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Water as a cross-cutting issue and its implication to KOICA programme

Among the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), goal number seven references the water issue by stating the need to “Ensure environmental sustainability”. Since then, water has acquired greater prominence upon the advent of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a new set of global benchmarks, as set down in the SDG 6, “Ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”. It is no longer seen as an isolated concern and has become a cross-cutting issue with significant implications for the economy, society, environment, and among others. Consequently, the global community is continually seeking to foreground water’s key role across various arenas, and organize conferences to help governments shape more effective, efficient, and inclusive policies.

This outlook is clearly manifest in the agenda of the UN 2023 Water Conference scheduled for March 22 this year. The conference will provide a platform to explore water’s influence across a breadth of economy, society and environment, and to discuss what we should do with five accelerators, Financing, Data and Information, Capacity Development, and Innovation and Governance, in order to fulfill SDG 6. Session 1, titled “Water for Health”, examines SDG 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 within the context of the wider framework of social SDGs. Session 2, “Water for Sustainable Development”, teases out how SDG 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5 interact with broader economic SDGs, and Session 3, “Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment”, covers likewise for SDGs 6.5 and 6.6 regarding environmental SDGs. Session 4, “Water for Cooperation”, evaluates the role of water as a mean of implementation of the SDGs, while finally, Session 5, “Water Action Decade”, seeks to identify possible mechanisms for accelerating the achievement of SDG 6 across the remaining five years.

In the leadup to the UN 2023 Water Conference, the member countries delivered inputs for each session in advance, some of which reflected their own interests. For instance, Japan, often subject to natural disasters, championed resilience and investment in robust systems

to properly respond to the disaster. Poland, bordering war-torn Ukraine, emphasized the importance of providing aid for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) service to its neighbor. Meanwhile, Vietnam, where the Mekong River flows, focused on financial assistance for water cooperative initiatives. Maldives, a small island nation, called for freshwater production and distribution mechanisms adaptable for islands. These contributions and insights from developing countries can be invaluable resources for KOICA in shaping its assistance strategies for water projects in these nations.

The Republic of Korea has contributed and participated actively in international cooperation in water since the 5th World Water Council's general assembly of 2009. Korea has hosted the World Water Forum, and is a founding and a board member of the Asia Water Council. The country also instituted the annual Korea International Water Week to take the lead in addressing global water issues and to help expand the Korean water industry's projects into overseas markets. Nevertheless, its contribution to shaping the agenda for the UN 2023 Water Conference seems somewhat muted. Moving forward, Korea should seek greater involvement in such affairs and input more directly on global water agenda. The upcoming 2024 10th World Water Forum in Bali, Indonesia, presents a timely opportunity to do so.

In keeping with the trend, KOICA has made concerted efforts to stay abreast with international discourses, as exemplified by the establishment of the second "Water Mid-term Strategy, 2021-2025". The strategy acknowledges the cross-sectoral implications of water and puts forth the concept of Integrated Water Resource Management, applicable to the majority of SDGs, as a top priority program. Guided by the strategy, KOICA is devising and initiating water projects taking other SDG targets into account. However, given that these efforts address only a subset of the overall SDGs, it becomes imperative for KOICA to intensify efforts in expanding the scope of project designs, thereby incorporating a comprehensive range of SDGs.