

Executive Summary

I . Introduction

1. Research purpose and methods

The main objectives of this research are to analyze the progress and main issues on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in developing countries from development cooperation perspective; analyze the linkage between donors' development cooperation policies and strategies and the SDGs; and review KOICA's progress in implementing the SDGs and provide recommendations for further improvement. In addition, this research will analyze the status and prospect of implementing the SDGs with the global pandemic of COVID-19.

This research is mainly based on literature review and data analysis. The literature review mainly relied on domestic and international literature as well as policy documents from relevant donors including KOICA. The research team also utilized statistical database on the SDGs developed by the UN, OECD and other international organizations to measure donors' progress in implementing the SDGs in partner countries. Lastly, in-depth interview with three South Korean experts on international development cooperation and the SDGs were conducted.

II . Measuring SDGs Progress from Development Cooperation Perspective

1. Implementing the SDGs in developing countries

Means to track the progress of implementing the SDGs in developing countries include the Voluntary National Reviews submitted by UN member states, UN's SDGs Progress Report and any or all international database on the SDGs. In particular, the VNR can

be a useful tool to track how each country is implementing the 2030 agenda and the SDGs, and the number of countries submitting the VNRs have been on an increasing trend.

UN also publishes annual SDGs Progress Report to track the status of SDGs implementation by the 17 goals. Through the 2020 report, UN emphasized that not only are 21 out of 169 SDGs targets challenging to achieve by 2020, but 4 targets (4.b, 13.a, 17.11 and 17.18) will be especially difficult to meet in developing countries. The report by UNCTAD published in 2019 also suggests that economically, many least developed countries (LDCs) are in debt or have a high risk of being in debt. Also, the economic growth of the LDCs are getting worse, which indicates that achieving the SDGs goals and targets will be particularly challenging for the LDCs.

In addition to these reports, there are databases to track the SDGs progress, including the UN's SDGs Indicators Database, Equality Measures 2030 which tracks the progress from gender perspective, World Bank SDGs Databank, SDG Dashboard and SDG Index developed by Sachs et al (2020), and the SDG Tracker developed by the One World in Data. After reviewing the data, it was evident that most countries in sub-Saharan Africa were the most falling behind in achieving the SDGs in general and from gender-sensitive perspective. Also, some countries were unable to provide relevant information and data which made it impossible to compare with other countries or generate rankings. Moreover, progress of implementing the SDGs differed by goals domestically.

2. Implementing the SDGs in COVID-19 era

While some goals on poverty, environment, inequality and gender were already falling behind, the global pandemic of COVID-19 further aggravated the situation in many developing countries. The pandemic has also hit the most vulnerable people harder, including women, children and the elderly. UN stated in its 2020 SDGs Progress Report and COVID-19 will cause the poverty rate to surge for the first time in 20 years and has already prevented 90% of students worldwide from attending schools. Women

have been facing more domestic and gender-based violence globally. Considering the interlinkage among SDGs goals and targets, failure in one goal or target will have a negative impact on others.

COVID-19 has also affected donor countries' domestic economy and thereby caused some donors to reduce their foreign aid budget for the following years. However, some countries including South Korea increased their official development assistance (ODA) budget for 2021 and many donors have increased their contributions to the global health initiatives that aim to tackle COVID-19 and assist developing countries with their COVID-19 response.

3. Instability of SDGs monitoring and indicators

SDGs indicators innately face limitations in the sense that there are different opinions to some of the key concepts of the SDGs and their goals and targets. Also, the indicators consist of those that are possible to measure and those that are more challenging to do so. Moreover, different statistical capacity will lead to different and limited use of SDGs indicators by countries. In particular, not only do developing countries lack statistical capacity compared to developed countries, but COVID-19 has severely affected all countries, including developed countries, in collecting, analyzing, reporting and utilizing the data on the SDGs.

III. Donors' Efforts to Achieve the SDGs

1. DAC members' development cooperation efforts to implement the SDGs

DAC members have announced their plan to assist partner countries with the SDGs implementation through VNR and their strategic papers. It is also possible to track how donors are assisting their partner countries' implementation of the SDGs through some statistical data. For instance, the data published by AidData in 2017 suggests that between 2000 and 2013, the amount of ODA provided by both DAC and non-DAC donors were mostly provided to SDG 16, 3, 17 and 11.

At the same time, OECD DAC's Working Party on Development Finance Statistics (WP-STAT) began to find ways to link the CRS purpose codes with the SDGs and published a guideline in February 2020. 2018 was the first year when the DAC donors published their aid data with linkages to SDGs goals and/or targets. 17 out of 35 donor countries and agencies participated and among the DAC donors, Australia, Canada, Hungary and Czech Republic among others marked over 90% of their aid projects to SDGs goals and/or targets in the CRS Database (DB). However, countries like US, UK and Germany did not mark any of their ODA projects to the SDGs.

OECD DAC also developed SDG Financing Lab which shows how much aid donors have provided per SDG goal between 2012 and 2017. According to the SDG Financing Lab, DAC donors provided most ODA to SDG 10, accounting for 15% of total ODA in 2015–2017. This was followed by SDG 17, 3, 16, and 2 which received around 10% of ODA. However, goals such as SDG 14 received less than 1% of total ODA disbursement. This database provides ODA per SDG by sector, recipient countries and regions, and donors.

2. Donors' linkage between SDGs and development cooperation strategies

This section reviewed development cooperation strategy and policy documents of major DAC donors to identify how they link the SDGs at strategy, objective and aid project/program level. Countries such as the US did not mention SDGs in its development cooperation strategy or objectives, whereas the Netherlands and the UK linked SDGs to their ODA strategy and objectives. Japan further linked SDGs to indicator-level. Also, Austria and Switzerland linked SDGs goals, targets and indicators to the ODA strategy and objectives. However, this was an analysis of the linkage at policy document level and does not show the actual impact that such linkage has made in implementing the SDGs in partner countries.

IV. Review of KOICA's SDGs Implementation

KOICA's SDGs implementation is mainly guided by the mid-term sectoral strategy of 2016–2020, in which 10 sectors are identified. Then, these 10 sectors are linked to corresponding SDGs goals, with SDG 2, 3, 4, 8, and 13 most linked to the 10 sectors. Simultaneously, KOICA has tried to map its aid projects with the SDGs goals. For instance, 177 aid projects were marked with corresponding singular SDG goal in 2018 and 3,387 aid projects in multiple forms were linked to one or more SDG goals and/or targets. Out of 3,387 projects, 248 were the project-type interventions which was the main focus of this study.

It was found that KOICA mainly implemented aid projects (i.e. project-type interventions) on SDGs 2, 3, 4 and 6. Among the four SDG goals, SDGs 2, 3, and 4 were also the goals that was most linked (by 4 times) to the 10 priority sectors in KOICA's mid-term sectoral strategy of 2016–2020. SDG 6 was also mentioned 3 times in the strategy. Cross-cutting issues such as gender equality and climate change were also well-reflected in KOICA's aid projects of 2018 and 2019, which suggest that KOICA's ODA were implemented in line with the mid-term sectoral strategy.

Moreover, KOICA has been trying to link SDGs goals and targets to their project and program sectors. However, the research team's review of relevant internal document suggests that KOICA should further consider the linkages among SDGs goals and targets including the synergies and tradeoffs, instability of SDGs indicators, availability of data, and different statistical capacity of partner countries among many. Furthermore, should KOICA continue to mark SDGs goals and targets per aid project, internal guideline needs to be developed for all staff to apply uniform and coherent standard when marking. Lastly, review of outcome and output indicators by program areas suggests that review of usefulness, probability of implementing and collecting relevant data in the field, and managing effective monitoring and evaluation should be considered.

V. Conclusion: Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the research team drew five policy recommendations for KOICA to improve implementing the SDGs in partner countries. They include first and foremost, consistently and gradually increasing ODA over mid to long term while considering partner countries' needs and contexts and abiding by the aid and development effectiveness principles. Second is to assist statistical capacity building of partner countries so that they can not only collect relevant data but also for KOICA to make use of them in its results management. Third was to update its mid-term sectoral strategy which will come to an end in 2020. Although there is no answer to whether KOICA should target a specific number of SDGs or all SDGs, KOICA should consider its aid philosophy, vision, comparative advantage as well as the South Korean government's foreign policy and ODA strategies. Fourth was to re-consider linking SDGs with KOICA projects and strategies by developing internal guidelines. Last was to reflect South Korea's efforts to help its partner countries achieve the SDGs in the upcoming VNR.