

Abstract

As the development cooperation environment undergoes major changes due to the COVID-19 (C19), donor organizations are trying to properly absorb these changes and take them as an opportunity to restore organizational efficiency. As part of this effort, donor agencies in the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Sweden and so on consider to apply Adaptive Management (AM) to their operation. AM refers to the project design, implementation, and management method that can achieves the development goal in the most effective way by trying various methods to determine which solution is most workable in a situation where the basis for decision-making is uncertain, repeating the evaluation of the methods and revising the project implementation accordingly. However, there is not much discussion on AM in Korean development cooperation industry. Considering the complexity and high volatility of the development cooperation environment, this paper tries to derive an implication by analyzing the cases of AM of other donors and elaborate its application to KOICA.

AM started with a critical mind that applying one blueprint or successful intervention to various, uncertain and complex development problems rather increases the possibility of project failure. It can be characterized with local ownership, local political economic contexts, repeat of problem-solving trials and the purpose of monitoring and evaluation being learning. For successful AM, a harmonious relationship among Adaptive Delivery, Adaptive Programming, and Adaptive Governance is essential. Since considerable resources are invested in AM, it is advisable to use AM when there is an understanding of local political economic contexts but data-based evidence to prove the effectiveness of the intervention is missing. In addition, prior to applying AM, it is necessary to clearly understand the common concept of AM within the organization, and to improve the process and culture for applying AM, and the relationship with implementing partners.

The US Agency for International Development (USAID), which introduced the concept of AM for the first time among donor agencies, defines AM at the institutional level to share a common concept. The leadership in USAID have all members regard AM as work obliged. Besides, in order to improve the understanding of AM principles and expand its implementation, they try to establish AM friendly environment through the introduction of supporting documents and tools, including guidelines and technical advise. In the meantime, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) developed a diagnostic framework to analyze the current state of the organization prior to the application of AM. They derived constraints against the introduction of AM within organization, suggested ways to eliminate them and designated facilitating AM as a long-term task for the organization. Like USAID, MFAT seems to believe that an accurate and common understanding of AM is very important for the introduction and implementation of AM, as well as the development of a tool that can help the staff to decide when to apply AM and the establishment of trust between MFAT and project implementing agencies. On the other hand, it appears that AM is still an unfamiliar and new in KOICA as a concept similar to AM in strategy and project documents has not been found. In a survey of asking staffs' perceptions of the AM enabling environment within KOICA, most of the staffs showed negative responses in all areas of permission space, planning, activity design, activity delivery and capacity, capability and culture. There were many employees who believes flexibility in projects, budgets, and contracts is low in the areas of activity design and activity delivery.

AM is emphasizing the logical contradiction that the current approaches have – applying one best practice to developing countries with different political, economic and social environments and planning the entire process beforehand are inconsistent with a complex, ever-changing and unpredictable development cooperation environment. However, as a government administrative body most development cooperation agencies are required to be rigid in budget, project planning and execution. Hence

there are limitations in introducing and utilizing AM, which has frequent changes and resource-intensive characteristics. Therefore, considering the complexity and high volatility of the development cooperation environment, it seems desirable to select and apply at least some elements of AM to KOICA. In order to establish a favorable environment for AM within KOICA, ensuring flexibility in projects, budgets, and contracts must be prioritized. In addition, a monitoring-evaluation-learning system with a focus on learning must be developed and implemented. Furthermore, it is necessary to secure a support base for AM by introducing various attempts and efforts that other donors are making to introduce AM to the domestic development cooperation industry.