

Reflections on Brazil's speech and practice: the internalization process on sustainable development norms

Artigo de Pesquisa - Diplomacia Civil

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Abstract

This article aims to produce an analysis of the speech geared towards the projection of sustainable development norms in the international community, through Forums and Conventions, and mainly meetings produced by the United Nations and its agencies, with focus on its agreements. The proposal of this paper is to analyse the sources that could verify the extent of which Brazil enforces the norms directed by certain meetings, that have in its scope the goal of achieving positive influences in the environment. Drawing on official Brazilian legislations, as well as other mechanisms implemented by the government, one can verify the preeminence of international speech in the domestic scope, which will set the center of the issue analyzed on this paper.

Keywords: Green Economy, Brazilian Foreign Policy, Sustainable Development, Environment, International Norms.

In 2015, the 70th United Nations General Assembly introduced the debate about the importance of sustainable development norms amongst major States. Although governments uphold the implementation of such norms through public policies, the investment standard in green mechanisms can still be considered scarce.

The emergence of a new agenda in the international community has been present in debates within international organizations since the last century. Human activities, such as industrialization or other forms of human interference in nature, combined with technological innovation – this has not followed recent discoveries about global warming - contributed to political acknowledgment on environmental degradation. The production and consumption patterns followed by the Industrial Revolution culminated on the acceleration in the issuance of what is currently known as greenhouse gases (GHG).¹ The increased emission of these substances has caused climate change, which, in turn, is accompanied by the rise in the average temperature of the Earth, conditioned by the imbalance in the composition of the planetary atmosphere, with the possible increase of sea levels and higher vulnerability of populations located in Less Developed Countries (LDCs).

In response to this global problem, 113 States participated on what could be considered the first relevant convention related to the issue: Stockholm 1972. After this summit, many conventions on environmental issues were held, prompting the eminence of this topic to the political elites, as well as to civil society, such as in Rio 92 and Rio +20. From this socialization process, Brazil incorporated important norms which promoted the insertion of green economy in the Brazilian society, despite the low adhesion by its main economical agents, which include companies, farmers and consumers.

¹ There are a set of examples of greenhouse gases, which include carbon dioxide (CO₂); ethane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O) and fluorinated gases. CO₂ is resulted mainly through burning fossil fuels, constituting the main source of GHG emissions. As another example, CH₄ is formed during the production and transport of coal, natural gas and oil. N₂O is emitted in agricultural and industrial activities, as well as during combustion of fossil fuels, while fluorinated gases are emitted from a variety of industrial processes. For more informations: <http://www3.epa.gov/climatechange/ghgemissions/gases.html>

The program of the United Nations for the environment / UNEP defines green economy as a programme that increases human well-being and social equality, by reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. The main goal, however, is to promote economic growth and investment, as well as improving the environmental quality and social inclusion. In this sense green economy is not necessarily based on an ecological corridor, but a growth in technological innovation, which reduces pollutant emissions. (ZELLER, RYAN, 2012).

Regarding the importance given to the theme of sustainable development, Brazil has maintained a very critical position to the guidelines manufactured by developed countries. The speeches given at Stockholm Conference, held in 1972, revealed the non-align position of the Brazilian diplomacy to Global North interests, such interests being perceived utilitarian and pragmatic in order to prevent the advance of industrialization of emerging countries, such as China, Mexico and Brazil.

In this sense, the presence of a dictatorial regime, carried out by the diplomacy of national interest of the Medici government has shown the limits to the incorporation of an environmental multilateral agenda, as opposed to the imperative of economic growth advocated by the military to strengthen policies that materialize the desire of global power and international prestige to Brazilian economy. Finally, the results of Stockholm revealed roughly that both players would leave defeated: the international community, frustrated in their attempt to advance an environmental agenda, and the Brazilian government, with a severely worn reputation. (BAUDET, 2010)

The Brazilian experience, however, despite some criticism within the international meetings, went through a long process of internalization of sustainable development standards in the decade of 1980, especially regarding the right of information to civil society on the implementation of public policies involving environmental issues. This transformation reflected the gradual opening process in the dictatorships of Geisel and Figueiredo, culminating in democratization of Sarney government, which in a way made possible the projection of international demands from environmental movements to the domestic legal system.

This process resulted in the absorption of item 18 of the World Charter for Nature, document proposed in the 37th General Assembly of the United Nations on October 28th, 1982, which stresses that “constant efforts shall be made to increase knowledge of nature by scientific research and to disseminate such knowledge unimpeded by restrictions of any kind”² .

Embedded in the Estate Constitution of 1989, this norm gives the right to information on environmental issues to civil society such as the duty of the government to provide this question. Anticipated access to environmental information, in a broad way, the states of Espírito Santo (Article 186, VII - "guarantees everyone access to information about the sources and causes of pollution and environmental degradation."); Minas Gerais (Article 214, § 1; II - "Ensure, as provided by law, free access to basic information on the environment"); Pará (Article 253: “It is ensured popular participation in all decisions relating to the environment and the right to information on the matter, according to the law”), amongst others. (MACHADO, p. 87, 1992)

Furthermore, in the year of 1988, the ambassador Paulo Nogueira Batista requested to be the host for the General Assembly in 1992 Conference on Sustainable Development, which would hereafter be designated as Rio 92. Stemmed from the Department of Foreign Affairs, the conference was a way to reverse the worrying deterioration in the image of the country which was affected by Brazilian critical position in relation to the imposition of green standards, despite the efforts in the process of democratization. (Corrêa do Lago, 2007, p. 150-151) From that event, delegates endorsed the Convention on Biological Diversity, which was ratified in 1994 by the National Congress, in order to provide a more solid basis in ensuring and promoting public policies that would enable environmental security within the limits of national jurisdiction.³ In addition, the Forest Management Decree was approved and, most importantly, Agenda 21, which established a sustainable development model to be followed by adhering countries. In this sense, the principle that sustainable development

² World Charter for Nature: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/37/a37r007.htm>

³ Convention on Biological Diversity: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cbd-en.pdf>

has been strengthened and reaffirmed as a structured concept from three pillars: economic, oriented receipt of revenues and job creation; environmental sustainability, based on the protection of nature through the conservation of resources; and social and cultural sustainability, formed from the respect for the values and traditions, maintaining social balances.

From the listed factors, it may be inferred that the setting of foreign policy during the Sarney government conceived new contours, symbolized by Brazilian interests on environmental issues. It is imperative to point out the continuity of the policy initiated at this time to the following decades. Upon completion of Rio 92, Brazilian diplomacy held constant efforts for the projection of a country that defends sustainable principles. Guided by the perpetuation of this pillar over the different governments that include Collor and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the country has established itself as a key agent in the defense of such standards in the Dilma Rousseff government.

In 2009, the United Nations Climate Change Conference was held in Copenhagen with the active presence of the Brazilian delegation. Although the event did not achieve a binding agreement for long-term action, it was extremely important for guidance in development policies for agriculture by the Environment Ministry. Known as Plano ABC, the project was a direct result of Brazil's commitment to comply with the guidelines proposed. Consequently, the plan appears as a government strategy to establish an agricultural policy for mitigation and adaptation to climate change for the consolidation of a low carbon economy.

Accordingly, to comply with the target set voluntarily at the meeting to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases projected until 2020 between 36.1% and 38.9%, incentives were generated for 80% reduction in Amazon deforestation and 40% in Cerrado. In addition, the use of biofuels and investment in alternative energy sources such as biomass and wind power were strategic targets during the preparation of the plan and already partially achieved in the current management of the government. The budget for the implementation of this agricultural policy until 2020 is around BR\$197 billion, financed through lines of agricultural credit and by the government itself.

Investment in innovation and technology is a key factor in promoting a green culture conducted by the state agent. In addition to promoting growth in the competitiveness of Brazilian companies and national agricultural producers, based on the growing concern of regional markets on sustainability in production chains, the state provides environmental sustainability, aiming to prevent global warming and conservation of resources.

CONCLUSION

In this respect, one can verify the change of paradigm in the implementation of green economy in the Brazilian society, from the perspective outside-inside. While Médici foreign policy distinguished the firm position of not negotiating further solutions to sustainable policies, Sarney, in a context of political openness, provides the basis to the consolidation of a struggling nation and which now operates as a protagonist in the environmental sphere, which demonstrates to a large extent, the shift from low politics to high politics for sustainable development, previously seen only as an epiphenomenon in international relations.

Besides, the Brazilian speech this year at the meeting of the UN demonstrates the focus of Brazilian foreign policy to lead the environmental movement. Achieving the goals set at Rio +20 strengthen the principle of non-retrogression placed by the Ministry of Environment in relation to the guidelines stipulated in the meeting of 92. Respect the legacy of 92 forward is normative and not to review what has been deliberate form the basis of this standard. In 2009, the national policy on climate change was established by Law 12.187, due to the commitments made at COP 15. In this context, the discourse generated by Brazil together with its gradual practice around the environment reflects the inflection in Brazilian foreign policy, which has been absorbing the environmental discourse in recent generations.

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