

**The Social Construction of Colombian-African Relations:  
A possible South-South cooperation framework?**

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## Introduction

When analyzing the current dynamics of the international system, it is possible to identify new trends that often seem to challenge the traditions that have dominated the interactions among states. Nowadays evidence suggest that the economic relations among states are being shaped under different frameworks such as cooperation among regions that have traditionally been labeled as underdeveloped, this issue might not seem to be relevant enough at first glance, however the new tendencies of cooperation among regions traditionally excluded from the headlines of the international community can be considered a challenge to the current *status quo*, and therefore deserve a careful analysis.

This text will begin analyzing different theoretical approaches to South-South cooperation in order to give some clues that help to diagnose the presence of this phenomenon. A second part will elaborate on the development and status of the relations between Colombia and some african states, highlighting the current ties among these actors, which academics tend to consider as part of the Global South. Later, based on the current academic developments on south-south cooperation, also on the context of the relations between Colombia and some african states, and on the concept of experts on the matter of Colombian foreign policy towards Africa, the text will theorize weather if it is possible to cathegorize the interactions between Colombia and Africa under a social construction of a south-south cooperation framework. The text will conclude with a series of insights on how to assess the relations between Colombia and Africa. The text will be elaborated upon the purpose to verify if both academia and the Colombian

government understand South-South cooperation under the same assumptions and implicit claims, or if on the other hand there is a gap among governments and academia regarding the symptoms of the South-South cooperation typologies.

### **Theoretical framework of South-South Cooperation**

During the last two decades the South-South cooperation has become a trendy concept among scholars of International Relations, however the existing academic literature is not extensive, and in many cases authors contradict each other on what is and what is not considered to be South-South cooperation. The broadest definition of the concept is the one formulated by the United Nations, which states that "South-South cooperation is a broad framework for collaboration among countries of the South in the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and technical domains." (United Nations, 2004), however this definition apart of being extremely vague, it also poses a major challenge to academics by using the expression "countries of the south" as a category of states, therefore becomes necessary to elaborate what is a southern country from a non-geographic perspective.

Even though the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation does not specify in a clear way what does the concept "south" means, in the last couple of decades there has been increasing research on a non-institutional group of states called the Global South, and it tends to be generalized that South-South cooperation is the cooperation framework that takes place among the Global South.

While when referring to the Global South it is often understood as Latin America, Africa, South Asia and the Middle East, or as a set of states that have recently gained a voice on the international system as a consequence of globalization and democratization (Hurrell & Sengupta, 2010), there is a literature gap regarding which characteristics clearly define the Global South. It is worth mentioning, that even if the concept of Global South seems to be new, it is generally understood as a denomination that encompasses developing and less developed countries, therefore the concept itself poses a North-South divide, that even if in most of the cases matches with the geographical allocation of states, what it really creates is a distinction based on the level of development and income of the states, this bearing in mind that development is still a vague concept that often tends to be biased by having the Global North as a point of comparison. However if the Global South is understood as a region (even though it comprehends territories that lack geographical continuity), there are constitutive elements that not only go beyond the geographic aspect, but also beyond the economic and political ones, and this is explained by the fact that regionalism is understood as a social construction (Acharya, 2007), therefore the Global South in its purest conception is not just a typology and has evolved into a concept that denotes a sense of regionalism, where shared level of income and development is only one aspect of a complex social construction, one that comes along with a new way to conceive the international order where co-responsibility in mutual development is assumed among states, understanding order as ``a pattern of activity that sustains the elements or primary goals of the society of states, or international society'' (Bull, 1977).

From a Marxist perspective it is possible then to argue that if the order created by the North-South divide sustains the primary goal of the international society, this goal is to generate an international class distinction. This specific feature of the international system shows not novelty at all, however it allows to conclude that the global south is indeed another way of referring to the traditionally not developed, less developed, and developing non-industrialized, non-aligned states of the third world. In this matter, it is possible to pose doubts regarding why the concept of third world is still used since it has no sense due to nowadays lack of presence of the socialist second world (Dirlik, 2004). The global south is hence one more narrative element to refer to what Marxists consider as the post-colonial periphery. This typology (as well as the global north) are one more of the trendy discursive elements that makes reference to a occidentalist geohistorical category that has shaped collective imagery since the end of the Cold War (Coronil, 1996). This debate on imperial geographical and historical categories, as well as the polemics on the thesis of the west and the rest, and the binary oppositions created by the western narratives reinforces the problems derived of dividing the world into regions nominated by normative concepts (Eckl & Weber, 2007) this debate has also been fed by scholars such as Noam Chomsky, Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington among many others.

Even when the term South-South cooperation has been widely used on the last decades, there is a constitutive factor in the terminology that sometimes tends to be forgotten by academics, and it is the fact that South-South cooperation more than being a concept used to describe the interactions among countries belonging to narrative divisions, it is a way to name the ties between states under similar conditions, therefore it is assumed that South-South

cooperation requires lack of asymmetry among the states engaged into this type of interaction. Understanding asymmetry from a theoretical perspective in which bilateral relations take place among partner states with uneven capacities (Becerra, 2013), asymmetric cooperation, hence is not possible to be conceptually conceived under a framework of South-South cooperation. This specific feature of South-South cooperation acquires significant relevance under a context of the Global South due to the fact that regional powers have an implicit hierarchical relation with subregional powers (Nolte, 2010), hence confirming once again that the Global North needs always to be excluded from a South-South cooperation framework, due to the conceptual necessity of this typology for having a lack of hierarchical relations.

Another problem for defining what South-South cooperation really is, lies under the fact that it is questionable the fact that two states can be considered as equals, therefore, in theory every single interaction among states might have a certain level of hierarchy due to the concept "South" being a geopolitical western construct (Jules & Morais, 2008). An example of this are the ties between Angola and Brasil, because even if these two states are considered as part of the Global South, the ties among them can not really be considered as South-South cooperation given the fact that being Brasil a state with more economic capabilities, it imposes a hierarchical relation to Angola, this specific scenario is useful then to expose a case of South-South realism (Frasson-Quenoz, 2016). This previous examples illustrates a case of cooperation because there is evidence of a win-win outcome, however due to Brasil's imposition of a hierarchy aligned to its foreign policy aspiration regarding the expansion of its sphere of influence (Abdenur, 2015), the relation now has a component of domination, and this type of interactions fit under the conceptual grounds of North-South cooperation. The case of Brazil and Angola is useful then to

pose doubts regarding if given the current balance of power, is a pure South-South relation really possible, understanding this concept as something that encompasses much more elements than just ties between states allocated under the Global South narrative?

Clues regarding the evidence of South-South cooperation appear by hand of authors that expand the concept even more. Particularly interesting is the school of thought that considers South-South cooperation as a counter-hegemonic trend, understanding it as a pattern in which states that have traditionally been dominated find South-South cooperation as mechanism of emancipation that challenges the *status quo* and breaks dependency linkages that have been tied upon post-colonialism (Santos, 2014). This perspective recognizes the existence of South-South relations as a mean through which states break traditional subordinative hierarchies, and engage into new interactions that lack hierarchy (Santos, 2014), but that can be categorized as South-South since they constitute a revolution in its purest sense due to the fact that they reflect a new tendency, and a shift in the balance of power and in the logic of dominance that North-South cooperation comes implicit with. Under the impossibility of breaking dependence relations with the use of hard power, South-South cooperation appears then as a mechanism of soft balancing, at least in the case of several countries that have historically been left behind in the periphery of the international system, and hence engage into South-South cooperation as the only way to establish foreign ties. South-South cooperation becomes then a tool used to re-shape the concept of poverty and underdevelopment formulated by the North-South divide (Thérien, 1999).

Another feature that defines South-South cooperation is the implicit sense of capacity building and public policy transfer that lies in this sort of interactions. However even if some territories traditionally considered as part of the world's hinterland such as Africa engage into cooperation in seek of aid and assistance (Omobowale, 2015), South-South cooperation must not be always related with humanitarian aid, since cooperation and aid in fields such as technology, science, and military issues are also major trends in South-South cooperation.

Since the interwar period, there is evidence of international cooperation as a significant field of study inside the discipline of International Relations, hence some classic approaches towards the phenomom of South-South cooperation proposed by the dominant theories of International Relations can not be ignored. As previously mentioned, Marxism and Dependency Theory provide an epistemological framework that defines South-South cooperation as a mean to create a shift on the *status quo*. When concerning about the conception of Realism regarding South-South cooperation, it can be defined as a strategy performed by the South to guarantee power given the fact that third world states are often economically and military dependant on benefactor industrialized states (Ayoob, 2002), hence assuming that South-South cooperation is any sort of cooperative interaction among the players of the Global South (Jules & Morais, 2008) it becomes a new way through which the South ensures power without the necessity to engage into hegemonic ties. It is necessary also to have in mind the approach that the Liberal school of International Relations has to cooperation, understanding this phenomom as something really possible (as opossed to Realism), and according to Jules & Morais, Liberalism conceives cooperation as a posibility of maximization of the self interest of the states, and as an option to avoid war. These same authors also conceive a Funcionalist approach according to which South-



South cooperation aims exclusively to pursue development, and hence is far from any ideological tendency, and therefore the implicit claims associated with this phenomenon come along as collateral effects.

It is also possible to use Critical Theory to interpret the political economy of South-South cooperation and reinforce the idea that it is a mechanism of social change, since it allows actors that traditionally have been marginalized from the international system to establish interdependence among themselves, and not through the traditional subordinative North-South divide. However if there is a theory useful to explain South-South cooperation in virtue of its multidimensional conception, is the theory of Constructivism, this given the fact that this school of thought elaborates on the social construction of reality, and therefore understanding different dynamics of the international system requires to understand them not as a single objective reality, but as an ever changing permanent construction (Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, 2007).

In order to proceed to analyze the specific dynamics of the relations between states belonging to the Global South, such as Colombia and states in the African continent, it is necessary then to proceed to establish which are the symptoms of South-South cooperation, this according to the theoretical elements previously discussed. In order to identify presence of South-South cooperation ties, it is necessary then to establish what Max Weber describes as ‘‘Idealtypus’’. The establishment of an ideal typology will allow to compare the scenarios of South-South interactions and extract conclusions (Sanchez de Puerta, 2006).

To summarize the ontological assumptions previously presented, and identify the ideal typology of South-South ties understanding cooperation as a normative concept, it is possible to identify four tendencies to be considered as implicit claims of South-South cooperation, at least at its purest and most ideal stage. The first symptom is the presence of at least two state actors that belong to the developing world, or at least two non-state actors belonging to developing states. For understanding this specific characteristic of South-South cooperation, it is avoided the use of the term Global South given the subjectivity previously discussed, instead it is considered to be more accurate the use of the expression “developing states” for the purpose of illustrating the nature of the actors that engage into South-South cooperation. The second symptom makes reference to the lack of hierarchy among the actors, bearing in mind that this symptom constitutes an ideal type of South-South cooperation but by no means exemplifies all the uses of the term. The third symptom assumes South-South cooperation as a phenomenon that while being oriented towards the generation of development, it has implicit a sense of breaking traditional ties of subordination. Finally an ideal type of South-South cooperation is considered as a mechanism that seeks development through policy transfer and capacity building. This last aspect is highly relevant because it implies that South-South cooperation goes beyond the traditional sense of international cooperation in which there is an element of domination, or a win-win outcome in the best of the scenarios. In South-South cooperation hence, the driver behind the action is merely cooperative and aid guided.

## **Context of the relations between Colombia and the African States**

The establishment of formal diplomatic ties between Colombia and the major states of the African continent can be traced back to the 1970`s, this does not only suggests that Africa is a relatively new region for Colombia in terms of foreign policy formulation, but also that the establishment of this relations corresponds to the context of the bipolar international system that took place throughout the Cold War in which both Colombia and most of the African states belonged to the Movement of Non-Alligned Countries, and also corresponds to the establishment of the Organization for African Unity. Since 1970 up to the first decade of the 21st century, the ties between Colombia and Africa have been limited to a weak mutual institutional presence and intergovernmental projects. Colombian-African trade and cooperation among the private sector used to be close to insignificant until the year 2010 when Colombia followed the path of some of it`s Latin American neighbors and included Africa into it`s trade policy formulation (Procolombia, 2013).

Since the establishment of the formal diplomatic channels between Africa and Colombia, the institutional presence of Colombia in Africa has been more extense that the presence of African states in Colombia. Many African states have institutional presence in Brasil due to ancient historical ties with this Latin American country, and it is from these embassies from where many african states pursues their foreign policy towards Colombia.

During the last 40 years, Colombia has never had more than 7 active diplomatic missions in Africa, and in many cases, since Africa has never been a priority for Colombia, the embassies

have operated with lack of continuity due to the different policies and budgetary priorities of the governments in turn. By the year 2016, Colombia has active but modest institutional presence in Morocco, Argelia, Lebanon, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Egypt, but among those only Egypt and Argelia have diplomatic missions operating in Bogotá (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2016).

From the former list of african states, several tendencies can be identified. The case of Argelia and Morocco suggests that the approach of Colombia to Africa has traditionally focused in the region known as the Magreb, which not only is a region with interesting economic performance among the continent, but also is a geo-historical imperial category that can be considered as part of the Global South. The case of Egypt is particularly interesting, because it is the only embassy of Colombia in Africa that has had continuity in its operation since its establishment almost four decades ago, also Egypt is the only African state that has had continuous institutional presence in Colombia. Additionally since 1982 Colombia's military forces have belonged to the Multinational Force & Observers (MFO) that guards the border between Egypt and Israel (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2016).

The case of the Colombian embassy in Kenya is remarkable as well given the fact that even though the mission of Colombia in Kenya was among the first ones to be established, the dialogue between the two nations is not fluid, and the embassy operates mainly as the link of Colombia towards the African multilateral organizations housed in Nairobi, hence it is through this diplomatic mission how Colombia acts as an observer member of the African Union (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2016). However, among the current diplomatic missions of

Colombia in Africa, the case of Ghana is the one with the highest particularities. The embassy of Colombia in Ghana is not only the most recent embassy of Colombia in Africa, it is also the latest opening of an Embassy that Colombia has performed. Opened in 2013, the embassy in Accra represents not only the presence of Colombia in an african state with which Colombia has traditionally had weak ties, it also represents the comeback of Colombian foreign policy to the region of western africa, a region were Colombia used to be present during the 1970's with diplomatic missions in Senegal and Ivory Coast. Having a permanent mission in Ghana might indeed seem quite unreasonable given the fact that oil dependant economies such as Nigeria are also in the region, also Nigeria has more tradition as a diplomatic spot in Africa than Ghana. Having hence the embassy located in Ghana is a response to the interests of the Pacific Alliance, and the institutional presence of Colombia in Ghana is encompassed among the commitments that this south american nation acquired with th Pacific Alliance members as part of the process of diversifying the presence of the alliance members in prioritary uncovered regions. The diplomatic mission in Ghana hence becomes the platform for the implementation of the Pacific Alliance's interests in the region of Western Africa (Turbay, 2016), a region that as well as Latin America is considered as part of the Global South. The case of the institutional presence of Colombia in South-Africa also deserves attention given the economic power of South Africa in it's own continent, and the potential of South-South cooperation in post-conflict issues. South Africa and Colombia established diplomatic ties in 1994, being hence South Africa one of the last countries in the African continent to which Colombia has approached (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2016).

If compared to the ties with other regions of the world such as Europe or North America, the ties between Colombia and Africa seem to be weak and less priority, however, since half a decade ago, the Colombian state has been interested in increasing the relations between Colombia and this continent in which there is high potential for cooperation. For understanding how and why the Colombian state has increasingly shown interest in regions traditionally unexplored in terms of foreign policy, it becomes necessary to trace back the doctrines of Colombia's foreign policy during the 1970's when Colombia established most of its diplomatic ties with African states. As previously mentioned, it is possible to associate the emergence of diplomatic relations between Colombia and Africa to the Movement of Non-aligned Nations, however even beyond the Cold War, it is possible to encompass the establishment of new ties inside the doctrine known as *Respice Similia*, according to which the foreign policy of Colombia should be formulated by prioritizing relations with states that show similar characteristics and levels inside the international system (Vargas-Alzate, 2009), and under this context, both Colombia and Africa appear as regions that have similarities that allow them to be categorized inside the Global South.

Since the 1970's until today Colombia has shifted its foreign policy doctrine, however, nowadays the Colombian State counts with several documentation that gives clues on how to understand the increasing interest of Colombia in Africa. Under the period of President Juan Manuel Santos, the Colombian government has pursued three main goals to achieve during the current administration which are peace, equality and education, and every action within the government plan is aligned with the achievement of one or several of these goals. Regarding foreign affairs the role of the current foreign policy is to diversify the agenda of development

programs with traditional and non-traditional partners in areas such as education, agriculture, infrastructure, environmental sustainability, energy sources and trade (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2014). It is necessary to clarify that given the traditional behavior of Colombia, the typology ‘‘non-traditional partners’’ makes exclusive reference to states located in Asia, Africa and Oceania.

In order to comply with the pillars of the current policy agenda designed by the Colombian government for the period 2014-2018, the foreign policy of the nation is built upon six specific actions, among which appears one that requires to consolidate the regional agendas with non-traditional partners under dynamics of international cooperation (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2014), and Africa is mentioned specifically as a region that requires a regional agenda based on South-South cooperation. Also the Colombian administration is looking forward to engage into cooperation schemes as a mechanism to promote development, but also as a tool for the internationalization of the good practices in several fields of policy areas in which the country already has expertise (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2014), therefore the strategy of the Colombian government is to demand cooperation, but also to positionate the country as a supplier of cooperative aid.

Since both the supply and demand of international cooperation is a priority for Colombia, the government implemented a presidential agency for international cooperation, which works towards the design of the required policies and strategies that guarantee to encompass all the international cooperation efforts inside the framework of the national objectives. The international cooperation strategy which is currently pursued by Colombia not only recognizes

Africa as a region of increasing importance for Colombia's foreign policy, but also elaborates on the necessity for current cooperation frameworks to get beyond the traditional North-South divide (Agencia Presidencial de Cooperación, 2012).

Colombia's demand priorities for international cooperation are encompassed under the national goal of achieving democratic peace and the strengthening of institutions, also as a state which is engaged into peace talks and post-conflict dynamics, the national government recognizes the lessons that Colombia can learn from other mid-income post-conflict societies. Other fields in which Colombia seeks to obtain capacity building via South-South cooperation are disaster management, relation with ethnic minorities, gender equality, migration, and food safety, among others (Agencia Presidencial de Cooperación, 2012). Given the socio-economic similarities, it is possible to identify potential cooperation opportunities in these areas with african states, actually Colombia's strategy of cooperation recognizes Africa as a region with unexplored potential for providing cooperation in this matters. In the specific case of reconciliation and post-conflict sociology, contries as South Africa can provide great lessons, also in fields such as food security, the capacity building programs between Colombia and Senegal (Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security, 2014) are a clear example of how effective cooperation among mid-income states cathegorized as part of the Global South is really possible, and that capacity building is not limited to the traditional North-South scheme of international cooperation.

As previously mentioned, Colombia intends to positionate itself as a relevant supplier of cooperation, hence the country as one of the CIVETS aspires to collaborate with the private sector, local governments and academia for improving it's image and it's position at the



international level by internationalizing its best practices in fields such as security, counter-terrorism, war on drugs, public health, sport promotion and symbolic reparation to victims (Agencia Presidencial de Cooperación, 2012). A concrete example of Colombia acting as a supplier of South-South cooperation is the recent case in which the armed forces of Nigeria visited Colombia looking for technical assistance (CATAM, 2016). Once again this case exemplifies a situation in which two countries engage into a cooperation framework as equals and without the inherence of an actor of the Global North.

The challenge for Colombia regarding Africa is to strengthen the ties with this continent through the consolidation of a regional strategy, and as part of the execution of this aim, Colombia determined a list of priority states in Africa with which it is of the essence to concentrate the cooperation efforts, this list of priority states was determined based on the compatibility that these states feature with Colombia regarding cooperation in the fields of peace building, rural development and environmental sustainability (Agencia Presidencial de Cooperación, 2014).

As noted in the previous paragraphs, throughout the administration of Juan Manuel Santos, Colombia has shown great advances in matters of foreign policy formulation and the conception of strategies oriented towards a more organized, planned and pertinent international cooperation scheme. It is necessary to highlight that the current administration of Colombia is the one that has recognized Africa for the first time in decades as a region with which is necessary to build stronger ties, and it is also the one that has taken advantage of the good practices of the policy agenda, and has established pertinent mechanisms for using these strengths

as mechanisms for gaining preponderance abroad while at the same time being a mid-income state with ties with both the Global North and South.

It is clear that Colombia already has the consciousness of the mutual lessons and great potential that will come along by strengthening ties with Africa. Evidence also suggests that the government has inside its bureaucratic policy agenda some of the required legal instruments to strengthen the ties. Even more, both Colombia and Africa had already shown that it is possible to generate efficient cooperation mechanisms, and significant African states have shown interest to generate approaches towards Colombia, hence recognizing the complementarity character of both regions, the debate now is to determine if such interactions can be labeled under the epistemological concept of South-South cooperation and the implicit claims of such social construct.

### **Social construction of the Colombian-African relations**

Even though it is possible to elaborate on the character of an *Idealtypus* of South-South cooperation, and as argued previously, both the concepts of Global South and South-South cooperation are vague and still widely used, it is possible to identify a pragmatic school of thought that considers South-South cooperation as a typology that can be assigned to several sorts of international interactions based on a mere functionalistic approach and in accordance to very basic normative criteria.

Applied to the specific case of the Colombian-African relations, evidence already shows that both regions have the institutional capacity to engage into mutual cooperation schemes, hence, based on Colombia's strategy for international cooperation, and on significant experiences already developed by Colombian institutions such as SENA, DANE, DIAN and the National Police, and based on capacity building experiences in issues regarding trade, reintegration and transitional justice, six african states have been prioritized by Colombia in order to strenghten the regional strategy of Colombia towards Africa, this priority states are Egypt, South Africa, Ghana, Argelia, Marocco and Kenya. (Delgado-Caicedo, 2016).

According to professor Jerónimo Delgado from Universidad Externado de Colombia, the Global South can be defined as a set of states that share vulnerabilities, challenges and dependencies, and this is precisely the distinctive feature that allows to catalogue South-South ties as an interaction among equals, hence any sort of cooperative link among states with shared challenges and dependencies can be cathaloged as South-South cooperation (Delgado-Caicedo, 2016). From this functionalistinc and pragmatic approach, being both Colombia and the average african state actors with shared vulnerabilities, challenges and dependencies, the cooperative efforts among Colombia and Africa can be understood and assumed under the typhology of South-South cooperation.

A more pragmatic approach towards the use of the South-South tag elaborates as well on the fact that an emancipation character is not necessarily a distinctive feature of South-South cooperation, and this element of the traditional academic idealtypus is undermined with the notion that South-South cooperation is always developed through specific projects determined by

conjunctural circumstances, and that appear upon demand, as opposed to the traditional schemes of international cooperation which are built upon supply (Delgado-Caicedo, 2016). In the case of countries such as Colombia that occupy a place as receptors of aid, but are also looking forward to act as suppliers of cooperation, the implicit claim of this phenomenon is understood as to contribute to the generation of a shift in the perception of some sectors of the international community that still understand Colombia as a problem-country, and this shift occurs as long as a state is able to internationalize its best practices. In this specific view there is a match between the traditional approach that recognizes South-South operations as both supply and demand oriented, and the pragmatic approach towards South-South cooperation which understands this typology as demand oriented.

Regarding the possibility of some states using South-South cooperation as a mean of soft balancing, this affirmation can be certain for the case of Latin American state actors such as Cuba, where the ban obligated the government to craft ties with non-traditional actors, hence Cuba is nowadays the country in Latin America with the largest experience dealing with the African states. Regardless that the case of Cuba is considered by some as an example of South-South cooperation being used for the sake of soft balancing, it needs to be considered as well the fact that North-South and South-South cooperation are complementary (Delgado-Caicedo, 2016), and Colombia is the example of this phenomenon due to the fact that according to its cooperation strategy, South-South cooperation is encouraged while at the same time ties with traditional allies in the Global North are still fundamental for the achievement of the national goals.

The case of the Pacific Alliance and its presence in Africa deserves a detailed analysis given the fact that it is another example of how a more pragmatic view of South-South cooperation can explain the joint efforts of Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Chile towards their African counterparts. As previously mentioned, the most recent institutional presence of Colombia in Africa is in Accra, the Ghanaese capital. This embassy was opened in virtue of an spirit of integration and recognition with the region of western Africa, where any member of the Pacific Alliance was present yet (Turbay, 2016). The Pacific Alliance according to its statutes is nothing more than a multilateral free trade agreement, however the shared ideology of the governments of its four members has given the Pacific Alliance a status of competitor with Latin American organisms such as the ‘Bolivarian Alternative for the People of Our Americas’ (ALBA) and Mercosur for being highlighted as Latin America’s excellence Latin American integration and cooperation forum, therefore the Pacific Alliance plays a key role in the promotion of a world integrated Latin America (Flórez-Montoya, 2014).

According to Claudia Turbay, current Ambassador of Colombia in Ghana and the person responsible for opening cooperation ties between the Pacific Alliance and western Africa, South-South cooperation plays a key role in the foreign policy strategy of both Colombia and the Pacific Alliance to cover the subregion of western Africa, more specifically in issues related to war on drugs, security, technical cooperation and cultural diplomacy, therefore the institutional presence of Colombia in Ghana through the promotion of cooperation within the two regions plays a key role in the implementation of the common grounds of the Pacific Alliance multilateral politics (Turbay, 2016). The Pacific Alliance, in which Colombia has active participation is hence an example of multilateral efforts towards South-South cooperation. With

these moves, countries such as Mexico and Colombia that have not traditionally had strong ties with Africa are following the steps of nations such as Brazil that has a long tradition of experience in african issues.

If the case of the cooperative efforts handled through the colombian embassy in Ghana, and the cooperation of several governmental entities of Colombia with their african counterparts such as the case of capacity building between DANE and the National Statistics Entity of Mozambique (Delgado-Caicedo, 2016) are examples of South-South cooperation, it is worth it to elaborate on the concept or idealtypus that the colombian government has as a tool to diagnose the presence of South-South cooperation. According to Gretel Rios, former consultant for african issues at the colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, South-South cooperation is assumed by the government as any non-monetary interaction that deals with the exchange of knowledge, experiences and best practices among countries located geographically at the southern cone of the continents, and that feature shared development paths and are hence catalogued as developing states, therefore South-South cooperation is the one that takes place between south America, the Caribbean, south-east Asia and Africa (Rios, 2016). According to the former definition it is possible to affirm that the Colombian government considers most of the cooperation taking place among Colombia and Africa as South-South cooperation.

When determining the reasons to have Africa included among the regions with which is required to strenghten the regional approach according to the cooperation strategy of Colombia, Africa becomes a significant actor due to the fact that there is a mutual experience regarding shared problematics that deserve to be learned by the counterparty (Rios, 2016). This

understanding of the added value that Africa can provide to Colombia and vice-versa, reinforces the previous pragmatic principle that supports the understanding of the Global South and South-South cooperation from a functionalist perspective, in the sense that the government assumes the existence of South-South cooperation given criterias that are not as narrow as the ones conceived on the academic ideltypus.

Since Colombia currently has a list of six priority african states, arises the question if it is possible for Colombia to consider any african state as an ally, in this matter however is difficult to provide an answer given the lack of importance that both Africa and colombia have traditionally shown among each other, and also given the fact that the high interest of strenghtening ties among the two regions is an idea not older than 5 years, however in the case of Egypt and South Africa, due to the the stability and the concrete projects that been developed since more than a decade ago, may be considered as the strategic allies of Colombia in the continent (Rios, 2016).

If the Global South is a concept that lacks homogeneity, and based on the evidence previously shown, it is hence possible to validate and apply the idea which argues that the Global South should not be considered any more as a cathegory of states that have shared levels of development, but more as a set of states with shared vulnerabilities and dependencies (Delgado-Caicedo & Sáenz-Peñas, 2013), it is possible then to validate from a normative perspective the fact that the Colombian government considers both Latin America and Africa as regions encompassed within the Global South which hence are subject to engage into South-South cooperation, even though there is assymetry of economic development among states on both

side of the southern atlantic. As previously mentioned, Colombia is also a state that is constantly engaged into cooperation frameworks with nations both in the North and South of the international system, this reinforces the idea not only that North-South and South-South cooperation frameworks are complementary, but also implies that countries such as Colombia combine such schemes while pursuing hedging strategies, also this use of the two cooperation paradims gives clues about a close future in which the dependency character implied in the traditional conception of the Global South will disapaear due to a deconstruction of the empire-westernized social studies (Delgado-Caicedo & Sáenz-Peñas, 2013).

It is necessary to elabore as well on the different approaches and understandings that the two last presidents of Colombia have had regarding Africa. Being true that while former president Alvaro Uribe was not a clever policy maker in terms of foreign policy, during his period in office there was a significant decrease in the institutional presence of Colombia abroad, justifying this reduction on budgetary concerns, and all the diplomatic efforts with Africa were limited hence to the signature of bilateral memorandums of mutual understanding among the nations, is necessary to highlight that such instruments lacked both context and applicability (Barrera-Castro & Delgado-Caicedo, 2010), however is true as well that before the Uribe administration, even though the colombian embassies in Africa were operating since the 1970's from the era of romanticism among the developing states (Delgado-Caicedo & Sáenz-Peñas, 2010), the true is that the foreign policy towards Africa was almost non-existant at all. With the change of government, and under the Santos administration, the foreign policy of Colombia not only suffered a normalisation process, but also cooperation, which included Africa as a priority



region for the first time, became a flagship policy throughout the years 2012-2014 (Martínez, 2014).

In the upcoming future, Colombia might also strengthen its position as a supplier of South-South cooperation by developing strategies for divulging and developing capacity building in the field of peace negotiation, the government hence has not only the necessity but also the moral obligation to contribute with its experiences in the context of other peace talks that are taking place in different regions of the world (Martínez, 2014), however the post-conflict scenario might also come along with the necessity of receiving cooperation regarding new challenges that the Colombian society will face, hence the current events happening in Colombia between the national government and the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces highly contribute to the achievement of the international cooperation strategy of the country by given chances to the country of working both in the supply and demand of South-South cooperation.

When analyzing how left behind is Colombia compared to its neighbors regarding the construction of ties with Africa, the country is ranked with a bad position compared to states such as Cuba, Brazil and Argentina, however, when determining if the ties of such states with African countries are encompassed within frameworks of South-South cooperation, there are common mistakes, for instance it is often for the Latin American policy makers to design foreign policies in which integration, cooperation and dialogue are treated almost as synonyms, when in fact each of these typologies, while being related, constitute different stages of interaction among states (Al Ibrahim *et al.*, 2010), and this misunderstanding misleads even more the assumption of a functionalist oriented ideal type of South-South cooperation. Another common

mistake among the governments of Latin America lies in the difficulty to recognize their african counterparts as an equal in the sense that are states facing similar problematics, this occurs mainly due to the fact that latin americans have a biased stereotype of Africa as a poverty generator given the narrow knowledge about the realities of the african states (Delgado-Caicedo & Barrera-Castro, 2010).

It is also necessary to bear in mind, that sometimes Africa might as well have erratic views of the capacities of the Latin American states, and hence might fall into stereotypes, therefore the experience of countries such as Venezuela and Libia is significant given the willing that each of these governments have shown to explore it's opposite landmass of the southern pacific and design extensive integration agendas with non traditional partners, the case of Libia and Venezuela shows the potential that South-South relations can generate when understood as a perfectly feasible way of transnational interaction, and not as an obligated tie with the fellow Third World state (Delgado-Caicedo & Barrera-Castro, 2010). These same authors also elaborate on the importance of the first African - South American Summit (ASA) in 2006 in Nigeria, where for the first time were settled the bases for the establishment of the multilateral southern policy priorities among the two regions as well as the consciousness of the mutual necessity to develop a more fluid dialogue. The resolutions adopted in this summit provide light on the high necessity of implementing South-South cooperation frameworks among the two regions, and provides also a footprint which has been followed by the embassy of Colombia in Ghana to pursue cooperation projects of the Pacific Alliance in western africa (Turbay, 2016).

### **A possible South-South cooperation framework?**

Having already presented enough evidence that characterises the nature of the relations between Colombia and Africa, and considering the historical development of the necessity of Colombia to approach to this region, it is possible to establish clear differences among what the academic literature defines as South-South cooperation, and the sort of projects that the governments pursues under the spirit of this same typology. At this point it is already clear that the exercise of building an ideal type of South-South cooperation based on academic literature provides a typology characterized by four requisites from which only one is shared with the functionalist oriented vision of the South-South cooperation tag that the Colombia government pursues and assumes.

Regarding the fact that South-South cooperation is limited to interactions among states belonging to the developing world and hence share similar levels of economic progress, evidence suggests that given the current ties between Africa and Colombia, it is more accurate to speak about South-South cooperation as exchanges taking place between states with shared vulnerabilities, challenges and dependencies (Delgado-Caicedo, 2016). This definition turns the concept of Global South into something less vague and eliminates the imperialist rhetoric traditionally associated with the North-South distinction. This new understanding of the concept of Global South also allows to overthrow the belief that South-South cooperation should only occur between states among which there is lack of hierarchy. This problem of asymmetries is sorted out by pointing out that countries in Latin America and Africa can be considered as equals

in the sense that both regions have gone through similar problematics, and therefore there is room for a constructive dialogue and exchange of practices.

The emancipation issue which intends to understand South-South cooperation as an counter-hegemonic trend that challenges the *status quo* (Santos, 2014) and that comes along with an implicit claim of soft balancing is dismissed by pointing out that currently too many governments, including both Colombia and many African states engage into South-South cooperation as a complement to the traditional North-South cooperation schemes, therefore both cooperative frameworks are compatible and complementary. Also it is necessary to remember that South-South cooperation projects occur based on demand, hence South-South cooperation projects will always seek to fulfill a necessity in a specific policy area, not a mere neorealist asymmetry issue. Finally both academia and cooperation policy makers agree on the fact that South-South cooperation requires policy transfer and capacity building. In the specific case of Colombia, the government identifies as an essential part of South-South cooperation the non-monetary exchange of knowledge, experiences and practices (Rios, 2016).

Based on the former analysis, it is possible to conclude that under the current way in which the relations and cooperation projects between Colombia and its strategic allies in Africa are occurring, such cooperative efforts can not be catalogued as South-South cooperation based on an academic ideal type given the lack of presence of theoretical symptoms that can allow the verification of the presence of such typology, however, the evidence suggests that for understanding the ties between Colombia and Africa it is necessary to understand South-South

cooperation as a more flexible concept which is socially constructed based on pragmatism and functionalism and not on theoretical rigid normative concepts.

Also evidence shows that the concept of Global South has more implication than the ones conceived on the idealtypus designed for the purpose of this research, and hence the idealtypus is not an useful tool to exemplify South-South cooperation, at least in the case of the Colombian-African relations. However given the pragmatic and flexible character that the Colombian government has regarding the understanding of South-South interactions, it is possible to affirm that for a pragmatic-functionalist perspective, the ties between Colombia and Africa are encompassed within a framework of South-South cooperation as long as the results of such projects are in accordance to what the outcomes of South-South cooperation traditionally seeks to achieve. It is possible to affirm hence that for cataloging the Colombian-African cooperative efforts as South-South cooperation it is necessary to concentrate on the outcomes of such efforts and not on the implicit claims, therefore the social construction of the relations between Colombia and Africa belong to a framework of South-South cooperation as long as the idealtypus is merely result oriented.

### **Closing remarks**

The fact that this research was not able to provide a categorical answer to its research question is something that actually enriches the discussion, and generates more questions of both methodology and epistemology. Also, affirming that the relations between Colombia and Africa

can be socially constructed as South-South cooperation as long as the measuring tool is not a symptomatic theoretical ideal type but a result-oriented footprint is still of high relevance for the analysis of Colombia's foreign policy formulation process. Also the fact that the Colombian cooperative efforts are considered within the South-South construct given its pragmatism, by no means undermines the validity of these South-South cooperation attempts.

This research aims to contribute to the lack of literature in the field of Colombian-African studies, more specifically in the assimilation of concepts such as Global South in the context of international cooperation. The research also aims to educate on the importance of Africa for Colombia, and citing the ambassador of Colombia in Ghana, research attempts of this nature are encompassed within the spirit of the recognition of a continent which tends to be forgotten but that is culturally close and necessary to the Colombian imaginary. Finally the research also pretends to provide lights in the understanding of how the public policy formulation towards Africa in Colombia can be improved in terms of cooperation strategies and foreign policy.

This research allows to affirm that there is a gap in the conception that the academia and the government have regarding the reach of terminology such as Global South and South-South cooperation, therefore it became necessary to come up with a conception of South-South cooperation that went beyond the theoretical assumptions and that was able to explain the assumptions that the public sector in Colombia has regarding South-South interactions.

Much more elaboration on the matter of Colombian-African relations is still to be developed. This research can be widened by providing clues on the foreign policy and cooperation strategies of African countries towards Latin America, also some questions are still unanswered, and therefore it is necessary to elaborate on matters such as which is the African conception of South-South cooperation, and if this typology is assumed by the African policy makers as well as a result-driven social construct.

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