

# **BRAZIL'S HEALTH DIPLOMACY IN THE FACE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: SCENARIOS FOR REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION?**

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In December of the year 2019, the first positive cases for coronavirus emerged in Wuhan, China, health experts suspect that the virus originated from an animal, which transmitted the virus to humans. And on March 11, 2020, the director general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, decreed a pandemic of coronavirus due to the virus' high power of dissemination, its consequences, and the fact that it is already present on several continents. The announcement is a warning to all countries to take the necessary measures to contain the coronavirus, to provide efficient access to health care for everyone in society, and to build contingency and emergency plans. The director-general states that the international system is in a state of urgency and concerned with the number of people affected and the number of deaths already verified. The characterization of the spread of the coronavirus as a pandemic also means that states must adopt stricter measures for the common good, such as mandatory quarantine depending on the local situation. For the director, some governments do not treat the issue with seriousness and the necessary care, and think that the dimension of the problem is small. The management of health strategies aimed at combating the Covid-19 virus has as its main objective to protect and maintain global health. Therefore, a brief explanation of the concept of global health is necessary in order to better understand how global health diplomacy works. The term global health encompasses the health needs of societies around the world, and since the right to health is a universal right, it is important to meet these needs, and it is through global health policies that the actors of the international system should assist. In a more detailed definition, we can point out that global health refers to "those health issues that transcend national borders and governments and demand people's health. It requires new forms of governance at national and international levels, which seek to include a wide range of actors." (KICKBUSH, 2010, BERGER 2010, apud KICKBUSCH & LISTER, 2006).

Given the brief conceptualization of the topic "global health", the reader is capable of a greater understanding of, and therefore is important to discuss health diplomacy and global governance in this work. Global governance is an emerging term within the social studies of International Relations, but it still does not have a unique and determined concept. Victoria Lennox (2008) points out in her article "Conceptualising Global Governance in International Relations", and based on studies by James Rosenau (1995), that in order to understand the term global governance it is necessary to verify five main points. The first of these is that global governance is the product of interdependent relations between actors of the new world order, who have a variety of ideas, goals and interests. But it is important to note that there is no fixed hierarchy within the international system, this means that positions of dominance are volatile among actors, and constantly change over time. The multiplicity of actors and diverse interests is an essential element for a better understanding of the concept of global governance. The objectives of these actors contribute to the formation of policies, which have international repercussions. The fourth point presented by Lennox demonstrates that these multiple actors participate in the decision-making process, whether at the domestic or international level, and the decisions made directly affect the functioning and development of global governance. As a last point, the author argues that the actors and institutions that have more power within the international system will be those who benefit most from the global order, as well as their interests, but reaffirming what was described in the second point, power is distributed through a social construction, and can vary periodically. Uniting and explaining Lennox's points, one can, in a way, summarize what global governance would be. Therefore, the term global governance is derived from a complex and dynamic global system, whose notions of power and domination are socially and historically constructed, being composed of interdependent relations of multiple actors, autonomous or not autonomous, and that hold different goals and interests, and end up performing governmental actions, either directly or indirectly, and consequently affect the functioning and mechanisms of the global system (LENNOX, 2008, pg. 7-8).

The definition of global governance is also worked out in the article "Global Governance as a Perspective on World Politics" by Klaus Dingwerth (2006) and Philipp Pattberg (2006). The paper was also based on the works of Rosenau (1995), and aims to develop a more detailed explanation of what global governance is and how it implies global politics. For the authors, global governance consists of a complex and systemic mechanism that interferes with the actions and decisions of various actors, that is, the term global governance refers to a network of interconnections between political levels, such as national,

regional, transnational and international. (DINGWERTH, 2006 and PATTBERG, 2006, pg. 7-8). It can be concluded then that global governance is built by normative systems and connections between domestic and international actors, who cooperate politically with each other in order to satisfy their interests and objectives, and when the equivalence of these occurs due to the presence of some global problem, these actors will cooperate to solve it. It is possible to use international tools, such as diplomacy, mediation, arbitration, or even world organizations for the occurrence of global governance.

During the Covid-19 virus pandemic, the need for greater cooperation and negotiations between states and other actors in the international system is notable. It is at this point that the development of global governance becomes indispensable, because it is through the development of global policies that the problem of the pandemic can be solved, with the help of world organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO). Diplomacy is one of the main branches for the occurrence of global policies and global governance, since the benefits of the negotiations carried out internationally accrue from them. In relation to the pandemic problem, countries, international organizations, governmental or non-governmental institutions, and other actors in the system have joined forces and resources to find an effective vaccine against the virus, so that it would be possible to stabilize the health sector and others, such as the economy.

It is this international cooperation that helps the progress of relations between states and other institutions, since the decisions they make have both internal and external effects. International interactions and aid grow when faced with problems or issues that affect most or all countries, where we can apply the example dealt with in this paper, the spread of the Covid-19 virus, which caused millions of human deaths and other consequences in various sectors of human action, such as the economy, health, and sociability, among others. When international actors encounter problems or issues that have (or may come to have) large and immediate dimensions, the first solution is to seek help, whether from neighboring countries, international organizations, or even private institutions, and through the application of measures and programs find an answer that is beneficial to all.

By conducting these interactions and negotiations aimed at preserving human health, international actors exercise what is called health diplomacy. The concept of health diplomacy is related to negotiations at the international level to shape global health policy, which has as its basic principle that states have a duty and responsibility to provide health care to all, and to cooperate with other states to increase strategies on global health, ensuring it as a human right and a public good. In other words, health diplomacy is characterized by

negotiations and other strategies carried out by a large number and variety of actors, national or international, whose goal is to manage global health policies. Moreover, negotiations generate optimal benefits for the participating parties, such as egalitarian benefits and greater trust, and it is possible to achieve global health goals (PANISSET, 2017, apud, BOND, 2008).

The new challenges presented that impact global health have caused the many and varied global health policy actors to pool their resources and other mechanisms for increased international cooperation. And by increasing and improving relationships among themselves, these actors practice health diplomacy, which is various negotiation processes whose outcomes build global health policy. The exercise of health diplomacy has three main objectives: first, diplomatic health negotiations aim to contribute to maintaining health security, both at the domestic and international levels; second, to strengthen diplomatic relations among international actors, making them more friendly and susceptible to altruistic actions for health; and last, to make clear that health is a human and universal right.

Finally, it is possible to conclude that health diplomacy was essential during the pandemic, since diplomatic negotiations generated promising and beneficial fruits, such as agreements, partnerships, and also a great growth in international cooperation and solidarity for the multiple actors of the international health scenario. Thus, it was possible for these actors, along with the support of global organizations such as the WHO and other institutions, to find an effective solution, a vaccine against the Covid-19 virus, in order to decrease its spread. It is necessary to emphasize the great role of the WHO during this pandemic, which, in a responsible and truthful way and with the help of groups of researchers, scientists, and doctors, was able to issue accurate reports about the virus and how it was spreading, indicate preventive and health measures, help states on how to deal with the virus, and also support states or precarious regions that did not have the resources to fight the virus.

Moreover, the health diplomacy exercised by these actors transformed global health policies, and consequently affected the development of global health governance. As such, it is remarkable to see that the progress in the area of health has been positive, so the health goals, whether they are related to the Covid-19 virus or to another global health issue, can be achieved more quickly and easily. On the other hand, global health governance holds the power to influence the decision-making processes about a nation state's health, and because of this it will shape the direction of its diplomatic health negotiations, whether to meet national or global health goals.

But for this to be possible, cooperation, solidarity, and altruism must be fostered among the multiple actors on the international plane, showing the need, in the face of a global

health problem, to put health goals first in order to combat the Covid-19 pandemic and eradicate the threat from this virus worldwide. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused quarantines and other restrictive measures to be imposed by many states to ensure the well-being and health of their societies, but the financial sector has been hit hard, as it depends on human activity to thrive. It is expected that the decision-makers of any state will put economic and commercial objectives in second place, not abandon them, but give preference to national and international health objectives. Having discussed the importance of international cooperation in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is also essential to highlight the value of regional cooperation from the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) block and how Brazil has used this tool to help combat the spread of the virus.

The regional integration that sustains Mercosur functions as a mechanism "to open trade and increase state capacity to respond to new social demands ..." and also "a strategy of political and economic international insertion" (MARIANO, 2015), and because of this fact, it should be strengthened and maintained by the countries that are members of the economic bloc. Because of this, Mercosur ends up being an institution of regional cooperation, where there is certain agreement among the main participants and the establishment of legal frameworks and rules that aim to coordinate and resolve certain issues in various sectors of human activity, such as health (MARIANO, 2015). For this reason, it is relevant to emphasize that the actions and reactions of the actors of the block directly influence the decisions of the other actors, which is why there must be a consensus among them, even more so during the Covid-19 virus pandemic period, where joint and cooperative actions generate better results and combat health threats faster and more effectively than individual actions.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how essential it is to have and maintain regional cooperation, whether through blocs like Mercosur, or through agreements and treaties, because the integration derived from it strengthens the participating countries and also, in turbulent times like the pandemic, is able to unite them with a common purpose, and thus, the actors of regional integration are able to implement preventive measures against the pandemic virus. In other words, regional integration is a closer door to solving certain problems, as it provides greater opportunities for countries to discuss among themselves and decide on action plans that benefit everyone.

Therefore, it is possible to understand that the development of health diplomacy is closely linked to the strengthening of regional cooperation, either through economic blocs, such as Mercosur, or through agreements and treaties, which can become an essential tool to fight the Covid-19 pandemic and several other problems related to health crises. Health

diplomacy finds greater support in regional cooperation, since the challenges that threaten health end up affecting many countries because they do not respect borders; therefore, the regional scope of South America seems favorable to unify actions and collective projects that aim at the good of the population of each country and also of others (BUSS et al., 2017). Moreover, it is worth noting that regional integration is reaffirmed when there is the inclusion of political processes, that is, when the negotiations and agreements signed involve the actions of the members of the regional bloc for the creation of a set of acts whose goals go beyond issues solving economic or trade problems (MARIANO, 2015), it covers other areas, such as, for example, the area studied in this paper, health. Communication between states is of utmost importance, especially in the pandemic period, because it is the exchange of information that will assist in the decision-making processes of each of these countries, thus making the enactment of preventive measures and action to combat the spread of the virus more precise.

Mercosur still faces certain difficulties and obstacles that need to be overcome in order for there to be more efficiency in the joint action plans created by the states to combat any threat to the bloc, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, which put the health sector and the economy at risk as well, driving state leaders to despair and pressuring them to make quick and effective decisions against the virus. The much-desired regional integration ends up lagging when the member countries of the bloc ignore the opportunities that active participation in Mercosur to solve problems offers. Mercosur is a strong mechanism to strengthen regional cooperation, but this will not develop if countries are not willing to take joint action. If countries continue to neglect the advantages provided by Mercosur and instead decide to act alone, regional integration will weaken and serious problems, such as the pandemic, will be difficult to circumvent and solve. Mercosur is not going backwards, but it is still considered a very slow process if compared to such a globalized and developed world (WELLBAUM, 2008 apud LAVAGNA, 2008).

We can then consider that Mercosur is a strong engine for South America, assisting in regional integration and in the development of various sectors, but, like any engine, it is necessary to have fuel for its operation, and this fuel would be a greater participation of member countries and the creation of sets of unique measures aimed at combating crises, both economic and sanitary. Brazil is considered a strong actor in Mercosur and South America as a whole, that is, it is a state that offers support and good neighbor policies, showing interests in regional projects and contributing to the strengthening of regional integration, being also an active actor in Mercosur (HAUGE, 2017). Having said this, it is

relevant to demonstrate how Brazil's regional action in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic mishaps happened.

In a first moment, the Brazilian government adopted negationist measures backed by speeches of president Jair Bolsonaro, and due to this, did not take the necessary preventive measures to combat the spread of the disease (NEVES and COSTA, 2021 apud CERIONI, 2020). The denialism, a defining characteristic of the Bolsonaro government, ends up becoming a generating fact for Brazil's withdrawal from regional cooperation. Explaining further, the denialist and anti-democratic policy has been putting the country against the world, and consequently, diplomatic health actions aimed at expanding regional cooperation are weakened and forgotten (ALVARENGA et al., 2020).

It is concluded then that Brazil, even with effective regional means, such as Mercosur, ended up distancing itself from regional integration, which for decades cultivated with the other South American countries, thus bringing several negative consequences for the country, as a set of preventive actions against the virus ill-prepared and slow, generating health crises throughout the Brazilian territory and further aggravating the economic crisis. Ideally, during the crises caused by the pandemic, Brazil should recognize the strong foundation created by the union of South American countries and use it to fight the Covid-19 virus, since access to regional support is faster and more effective than access to international support. Moreover, it is worth noting that strengthening regional cooperation is extremely important for the development of regional health diplomacy as well, since the bloc's countries seek to combat health crises by building joint and orderly plans.

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