WWP) set up in 2013 between UNDP, the World Bank and the Brazilian government (through the former Ministry of Social Development, now the Citizenship Ministry). This learning initiative aimed to document and disseminate Brazil's innovative social protection policies and anti-poverty solutions to international audiences through an online portal, and foster knowledge exchange among policy-makers from different countries on these topics. WWP was born out of a World Bank proposal to respond to a "cooperation fatigue" (Waisbich, 2020) stemming from the large number of cooperation demands Brazil had received to share its flagship social policies, in particular *Bolsa Familia*. The initiative operated between 2014 and 2017 and was then discontinued, despite it having secured a renewed Memorandum of Understanding to keep it running until 2021 (Garcia, 2018). The "slow death" of WWP was the result of internal programmatic challenges with regards to making the platform a meaningful tool for its intended international audiences[85] as well as political challenges faced by Brazilian policy makers and experts working on social protection domestically to carry out additional development cooperation activities under an increasingly constrained, if not openly hostile, environment at home (Waisbich, 2020).

While the contours and direction of institutionalisation dynamics are thus far from obvious, the differentiation of projects, programmes and centres provides a basic structuring device to map different types of policy transfer partnerships and provide the foundation for a more systematic analysis of Brazil's and China's cooperation landscapes with the UN.

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82 A number of UN entities have recently been more cautious about using BRI-related framings because of Western member states' increasingly visible opposition. While this might not affect the continuation and/or expansion of cooperation between the UN and China on the nexus between infrastructure and sustainable development, some reframing and redesigning of China–UN collaboration has been underway (see Haug, mimeo; Baumann, Haug & Weinlich, 2022).

83 The appointed Director of the Centre at the time of its creation was Rômulo Paes de Sousa, an epidemiologist and social protection expert, who headed the Centre between 2013 and 2017, after having worked for more than a decade at the then Ministry of Social Development, including on monitoring and evaluating the impact of the *Bolsa Familia* programme.

84 Such a role was exercised in the first years, through events and publications, including the 2016 report "Social Protection for Sustainable Development: Dialogues between Africa and Brazil" (see RIO+ Centre, 2016).

85 For a more detailed discussion of WWP's knowledge-sharing challenges, see Chapter 6.

5 Transfer dimensions: what, who and how

While different partnership types exhibit different features, they share certain key dimensions. Again, we introduce a three-pronged heuristic that allows for a structured examination of Brazilian and Chinese policy transfer partnerships with the UN, this time for analysing the fundamental transfer dimensions inherent to all projects, programmes and centres mapped out above: the what (policies), the who (transfer agents) and the how (transfer processes, instruments and arrangements).

What: The *policy* that is to be transferred stands at the centre of content-related questions in triangular development cooperation partnerships. Usually embedded in a broader policy area, the specific policy ideas and solutions promoted by these partnerships are among the most visible characteristics of transfer dynamics.

Who: The ecosystem of actors taking part in the transfer of policies – including related knowledges and technologies – includes key *transfer agents*, notably: (a) national actors (both organisations and individuals)[86] within Brazil and China that act as "hubs" of Southern policy expertise; and (b) organisational units and individuals within the UN system, including SSC teams within headquarters, SSC officers in UN country offices in Brazil and China, and UN country offices in Southern partner countries. Southern partner country institutions and representatives as well as other development partners, including Northern bilateral agencies or Northern-based foundations, also play important roles in transfer processes. As we focus on the institutional approach and unpack the partnership dynamics unfolding between UN entities and Brazil or China, however, our analysis is limited to actor groups (a) and (b).

How: Transfer agents (try to) transfer specific policies via *processes* that include a range of *instruments* through which policies are presented, disseminated, discussed and/or adapted. Popular instruments include expert secondments, workshops, study tours or technology-sharing exercises. In many ways, these instruments are the main channels or modalities through which South–South transfers are operationalised. Concrete transfer processes are embedded in governance and funding *arrangements*, usually based on inter-institutional agreements that provide the political, financial and operational foundations for policy transfer to take place.

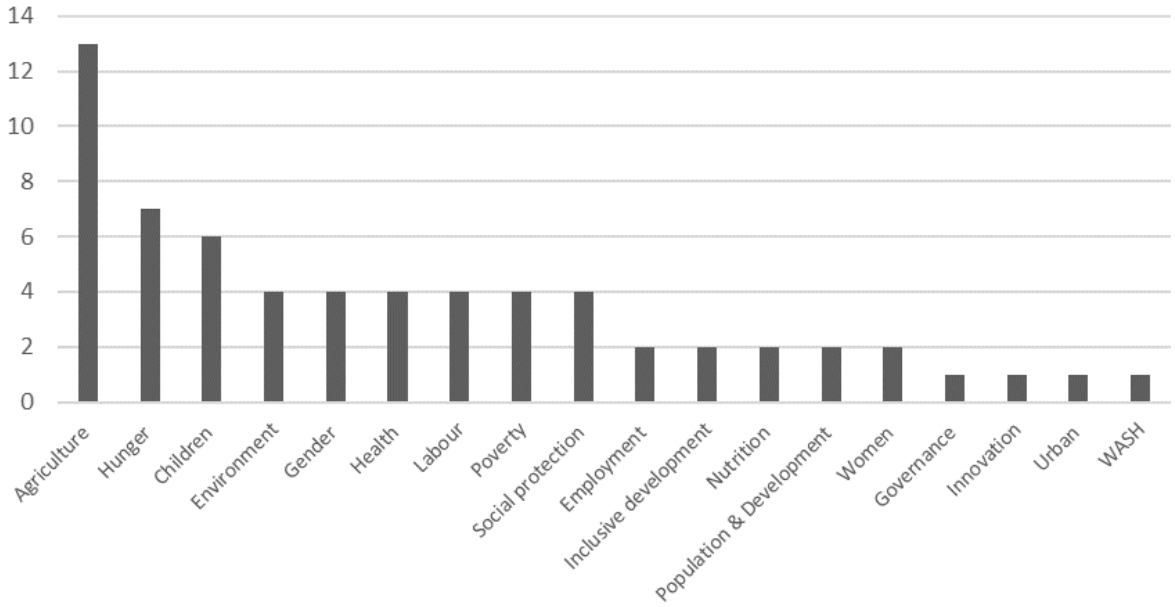
5.1 Transfer dimensions of Brazil's partnerships with the UN

What: policies

Figure 3 depicts the main issue areas covered by the Brazilian policies that have been shared with other Southern countries through partnerships with the UN. As transfer initiatives can address more than one issue, from the 17 partnerships mapped out above (see Table 3) – including projects, programmes and centres – we have identified 64 issue areas as part of major policy clusters. The size of each bar indicates the relative weight of these policy clusters in the overall sample of Brazil–UN initiatives mapped out in this study.

86 The role of individuals will not be fully analysed in this paper. For a comprehensive discussion of individuals as policy ambassadors see Porto de Oliveira (2017). See also Waisbich (2022b) for a brief discussion of the role of individual Brazilian experts in policy diffusion through South–South cooperation.

Figure 3: Policy clusters: issue areas covered by policies travelling from Brazil



Explanation: partnerships usually cover more than one issue area; overall, 64 issue areas were identified across the 17 Brazil–UN partnerships mapped out above.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on publicly available sources.

This clustering exercise echoes previous findings that highlight Brazil's role as a major hub in the global diffusion of social policy (Pomeroy et al., 2019; Porto de Oliveira, 2020). More specifically, Brazil's social policy solutions and social technologies that have stood at the centre of transfer efforts focus on poverty alleviation and inclusive development in the realms of agricultural development, the fight against hunger and child-related issues. Other social policy-related clusters such as social protection, labour, gender, or health have also been important. While social policy was indeed a priority for the Brazilian government in its 'policy export' strategy during the Workers' Party era (2003-2016) (Faria, 2012; Waisbich et al., 2022), the mapping of Brazilian partnerships with UN entities also points to other areas in which Brazilian experiences have been shared, such as urban issues; water, sanitation and hygiene; and the environment.

As mentioned in Section 2, the array of policy areas being addressed reflects the variety of cooperation demands coming not only from other Southern governments but also from UN entities themselves (Leite et al., 2015; Milhorance & Soulé-Kohndou, 2017). Acting as catalysers and "ambassadors" for their own concerns and sectoral priorities, UN entities have engaged and supported the Brazilian government and experts in sharing policy solutions with other developing countries through specialised policy units within headquarters and/or through their country office networks, usually building on their dialogues and cooperation portfolios with other Southern governments, mostly in Latin America and Africa (Articulação Sul, 2020).

In some cases, policies that have been transferred mirror the main pillars of Brazilian policy frameworks. For instance, key components of Brazil's National Food and Nutrition Security System[87] – including family farming short-circuits, institutional purchases and school feeding –

87 For more detailed information on the System, see Magalhães and Buani (2017).

were taken up in the design of the Brazil–FAO Programme (FAO, 2018).[88] Technical cooperation initiatives under this partnership have reflected what Brazil in the early 2010s referred to as "structuring projects"[89] (Milhorance & Soulé-Kohndou, 2017), in which the aim is to share not only the thematic pillars of the Brazilian system but also its principles, namely a rights-based and inter-sectoral approach and the active participation of civil society. A major focus of the Brazil–FAO Programme has also been directed at school feeding. In fact, both FAO and WFP have partnered with Brazil to share the Brazilian home-grown school-feeding model with other Southern countries (Milani, 2017). While FAO has mostly focused on Latin America, WFP has also supported the sharing of Brazilian school-feeding models with partners in Africa and to a lesser extent in South Asia, notably Bangladesh (FAO, 2018; WFP CEAH, 2021).[90]

Who: transfer agents

In Brazil's policy transfer partnerships with the UN, transfer agents have above all been Brazilian experts working for national institutions such as line ministries, specialised agencies or public research centres. These institutions – often referred to as "islands of excellence"[91]– are mainly responsible for implementing national policies domestically but also put their experts to work on Brazilian technical cooperation and knowledge exchange initiatives, including in triangular partnerships with UN entities or with traditional donors (see ABC, 2022; see also Section 2).

As shown in Figure 4, national implementing bodies include specific divisions or agencies within line ministries, such as the HIV/AIDS department at the Ministry of Health or the National Education Fund in the Ministry of Education (FNDE); independent public entities like the Brazilian Central Statistical Agency (IBGE) and the Brazilian Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA); state-level actors such as state and city governments; and public agriculture-related companies such as the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) and the numerous state-level Companies for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (EMATER). In recent years, non-state actors related to the Brazilian cotton sector, such as the Brazilian Cotton Institute (IBA) and the National Association of Cotton Producers (ABRAPA) have also joined triangular cooperation initiatives (see below). Engagement of non-state actors – namely civil society organisations and agrarian social movements that are members of the National Council for Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA) – was found in the context of the 2012–2016 FAO–WFP–Brazil project Purchase from African for Africa (PAA Africa) initiative (Miranda, Klug & Braz, 2015; Pomeroy & Silva, 2017; Waisbich, 2021a).

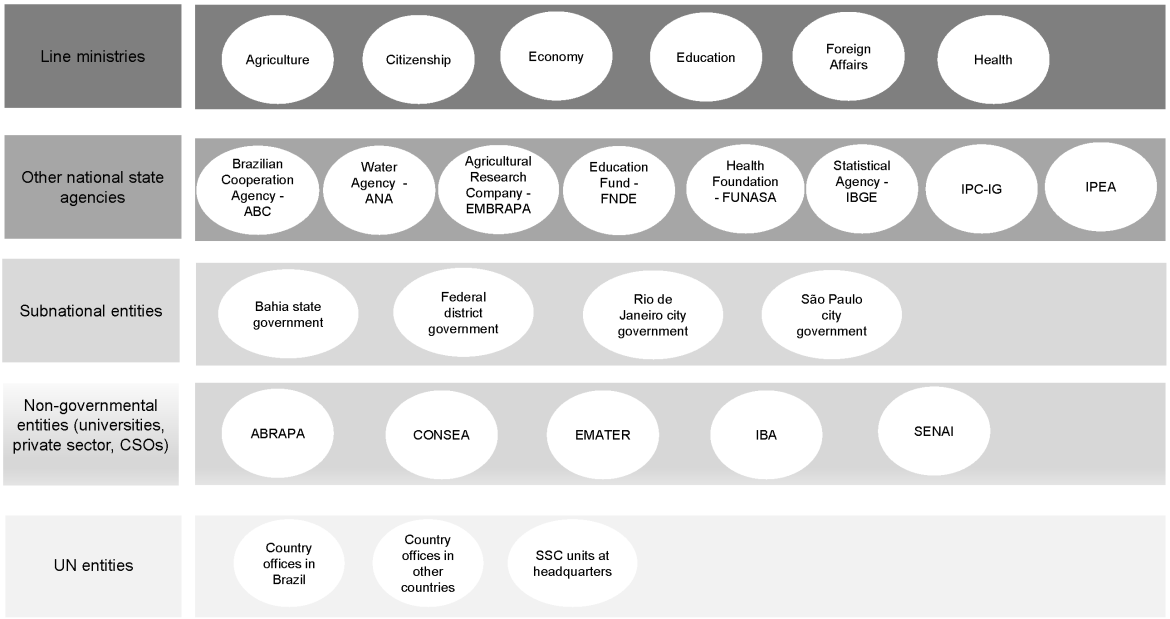
88 The programme was initially called Brazil–FAO Programme on Food Security and Nutrition due to its focus on this particular sector. In more recent years, the programme was renamed Brazil–FAO International Cooperation Program, also reflecting a broadening of the policy issues and areas encompassed in this partnership.

89 "Structuring projects" or "structuring cooperation" is the way ABC and some Brazilian SSC implementing agencies refer to their initiatives geared toward strengthening the capacities of institutions and systems in partner countries. According to health cooperation experts in Brazil, who first developed this approach in the early 2000s, "structuring cooperation" is not only more sustainable but also breaks with traditional passive knowledge/technology paradigms by reinforcing endogenous capacities instead (see Suyama et al., 2016).

90 In more recent years, the WFP Centre in Brazil has also enhanced its activities on school feeding with countries in Latin America. An example is the Nurture the Future (*Nutrir o Futuro*) project, launched in 2019; see WFP CEAH (s.a.).

91 For a discussion on the Brazilian 'islands of excellence', see Cabral and Weinstock (2010), Suyama et al. (2016) and Farias (2019).

Figure 4: Policy transfer agents in Brazil–UN partnerships[92]



Source: Authors, based on publicly available sources.

Two public institutions that were active players in the Brazilian SSC and policy transfer landscape until the mid-2010s, namely the Ministry of Social Development and the Department for Humanitarian Cooperation and Combat against Hunger, ceased operations in 2016.[93] While some of their functions and experts were incorporated into other public structures, their disappearance in a context of radical policy change – and in many ways a general social policy dismantling since 2016 – has also had a negative impact on Brazil's overall willingness and capacity to carry out its own cooperation initiatives in related policy areas, such as food security, social protection or social policy targeting (Waisbich et al., 2022).

The Brazil-based UNDP Center for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) – mostly comprised of social protection experts from IPEA – is not only a policy transfer partnership in and of itself but also engages as transfer agent with South–South and triangular initiatives conducted or led by other players in the wider Brazilian knowledge cooperation ecosystem. It disseminates studies and assessments of Brazilian social protection initiatives, receives foreign delegations and joins technical missions in third countries. UN country offices in Brazil and/or partner countries also play a major role as transfer agents. Recent evaluations of Brazil's partnerships with UNICEF, FAO and WFP[94] found, for instance, that UN country offices shaped South–South knowledge exchanges by matching demands from other countries with Brazil's supply based on their appreciation of, and/or engagement with, governments on both sides of the equation. In many cases, they are the ones who initiate or actively pursue collaboration based on the needs

92 Acronyms: ABC – Brazilian Cooperation Agency, ANA – National Water Agency, EMBRAPA – Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation, FNDE – National Education Fund, FUNASA – Brazil's National Health Foundation, IBGE – Brazilian Central Statistics Agency, IPC-IG – International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth , IPEA- Brazilian Institute for Applied Economic Research, EMATER – State-level Company for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension, ABRAPA – National Association of Cotton Producers, CONSEA – National Council on Food and Nutritional Security, IBA – Brazilian Cotton Institute, SENAI – National Service for Industrial Training.

93 For a discussion on the closing down of the Department, see Campello et al. (2016).

94 As WFP no longer has a country office in Brazil, the WFP offices that play a major role in the case of the CEAH, for instance, are those located in the countries with whom Brazil cooperates.

assessments made in the contexts they operate in, regardless of the actual level of political backing from the other Southern partner (Articulação Sul, 2020; also Leite et al., 2015).[95]

How: transfer processes, instruments and arrangements

Overall, Brazilian triangular partnerships with UN entities have relied on two central and interconnected strategies: capacity development and knowledge sharing. Not uncommonly, partnerships have also featured advocacy as a third strategy (see Section 2.1). With regard to the knowledge component, different partnerships have made use of a fairly similar set of transfer instruments. These can be divided into two major clusters, according to their function and focus in policy transfer dynamics: instruments for *sharing* policies, including related knowledges and technologies; and instruments for *piloting* "solutions" on the ground (see Table 5). In the sharing category, we have clustered instruments that mostly centre on telling others about and showcasing Brazilian polices, programmes, instruments, and/or technologies. This can take the form of bi-directional exchanges but often unfolds as unidirectional activities to provide first-hand "inspiring" insights into Brazilian experiences.[96] The piloting category is characterised by "hands-on" activities and technical exchanges designed to contribute to other countries adapting and implementing concrete programmes and technologies.

Table 5: Policy transfer instruments in Brazil-UN partnerships

Cluster	Instrument
Sharing	(Cross-)Regional policy dialogue
	Trainings
	Advocacy (investment in international and regional enabling environments)
	Public events
	High-level policy dialogue missions
	Knowledge production and dissemination
	Online knowledge platform
	Expert seminars
	Study tours
Piloting	In-country technical assistance visits
	In-kind donations
	Organisation of national participatory consultations
	In-country pilot projects
	Remote policy advice
	Remote technical support
	Social technology transfer
	Technical assistance
Sharing and piloting	In-country policy advice
	In-country technical missions
	Promotion of civil society engagement

Source: Authors.

95 On UN entities' role as "brokers", "matchmakers" or "catalysers", see Section 3.

96 For a discussion on the inspiring effect of Brazilian South–South and triangular initiatives, see Articulação Sul/Move Social (2017); Articulação Sul (2020).

The partnerships between Brazil and UN entities do not follow a single governance or funding model. The diversity of arrangements illustrates the case-by-case nature of these evolving partnerships. Some of the more established cases, such as the programmes or centres with WFP and FAO, have been funded via trust funds or similar long-term funding facilities. Initially established to enable the piloting of triangular projects in partner countries with Brazilian resources, they were then successively replenished to enable a long-term functioning of the evolving partnership arrangements. The Brazil–FAO Programme established in 2008 initially ran on a Brazil-led trust fund with FAO. Until 2018, more than USD 60 million had been invested by Brazil in this programme, which at the time had 13 projects under execution, with a total budget of approximately USD 58 million. Seven projects were entirely funded by the Brazilian government (USD 44 million) while six projects (USD 14.4 million) had also received funding from the Brazilian Cotton Institute (FAO, 2018). In 2022, FAO and the Brazilian government agreed on a new phase to run from 2023 to 2027 (FAO, 2022c). In the case of WFP, a Brazilian Trust Fund was created in 2007 to enable South–South exchanges between Brazil and other Southern countries, in particular school-feeding-related activities with countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The initial contribution from the Brazilian government between 2007 and 2010 (which came from the country's own National Fund for Education, FNDE) was of approximately USD 2 million.[97] In 2011, the partnership evolved into the WFP–Brazil Centre of Excellence Against Hunger (CEAH), which still relies on the same Brazil-led trust fund as its main funding source and has been successfully replenished since.[98] While the Brazilian government, through FNDE, remains the major contributor to the trust fund (and thus to the centre), the initiative was able to attract financial contributions from other partners, including traditional donors like the United Kingdom or the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which contributed to grants targeting specific issue areas (such as nutrition) and/or countries (Articulação Sul & Move Social, 2017).

UNDP–Brazil partnerships, in turn, feature other and often more complex multi-stakeholder funding arrangements. The former World Without Poverty (WWP) initiative, for instance, gathered two international organisations and two Brazilian federal ministries and was mostly running on a World Bank grant, with Brazil contributing funds related to its human resources, i.e. "technical hours" national experts were devoting to the initiative.[99] In the case of the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) with UNDP, the Brazilian government has been covering operational costs for the centre to function, namely the physical structure and human resources (mostly social policy researchers from IPEA).[100] Finally, an increasing number of cotton-related sub-projects has been integrated into many of the existing triangular partnerships – including those with FAO, ILO and WFP – and, as mentioned above, are funded by the Brazilian Cotton Institute (IBA). Cotton-related initiatives have become a flagship area for the Brazilian government in the last decade and build on a special (and rather stable) funding stream hosted by IBA, set up after Brazil won a cotton-related WTO dispute against the United States in 2002. Until 2020, the aggregated budget of these projects – largely provided by IBA – amounted to roughly USD 22 million; more projects have been added to the cotton portfolio since (Silva & Moreira, 2020).

97 The initial contribution made in 2007 was of USD 995,000 and was followed by a replenishment of USD 1 million in 2009.

98 According to the first external evaluation of the Centre, conducted in 2017, the total budget operated by the Centre from 2011 to 2016 exceeded USD 16 million through 11 different grants (Articulação Sul/Move Social, 2017). At the time, external evaluators were not provided with disaggregated financial information that would have allowed for a precise calculation of the total of Brazil's contributions vis-à-vis other funding sources as well as other types of financial and cost-effectiveness analyses.

99 For more on "technical hours", see Leite et al. (2014).

100 More detailed information on these operational costs is not publicly available.

Box 3: The WFP–Brazil Centre of Excellence Against Hunger: exemplary insights into transfer dimensions

***What*: policies**

Through their Centre of Excellence Against Hunger (CEAH), WFP and the government of Brazil have aimed to share policy experiences and solutions centring on:

- nutrition and school feeding (bills, national programmes, guidelines etc.)
- social development
- smallholder farming
- commercial agriculture with social impact
- capacity strengthening
- food and nutrition security research.

***Who*: transfer agents**

- Focal point for the partnership at the Brazilian government: Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC)
- Main knowledge hubs: National Educational Fund (FNDE) in the Ministry of Education and the Department for Humanitarian Cooperation and Combat Against Hunger (CGFOME/MRE), currently a unit within the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC)
- Additional knowledge hubs: Brazilian Company for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (EMATER); Bahia state government; Sao Paulo City government; and WFP country offices in partner countries.

***How*: transfer arrangements, instruments and processes**

Transfer arrangement: In the context of Brazil's Zero Hunger Programme, the Brazilian government and WFP joined efforts in 2003 to carry out humanitarian food aid projects to alleviate hunger in other developing countries. In 2007, the partnership evolved into a multi-donor fiduciary fund to support South–South exchanges on school feeding. The first phase of the Fund (2008–2010) was followed by the decision to set up a hub or centre as a more "durable and structural" response to global food insecurity (Magalhães & Buani 2017, p. 458). In 2011, the Brazilian government and WFP signed an agreement to set up the CEAH in Brasília. Through the National Education Fund (FNDE) – the entity in charge of school feeding in Brazil – the Brazilian government remains the main financial contributor to the centre as well as the main "knowledge hub" and site of technical and policy expertise for the activities carried out to fight hunger and malnutrition abroad. Other providers (such as the United Kingdom and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) have also contributed to the fund (see above); and in some cases, funding for activities has been matched by Southern partner countries. While more than 20 people currently work for the centre, its director and some of its senior leadership came from FNDE.

Transfer instrument(s): The centre works with three main strategies – capacity development, knowledge sharing and advocacy on Zero Hunger – aimed at enabling or strengthening the exchange of experiences; policy advice and technical assistance; and investment in international and regional enabling environments for nationally owned home-grown school feeding. The implementation of these strategies has built on a combination of sharing and piloting instruments, notably study visits, high-level exchanges between ministries and senior decision-makers, in-country technical assistance visits, organisation of national participatory consultations, and continuous remote support and advice. While study visits were the flagship instrument during the first cycle (2011–2016), the centre has since been investing in more tailored technical support and advice activities with each partner country.

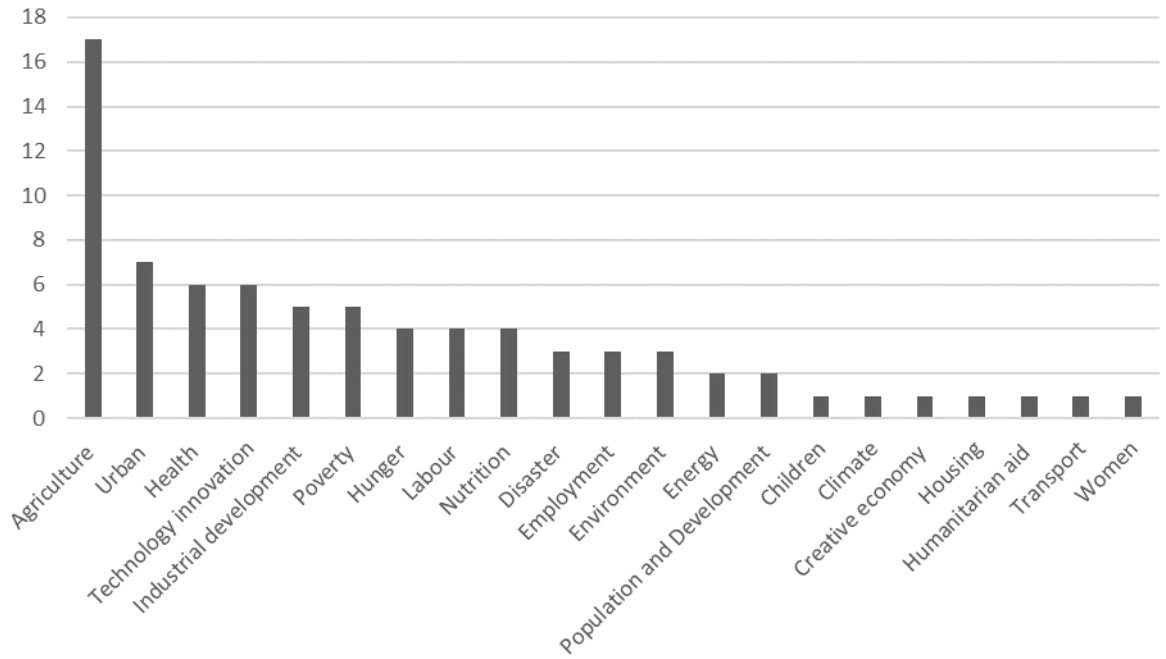
Transfer process: Transfer processes at CEAH usually start with an official request from partner countries that triggers negotiations on the scope of the activities to be developed according to each national context. Partner countries benefit from a range of activities according to their support needs. Their demands can evolve over time and thus prompt new types of activities, including new policy transfer modalities. The process is reliant on a continuous blend of South–South exchanges involving senior authorities and policy-makers (including ministers) as well as technicians. Countries such as Togo, Kenya and Bangladesh are among the most illustrative examples of how exchanges with Brazil through the centre have helped build and secure robust national school-feeding frameworks. (For the case of Bangladesh, see WFP CEAH, 2021).

5.2 Transfer dimensions of China's partnerships with the UN

What: policies

Compared to Brazil, the Chinese landscape is even more diverse in terms of the issue areas covered by the policies transferred through triangular partnerships with UN entities. Figure 5 depicts the policy clusters China is currently sharing with other Southern countries through triangular arrangements involving the UN. As with Brazil, most partnerships mapped out above (see Table 4) address more than one issue area. In total, we have identified 78 issue areas across the 18 China–UN partnerships that have been clustered according to their major development-related policy area. The number of partnerships per cluster again indicates the relative weight of different policy areas in the overall sample of China–UN partnerships.

Figure 5: Policy clusters: issue areas covered by policies travelling from China



Explanation: partnerships usually cover more than one issue area; overall, 78 issue areas were identified across the 18 China–UN partnerships mapped out above.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on publicly available sources.

This clustered mapping of policy issues being shared through China–UN partnerships contributes to nuancing two simplistic but widespread assumptions or narratives about Chinese development cooperation. First, that China's development exchanges only concern infrastructure, connectivity and development finance and thus largely overlook social or governance dimensions of development cooperation often prioritised by "traditional donors". [101] Second, that China's strong (discursive) commitment to the SSC non-interference principle means that Chinese South–South development exchanges refrain from engaging in policy and governance

101 A similar point has been made by Urbina-Ferretjans and Surender (2013).

knowledge transfers.[102] Our mapping indicates that China draws from a wide range of issue areas for transferring its techniques, technologies, and development solutions to other countries, and that it indeed engages in policy and governance conversations with its Southern partners. Policies shared cover not only areas closely connected to economic development – including productivity-related fields such as energy, technology and innovation – but also many sectors the global development community commonly associates with poverty-reduction agendas or describes as "soft" development issues in line with the approach of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), such as health, poverty alleviation, zero hunger or child nutrition. There has also been a growing focus on policies that are somewhat connected to the more recent sustainability and climate agendas in line with the SDGs.

The relevance of policy sectors beyond the poverty alleviation agenda is not that surprising as China's identity as a global development player strongly relies on and derives from its own domestic development philosophy, often referred to as New Structural Economics (Xu & Carey, 2021). Such thinking is based on two major premises: first, to move labour and other productive resources from low-productivity to high-productivity economic activities in line with latent comparative advantages; and second, to promote the market system and private entrepreneurship while the government plays a facilitating role in mitigating the constraints on the path to economic structural transformation. The policies travelling from China to partner countries through triangular partnerships with the UN do not necessarily include a full package of the more traditional components of Chinese economic development thinking, such as infrastructure projects and Special Economic Zones that China has been promoting in its bilateral SSC (see Alves & Lee, 2022). Policy transfer processes do, nonetheless, cover certain aspects of the conventional Chinese development package, such as skills enhancement, technology capacity development, or trade linkages.

As mentioned above, there is also a trend for UN entities to partner with China in countries where BRI-related investments are taking place, notably to complement infrastructure and connectivity investments with impact mitigation and/or social development components. While not fully visible in the China–UN portfolio yet, this is an area with potential to grow in the near future as both sides have an interest in expanding collaboration. For UN entities, contributing to "greening" and increasing the sustainability of BRI-related processes offers a key venue for expanding engagement with China's development-related activities.[103] For China, in turn, working with the UN system feeds into its broad "Green BRI" strategy set to improve the image of infrastructure projects. New guidelines, issued in March 2022, towards "greening" BRI – i.e. stimulating environmentally friendly finance and projects[104] – might provide China–UN partnerships with an extra push towards more exchanges on environmental and climate-related matters. While this overlap of interests highlights the potential synergies in collaboration on BRI-related processes, recent controversies over UN engagement with the BRI might also lead to adapted framings – potentially more in line with China's recently launched Global Development Initiative (see Haug, mimeo; Baumann et al., 2022).

102 A similar argument about the changing landscape in Chinese development-related engagements is made by Cheng (2016) and Mawdsley (2019) when looking at the expansion of the FOCAC agenda toward more robust engagement with policy in Africa. The authors point to a significant expansion of the agenda to encompass social issues (including local livelihoods and governance) as well as trade and industrial policy planning. Such shifts are also visible in the more recent China White Paper on International Development (see SCIO, 2021).

103 Interview with UNDP China staff (Beijing, December 2018).

104 The guidelines say the Chinese government will actively play a leading role in improving policy support for green development, building a green exchange and cooperation platform and establishing an environmental risk prevention and control system (Global Development Policy Centre, 2022).

A more recent addition to the Chinese portfolio has been pandemic-related initiatives within existing partnerships. WFP China, for instance, opened a new funding window in 2020 for projects related to food security and nutrition in the context of the pandemic, and Covid-19-related projects have dominated WFP China work since (WFP, 2022a).[105] Here again, this (renewed) focus on health is embedded in a long trajectory of health diplomacy as a major pillar of Chinese global development engagement (Yang, Liu & Guo, 2018; Wang et al., 2019).

Who: transfer agents

As in the case of Brazil, China–UN partnerships include a considerable range of policy transfer agents (see Figure 6). Chinese experts and technicians play a particularly central role. Their activities are carried out both inside China (hosting peers during learning tours, seminars, trainings, etc.) or abroad for short- and long-term missions. The constellation of Chinese institutions involved in policy transfers through different forms and in different capacities includes the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) under the State Council; the International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE) under MOFCOM; research centres like the China Population and Development Research Center (CPDRC); and line ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA), the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS). Besides these central state entities, several city and provincial governments as well as their specialised institutions also take part in triangular partnerships with the UN, including the Hunan provincial government, the Lishui city government and the government of Shenzhen, representing one of China's Special Economic Zones.[106] A range of non-state actors is also involved, including universities (such as the China Agriculture University); the All-China Federation of Trade Unions; and businesses, including e-commerce companies such as the Alibaba Group and Pinduoduo Inc. The presence of companies is an important dimension of China–UN partnerships, visible in the cases of UNICEF, WFP and FAO (see Section 6). In the case of the China–FAO Programme, Pinduoduo's participation helps to make the case for the role of smart agriculture in bolstering food production and security, as well as for the nexus between digitalisation and efficiency. From the company's perspective, knowledge sharing has a market value as it "is a key component of the adoption and proliferation of technology […]. By organizing such sharing sessions, we want to help promote smart agriculture and its benefits and generate more interest in this very important sector of society" (FAO, 2022a). No similar engagement from businesses has been found in Brazil.

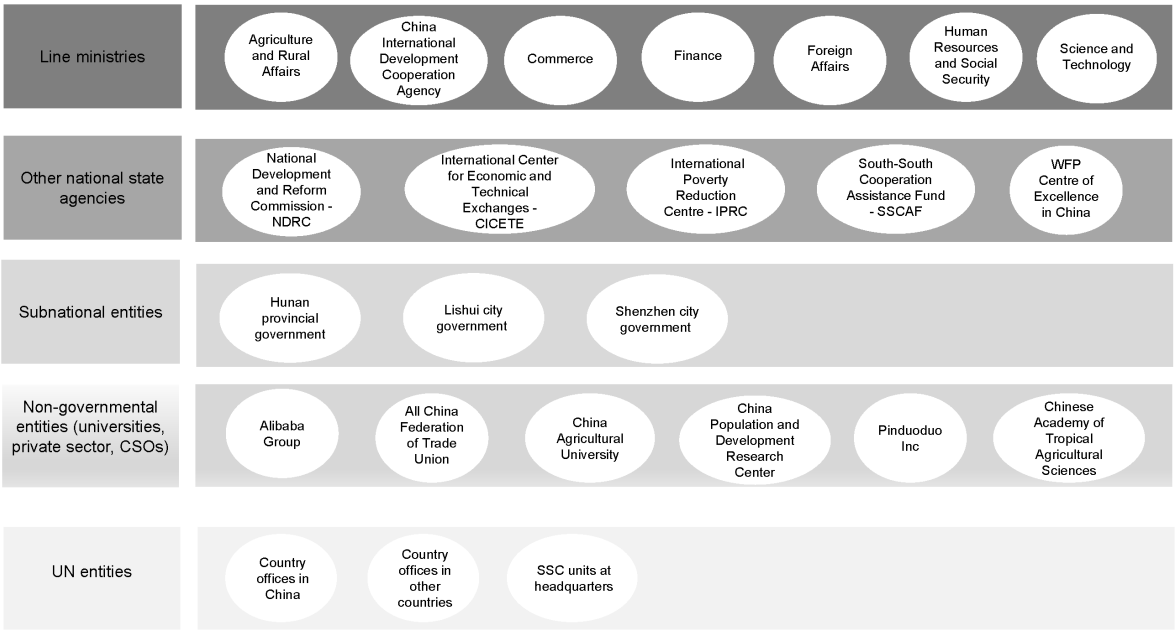
UN country offices also play an important role for triangular partnerships with China, but their role is less developed than in the case of Brazil. This is mostly due to the incipient nature of some of the partnerships and the challenges UN offices in China are still facing to build trust and generate the right modus operandi for these partnerships.[107] At the same time, and similar to the Brazilian case, some of the policy centres created together with UN agencies intended to serve as "knowledge sharing hubs" from China to the world – such as the China–WFP Centre of Excellence on Rural Transformation, the Global South–South Development Centre and the International Poverty Reduction Centre in China – have themselves become transfer agents in other exchange or transfer initiatives led by national expert institutions.

105 The partnership with UNDP has equally expanded its scope to include Covid-related initiatives since 2020 (UNOSSC, 2021).

106 See Yu (2019) on the role of Chinese provinces in China's overall development cooperation landscape.

107 Interview with international development expert with experience in evaluating triangular initiatives in China (phone interview, July 2018); interviews with UN officials (video interviews, October 2021 and August 2022).

Figure 6: Policy transfer agents in China–UN partnerships



Source: Authors, based on publicly available sources.

How: transfer processes, instruments and arrangements

Table 6 provides an overview of policy transfer instruments employed under China–UN triangular partnerships. In addition to instruments similar to those found in the Brazilian case, there are also more "China-specific" transfer tools such as hosting hands-on trainings *in China*; piloting or building demonstration centres in partner countries and reference centres *in China* as SSC "focal points" or "expert hubs"; and dispatching or fielding Chinese experts to other developing countries. Sending out Chinese experts for long-term assignments, for instance, has been a major tool in FAO–China collaboration since its inception and has also been used by other UN entities, such as UNDP (FAO, 2019; Zhou et al., 2020). Piloting for demonstration purposes is also an instrument increasingly adopted in the context of Chinese development cooperation (Bräutigam, 2008; Zhang, Li, Connerley & Wu, 2019), including in triangular partnerships with the UN. Some partnerships, such as the UNOSSC-China Cities Project, also include advocacy strategies to accompany policy transfer processes. Here, advocacy-related activities are – unlike the more normative and rights-based agenda found in Brazil – described as strongly intertwined with communication and outreach efforts to engage the general public as well as local and national policy-makers to enhance the visibility of the policy areas the project focuses on (see UNOSSC, 2021, pp. 14-16). In more recent years, much of the advocacy work in the Cities Project was geared towards promoting greater South–South solidarity and mutual support in the context of Covid-19, including mask and medical supplies donations as well as policy exchanges on Covid response.

Table 6: Policy transfer instruments in China-UN partnerships

Cluster	Instrument
Sharing	Trainings in China
	Reference centres in China
	Twinning programme between cities
	Regional knowledge exchange/regional seminars
	Research
	Policy dialogue
	In-country policy missions
	High-level events
	Knowledge production and dissemination on good practices
	Learning events
	Symposia
	Study or learning tours
	Internships
	Remote/online webinars
	Remote/online trainings
Piloting	Fielding experts in long-term assignments
	Technology transfer
	Demonstration centres
	Grants/provision of financial resources
	Pilot on the ground for demonstration purposes
	Advisory service/consultancy service
	Public-private partnerships
	Private sector engagement
	Demand-driven needs assessment
	In-kind donation
	Project implementation
	Technical assistance
Sharing and piloting	Advocacy

Source: Authors.

Funding arrangements for China–UN triangular partnerships used to include schemes reliant on resources mobilised by international organisations themselves and grants from traditional donors to fund China's South–South knowledge exchanges (Zhang, 2020). In recent years, however, the Chinese government has often opted to set up trust funds and facilities, with successive replenishing from both China and eventually also from other sources (Tang & Zhu, 2019). The FAO–China Programme, mentioned above, is an emblematic example. So is the China-funded South–South Cooperation Assistance Fund, managed by CIDCA and CICETE

with support from UNDP China and set up in 2015 as a USD 2 billion fund (see Box 2 above), to which partner countries and UN entities can apply for funds that are sometimes to be matched with their own resources.[108] Several other partnerships, in turn, now work on a model where Chinese institutions provide financial resources and UN agencies work as implementers. This is the case for the partnership between the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) and ILO, which jointly set up a trust fund in 2018 (with an initial contribution of USD 1 million from China); it also applies to the partnerships of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) with WFP (set up in 2019) and IFAD (running since 2018).

Overall, funding dynamics behind policy-transfer partnerships have evolved considerably over the last few years, with China increasingly claiming (financial) ownership of its triangular arrangements with UN entities. The partnership between China and WFP, for instance, has recently experienced a major boost. Following years of low-level activity, from 2019 to 2021 WFP's triangular initiative with MARA contributed to strengthening national food systems in 19 developing countries, focusing on five pilot project partners – Ecuador, Kenya, Peru, Republic of Congo and Sri Lanka – where almost 10,000 farmers and school children were reported as beneficiaries (WFP, 2022a, pp. 5-8).[109] The expansion of activities builds on an alignment with Chinese policy priorities and commitments, including BRI, where resources are allocated through a funding application process offering WFP "little direct influence" (WFP, 2021, p. 18). Another feature of the evolving funding landscape is an intent to diversify funding mechanisms involving NGOs, local governments and, most notably, Chinese businesses (UNDP China, 2022). FAO, for example, sees private-sector funding – including through co-funding arrangements and blended finance – as the new frontier in its partnerships with China (FAO, 2019).

108 For example, UNDP submitted a proposal together with partners in China, the Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia, Nepal and Laos with an overall budget of more than USD 11 million, of which USD 5 million was supposed to be contributed through SCCAF and the rest through contributions by UNDP and some of the participating governments (UNDP, 2020).

109 As in other cases, budget figures on this initiative and pilot projects are not publicly available.

Box 4: FAO–China reference and demonstration centres: exemplary insights into transfer dimensions

What: policies

Through reference and demonstration centres, the China–FAO South–South Cooperation Programme has aimed to share policy experiences and solutions centring on:

- agricultural development, productivity, profitability, technology and innovation;
- traditional agricultural areas;
- sustainable food systems, including value chains, supply chain management and international agricultural trade;
- tropical agriculture and dryland farming;
- resiliency and emergency response;
- food and nutrition security; and
- poverty reduction.

Who: transfer agents

- Focal points for the partnership: China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) and China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE)
- Main knowledge hub: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA)
- Additional knowledge hubs: China Agriculture University, Hunan Hybrid Rice Research Centre, Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences, Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences, and Pinduoduo Inc.

How: transfer arrangements, instruments and processes

Transfer arrangement: China joined FAO South–South cooperation programmes in the mid-1990s by sending its experts and technicians to FAO field operations. In 2003, FAO and China set up a trust fund to enable SSC projects in which China was also fielding its national experts in long-term assignments in countries like Nigeria. This was followed by an intention to move toward a more comprehensive programme under a renewed FAO–China Strategic Alliance in 2006. In 2009, a trust fund for triangular cooperation projects was launched to cover activities in 12 African countries. The first phase of the fund ran from 2009–2014 (with funds from China of USD 30 million), followed by a second phase between 2015 and 2020 (with additional funding from China of USD 50 million), and a third phase since 2020. Overall, FAO calculates that China's contributions to this partnership since 2009 amount to a total of USD 130 million (see numbers on FAO in WFP, 2021a). In January 2022, China announced its intention to donate another USD 50 million to the China–FAO Trust Fund to help with the implementation of the current – third – phase of the partnership (MARA, 2022). As an integral part of the China–FAO South–South Cooperation Programme, in 2014, China and FAO agreed on a list of "reference centres" within China to serve as "expertise hubs" and focal points in China–FAO SSC activities, with traditional donors such as the Netherlands collaborating in certain sub-projects.

Transfer instrument(s): Historically, "fielding" Chinese experts has been a major policy transfer instrument in China–FAO partnerships. Under the most recent China–FAO programme, dispatching experts for long-term assignments to partner countries remains an important tool for transferring and adapting Chinese technology on the ground. Other instruments are inter-regional knowledge exchanges and global capacity-building activities, which largely rely on China-based training facilities (i.e. the FAO reference centres) for SSC activities, including study tours, symposia and high-level events (FAO, 2019, p. 27). The partnership also relies on demonstration sites located in partner countries for showcasing agricultural techniques, such as cultivation, pest control or water conservancy. This can be done through so-called farmer field schools that involve "small-scale producers directly in both testing and demonstrating techniques" (FAO China, 2019, p. 9) as a source of inspiration and knowledge dissemination, or through other types of public–private demonstration mechanisms. While farming schools rely on farmers' peer-to-peer exchanges as an alternative to top-down approaches and extension methods, public–private demonstration sites and centres – also used in other China-led

Box 4 (cont.): FAO–China reference and demonstration centres: exemplary insights into transfer dimensions

bilateral and triangular initiatives, notably in Africa (Zhang et al., 2019) – rely on a different business-sustainability rationale. Agricultural demonstration centres, for instance, are typically operated jointly by the Chinese government and Chinese businesses – in a public–private partnership or a commercial-aid model – to transfer Chinese techniques and technologies to African counterparts. They work through a tendering process set up by the Chinese government in which agro-companies bid for projects. The participation of businesses is intended to secure the long-term commercial viability of the project, and provide a platform for Chinese companies to develop in Africa and promote China's "Agricultural Going Out" policy (Jiang, Harding, Anseeuw & Alden, 2016).

Transfer process: China-FAO policy transfer arrangements can take the form of national, regional, interregional or global projects. National projects are characterised by learning-by-doing ("teaching-how-to-fish") approaches (Yu, 2019), while regional, interregional and global projects are more focused on exchanges and trainings. As mentioned above, the innovative component here is the engagement of businesses as a means to guarantee sustainability, by helping to establish markets for agricultural products. As part of its transfer processes, the programme also encourages countries that have benefited from projects to act as knowledge multipliers, becoming themselves "providers of technical assistance to other developing countries" (FAO, 2019, p. 13). According to FAO, another innovation relates to the programme's schemes between Southern countries through Memoranda of Understanding and other tripartite frameworks, "defining clear responsibilities of FAO, China and recipient countries in SSC exchanges" (FAO, 2019, p. 12).

6 Policy transfer partnerships with the UN: comparing insights from Brazil and China

Building on the descriptive mapping and analytical discussion above, this section revisits and expands on a series of cross-cutting issues related to the transfer of policies in the context of Brazil's and China's triangular partnerships with UN agencies. While both Brazil and China look back on longstanding support schemes with the UN, since the early 2000s they have developed more robust triangular partnerships with strong policy transfer dimensions that reflect the variety of mandates and agendas within the UN development system. For Brazil, working with the UN to transfer policy knowledge to other Southern countries is a major feature of its identity as a Southern provider; and the partnership landscape in Brazil has been one of early institutionalisation of programmes or centres and fewer projects. For China, in turn, policy transfer with the UN has so far been a more marginal part of its broader development cooperation landscape. China currently has fewer programmes and centres but a larger number of projects that build on trust funds and other funding facilities less frequently used in Brazil. Overall, partnerships between China and UN agencies have recently headed towards increased programmatic institutionalisation, transitioning from funding facilities that harbour a range of sometimes unrelated small projects to more coherent programmes or policy centres. Focusing on insights from trajectories, partnership types and transfer dimensions discussed above, this section compares the what, who and how of Brazil's and China's policy transfer partnerships with the UN. Taken together, insights from the 35 partnerships under consideration illustrate both commonalities and key differences between Brazilian and Chinese engagement patterns.

6.1 What: policies with Brazilian and Chinese characteristics

Both Brazilian and Chinese policies that have been made to travel over the last two decades generally foresee a strong role for the state and may thus appear as antidotes to a neo-liberal focus on market-based solutions – what Indian development experts once called the "visible hand" approach to development and development cooperation (see UNOSSC & UNDP, 2021). Brazilian policies travelling abroad have overwhelmingly been related to building state (institutional and inter-institutional) capacities to address a range of social policy issues, notably poverty and hunger alleviation challenges, and have been strongly aligned with relevant parts of the MDG and SDG agendas, notably SDG 2 (zero hunger). Chinese policies, in turn, have largely focused on enhancing capacity (particularly of labour, industrial or farming skills) as a means to enhance productivity. There has been a strong focus on building individual capacities and skills, under what the Chinese government calls "cooperation in human resources development" (SCIO, 2021, Chapter 1). At the same time, Chinese partnerships also tend to combine selected social policy issues, such as health, with a focus on the economic dimension of the SDG agenda, notably through promoting technology and innovation as well as private-sector engagement. China's general approach to SSC, blending aid, trade and investments, thus also shapes (the intent behind) its triangular policy transfer partnerships, in terms of both the issue areas these partnerships work on and the instruments employed.

The policy transfer partnerships both countries have set up with FAO – similar to those set up with WFP – highlight key differences in what Brazil and China share with other countries through triangular cooperation initiatives. The agricultural and food security solutions each country has adopted and sought to globalise differ significantly. While both countries have explicitly championed making agricultural development agendas inclusive and sustainable, the very term "sustainable" – as applied to agriculture or food systems – takes on different meanings. Not only do the sub-areas within the broader agriculture policy cluster vary – with China taking a more market- and trade-based approach than Brazil – but so do the associated policy clusters. Whereas Brazil emphasises the nexus between agriculture and social agendas (notably hunger, nutrition and social protection), China focuses on productivity, technology innovation, supply chain management and international agricultural trade, as well as disaster and emergency-related issues.

In the case of Brazil, exported policies have sought to innovate through agricultural development solutions in line with the more traditional poverty alleviation umbrella and a focus on social concerns. Geared towards addressing food insecurity while strengthening family farming and social protection, the policy models behind Brazil–FAO initiatives understand "sustainability" through the prism of local and short-market circuits and guaranteeing market purchase by the state in areas like school feeding. With a focus on countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Brazil has aimed to export its "model" of a "more direct approach to integrating smallholders into domestic markets by linking the demand for food purchases in social programmes to the supply of locally produced food" (Arias, Hallam, Krivonos & Morrison, 2013, p. 37).

The China–FAO Programme, in turn, was set up in the late 2000s to improve agricultural production and the productivity of small-scale producers, promoting agricultural value chains, the agriculture-industry nexus, market linkages, or digitalisation processes (known as "smart agriculture'). For the third (and current) phase of this partnership, China and FAO have been exploring new ways to engage the private sector, not only in events but also as implementation partners (through joint ventures) and financiers (through blended finance schemes) (FAO, 2019). In this context, "sustainable" agriculture is, therefore, largely understood and related to its *economic* dimensions of durability and profitability illustrated through the emphasis on markets and trade linkages. In many ways, China–FAO partnerships (as well as China's partnerships with other Rome-based organisations) reflect and are part of the Chinese response to the developmental challenges of ending poverty and achieving food security (SDGs 1 and 2) by echoing the "scientific farming" approach developed throughout the 20th century as part of

China's own domestic agricultural development (Cabral, Pandey, Poonam & Xu, 2022) and then transplanted to its international agricultural development exchanges, notably in Africa since the late 1990s (Bräutigam, 2009; see PPDC, 2022). By focusing on market-based agricultural solutions, the case of China–FAO partnerships corroborates previous studies, suggesting that Chinese development partnerships have moved "beyond the pro-poor redistributive paradigm" traditionally advocated for by Western donors when engaging in social development support (Urbina-Ferretjans & Surender, 2013, p. 262).

6.2 Who: Brazilian and Chinese transfer agents

For the transfer of their policies through triangular partnerships with the UN, both Brazil and China mobilise their own human resources. Of particular importance are national experts and technicians – usually civil servants – working in national flagship institutions, including line ministries, specialised agencies, and research centres. These individuals often hold long-term and context-specific expertise on relevant policy issues and can thus assist in information sharing and inter-institutional relationship building (Garcia, 2018). In both countries, there is an underlying assumption that these experts are the most appropriate transfer agents in a government-to-government exchange because they understand the complexity of the policy world and the challenges embedded in working within and across governmental structures.

There are, nonetheless, some more or less subtle differences in how Brazilian and Chinese transfer agents engage. In Brazilian partnerships, hands-on knowledge exchange often unfolds through study visits and short missions by both high-level policy actors and technicians, as well as remote support. The engagement of Brazilian civil servants in international cooperation initiatives is agreed upon and accounted for under what in Brazil's public management lexicon is referred to as "technical hours". China also makes use of its own experts in short-assignments and dissemination events but, in addition, "fields" them in long-term assignments, as discussed above in the context of China–FAO partnerships.[110]

Another difference relates to the types of non-state actors being invited to team up with government agents and UN entities. In Brazil, there have been attempts to include Brazilian civil society actors in partnerships with FAO, UNICEF, and WFP. In China, the focus has been directed at involving Chinese businesses. According to FAO China, "[t]he time has come for the [China–FAO] Programme to focus on responsible, equitable and environmentally sound agribusiness development, in partnership with the private sector" (FAO, 2019, p. 33). An example is the participation of the e-commerce company Pinduoduo Inc. in FAO–China activities to address the role of digital technology in agriculture. Seen from the perspective of the Chinese government and FAO, engaging companies like Pinduoduo helps foster the dissemination of "successful" Chinese agricultural knowledge and techniques "through market mechanisms and by non-farmer actors in value chains" (FAO, 2019, p. 11). In both China and Brazil, however, governmental institutions and experts from well-known national-level – and increasingly also subnational-level – policy and technology hubs remain the most important transfer agents.

6.3 How: Brazilian and Chinese transfer arrangements

Triangular policy transfer partnerships involving UN entities and the national governments of Brazil or China are backed by formal agreements. They usually build on letters of intention or Memoranda of Understanding that, in some cases, evolve towards partnership agreements or

110 Long-term fielding has been a feature of both China's domestic development process – where experts used to be sent to less developed and often rural parts of the country such as the western provinces and Yunnan – as well as China's South–South exchanges (Zhang et al., 2019).

other official frameworks. Formal arrangements often follow traditional UN project documentation procedures, including narrative and financial reports and some kind of project assessment or evaluation (Waisbich, 2021b). However, such documentation is not always publicly available. Overall, Chinese partnerships with UN entities are less documented than the ones with Brazil, even though aggregate and/or more fine-grained information on financial resources can also be scarce for Brazilian partnerships. The China-based WFP Centre of Excellence, for instance, was set up in 2016 but had a very limited public face until early 2022.[111] There is, however, a growing effort by the UN system – notably through the South–South Galaxy platform administered by the UN Office for South–South Cooperation – to increase information and understanding around China's triangular initiatives (see UNOSSC, s.a.-a).

For both Brazilian and Chinese partnerships, there has been limited public information on funding. While some pledges and grant figures are available, unpacking the overall funding landscape – including contributions over time and funding arrangements – is a difficult task. Funding mechanisms are increasingly complex and not always comparable, both within country and between countries. Moreover, there are important gaps between pledges and actual disbursements, particularly in the case of China. These limitations notwithstanding, there are some interesting commonalities between Brazil and China. While their initial triangular initiatives with the UN used to be primarily funded through contributions by traditional donors or UN entities themselves, both countries have increasingly made use of trust funds through which they voluntarily contribute resources to a given UN entity in order to fund their own global development engagements. While these trust funds have enabled a set of initially more modest or dispersed South–South and triangular projects, they are also the basis upon which both countries have operationalised programmes and centres as more robust partnership forms. Both the Brazil–FAO Programme and the China–FAO Programme run with funds from the respective Brazil-led and China-led trust funds managed by FAO.[112] Likewise, the WFP–Brazil Centre of Excellence Against Hunger works with funding from the now multi-donor Brazil Trust Fund. Another recurring pattern centres on co-funding, such as the Brazil–UNICEF Programme and the China-WFP partnership with MARA (see Articulação Sul et al., 2020; WFP, 2022a). These co-funding arrangements mobilise UN entities' internal funds together with governmental investment from Brazil or China set aside for the partnership. In some cases, co-funding has also been matched with grants from Northern donors, such as the British and Dutch governments in the above-mentioned case of the Brazil-based WFP Centre of Excellence and the China–FAO Programme.

The four decades of collaboration between China and UNDP through its country office in Beijing illustrate some of the changes in transfer arrangements over time. Initially, the China–UNDP partnership was about pooling knowledge resources, notably Chinese expertise and UNDP's best cooperation practices. This evolved into a model of partnerships whereby China offered expertise and UNDP managed the initiative while a third country provided funding. In the current phase – which remains work in progress and coexists with elements from previous arrangements – UNDP co-manages funds provided through SSCAF, China's major self-funded technical cooperation fund (see Box 2 above). Based on our mapping and related background research, this kind of partnership is likely to expand in policy areas that have recently been of increasing relevance for the Chinese government and could contribute to strengthen triangular partnerships in sectors beyond economic productivity, including health, renewable energy and disaster risk management. Changes in partnership patterns thus reflect not only the ways in which

111 Its website was launched in 2022. See WFP (2022b).

112 The government of China refers more openly and frequently to its trust fund with FAO – the China–FAO South–South Cooperation Fund – in its official communication, while the Brazilian government seems to opt for referring to the International Cooperation Programme (or the Trilateral Cooperation Programme) with FAO instead. However, as mentioned above, both programmes effectively run with funds transferred by both governments to FAO in the form of voluntary contributions.

UN entities have expanded and mainstreamed triangular cooperation but also the (ongoing) evolution of China's development thinking and policy planning.

In sum, Brazil's and China's approaches are not that dissimilar but have followed distinct trajectories, as the exemplary comparison of the WFP centres in both countries illustrates (Box 5). More generally, Brazilian and Chinese policy transfer partnerships with the UN exhibit visible differences in all three transfer dimensions. On what is being transferred, China tends to focus on a variety of issues but with stronger emphasis on the economic and market dimensions, whereas Brazil focuses on social policy and social protection. As for transfer agents, both strongly rely on public institutions and national experts. China–UN partnerships, however, have seen stronger engagement with the business sector as part of the arrangement – as major beneficiaries of policies being shared, as providers of input or supplies, or as financiers – even if the role of corporate actors in policy, knowledge or technology sharing is not always clear. As for how policy transfers unfold, Brazil–UN partnerships usually feature joint control over policy transfer processes (sometimes pending towards UN entities influencing the agenda), while the Chinese government seems to wield increasingly stronger control over China–UN partnerships and related transfer processes.

Box 5: WFP Centres in Brazil and China: comparing approaches

Both Brazil and China host WFP centres related to food security and nutrition. A comparative analysis of both centres highlights similarities but also important differences. Both centres feature transfer approaches based on policy advice, knowledge sharing and hands-on exchanges. Yet the Chinese centre has adopted the enhanced version of "hands-on" knowledge sharing with the DAA formula – "Demonstration in Asia/Africa by Asians/Africans". This approach was already used by Brazil almost a decade earlier in the WFP–FAO Brazil Purchase from Africans for Africa – PAA Africa, named after a Brazilian programme (*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* – PAA) but mobilising the ownership narratives of "from Africa, by Africans". The centre in China, in turn, is more China-led or China-controlled than the one based in Brazil (see WFP, 2021b; Articulação Sul & Move Social, 2017). At the same time, available evidence suggests that the centre in China has been less robust and active than the one in Brazil. The very identity of the one based in China remains somewhat vague, its official purpose being "to promote South–South cooperation, so that other countries can learn from China's experiences" (WFP, 2021b).

The Brazil-based and China-based centres also exhibit two different sets of policy ideas and instruments to achieve food security and nutrition goals, reflecting the patterns identified above. In the case of Brazil, this has meant sharing Brazilian home-grown school-feeding inter-sectoral policies and policy instruments. As for China, the centre is geared towards promoting market linkages and stronger partnerships with market actors. The demonstration centres follow broader blueprints of China's cooperation in Africa based on enterprise-led demonstrations (see Box 4). The Brazil-based centre, alternatively, has no strong linkages with business actors. Another important difference is that WFP's focus on South–South cooperation in China is somewhat unique, given the link between the domestic and strategic programmes the organisation has implemented together with Chinese counterparts. This includes an ongoing conversation with FAO and IFAD to align approaches for both domestic and international portfolios (WFP, 2021b).

Finally, a common challenge for both centres refers to demand-driven cooperation. In both cases, recent reviews and evaluations (see Articulação Sul & Move Social, 2017; WFP, 2021b) have pointed out that demands are often not generated by governments themselves but by WFP country offices in other Southern countries in which WFP plays the role of not only a facilitator or enabler but also an inducer (see Leite et al., 2015). While there have been efforts of alignment between WFP strategies and national priorities of the programme countries it operates in, these two should not be conflated. Similar questions about the nature of policy transfer demands are also visible in the ongoing reflections by experts working for the WFP Centre in China on whether their policy transfer focus should centre on "low-tech" or "tech-heavy" solutions, based on a mismatch between what Chinese stakeholders want to share and the needs and priorities of partner countries (WFP, 2021b).

7 Partnership challenges: on the future of (researching) policy transfer and triangular cooperation

The mapping and comparative analysis in this paper suggest that triangular policy transfer partnerships with the UN have become an increasingly visible phenomenon in international development, at least when it comes to Brazil and China. Overall, however, these partnerships still appear as a minor phenomenon in both countries' cooperation portfolios as well as the global development cooperation landscape more generally. The lack of reliable funding data or comprehensive in-depth evaluations makes it difficult systematically to assess their financial weight or developmental relevance relative to other forms of cooperation. As with any collaboration modality, Brazilian and Chinese triangular policy transfer partnerships with the UN also face a number of specific obstacles to their effective implementation. This section engages with what we have identified as three of their most central challenges, namely: (i) asymmetries and invisibility dilemmas among partners; (ii) interests and power relations at the UN; and (iii) developmental impact of policy transfer through triangular partnerships. Rather than final answers, we provide reflections that are meant to contribute to strengthening and expanding the policy and research agenda on triangular cooperation involving Southern powers and UN entities.

Asymmetries and invisibility dilemmas

While Southern providers have often emphasised the non-coercive nature of their policy exchanges with other countries in the Global South, there is no doubt that transfer attempts have been embedded in – often substantial – asymmetries. Building on the insights discussed in this paper, a key question further research should address is the issue of whose priorities count while defining targeted policy areas and designing (and implementing) joint interventions. In terms of the relationship between Brazilian or Chinese stakeholders and the UN, some minor but palpable challenges highlight questions about (in)visibilities. For Brazil, unease has included an alleged invisibility of Brazilian institutions – both ABC and national implementing agencies – in triangular arrangements, particularly in contexts where the UN brand is very strong, or where Brazil-funded initiatives are exclusively implemented by UN agencies (Waisbich, 2021b). As for China, discomfort with triangular cooperation initiatives involving UN agencies used to relate both to a lack of ownership and/or voice from Chinese stakeholders when funding comes from sources other than China, as well as to uneasiness with agreements that are not clearly beneficial to China (Zhou, 2016).[113]

A more fundamental – and enduring – challenge concerns the invisibility of a set of agents and spaces that this paper has not focused on: the partner countries and stakeholders Brazilian and Chinese policies are transferred to. Our mapping and analysis suggest that, in their partnerships with the UN, Brazil and China target both their immediate "near abroad" (the Latin American region for Brazil and Asia for China) and a "far abroad", which for both countries is mainly Africa. Brazil has very few policy transfer partnerships involving Asian countries and the same goes for China in Latin America, with some notable exceptions, such as Brazil's work with Bangladesh in the context of the partnership with WFP and China's work with Caribbean islands in the context of SSCAF. For UN entities, work with least developed countries – in Asia but notably in Africa – has been of particular importance. Yet the power dynamics and the (potential) marginalisation of certain Southern – particularly African – voices in cooperation with both Southern heavyweights

113 Interview with international development expert with experience in evaluating triangular initiatives in China (phone interview, July 2018).

and multilateral partners is a well-known challenge.[114] The frequency of "provider-led" knowledge-sharing arrangements – to make use of a typology used by IFAD (see IFAD, 2017) – in which Southern "beneficiary" partners are invisible or largely passive receivers of Chinese or Brazilian expertise is staggering. In most of these arrangements, mutual or multi-directional learning is largely absent. Existing reviews, assessments and evaluations of triangular partnerships highlight both innovations towards more horizontal schemes and remaining obstacles to meaningful participation of Southern beneficiary partners in both the design and governance of these initiatives. Rather than always building on genuine requests, triangular policy transfer partnerships are often negotiated between Brazil or China and the UN entity in question to suit potential or alleged demands from different less-developed Southern partners (see, for example, Articulação Sul, 2020; Articulação Sul & Move Social, 2017; WFP, 2021b; see also Box 5 above). In many ways, this reflects some of the fundamental flaws of, and long-standing criticism voiced against, traditional Northern-led development assistance schemes.

A related challenge illustrating the implications of intra-South asymmetries for policy transfer partnerships centres on the logic that informs the setting up of knowledge-sharing mechanisms. The Brazil–UNDP WWP platform, as a less successful experience of cooperation between Brazil and the UN, provides a number of relevant insights. First, documenting Brazilian experiences in the framework of WWP was a complex and time-consuming task as Brazilian experts had to learn how to translate their practical knowledge for an international audience. A similar "translation" challenge has been found in the case of the International Poverty Reduction Centre in China (Lu, 2021; see Section 3). Second, while WWP ended up collecting extensive documentations about Brazilian policies (including on less positive dimensions and "hands-on" reflections on implementation challenges), the platform attracted less interest among practitioners from other countries than originally expected (Garcia, 2018). There is no single explanation for why this was the case, but the fact that WWP – and other centres like IPRCC – worked under the premise of a diffuse and passive "knowledge demand" by other developing countries instead of proactively consulting developing country partners certainly contributed to the challenges of sustaining the partnership. Indeed, these centres highlight some of the more general challenges of South–South knowledge transfer models born out of a passive, mostly unidirectional or top-down, diffusion of "Southern-grown" policies to other Southern countries. Moving forward, more comparative studies of – more or less successful – initiatives (such as the WWP and IPC-IG) or of the different partnerships that comprise the UNDP network of poverty reduction policy centres (including the Brazil-based IPC-IG and the China-based IPRCC) would provide useful in-depth insights.

While there is some basic evidence about the performance of WWP and other Brazil–UN initiatives, there are comparatively few(er) assessments of China–UN partnerships and thus less insight into transfer processes and outcomes. Yet, Alves and Lee (2022) identify dynamics similar to those discussed above when assessing knowledge transfer dynamics in the context of Chinese-led or China-funded Special Economic Zones in Africa and South Asia. They highlight the so far modest impact of knowledge transfer due to largely top-down approaches adopted by Chinese firms when operating in other Southern countries. They also argue that, while Special Economic Zones have indeed generated positive economic outcomes for partners (including local jobs as well as increases in foreign direct investments and exports), there is still a mismatch between narratives of "SSC horizontality", on the one hand, and top-down knowledge and technology transfer dynamics between China and its Southern partners, on the other. Besides revealing challenges similar to those discussed above, Alves and Lee also offer first insights into how Chinese companies relate to transfer processes. While business-sector engagement is a key feature of China's SSC and – as discussed above – also an increasingly

114 For discussions on African agency, see Brown and Harman (2014); Soulé (2020); Mohan and Lampert (2013). For the extent to which African stakeholders have engaged with discussions around the notion of South–South cooperation, see Haug and Kamwengo (2022).

visible phenomenon in triangular partnerships involving UN entities, the exact role of market actors in policy transfer processes is yet to be better unpacked and understood.

Interests and power relations at the UN

From a UN perspective, experiences of partnering with Brazil and Chin raise important questions about the motivation of UN agencies to establish and/or reinforce specific agreements with Southern partners, as well as the impact stemming from these partnerships on UN structures and procedures. More generally, triangular policy transfer partnerships with Brazil and China reflect and contribute to shifting power dynamics across the UN development system. UN partnerships with major "SSC champions" such as Brazil and China started to expand at a time when several UN bodies were facing a dual funding and legitimacy crisis. From the early 2000s onwards, these partnerships allowed different entities within the UN development system to explore ways of enlarging their funding base by tapping into financial resources coming from Southern powers. They were also part of UN entities' attempts to gain legitimacy by incorporating SSC into their workings, showcasing "donor horizontality" at a time when traditional aid was being challenged by emerging Southern-led cooperation paradigms. While a number of contributions have studied these general motivations (Abdenur & Fonseca, 2013; Weinlich, 2014; Milhorance & Soulé-Kohndou, 2017; Lima & Santana, 2020; Haug, 2022), the impact of evolving partnerships on UN entities and their link with current – shifting – power dynamics across the UN development system remain poorly understood.[115] In order to shed light on recent empirical processes, a first venue for future inquiry relates to the very mainstreaming of triangular partnerships with major Southern powers across the UN system (see Haug, 2021), and the ways in which experimentation by pioneering agencies – including FAO, UNDP and WFP – are being shared with or adopted by other UN entities.

Another important issue relates to power dynamics within individual agencies. The evolving power and policy realities at FAO, WFP and IFAD, for instance, clearly reflect the evolution of North–South relations over the past decades, with Southern voices and partners playing an increasingly visible role in agriculture-related processes.[116] They also reflect important and unsolved policy debates – such as the divide between agricultural productivity and food systems approaches – that cut across Southern and Northern powers' domestic agricultural policies as well as their diplomatic positions at the Rome-based UN entities. Rather than purely technical debates, these are instantiations of "intermestic" food politics based on ongoing disputes about what agricultural development is and how it should be promoted (Emadi & Rahmanian, 2020; Lima, 2020). The differences in Brazil's and China's national and international policy priorities embedded in their international cooperation partnerships with FAO and WFP illustrate these diverging views on what "works" for rural development, hunger alleviation or food security.

Moreover, the question of who is socialising whom, and on what, remains an important gap in research on multilateral cooperation dynamics, notably in light of the growing influence of China through SSC mainstreaming across the UN development system (Haug, 2021). For more than a decade, UN entities have often proactively led outreach efforts to "engage China" as an increasingly visible contributor to global development endeavours (Zhou et al., 2020). This has coincided with outreach efforts by traditional donors at the OECD to engage China (Waisbich, 2021b), so far with mixed results.[117] Irrespective of how the setup of collaboration formats unfolds, however, once partnerships are running there are important mutual socialisation dynamics taking

115 For a recent contribution focusing on China's expanding engagement with the UN development pillar, see Baumann et al. (2022).

116 On China-related controversies at FAO, see Baumann et al. (2022).

117 For potential cooperation opportunities between China and Development Assistance Committee members at the OECD, see Janus and Tang (2020).

place.[118] Understanding these is a prerequisite for making sense of policy circulation processes and power dynamics within and beyond multilateral fora.

Developmental impact of triangular policy transfer partnerships

While strategic political outcomes (including soft power or trust building) are a key component of and often a major driver behind triangular partnerships, development outcomes are often more difficult to ascertain.[119] As the limited number of existing evaluations and illustrative evidence suggest, some of the capacity building initiatives discussed in this paper were successful in raising awareness around a particular policy issue but failed to create more meaningful technical and policy exchange between partners. There is a clear need to move beyond "sharing" instruments – such as study tours, seminars or one-off exchange meetings – to promoting more meaningful contributions centring on the implementation of adapted solutions in close partnership with stakeholders in partner countries (see Articulação Sul, 2020; Articulação Sul/Move Social, 2017). This means working with committed partners on both sides, rather than those who simply value the exchange for individual gains, such as travelling abroad. It also means developing joint reflections and roadmaps on how to move from a focus on sensitising or inspirational effects to piloting concrete solutions on the ground. Rather than simply adjusting development cooperation planning and including new strategies and activities, these ongoing reflections on how to improve triangular cooperation also reveal an emerging consensus among South–South and triangular cooperation practitioners on the need to discuss effectiveness issues and to develop partnerships that are able to follow policy travelling throughout the policy cycle, including at the implementation level (UNOSSC & UNDP, 2021; Waisbich, 2022a).

This is not an easy task. There are a number of tensions between effectiveness debates led by traditional donors and metrics to capture what change and impact look like in the context of SSC (Waisbich, 2022a). Most partnerships between Southern powers and the UN discussed in this paper could arguably make room for flexibility and innovation as well as more strategic joint planning processes. SSC principles – such as demand-driven cooperation, horizontality and non-interference – can offer an important compass to guide partners on how to jointly design, implement and assess initiatives as well as on how to structure the policy "supply side" in countries like Brazil and China (see Articulação Sul, 2020). Moreover, while the initiatives discussed in this study are – or aim at – transferring policies, not all have an explicit theory of policy change. A first evaluation of the Brazil–UNICEF Programme published in 2019 provides a helpful framework for understanding policy transfer outcomes through SSC. The report uses three categories – "informed", "influenced", "peer-reviewed or co-developed" – to assess contributions from the programme to the enhancement of partners' policy frameworks (Articulação Sul, 2020, p. 18). In line with this logic of making assessments explicit, achieving greater clarity on a case-by-case basis over desired outcomes is key to enhancing developmental impact.

118 On mutual socialisation, see Waisbich and Mawdsley (2022).

119 On the dual focus on partnership and development-related results in triangular partnerships, see OECD (2019).

8 Conclusion

This paper has focused on triangular partnerships with the UN set up by Brazil and China to enable and expand the transfer of successful domestic policies to other Southern countries. Our analysis of patterns stems from 35 partnerships, which include all relevant initiatives Brazil and China have developed with the eight UN entities under consideration. We thereby provide the first systematic account of Brazilian and Chinese policy transfer partnerships with the UN and thus contribute to making sense of an increasingly visible phenomenon in international development. The two three-pronged heuristics we have introduced to capture partnership types (projects, programmes and centres) and transfer dimensions (the what, who and how) have not only helped to structure our discussion but also offer conceptual references for future work.

Our analysis shows that there is neither a single model for Brazilian and Chinese partnerships with UN entities nor uniquely Brazilian or Chinese approaches. Partnership types analysed and discussed in this paper range from small (pilot) projects to robust multi-year programmes or institutionalised centres with a long-term outlook. While some are comprehensive and long-standing endeavours that rely on both sharing and piloting on the ground, others are newer and more limited to promoting policy solutions supposed to inspire stakeholders in partner countries. Overall, the partnerships analysed exhibit various levels of institutional development and are designed to serve different goals. Across initiatives, UN entities play multiple roles, ranging from managerial functions to technical implementation and policy advocacy.

The policy transfer partnerships analysed here also cover different issue areas. While both Brazilian and Chinese initiatives put a strong focus on agricultural development, they emphasise different dimensions that strongly relate to and build on domestic agricultural politics and agendas. Brazilian partnerships have emphasised food and nutritional security with strong linkages to social policy and social protection measures, such as school feeding programmes. Chinese partnerships, in turn, have focused more on strengthening market linkages, supply chains and agricultural productivity through technological innovation.

Beyond agriculture, our mapping has identified a range of other sectors where policy experience from Brazil and China is being shared under the umbrella of triangular partnerships with UN entities. In the case of Brazil, this has included fields such as health, decent work, and conditional cash transfer programmes. This resonates with the fact that, more generally, Brazil has put the transfer of public – and notably social – policy at the core of both its SSC portfolio and its identity as a “Southern provider”. China, in turn, exhibits a policy transfer profile also focusing on health but engaging more with emergency and disaster relief or smart cities. China–UN partnerships also feature economic productivity more prominently, including labour and industrial skills development.

This mosaic of policy issues, together with continuities and shifts over the course of individual initiatives, underlines the importance of context and time for the partnerships forged between the governments of Brazil or China and their UN counterparts. Partnerships reflect continuously evolving negotiations – also informed by the network of UN country offices located across the South – to identify policy areas related to the mandates of specific UN entities that match Brazil’s or China’s experience, willingness and capacity to share at a given point in time. The evolving partnership patterns of both countries also indicate the extent to which their trajectories differ. In the early 2000s, Brazil started to engage with and rely on UN agencies in a more substantial way than China. The Chinese partnership landscape, however, has recently been evolving more rapidly and is becoming increasingly populated by new agreements, pledges and institutional arrangements that follow China’s expanding engagement with the UN and the broad field of global development.[120]

120 On China’s expanding engagement with the UN development pillar, see Baumann et al. (2022).

Against this backdrop, the paper at hand contributes to illuminating the role played by the UN in triangular policy transfers and related knowledge and power dynamics. SSC has been historically funded and supported by the UN, as well as other multilateral bodies or Northern cooperation agencies. Since the 2000s, however, UN entities have also – and increasingly – been shaped by and trying to engage more forcefully with SSC. In addition to the systematic mapping of an under-studied segment of UN partnerships, our analysis provides evidence on the substantial diversity among UN entities. FAO, for instance, has been one of the most long-standing partners for both Brazil and China. Their partnerships with FAO – and WFP – provide insights into key differences in policy transfer approaches, with China focusing on productivity-related questions and private sector engagement and Brazil engaging more with social programmes and public support schemes. UNDP has also played a special role in both Brazil and China by not only providing institutional support but also brokering knowledge exchanges. While Brazil's triangular partnerships with UNDP expanded in the early 2000s and later lost steam, China has developed a growing appetite for partnerships, with both UNDP and the UNDP-hosted UNOSSC, on policy areas ranging from climate change to city-to-city cooperation.

Beyond the explicit focus on UN entities, this paper also speaks to attempts to understand the context and time-specific negotiations taking place on policy transfer in the global development arena more generally. As others have pointed out, decisions on which solutions are transferred respond not only to a given policy's effectiveness or suitability in a particular context but also to "the distribution of power in the international system in a given moment and its impact on global governance structures" (Leite et al., 2015, p. 1449). Over the last two decades, global policy circulation has been strongly impacted by the growing authority, willingness and capacity of a range of Southern countries – notably but not only Brazil and China – to share their models and experiences with others. The expanding and diversifying partnerships with UN entities are one set of mechanisms or channels through which Southern powers have tried to internationalise and transfer their home-grown policy solutions from the mid-2000s onwards. In order to understand which policies end up circulating, and why certain transfer partnerships with UN entities evolve while others fade or disappear, both domestic and geopolitical dynamics need to be considered. In order to make sense of where the policy market for development solutions is heading, there is also a need to better unpack mutual learning dynamics. This includes reflections across the UN system on how to work with Southern policy hubs as well as a focus, in both Brazil and China, on how to sustain partnerships that enable their policies to travel.

In addition to the three central challenges for triangular policy transfer partnerships and related research needs discussed above – focusing on asymmetries among partners, interests and power dynamics, and developmental impact – we finish this paper with three concrete suggestions on research venues to be explored further.

First, the policy transfer dynamics under the partnership types discussed above should be examined to detect changes occurring when partners move from projects to programmes and then to centre-like arrangements. Are these processes accompanied by any developmental effectiveness gains, in terms of impact or partner satisfaction? Are there other strategic gains – related to visibility, identity, soft power or partnership building – for UN entities or Southern powers?

Second, the very idea of centres of excellence, and how they relate to the structural knowledge dynamics in the field of global development, should be scrutinised. Are these centres challenging or reiterating existing hierarchical paradigms, often including myths of developmental expertise and solutions imposed by those who have achieved a certain level of development upon actors and spaces generally framed as less developed?

Third, dynamics specific to the UN system need to be examined in more detail: how do policy transfer partnerships relate to ongoing multilateral attempts to reform the UN development system? To what extent do they provide sustainable mechanisms for engaging Southern powers

who have so far been unwilling to increase substantially their voluntary contributions to UN funds and programmes?

Far from exhaustive, these questions point to emerging issues in broader research agendas on South–South policy transfer and the evolving role of multilateral organisations. If anything, they highlight the extent to which triangular policy transfer partnerships offer rich empirical material to engage with questions that are central to our understanding of the evolving contours of global development.

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