

Strategies to Raise Public Awareness on Development Cooperation

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I. Introduction

“From Aid Recipient to Donor” is not only a phrase that explains Korea’s modern history, but also a slogan often used to promote Korea’s development cooperation. The slogan represents HOW Korea is trying contribute to the developing world with its unique development experience, and it also shows WHY Korea believes it should do so.

Is this a compelling slogan for Korean tax payers? It may be for those who have experienced Korea as an ODA recipient. However, it is worth noting that in 2021 only 66.6% of Koreans said they were well aware that Korea was once an ODA recipient, and in 2022, it was 65.2%. Considering that the awareness rate was 93% (2011) and 72% (2012) a decade earlier, the decline across generations is significant. Moreover, only 77.9% (2021) and 77.2% (2022) say they believe that the aid from the world has played a significant role in Korea’s economic development, which is another significant drop from the 97.3% for the same question in 2013.

On the other hand, the public support for Korea’s ODA has declined every year. In 2011, right after Korea became an OECD DAC member, 89% of Koreans supported their government providing ODA to the developing world; the support constantly dropped and reached 81.3% (2019), and even further after COVID19 76.1% (2021), then finally reached 75.2% (2022). More interestingly, among those who supported ODA, 41.2% (2011) and 48.8% (2012) justified their support with the reciprocal reason: “Because Korea has benefitted from other countries’ aids in the past.” In the most recent surveys, such reciprocal justification of “repaying” is no longer the main reason for the public support, 28.6% (2021) and 23% (2022).

Public opinion on the budget size of ODA may also be worrying. In 2022, only 26.9% were in favor of increasing Korea’s ODA, while 12.4% wanted to see a further reduction in the ODA budget. This may still be an improvement compared to the 19.4% (2021) to

20.9% (2019) who answered “Korea should cut down on its ODA budget.”

The Korean government has constantly stated its intention to expand its contribution to the developing world. To do so, the Korean government should develop a new public relations (PR) strategy to convince its own tax-payers and gain public support.

In this brief report, I explore and present some of the alternative measures to improve public awareness of development cooperation and Korea’s role in it.

II. Analyses

1. Data and Methodology

For the analyses, I use the original survey data from the “Survey for Public Awareness in Korea on Development Cooperation (2022).” The survey was conducted between July and August of 2022, and consists of a representative sample of 1000 Korean citizens across the country.

Along with basic demographic information,

the survey collects the public opinions on ODA policies and the global issues, individual experiences with development cooperation and developing countries. Table 1 and Table 2 report public opinion on Korea’s ODA. Table 1 shows general support for Korea’s ODA. As mentioned in the introduction, 75.2% supported Korea’s ODA contribution. However, it is worth noting that only 6.8% were strong supporters while, the majority of the supporters were less clear in their opinion.

The question on the appropriate size of the ODA budget followed the general opinion question. Before being asked about their opinion on budget size, respondents were given the additional information on the current level of ODA budget, which may have influenced their opinion. Table 2 shows how conservative the public is when it comes to figures. While around 60% wanted neither expansion nor reduction on the budget, another 22% agreed that the Korean government should keep its word and increase the budget to the level promised to the global community. On the other hand, 12.4% wanted the more extreme policy orientation of cutting the budget.

Table 1. Public Opinion on Korea’s ODA

| Age Group | Sample Size | Strongly Support | Mildly Support | Mildly Against | Strongly Against |
|-----------|-------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| | | Percentage (%) | | | |
| 19-20s | 165 | 7.3 | 74.5 | 16.4 | 1.8 |
| 30s | 160 | 3.1 | 73.8 | 21.3 | 1.9 |
| 40s | 201 | 5.5 | 69.7 | 22.9 | 2.0 |
| 50s | 208 | 8.7 | 68.3 | 21.2 | 1.9 |
| 60 + | 266 | 6.8 | 62.0 | 28.2 | 3.0 |
| Total | 1000 | 6.4 | 68.8 | 22.6 | 2.2 |

Source: Author’s Calculation using Survey for Public Awareness in Korea on Development Cooperation (2022).

Table 2. Public Opinion on Korea's ODA Budget Size

| Age Group | Sample Size | Expand to suggested level (0.7% of GNI) | Expand to the committed level (0.2% of GNI) | Maintain current level | Reduce |
|-----------|-------------|--|--|------------------------|--------|
| | | Percentage (%) | | | |
| 19-20s | 165 | 7.3 | 23.6 | 61.2 | 7.9 |
| 30s | 160 | 4.4 | 23.8 | 60.6 | 11.3 |
| 40s | 201 | 3.0 | 22.4 | 61.7 | 12.9 |
| 50s | 208 | 4.3 | 21.2 | 59.1 | 15.4 |
| 60 + | 266 | 4.9 | 21.1 | 60.9 | 13.2 |
| Total | 1000 | 4.7 | 22.2 | 60.7 | 12.4 |

Source: Author's Calculation using Survey for Public Awareness in Korea on Development Cooperation (2022).

The statistic of 75.2% public support, which may still seem high despite its declining trend, should not be mistaken for a concrete support for the Korean Government's effort of expanding its ODA. It represents a rather lukewarm, cautious agreement that can easily be withdrawn. What is the right strategy to transform these mediocre supporters into a more enthusiastic group?

The 2022 survey also includes a survey experiment component that randomly presents 4 different articles that are designed to convey different message and impressions about the

food situation in East Africa (Table 3). From each article, one paragraph was selected and presented with a random probability of 20%, including a control group with no additional background information (Control Group).

Right after reading, respondents were asked 1) whether Korean Government should allocate an additional budget to resolve the food crisis in East Africa, 2) whether individuals are willing to make a personal donation, and 3) and how much a respondent is willing to donate out of his/her own pocket.¹ Here, I report the main findings using the public opinion on the additional budget.

Table 3. Composition of Survey Experiment

| Group | Message and Feature Intended | Sample | Variable Name |
|-------|--|--------|---------------|
| 1 | No Article, Control Group | 183 | |
| 2 | A Depiction of an Experience of a Specific Victim, Emotional Appeal based on the Cruelty the Situation | 186 | Mssg2 |
| 3 | An Assessment of the Current Situation and Future Risks, Descriptive Opinion from an International Organization | 183 | Mssg3 |
| 4 | Diplomatic Efforts by Challenged Countries and a Prediction that these Countries may Become Dependent on Other Countries | 212 | Mssg4 |
| 5 | A Successful Case of Korea's ODA in Agriculture Sector in East Africa | 236 | Mssg5 |

Source: Author's recreation from Survey for Public Awareness in Korea on Development Cooperation (2022).

For more details, please refer to Yun, J., E. Lee, J. Song, H. Yoon, and S. Park. 2022. "A Comparative Study on ODA Policy Process: Public Awareness as a Policy Motive." KIEP Policy Analyses (PA), no. 22-19.

¹ It was clarified that the questions are hypothetical,

thus it is not to be misunderstood as a preference-revealing experiment design.

In this report, I present some of the key results and findings from the first question, support for additional ODA budget for East Africa, to assess the validity of the message, and its effectiveness against the Control Group.

For the analyses, two sets of identification strategies were used, with a linear:

$$AFbdt_i = \sum_{j=2}^5 \alpha_1^j Mssg_i^j + \alpha_2 X_i + \mu_i \quad (1)$$

$$\begin{aligned} AFbdt_i &= \sum_{j=2}^5 \beta_1^j Mssg_i^j + \sum_k \beta_2^k Mssg_i^k \times Z_i^k \\ &+ \beta_3 X_i + \varepsilon_i \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

$AFbdt_i$ is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if individual i , either strongly or mildly, supports additional budget for East Africa, and 0 otherwise. $Mssg_i^j$ is an indicator that takes a value of 1 if individual i was exposed to article j ($j=2, 3, 4, 5$), and similarly defined, $Mssg_i^k$ to article k ($k=2, 3, 4, \text{ or } 5$).²

Equation (1) identifies the average impact of each message ($j, j=2, 3, 4, 5$) to the general public: How effectively each one conveys the urgency of the situation and generates public support. However, it is likely that different messages will have differential impacts depending on the background of each individual. Equation (2) examines whether there are such complementary effects as a function of individual characteristics ($Z_i^k, k=2, 3, 4, \text{ or } 5$). If there is such

complementarity, it implies it is more important to employ a long-run strategy to create a favorable environment and exploit it in a short-run advertisement with a specific message ($Mssg_i^k$).

A vector of control variables (X_i), including a constant, gender, age, political orientation, marital status, child status, religion, area of residence, and its urban indicator. While the $Mssg_i^j$ is orthogonal to the unobserved errors (μ_i, ε_i) due to the experimental structure, to ensure the robustness of our result, I control for the individual characteristics in both analyses.

2. Results

Table 4, shows the analysis results that correspond to Equation (1). Each column represents the analyses with different subsamples.³ All results agree that $Mssg2$, the article depicting the cruelty of the situation, is the most effective in eliciting an immediate response. Column (3) shows how those who read the personal experience of a victim show 5% higher support for funding an additional budget. On the other hand, the other 3 messages did not have a statistically significant effect, nor was the magnitude noteworthy. Without reporting, the analysis with ANY message also showed no significant result. This suggests that the public reacts differently on different information and/or the structure of the information. Therefore, “the more the better” is not the most effective PR strategy, but needs to be carefully structured.

² The summation over k in equation (2) does not necessarily include all k from 2 to 5, but may only include interacted variable of our interest. A general notation is adopted to allow for the flexibility, but to denote that

there still may be multiple interaction term.

³ For the rest of the analyses in this report, subsamples are constructed based on the general opinion on Korea's ODA (Table 1).

Table 4. Average Impact of Message on Public Support

| Dep Var | (1) AFbdgt | (2) AFbdgt | (3) AFbdgt |
|--------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Mssg2 | 0.0550** (0.0252) | 0.102 (0.0781) | 0.0512* (0.0266) |
| Mssg3 | 0.00809 (0.0167) | 0.0821 (0.0619) | 0.000403 (0.0175) |
| Mssg4 | 0.00974 (0.0122) | 0.0506 (0.0375) | 0.00369 (0.0129) |
| Mssg5 | -0.0103 (0.0103) | 0.0495 (0.0371) | -0.0153 (0.0109) |
| Constant | 0.618*** (0.0818) | 0.889*** (0.245) | 0.642*** (0.0854) |
| Controls | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subsample | Whole sample | Strongly Support | Mildly Support & Mildly Against |
| Observations | 1,000 | 64 | 914 |
| R-squared | 0.084 | 0.297 | 0.086 |

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, standard errors in parentheses.

Source: Author's Calculation using Survey for Public Awareness in Korea on Development Cooperation (2022).

The power of emotional appeals is well-known and is often used by NGO in their fundraising campaigns. However, the strategy is often controversial because it can misuse and distort the image of poverty and alienate the aid recipient. The extreme case of such abuse is known as “poverty pornography.” Moreover, such emotional appeals can easily lead to “compassion fatigue” or even “donor fatigue,” making the strategy less attractive as a long term means of enhancing public awareness of development cooperation.

If constant exposure to negative images is not a sustainable PR strategy for the Korea's ODA, what should be the longer-term alternative? Looking more closely at other aspects of perception, Table 5 and Table 6 may suggest some alternatives that we could consider.

Table 5 reports the result that corresponds to Equation (2), where k takes all values of $k=2, 3, 4, 5$. I examine the differential impact of each message, to see if there is a specific background understanding. Columns (1) and (2) first show that while the emotional appeal with a negative portrayal (Mssg2) is still a powerful one, for those who had any experience of GCED (Global Citizenship Education) had an additional complementary effect of Mssg3, a descriptive assessment of the current situation and future risks.

Columns (3) and (4) further explore which components of GCED played a role in the complementary impact found in Column (1) and Column (2). As mentioned in the introduction, Korea's experience as an aid recipient (ack_recip), and its responsibility to contribute

Table 5. Complementary Impact of Message on Public Support (by Individual Characteristics)

| Dep Var | (1) AFbdgt | (2) AFbdgt | (3) AFbdgt | (4) AFbdgt |
|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Z_i^k | gced | gced | ack_recip | ack_sdg |
| Mssg2 | 0.1000* (0.0520) | 0.0933* (0.0547) | -0.00382 (0.0899) | 0.0885 (0.0642) |
| Mssg3 | 0.000502 (0.0518) | -0.0168 (0.0541) | -0.0407 (0.0932) | -0.0202 (0.0642) |
| Mssg4 | 0.0285 (0.0501) | 0.00861 (0.0529) | 0.00217 (0.0886) | -0.00316 (0.0637) |
| Mssg5 | -0.0583 (0.0529) | -0.0781 (0.0560) | -0.168* (0.0926) | -0.0848 (0.0666) |
| Z_i^k | -0.187 (0.139) | -0.177 (0.151) | -0.0348 (0.0836) | 0.0871 (0.0794) |
| Mssg2 x Z_i^k | 0.130 (0.214) | 0.138 (0.250) | 0.176 (0.112) | 0.0711 (0.112) |
| Mssg3 x Z_i^k | 0.372* (0.209) | 0.312 (0.239) | 0.0622 (0.113) | 0.0884 (0.112) |
| Mssg4 x Z_i^k | 0.129 (0.221) | -0.0416 (0.287) | 0.0156 (0.109) | 0.0578 (0.108) |
| Mssg5 x Z_i^k | 0.0567 (0.211) | -0.0991 (0.235) | 0.140 (0.109) | 0.00463 (0.105) |
| Additional Controls | Included | | | |
| Subsample | Whole sample | Mildly Support & Mildly Against | | |
| Observations | 1,000 | 914 | 914 | 914 |
| R-squared | 0.088 | 0.092 | 0.093 | 0.100 |

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, standard errors in parentheses.

Source: Author's Calculation using Survey for Public Awareness in Korea on Development Cooperation (2022).

to the global SDG (ack_sdg) are some of the key components emphasized in GCED, or ODA advertising in general. However, we find no evidence that these components have a complementary effect with additional information provided exogenously.

Such a result may be due to a lack of statistical power of the test, resulting from the mechanical inclusion of too many irrelevant independent variables.⁴ Table 6 presents the results from selective analyses with potentially more relevant interaction variables on the right-hand side.

⁴ Note that the 4 treatment arms are mutually exclusive, thus the statistical significance are results of

analyses from only (roughly) 400 samples.

Table 6 corresponds to Equation (2), where k takes – not all, but – a selective value of k . For Z_i^k s, I have taken certain characteristics that are likely to represent an individual with a better understanding of international issues or development agenda; The variables Z_i^k in each column of Table 6 take the value of 1 if and only if the individual trusts foreign media

(trust_fm), trusts international organization (trust_io), knows SDGs (ack_sdg), knows Korea is a member of OECD DAC (ack_dac), knows Korea is a donor country (ack_donor), knows Korea was a donor country (ack_recip), trusts Tanzania (trust_TZN)⁵, trusts Korean Government (trust_kg), or trusts NGOs (trust_ngo), respectively.

Table 6. Complementary Impact of Message on Public Support (by Awareness)

| VARIABLES | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | AFbdgt | AFbdgt | AFbdgt | AFbdgt | AFbdgt | AFbdgt | AFbdgt | AFbdgt | AFbdgt |
| Z_i^k | trust_fm | trust_io | ack_sdg | ack_dac | ack_donor | ack_recip | trust_TZN | trust_kg | trust_ngo |
| $Mssg_i^k$ | Mssg2 | Mssg3 | Mssg3 | Mssg3 | Mssg3 | Mssg3 | Mssg4 | Mssg5 | Mssg5 |
| Mssg2 | 0.1000 (0.0720) | 0.0513* (0.0264) | 0.0555** (0.0265) | 0.0546** (0.0264) | 0.0522* (0.0267) | 0.0545** (0.0267) | 0.0502* (0.0265) | 0.0553** (0.0266) | 0.0574** (0.0264) |
| Mssg3 | 0.000343 (0.0176) | -0.126 (0.0835) | -0.00878 (0.0592) | -0.00710 (0.0633) | -0.00185 (0.0714) | 0.0196 (0.0776) | -0.000571 (0.0175) | 0.00393 (0.0176) | 0.00190 (0.0174) |
| Mssg4 | 0.00371 (0.0129) | 0.00370 (0.0128) | 0.00421 (0.0128) | 0.00523 (0.0128) | 0.00366 (0.0129) | 0.00475 (0.0129) | -0.0452 (0.0599) | 0.00473 (0.0129) | 0.00720 (0.0128) |
| Mssg5 | -0.0152 (0.0110) | -0.0148 (0.0109) | -0.0166 (0.0109) | -0.0148 (0.0109) | -0.0153 (0.0109) | -0.0145 (0.0110) | -0.0150 (0.0109) | -0.0324 (0.0754) | 0.0397 (0.0722) |
| Z_i^k | 0.00526 (0.0380) | 0.0937** (0.0396) | 0.118*** (0.0396) | 0.120*** (0.0362) | 0.0378 (0.0382) | 0.0532 (0.0385) | 0.0691* (0.0391) | 0.0891** (0.0409) | 0.175*** (0.0409) |
| $Z_i^k \times Mssg_i^k$ | 0.00472 (0.0832) | 0.181** (0.0908) | 0.0566 (0.0884) | 0.0394 (0.0821) | 0.0115 (0.0835) | -0.0247 (0.0860) | 0.147* (0.0809) | -0.0706 (0.0797) | -0.176** (0.0776) |
| Additional Controls | Included | | | | | | | | |
| Subsample | Mildly Support & Mildly Against | | | | | | | | |
| Observations | 914 | 914 | 914 | 914 | 914 | 914 | 914 | 914 | 914 |
| R-squared | 0.086 | 0.103 | 0.100 | 0.102 | 0.088 | 0.088 | 0.099 | 0.091 | 0.105 |

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, standard errors in parentheses.

Source: Author's Calculation using Survey for Public Awareness in Korea on Development Cooperation (2022).

⁵ Tanzania is not only one of the well-known East African countries to the Korean public, but is also the biggest

partner in terms of Korean ODA among African countries.

A better understanding of the development agenda (ack_sdg, ack_dac) led to significantly greater support for the food crisis in East Africa. Trust in international organizations and Tanzania, and Korean Government, NGOs, each led increases in support of 9%, 7%, 9%, and 17.5%, respectively. However, it is underwhelming to find the most common campaign, “From Aid Recipient (ack_recip) to Donor (ack_donor)” does not necessarily lead to a higher support on a particular issue.

More interestingly, some of this background knowledge induced additional support when a specific message is delivered. The trust in international organizations (trust_io) had an 18% higher complementary effect when exposed to a warning from international organization (Mssg3). Trust in Tanzania (trust_TZN) had an additional complementary effect of 14% higher support when exposed to a message about the efforts taken by East African countries (Mssg4).

The results show the importance of building trust in actors in development cooperation, especially on those that the general public does not encounter in their daily life. Not only does trust correlate with greater support for ODA, but more importantly, it facilitates further support simply by providing information on urgent situations.

III. Conclusions and Policy Implications

The analyses results presented here are consistent with other findings from the survey. In

another question, the majority of Koreans responded that they are mainly curious about “whether Korean benefitted the developing countries (28.2%)”, “whether the budget has been used effectively (26.5%)”, and “whether the ordinary people in the recipient countries are satisfied (19.3%).” Contrary to the general concern, only 18.2% were more curious about “whether ODA has brought any benefits to Korea.” This shows that the general Korean public is willing to support ODA and is sympathetic to their government’s contribution to the developing world, as long as they are assured that ODA is well implemented and contributes effectively to its objectives.

At the same time, it points to the need for a new long-term PR strategy to overcome current doubts about the effectiveness of ODA. The current message of “From Aid Recipient to Donor” is not a catchphrase that effectively raises public awareness, nor does any other emphasis on Korea’s past achievements in the global community. Emotional appeals may be effective in the short run, but it is questionable how appropriate and sustainable such a strategy is.

In order to raise the public awareness of development cooperation and gain greater public support for ODA, it is time to rebuild the social capital of public trust. This requires a tangible improvement in transparency and accountability in the ODA governance, and a strategic coordination with longer-term education on sustainable development. **KIEP**