A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION AS A PATHWAY TO REDUCING HUMANITARIAN AID DEPENDENCY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the academic literature's positioning of South–South Cooperation (SSC) as an approach that has the potential to reduce structural dependence on conventional humanitarian aid. Using the PRISMA-based Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, this study synthesizes 142 publications that meet the selection criteria and were published between 2010 and 2025. The findings reveal three main themes that shape SSC practices: needs-based assistance that is responsive to the local context; institutional capacity building through technical cooperation, training, and knowledge exchange; and non-conditional horizontal partnerships that challenge hierarchical patterns in North–South aid. These three themes reflect SSC's efforts to expand the autonomy and increase the agency of developing countries, in line with the main arguments of dependency theory. However, the study also identifies challenges, such as fragmented governance, limited monitoring and evaluation standards, and uneven institutional capacity, which limit the long-term transformative potential of SSC. Overall, this study clarifie how SSC is understood in academic discourse and highlights its opportunities and limitations as a counter-dependency mechanism in the Global South.

Keywords: South–South Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid, Dependency Theory, Systematic Literature Review, Autonomy

1.   Introduction

South–South Cooperation (SSC) is increasingly emerging as an alternative humanitarian and development architecture, driven by principles of solidarity, equality, and mutual benefit among developing countries. This paradigm presents a contrast to the long-standing structures of global aid, which are often dominated by Northern states. Scholars argue that these structures are often misaligned with local realities, contributing to various forms of structural dependency. Although the global humanitarian system has historically been shaped by the political and economic interests of donor countries, the growing academic attention to SSC reflects shifting expectations regarding more equitable and context-sensitive forms of cooperation (Pujayanti, 2015; UNDP, n.d.; United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation,

2022).

In the contemporary era, developing countries view SSC not only as a technical modality but also as a political instrument to broaden policy autonomy and strengthen resilience. This shift aligns with long-standing calls from dependency theorists who argue that unequal global structures restrict peripheral countries' ability to define their development agendas independently (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979; T. Dos Santos, 1971; Frank, 1966; Wallerstein, 1974). Thus, SSC becomes an increasingly relevant framework within debates on humanitarian governance and sovereignty.

The limitations of traditional humanitarian aid frameworks have been widely documented, strengthening the appeal of SSC. Studies of the Syrian crisis, for instance, demonstrate how humanitarian assistance from Northern countries often arrives with strategic considerations that overshadow the real needs of affected communities (Salsabila & Aswar, 2023). In Asia, recurring climate-related disasters, including tsunamis, cyclones, floods, and earthquakes, underscore the need for rapid and adaptive responses. However, traditional aid flows frequently misalign with local contexts, partly because Northern donors employ standardized approaches shaped by geopolitical interests rather than local knowledge (Brin, 2024; NBR Energy and Environmental Affairs, 2022).

The compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, structural poverty, and political instability across several developing countries—including those experiencing weakened economic growth and deepening inequality—further reveal the fragility of aid-dependent systems (Anggraini, 2024; Dimas, 2025; Tata Ihsan, 2025). These observations reinforce long-standing critiques that the global aid system, while highly resourced, is not necessarily grounded in the realities and aspirations of recipients.

Recent scholarship also highlights the increasingly political nature of humanitarian aid, which complicates trust between donors and recipients. Aid has been utilized as an instrument of disaster diplomacy or soft power, as evident in the medical diplomacy efforts of the United Arab Emirates or policy-linked humanitarian initiatives by Turkey in Afghanistan and Somalia (Gökalp, 2020; Rahmawati & Dina, 2025). China's medical diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic similarly demonstrates the duality between humanitarian claims and geopolitical positioning (Sitepu & Agsmy, 2022).

In some cases, Northern donors overtly connect aid allocations to foreign policy objectives, shaping recipients' domestic priorities in ways that subtly reinforce dependency (Rahmat et al., 2024). Despite this, there are examples of donors who uphold political neutrality, such as Norway, Sweden, and Canada, as well as JICA's assistance to Gaza, which are cited as exceptions rather than norms (Agnes, 2019; Government of Canada, 2024; Irwin, 2019; JICA, 2024; Kayashima & Asada, 2024). These dynamics collectively illustrate that humanitarian aid is embedded within broader power asymmetries—an issue central to

dependency theory.

In response to these structural challenges, SSC offers a form of cooperation that emphasizes equality, mutual learning, and prioritizing local needs. SSC has been institutionalized through various national and regional mechanisms, ranging from bilateral technical training programs to multilateral forums such as the Buenos Aires Plan of Action, the New Asian–African Strategic Partnership (NAASP), and UNOSSC's trust fund system (UNOSSC, 2022). Argentina's SSC initiatives, Indonesia's humanitarian diplomacy, Brazil's agricultural partnerships, South Africa's technical cooperation, and India's ITEC programs exemplify how Southern countries deploy assistance in a manner rooted in shared experiences rather than conditionality (Bayar & Arpa, 2020; Lauria & Fumagalli, 2019; Ramadhaningtyas & Rizki, 2021; Rozy, 2020; Seifert, 2021).

In the Indonesian case, more than 150 international training programs conducted through Indonesian AID between 2015 and 2022 illustrate the expanding commitment of emerging Southern donors to strengthening institutional capacity among partner countries (Azis, 2025; Azis & Satriawangsa, 2024; Bappenas, 2023). Such initiatives show SSC's potential to build long-term resilience and autonomy.

The intellectual foundation of this shift is rooted in the classic debates of dependency theory, which argue that structural inequalities within global capitalism constrain the capacities of developing states to define independent development trajectories. Frank highlights how the extraction of surplus from the periphery reinforces underdevelopment (Frank, 1966; Rashid, 2023), while Dos Santos emphasizes the political mechanisms through which external dependence is perpetuated (T. Dos Santos, 1971; B. Santos & Ortega, 2023).

Meanwhile, Cardoso and Faletto highlight the role of domestic elites in mediating dependency relations (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979), while Wallerstein situates these dynamics within a broader world-system hierarchy (Wallerstein, 1974). In humanitarian contexts, these theoretical insights shed light on how Northern aid can perpetuate dependency by controlling technology, financial instruments, expertise, and policy agendas. Consequently, SSC becomes an attractive framework because it seeks to circumvent these hierarchical structures by focusing on horizontal cooperation and South-led institutional strengthening.

Empirical studies also underscore SSC's potential as a counter-dependency mechanism. Research shows that SSC avoids conditionalities typical of North–South cooperation, such as policy reforms, privatization pressures, or structural adjustment-like requirements (Ofir, 2021). Indonesia's involvement in the Colombo Plan, Triangular Cooperation, and Indo-Pacific diplomacy further demonstrates how SSC can expand policy autonomy while enhancing the soft power of emerging Southern donors (Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, 2023).

Indonesia, Brazil, India, South Africa, and Venezuela have each implemented SSC

strategies that combine capacity building, institutional support, and technology transfer in ways designed to strengthen autonomy and reduce aid reliance (Rachmawaty & Rachmaliani, 2019; Seifert, 2021; Velasquez, 2023). By linking these practices with dependency theory's call for structural transformation, SSC positions itself not merely as a humanitarian modality but also as a strategic tool for rebalancing global power relations.

Despite increasing scholarly attention, there remains a limited systematic analysis of how SSC contributes to reducing structural dependence on humanitarian aid. Most existing studies discuss SSC's operational features, domestic political motivations, or sectoral outcomes, but do not synthesize how SSC is conceptualized across the academic literature as a strategy for transforming dependency structures (Besada & Tok, 2019; Miller, 2019; UNCTAD, 2021).

This gap underscores the need for a comprehensive review that identifies thematic patterns, clarifies conceptual linkages, and examines how SSC aligns with or challenges existing global humanitarian norms. Therefore, this study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) to analyze scholarly debates on SSC and humanitarian aid dependency, situating them within the broader theoretical framework of dependency theory. By synthesizing diverse academic sources, this study aims to contribute both theoretically to discussions on counter-dependency mechanisms and practically to policymaking in the Global South.

2. Literature Review

Studies on South–South Cooperation (SSC) have shown a significant increase over the last two decades, as reflected in the Scopus search results on June 13, 2025, using the keywords "South AND South AND Cooperations," which yielded 18,749 documents before being filtered down to 720 relevant articles. Meanwhile, a search using the keywords "Humanitarian AND Aid AND Dependency" yielded 96 documents, which were narrowed down to 11 articles. For theoretical coverage, a search for "Dependency AND Theory" found 32,750 documents, which were reduced to 564 articles using the same filtering criteria. The scale of this dataset shows that discussions on SSC, dependency, and humanitarian aid are proliferating and becoming increasingly thematically connected in global literature. However, many studies remain fragmented, focusing on specific sectors without examining the integration between concepts. Therefore, systematic mapping through a bibliometric approach is needed to understand the conceptual relationships between the three fields and to identify research gaps that have not been widely discussed.

To map the patterns of interrelationships between research themes, 1,402 selected documents were entered into VOSviewer and visualized using overlay visualization. The results are illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 1. Overlay Visualization
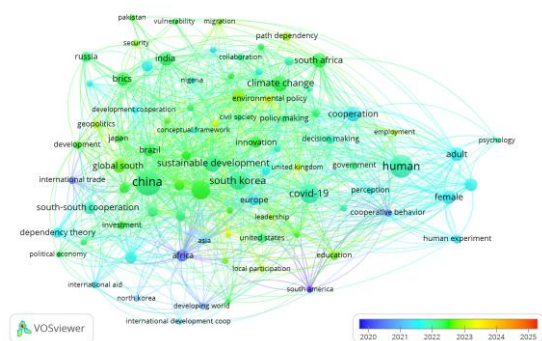
Source: Compiled   using Vosviewer, 2025

The figure shows a surge in publications since 2022 in the clusters "sustainable development," "south–south cooperation," and "global south," indicating an academic transition toward sustainable development through equal partnerships. The green color in the terms "local participation," "policy making," and "conceptual framework" underscores the importance of empowering beneficiaries in the planning and implementation of programs. Meanwhile, the light green cluster, "climate change," "innovation," and "environmental policy" (2023–2024), shows a trend toward integrating environmental issues into the SSC framework, emphasizing the diversification of resources and green innovation as pillars of local economic resilience.

The bright green cluster "COVID-19" provides empirical evidence of how the pandemic has prompted recipient countries to strengthen SSC to meet health and economic needs independently of traditional donors. Unlike previous studies that focus on sustainable development and dependency theory, this research emphasizes SSC

mechanisms within the context of humanitarian assistance. Through triangular forums and regional networks such as NAASP and UNOSSC, the study explains how demand-driven assistance and blended finance models can reduce economic and political dependency without sacrificing domestic agendas.

This study employs Andre Gunder Frank's dependency theory, which posits that world economic relations are characterized by a hierarchical "core-periphery" structure, where peripheral countries serve as providers of cheap labor and raw materials. In contrast, core countries control capital, technology, and markets (Frank, 1967). To analyze the "Real Needs of Recipient Countries" in South-South cooperation, economic foreignization indicators can be used, namely the ratio of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Stock to Total Capital Stock, which reflects the dominance of external capital over domestic investment; position in Global Value Chains (GVC), which indicates the extent to which a country participates in international production chains; and Relative Unit Labor Costs (RULC), which measures the relative competitiveness of labor costs compared to other countries (López & Barrera Insua, 2024). These three indicators reveal the degree of structural subordination of recipients within the global capitalist system, as outlined in the analysis of growth and dependence of central and peripheral countries.

From Frank's perspective, the structure of dependence can also be operationalized

through indicators of export concentration using the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index for exports, which assesses the concentration of exports in a few key commodities and their implications for development vulnerability (Loungani et al., 2019); the ratio of external debt to GDP, which reflects the burden of debt repayment and limits national policy autonomy; and commodity dependence, defined as when >60% of a country's exports depend on raw materials, indicating vulnerability to price and global market fluctuations (UNCTAD, 2021). These indicators facilitate the empirical analysis of the real needs of recipient countries and the effectiveness of South–South cooperation strategies in reducing dependence on external donors.

Although the literature on SSC, dependency, and humanitarian aid is extensive, studies that systematically link the three are still limited. Many studies focus on sustainable development or theoretical analysis of dependency theory without evaluating how SSC operates in a humanitarian context. VOSviewer shows that the relationship between "south–south cooperation," "aid dependency," and "humanitarian assistance" still rarely appears as a strongly connected node, indicating a conceptual gap in academic studies. Therefore, this study contributes to the understanding of the integration of these three fields through systematic and data-driven analysis. By combining bibliometric mapping, dependency theory, and an evaluation of SSC mechanisms, this study clarifies the circumstances under which SSC can serve as an instrument of structural mitigation against aid dependency. Furthermore, this study provides a conceptual basis for developing more systematic SSC evaluation indicators, which have not been adequately discussed in the literature. Thus, this study enriches the academic discourse on the role of SSC in realizing the independence of Southern countries from external aid.

3. Research Method

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. The SLR approach was chosen because it enables the systematic synthesis of scholarly discussions on South–South Cooperation (SSC), humanitarian aid dependency, and the application of dependency theory, rather than generating primary empirical data. As emphasized by Creswell (2014), a literature-based qualitative design enables researchers to contextualize complex social phenomena by integrating diverse theoretical and empirical sources. The analytical orientation of this study also aligns with Moleong's (2018) qualitative tradition, which views literature as an interpretive field for linking concepts, debates, and patterns that emerge across academic publications. Because SSC research spans multiple disciplines, including international relations, development studies, and public policy, the SLR design ensures both breadth and depth of coverage. This design provides the methodological

foundation for examining how SSC is conceptualized as a mechanism to reduce humanitarian aid dependency within the past decade.

The search strategy relied on three major academic databases, supported by institutional digital libraries and policy document repositories from organizations such as UNOSSC and OECD, to ensure comprehensive coverage. Keyword combinations included "South–South Cooperation," "Humanitarian Aid," "Aid Dependency," "Global South," and "Dependency Theory," following established SLR search formulation techniques. The search was confined to English-language publications from 2010 to 2025, peer-reviewed journal articles, and works within the social sciences, to ensure recency and academic legitimacy. The inclusion of international agency reports and policy documents was intended to capture the practical and institutional dynamics of SSC that may not be apparent in indexed journals. In line with Creswell's recommendation for structured data gathering, each search result was catalogued based on title relevance, abstract clarity, and publisher credibility. This systematic search procedure ensures that the reviewed literature represents the most current and authoritative debates on SSC and humanitarian dependency.

The screening process followed PRISMA's four-stage protocol: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. During the identification stage, 19,161 records were collected, including 18,749 database results and 412 Google Scholar entries. After removing 2,836 duplicates, 16,325 records proceeded to screening based on titles and abstracts. At this stage, 16,042 studies were excluded because they lacked direct relevance to SSC or humanitarian dependency. The eligibility stage involved a full-text assessment of 283 articles, with 141 excluded due to a narrow economic focus, insufficient methodological clarity, or the absence of SSC-humanitarian linkages. Ultimately, 142 articles met the inclusion criteria. These criteria required studies to (1) discuss SSC as a development or humanitarian mechanism, (2) link SSC to autonomy, capacity building, or dependency reduction, and (3) provide empirical, conceptual, or theoretical insights. Excluded materials included non-academic documents, articles that focused exclusively on North–South Cooperation, and inaccessible full texts. This multilayered screening ensures analytical rigor and thematic consistency.

Data analysis employed a combination of thematic synthesis and content analysis, drawing on the qualitative coding procedures outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Saldana (2021). The process began with open coding to identify recurring concepts related to SSC mechanisms, dependency structures, capacity building, and technology transfer. These codes were then grouped into thematic clusters, reflecting the main analytical categories: institutional capacity strengthening, horizontal cooperation mechanisms, and autonomy-oriented development strategies. Following Miles and Saldana's steps of data reduction, data

presentation, and verification, themes were refined through iterative reading to ensure conceptual saturation. Triangulation of sources, integrating peer-reviewed journals, international agency reports (such as the UNOSSC and OECD), and government policy documents, was employed to enhance validity and minimize interpretive bias. Peer debriefing with academic colleagues further strengthened reliability by challenging potential subjective interpretations. Through this structured analytic approach, the study synthesizes diverse perspectives to illuminate how SSC is understood as a counter-dependency mechanism within humanitarian contexts.

4. Results and Discussion

4. 1 Demand-Driven, Contextualized, Non-Conditional Mechanisms in South-South Cooperation

Initial findings from the literature review suggest that South–South Cooperation (SSC) is guided by the principle of meeting the genuine needs of partner countries, which differs from the North–South aid architecture that is often influenced by geopolitical interests and specific structural policies. Various studies confirm that the SSC model provides recipient countries with the space to determine their priority agendas, ensuring that development decisions are not externally determined by donor countries or international financial institutions (Gökalp, 2020; Heriamsal et al., 2024).

This approach is conceptually in line with the critiques of Frank (1966) and dos Santos (1971) regarding the domination of peripheral countries by central countries through unequal aid mechanisms. Thus, SSC appears as a form of resistance to the hierarchical aid patterns that have long governed the dynamics of structural dependence.

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Table 1. Thematic Synthesis of SSC Literature (2010-2025)

Theme	Description	Representative Issues Identified	Implications for Dependency Reduction
Demand-Driven Assistance	SSC aligns programs with the needs and contextual realities of recipients.	Locally defined priorities; culturally relevant interventions.	Reduces external agenda-setting; enhances local ownership.
Capacity Building & Knowledge Transfer	Emphasis on skills, institutional support, and technical cooperation.	Training centers, technical missions, and support for the health system.	Strengthens long-term autonomy and resilience.
Horizontal Partnerships	Equality, solidarity, and mutual benefit guide cooperation.	Non-interference, absence of political conditions.	Avoids coercive structures typical of North–South aid.
Institutional and Operational Gaps	SSC lacks standardized evaluation and consistent coordination.	Fragmented reporting, varying institutional strength.	Limits the ability to measure and sustain reduced dependency.

Source: Proceed by Scopus

The thematic table shows that the demand-driven character is the primary foundation of SSC, as this model operates based on demand and recipient capacity, rather than the donor's agenda. This principle is evident in various studies on Argentina, India, Brazil, and Indonesia, which designed cooperation programs through two-way consultation to ensure relevance to field needs (Ramadhaningtyas & Rizki, 2021; Seifert, 2021).

In the literature, this approach is seen as a practice that minimizes external political domination while strengthening domestic policy sovereignty. This contrasts with North-South aid, where donor countries often impose conditions on fiscal policy, market liberalization, or public sector reform that are not always appropriate to the local context (Ofir, 2021; Winanti & Alvian, 2021).

In addition to being demand-driven, SSC is also widely praised for avoiding political conditionality, thereby creating more horizontal partnership spaces. The principles of non-interference, non-conditionality, and mutual benefit consistently appear in UNOSSC documents and various field studies (Pujayanti, 2015; United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, 2022).

Based on the dependency theory

perspective, this principle contributes to dismantling the relationship structure that places developing countries as objects of intervention (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). On the other hand, this approach also allows recipient countries to maintain complete control over programs, ensuring that interventions are more closely aligned with national development planning. The literature emphasizes that this flexibility is the main difference between SSC and conventional aid patterns, which tend to be technocratic and paternalistic.

However, literature notes that horizontal relationships within SSC are not entirely free from the potential for internal asymmetry. Aid-providing countries, such as China, Brazil, or India, have far greater diplomatic and economic capacity than most of their partners, thereby increasing the possibility of new inequalities in South–South relations (Kumar, 2022; Velasquez, 2023). This capacity gap does not always result in political pressure, but it has the potential to create long-term technical dependence if it is not balanced with joint accountability mechanisms. Therefore, various studies emphasize the need to strengthen collective governance so that the principle of horizontal partnership is not just rhetoric, but is truly reflected in SSC institutional practices.

4. 2 Institutional Capacity Building Knowledge Sharing as Pathways Toward Autonomy

The second prominent theme in the literature is the role of SSC in strengthening domestic institutional capacity through technical training, expertise exchange, and the development of regional learning centers. This approach places capacity as the foundation for long-term independence, rather than merely a short-term response to humanitarian needs.

Studies from Indonesia, Brazil, India, and South Africa confirm that cooperation in education, health, disaster management, and technology is the primary mechanism of SSC for building more resilient and adaptive institutions (Chaturvedi, 2012; Lauria & Fumagalli, 2019; Rachmawaty & Rachmaliani, 2019). From the perspective of dependency theory, this strategy challenges the global structure that positions developing countries as consumers of technology, rather than as producers of knowledge.

In this context, knowledge transfer in SSC is not one-sided, but combines scientific knowledge with local practices. For example, during the pandemic, SSC between India and Nepal combined Ayurvedic approaches with modern health technology as a strategy to strengthen community resilience (Bhattarai & Bista, 2024).

This approach, which recognizes the value of local knowledge, is referred to by Mawdsley (2019) as a form of "epistemic reconstruction," which is an effort by Southern countries to rebuild the knowledge base of development based on their own contexts and experiences. This also demonstrates that SSC not only facilitates technology transfer but also develops alternative development models that are not always compatible with the dominant Northern paradigm.

However, SSC's ability to build

institutional capacity faces several significant limitations. Various studies show a lack of trained human resources, limited logistical infrastructure, and dependence on the domestic facilities of the aid-providing country (Oliveira, 2021; Tiwana, 2020). The UNDP (2021) emphasizes that most Southern countries lack standardized and integrated technical training systems, resulting in sporadic and inconsistent capacity-building programs. This condition means that SSC has great potential at the conceptual level, but its implementation depends on the domestic readiness of each country.

Despite these limitations, institutional capacity remains a key pillar of SSC as a long-term mechanism for reducing dependence on global actors. In various cases, such as Brazil–Timor Leste cooperation in the health sector (Amaral, 2022), or community-based disaster management training in Southeast Asia (Banerjee, 2021), SSC shows that strengthening local institutions can expand the autonomy of recipient countries in responding to crises. This is relevant to the perspective of Cardoso & Faletto (1979), who emphasize that domestic power is an important internal factor in the process of escaping structural dependency. Therefore, institutional capacity in SSC is understood not only as a technical component but also as a political instrument for negotiating the state's position in the global order.

4. 3 Fragmented Governance, Weak Evaluation Systems, and Internal Dynamics Shaping SSC Implementation

A third strong theme in the literature is the fragmentation of governance and weak evaluation systems in the implementation of SSC. Unlike the OECD-DAC standards, which strictly regulate reporting, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms, SSC operates within a framework of flexibility and voluntarism (Chaturvedi, 2021; Mawdsley, 2022). UNOSSC (2021) notes that only a small number of Southern countries regularly publish reports on their foreign aid programs.

This fragmentation means that the quality of SSC implementation varies significantly between sectors, countries, and even within different government terms. From a global governance perspective, the absence of common standards creates a "coordination deficit" that hinders collective learning among Southern countries (Weiss & Wilkinson, 2018).

In the national context, various studies have shown that coordination between domestic institutions is often a significant challenge. For example, in the case of Indonesia, the roles of National Development Planning Agency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Indonesian AID are not yet fully integrated, resulting in overlapping mandates and delayed responses to international humanitarian situations (Kloke-Lesch, 2020; Rozy, 2020).

Similar challenges arise in India–Africa and Brazil–Mozambique cooperation, where incompatible institutional agendas result in

inconsistencies in program implementation (Mawdsley, 2022; Seifert, 2021). This suggests that the internal dynamics of aid-providing countries have a significant impact on SSC governance.

Domestic political dynamics also play a significant role in shaping the direction and priorities of SSC. Various studies have shown that diplomatic agendas can influence decisions on the allocation of SSC assistance, the pursuit of international legitimacy, or prevailing foreign policy (Callaghan & Hubbard, 2020; Sidiropoulos, 2020). Although SSC promotes the principle of solidarity, the literature warns that flexibility without institutional safeguards has the potential to open up space for the politicization of programs.

From a realist perspective, states remain rational actors that utilize various instruments, including SSC, to enhance their strategic position at both regional and global levels. Leadership changes in aid-providing countries often have a direct impact on the sustainability of programs.

Despite the challenges, the literature also highlights opportunities to enhance SSC governance through regional consolidation and institutional reform. Initiatives such as the AHA Center in the ASEAN region or the African Union Humanitarian Agency show that regionalism can provide a more stable coordination structure (Geremedhn & Gebrihet, 2024; Lee, 2021). Strengthening national legal frameworks, standardizing results-based evaluations, and increasing investment in cross-border training centers are considered important to ensure the sustainability of SSC (Tiwana, 2020; UNDP, 2021).

Therefore, despite the structural fragmentation faced by the SSC, these various opportunities for reform provide scope for the SSC to evolve into a more measurable, transparent, and adaptive mechanism for cooperation in response to the complexity of contemporary humanitarian crises.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that South–South Cooperation (SSC) presents an important alternative to North–South aid patterns through three primary mechanisms identified in the literature: a demand-driven approach, institutional capacity building, and horizontal and non-conditional partnerships. These three mechanisms represent the collective efforts of Southern countries to renegotiate their position in the global dependency structure, as criticized in the works of Frank, dos Santos, and Cardoso & Faletto.

The synthesis of the literature reveals that SSC is not merely a form of material aid but also reflects an epistemic reconstruction that incorporates local knowledge into the development strategy. In this context, SSC is understood not as a technical instrument, but as a political practice that gradually reduces the dominance of external actors in the formulation of the domestic agenda of developing countries. Thus, SSC plays a role in expanding the autonomy of partner countries through increasing institutional capacity and strengthening decision-making mechanisms based on local needs.

However, this study also emphasizes that the potential of SSC is inseparable from various structural and operational challenges, particularly those related to governance fragmentation, limited national capacity, and the absence of standard evaluation criteria. The literature indicates that the absence of a coordinated accountability framework results in significant variations in the quality of implementation, while the domestic political dynamics of donor countries often impact program consistency.

These challenges indicate that the success of SSC still depends heavily on the readiness of Southern countries' institutions to establish inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms, strengthen reporting systems, and improve the technical capacity that supports the sustainability of cooperation. From the perspective of dependency theory, these challenges suggest that structural transformation cannot be achieved solely through the principle of solidarity, but rather requires planned and consistent institutional investment.

Therefore, the future of SSC will be largely determined by the ability of Southern countries to consolidate regionally, strengthen national legal frameworks, and develop joint evaluation indicators that enable SSC to evolve as a more transparent, responsive, and sustainable model of international cooperation.

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