



Integrated SDGs on the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Cooperation



Yul Kwon

Deputy President, Ph.D., Senior Research Fellow,
Center for International Development Cooperation
Korea Institute for International Economic Policy

The United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 and presented 17 goals and 169 detailed targets to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030. Accordingly, as a member of the United Nations, North Korea also established a new strategic framework for cooperation with the United Nations in 2016 to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This UN Strategic Framework (UNSF) has covered the period 2017-2021 and was co-signed by the UN Country Team (UNCT) led by the Resident Coordinator in DPR Korea.

Major UN agencies, including FAO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, are participating in the UNSF Steering Committee, which currently serves as a representative of UN agencies residing in Pyongyang, and under consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of North Korea it has set up Thematic Groups (TGs) and Sectoral Working Groups (SWGs) by detailed issues to coordinate bilateral and multilateral cooperation projects.

It is noteworthy that even UN agencies and international NGOs not residing in North Korea have actively participated in such a cooperative system to enhance global partnerships and establish close consultation and coordination channels with North Korean authorities. Despite the continued international sanctions against North Korea, the UN's country-level relationship with DPRK is playing a leading role in improving global partnerships to achieve SDGs. Also, the fact that North Korea is actively participating in the formation of various consultative bodies to implement SDGs suggests not only international support for North Korea's development cooperation but also inter-Korean cooperation.

The UNSF Steering Committee is co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator and Secretary-General of National Coordinating Committee under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, and four thematic groups (TGs) are organizing program delivery according to their strategic priorities. The detailed activities of the project are discussed with the wide participation of international development NGOs and major aid agencies participating in bilateral and multilateral cooperation projects through the sectoral working group (SWG).

The UN is actively pursuing global follow-up measures to implement SDGs, and a high-level political forum (HLPF) is held annually under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). As the main United Nations platform on sustainable development, the HLPF plays a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global level. Until now, the UN has conducted the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), which are expected to serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the HLPF. As a result, 144 countries conducted voluntary national reviews and Korea implemented its own VNR in 2016. North Korea also officially engaged the ECOSOC to undertake a VNR in December 2018. To this end, North Korea comprehensively reviews its strategic priorities for implementing SDGs through its annual report titled "Needs and Priorities" every year under the UNSF (2017-2021), jointly established with the UN, and specifically presents humanitarian needs, strategic focus and required resources to the international community every year.

In Korea, whole-of-government policy efforts have been expanded to establish targets and indicators suitable for the nation's sustainable development. In the first half of 2018, a public-private joint task force was formed to draft targets and indicators for Korea's SDGs (K-SDGs), and the Major Groups and other Stakeholders (K-MGoS), which included more than 90 NGOs and organizations, submitted their position documents by sector, and after collecting public opinions through roundtable meetings and public hearings, the K-SDGs were confirmed with 122 targets and 214 indicators through a Cabinet meeting in December 2018.

As such, the 17 goals proposed by the international community as SDGs were developed by expert teams and groups of key stakeholders (MGoS) in accordance with Korean conditions, but discussions on the establishment of SDGs on the Korean Peninsula in connection with inter-Korean cooperation have remained insufficient. It is time for South Korea's K-SDGs to actively seek SDGs on the Korean Peninsula that encompass the two Koreas. Since the UN has also pushed for voluntary review and sharing of best practices in the regional cooperation, the establishment of SDGs on the Korean Peninsula linking the two Koreas could greatly contribute to enhancing global partnerships.

Therefore, it now becomes urgent to utilize the UN's country-level relationship with DPRK, and the international community's channel for coordinating cooperation, to select detailed indicators which can be jointly adopted by the two Koreas for the integration of the Korean Peninsula, or to establish a foundation for promoting joint cooperation projects. It will be important to enhance global partnerships and establish integrated SDGs on the Korean Peninsula through which effective SDGs implementation can be driven, as North Korea is also actively pursuing various implementation plans and cooperation systems linking its five-year national development plan with the SDGs achievement goal. In order for inter-Korean cooperation, currently limited to humanitarian aid due to international sanctions against North Korea, to strengthen global partnerships with the goal of achieving SDGs under the UN coordination and come up with concrete measures for implementation, it is necessary to actively utilize the global partnership being pursued by the UN, and it is important to seek future avenues of inter-Korean cooperation so that SDGs can be implemented through the establishment of SDGs on the Korean Peninsula.

Under the international sanctions leveled against North Korea, it has reflected its strategic focus for implementing SDGs in its five-year national development plan adopted at the seventh party congress held in May 2016, and announced measures to implement the SDGs in major areas such as energy, food and agriculture, drinking water and sanitation, forest restoration and environmental protection. The UN is expected to come up with measures to implement the SDGs in consideration of North Korea's strategic priorities, and to gradually expand various implementation plans and technical assistance linking the North's five-year national economic development strategy with the goal of achieving SDGs. Therefore, as a member of the international community, North Korea is focusing on multilateral cooperation as a major means of achieving the SDGs, and in light of the urgent need for effective, inclusive, and reliable implementation systems to solve the challenges facing the international community, various coop-

eration mechanisms should be established to establish integrated SDGs and enhance partnerships on the Korean Peninsula through inter-Korean cooperation.

As the role and function of multilateral organizations, including international organizations under the UN, are expanding in response to the rise in global challenges and support for international public goods, there is an urgent need to establish a set of joint SDGs on the Korean Peninsula to create a platform for discussing and exploring major cooperative projects. As relations between the U.S. and North Korea have improved since the inter-Korean summit in 2018, major advanced donor countries are expanding humanitarian aids through major international organizations, along with quantitative aid to North Korea, meaning it is necessary to seek joint cooperation in accordance with the international community.

For continued cooperation with the United Nations in the future, it is necessary to strengthen the foundation for cooperation with the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), which consists of 32 agencies in charge of development cooperation, and to closely examine the establishment of trust funds by sector through comprehensive agreement. It is also necessary to expand joint projects in major health sectors such as tuberculosis and malaria in cooperation with the Global Fund and the Global Alliance for Vaccine Immunization (GAVI) as a multilateral organization that supports North Korea.

As international sanctions against North Korea continue, the focus will remain on humanitarian aid, but with more of a focus on "sustainable and resilient human development projects" and institutional capacity-building projects to address the international community's implementation of SDGs. In the case of major advanced donor countries, invitational training and scholarship support have continued for a considerable period of time, so it is necessary to seek participation in triangular cooperation with major countries and strengthen the cooperative system with major universities and research institutes. In order to promote full-fledged development cooperation to implement SDGs, North Korea's institutional building and human capacity building are key objectives, pointing toward the need to expand the foundation for technology cooperation projects in hand with various international organizations and private institutions, and to prepare ways to link inter-Korean cooperation. **KIEP**