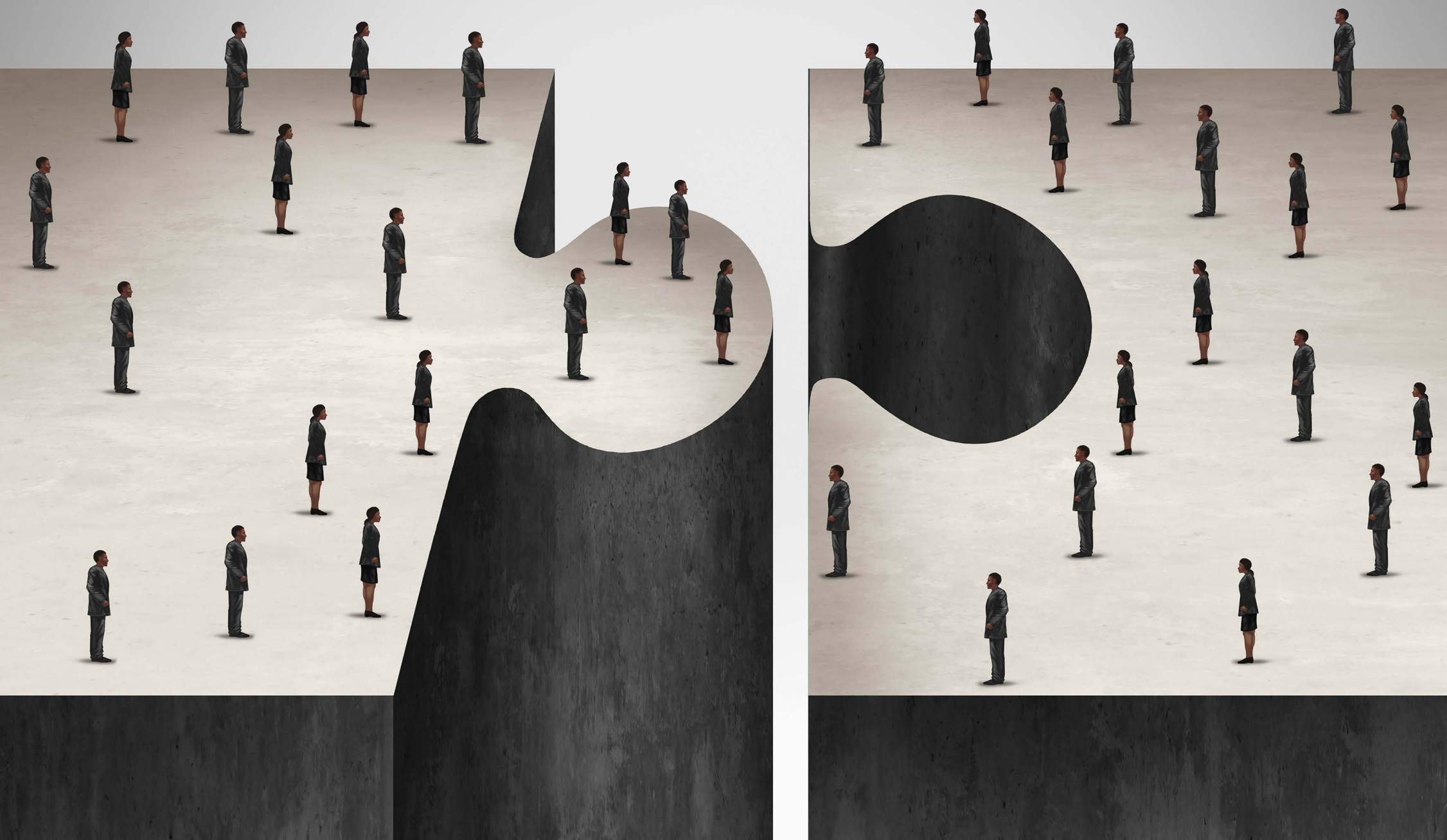


BEYOND THE MYTHS OF SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION



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In the view of Arlene B. Tickner, researcher at the Faculty of Political Science, Government, and International Relations, South-South cooperation per se is neither better, more effective, nor more altruistic than help provided by northern countries.

For some years now, Arlene B. Tickner, full-time professor at the Faculty of Political Science, Government, and International Relations, has been acknowledged as one of the most knowledgeable authorities on this form of cooperation. Tickner explores the complexities involved in this subject of growing interest in one of her most recent publications, the introductory chapter to a book edited by her and fellow researchers Isaline Bergamaschi and Phoebe Moore—*South-South Cooperation Beyond the Myths: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, published by Palgrave as part of its Political Economy Series.

Tickner, who holds a PhD in International Studies from Miami University, has long studied the complicated relations of international cooperation for development of countries that states set up under the pretext of solidarity. She emphatically underlines, however, that “all international cooperation answers to interests, rather than to altruism.”

Throughout the book’s ten pages, Tickner and her research colleagues from both northern and southern countries set out to fill the vacuum in existing literature on understanding South-South relations, using case studies that show different practices and mechanisms relevant to this form of cooperation. “It is a trendy subject now in social sciences but one that is rarely explored from a critical point of view,” she adds.

This hypothesis put forward by Tickner, also a columnist on the Colombian daily newspaper *El Espectador*, is quite clear: South-South cooperation in itself is not necessarily either more effective nor more altruistic than that offered by cooperating northern countries. Tickner’s view is that it is simply a new form of international cooperation on many things, and it



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“must be examined in a more comprehensive and critical way,” she points out.

The study makes findings in regard to several nations. While it does involve South-South cooperation, “it is a vehicle for positioning countries within the international system, because the outcomes do not prove more effective nor meet the high expectations that are created,” the researcher affirms.

Cooperating countries, she explains, collaborate in different ways and for different motives, emerging with different requirements. One example of this is China’s interaction with African countries, where the Asiatic giant comes to the table bearing interests “just as if it were cooperation from the north; the difference being that there is no decent government, democracy, respect for human rights, and so on; requirements do not have to be fulfilled to obtain cooperation,” she details. China, although not a traditional cooperating country, did make some efforts in the times of Mao Zedong. Even so, the phenomenon of South-South cooperation is relatively new, and this form can be dated back to the beginning of the 21st century in different world areas in attempts by northern countries to be independent.

Venezuela merits a chapter on its own during the times of President Hugo Chávez, when he was drawn to this mechanism in the Cuban style, for example, making attempts in Africa to achieve regional leadership via a spirit of apparent solidarity, and especially with Caribbean countries. But, points out Tickner, the author of this chapter in the book



ponders “to what degree this was true solidarity or whether it was really about the exercising of *Realpolitik* to expand his interests.”

From within the ‘neighbourhood’, Brazil has used South-South cooperation to take a leading role in regional power. On the other hand, this met with cases of resistance. The researcher points to the case of Mozambique in regard to agricultural matters, where Brazil tried to impose a script that created resistance on the part of Mozambican society, which became suspicious of the practices of our neighbours in this field.

“Little by little, developed countries have reached the conclusion that they have neither the means nor the interest to continue to be partners of developing countries, thus the countries of the south have come in to fill the vacuum,” argues the researcher.

AND WHAT ABOUT COLOMBIA?

In Tickner’s view, the Colombian state has sought South-South cooperation as a mechanism for getting closer to the powers of the north. “Colombia, for example, has done this in the question of security with the US, and has sought to boost its image as an expert partner in matters of security, especially in counter-insurgency,” she declares.

In an earlier article, ¿Exportación de la seguridad y política exterior de Colombia? (*Exporting security and Colombia’s foreign policy*) written by Arlene B. Tickner for Fried-

rich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), she points out that it is less controversial in political terms for the US—and more efficient costwise—to have Colombia as the leader of cooperation efforts in security in other countries, given Latin America’s ongoing sensitivity to foreign interventionism.

In recent years, the US has keenly pursued this “light footprint” approach in international cooperation in order to achieve greater strength in the fields of security and defence when building skills locally. And for Colombia it is good business for the country’s officers to be seen as expert trainers of foreign police forces and armies, thus reinforcing its status as a strategic partner of northern countries and, furthermore, enabling its move to other cooperation agendas, not solely in security.

Through an official written request to the Colombian Ministry of National Defense’s International Affairs Office, Tickner learnt that between 2010 and 2015 Colombia provided police and military training to 29,603 people from 73 countries in such skill areas as land, air, maritime, and river interdiction; police testimony; explosives, intelligence operations, psychological operations, and jungle commando combat. In this way,

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Colombia has made the most of this type of cooperation to boost its legitimacy through the transfer of knowledge on security questions, and even more so in the period since the peace agreement.

This type of cooperation allows Colombia to join the select club of rich countries comprising the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCDE), thanks to which the country has moved forward in the fight against insecurity, violence, illegal drugs, and armed insurgency, projecting an image as a regional expert in these matters.

Will South-South cooperation formulas have a long life? For Tickner, the answer is yes. This type of cooperation will continue to fill the vacuums that cooperation with the north is not filling. Even so, countries such as Brazil—thanks to its internal crisis—are not going to be able to continue cooperating.

This research carried out at the Universidad del Rosario means progress in understanding the mechanisms of South-South cooperation, as well as the political, social, and economic implications that lead to such international relations practices. ■