

# Sowing the seeds of transformation

The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) will deliver on the promise of a better life for all, by tackling multiple targets in a unified strategy



By *Young-mok Kim*  
President, KOICA

2015 was a landmark year in which we reached the target date of the Millennium Development Goals that have steered development since the turn of the 21st century, and ushered in a new development paradigm for the post-2015 era, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Development was also the focus of global attention at the 3rd International Conference on Financing for Sustainable Development, held in Addis Ababa in July, and the year culminated with the UN Conference on Climate Change COP21 in Paris, at which world leaders reached an historic agreement on climate change response.

The SDGs have embraced universality, inclusiveness and equality as core values, placing renewed emphasis on respect for human dignity, good governance, social prosperity, peace and security. Overarching the SDGs are three key elements, identified as requisites for sustainable global development: social development, economic growth and environmental conservation. What makes the SDGs stand out is that they take these three seemingly conflicting factors and strive to balance and harmonise them.

## Partnerships

It is instructive to consider why the SDGs include: “Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development” as a goal in its own right, not merely a means to achieving the goals. Development can no longer be viewed as just the product of interaction between donor and recipient countries, but is a process applicable to all countries, the developed world included. Furthermore, developed countries should recognise their responsibility to respond promptly to their own development deficits and lead by example.

Conversely, the communities that we engage with in impoverished areas must be regarded as partners, not aid recipients. It is critical to show them respect and emphasise the spirit of self-reliance in order to empower them.

It is imperative that donor countries, partner countries, public and private players all combine their development efforts to achieve the full ambitions of the SDGs.

From Korea’s perspective, it is not our desire to impose our own methods, knowledge and experience but instead to learn from and cooperate with international players, local intellectuals and organisations, as well as development communities. This type of inclusive partnership will increase the quality and effectiveness of our ODA, and fulfil our vision of turning KOICA into a truly open, development-cooperation platform.

## Our approach to the SDGs

We envision programmes as a whole, not segregated

by sector or specialism. Across the matrix of our work, whether between our focus sectors – education, health, agriculture and fishery, public administration and ‘technology, environment and energy’; or between our cross-cutting specialisms – ‘science, technology and innovation’, climate change and gender equality; or even between countries, we ensure that we have efficient linkages, clear communication and effective coordination. We call this ‘Impact in One’.

KOICA has so far formulated five programmes to support the achievement of the SDGs globally, with others to be finalised in the coming months:

- inclusive and sustainable rural development based on ‘Saemaul Undong’ (literally: New Village Movement);
- ‘Better Life for Girls’, which aims to provide better education and health for, as well as the empowerment of female adolescents;
- ‘Safe Life for All from Infectious Diseases’ in global health security;
- ‘Science and Technology and Innovation for a Better Life’;
- ‘Safe Water and Clean Energy in Climate Change Response’.

‘Smart’ Saemaul Undong (SMU) draws on Korea’s own rural development model, which helped it to eradicate poverty in the 1970s, and tailors it to new cultural and geographic contexts. It exemplifies KOICA’s holistic ‘Impact in One’ philosophy. This programme is particularly pertinent for the success of the SDGs, as 70% of the world’s extreme poor reside in rural areas.

KOICA has teamed up with UNDP to increase its reach and it partners with governments, down to a local level, to design appropriate, integrated development plans. SMU engages communities through village meetings and, through education and training, transfers responsibility and ownership to the beneficiary community.

The second strand, ‘Better Life for Girls’, is an area that has particular support from Korea’s President Park Geun-Hye, the first female president of an East Asian nation, who pledged at the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Summit to support the programme with US\$200 million for the period 2016 to 2020. The programme is built on three pillars: the right to education, the right to health and the right to a profession, with the aim of equipping girls with the knowledge and skills to participate fully and on equal terms in society. An important enabler for this programme is complementary public awareness campaigns to enlist the support of families, schools and communities.



In addition to the health of girls and reproductive health, a focus of 'Better Life for Girls', we have a programme that focuses on disease control and health security, supporting three of 11 action packages set out by the Global Health Security Agenda. These are: 1) an effective nationwide vaccine delivery system that is able to respond to new threats; 2) a nationwide laboratory system to test and identify outbreak specimens; and 3) health security professionals, trained and equipped to meet these threats.

Korea's emergence as a world leader in technology has taught us the potency of innovation and technology in tackling development challenges. We exploit this experience through our Creative Technology Solution (CTS) programme that encourages, via a public contest, the exploration of technological solutions that can be used to eradicate poverty in developing countries, and then create a business to develop and market that technology.

CTS is currently targeting 16 African countries, 15 in Asia, six in the Commonwealth of Independent States / Middle East and eight in Latin America, while projects are promoted where they relate to KOICA's Country Partnership Strategy, which prioritises countries based on their income, political situation, diplomatic relationship with Korea and economic potential.

As the world finally recognises the scale of the threat from climate change, which will multiply the suffering of those that are already most deprived, this clearly has to be a major focus for us. We have been active across continents, implementing a diverse range of projects, supporting education and renewable energy, and helping to develop national plans for green growth. Like all our programmes, this

does not operate as a silo, and technology and knowledge sharing form a major part of the cooperation.

The long-term success of projects will often depend on building momentum, particularly with follow-on investment. In this area, it is crucial to build efficient connectivity with the private sector. KOICA is exploring how to work with private finance in countries where we are providing technical assistance and encouraging input to grow. As part of this we have engaged with KPMG in a feasibility study entitled, 'Mobilizing finance for Infrastructure Development Projects in Developing Countries'.

The consultation will look at the constraints and possible solutions KOICA faces in getting finance flowing. The scope of the project includes: picking out potential investors and analysing investor's responses; promoting investment activities; and providing practical action plans in order to attract investment.

We are entering a new era for development, founded on rights and dependent on a balanced, coordinated response. We at KOICA are ready to play our part in that transformation by providing assistance, ideas and support; acting as a development platform, uniting an array of development actors to bring lasting benefits. ■

■ Clockwise from top left: a clinical dentistry project in Peru; an integrated rural development project in Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia; the Hlegu Township rural development programme, Myanmar; solar installations in East Timor