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## Research Report

# Learning from each other: The multifaceted potential for partnership between the Republic of Korea and Germany

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## Learning from Each Other: The Multifaceted Potential for Partnership between the Republic of Korea and Germany

Niels Keijzer, Stephan Klingebiel and Min Jee Oh

### Summary

Although geographically distant, there is considerable convergence in the development policy priorities of Germany and the Republic of Korea (hereafter: Korea) – and indeed scope for cooperation between them. Whereas Germany was a founding member of the international development cooperation system as we know it today, Korea is a recent member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and its Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and both an important former recipient as well as a current provider of development cooperation.

The development policies and operations of Germany and Korea are confronted by a challenging global geopolitical and economic setting, as well as a worrying decline in human development globally. Both countries are being challenged to respond to this changing setting and to communicate such changes effectively in their contributions towards advancing sustainable development at home and through international cooperation.

Both countries have seen considerable increases in their official development assistance (ODA) budgets during the past decade, with Korea expected to continue its gradual growth path, whereas Germany may face challenges to consolidate its ODA budget – notwithstanding its important position as the only G7 member that has reached the target of providing 0.7 per cent of its gross national income (GNI) as ODA.

This policy brief describes and discusses the German and Korean systems for setting development policy.

Both countries maintain a centralised political responsibility for development policy – in Germany's case with a dedicated ministry, whereas in Korea, two ministries share the responsibility for development cooperation. With various line ministries and organisations with implementing mandates involved in both countries' development cooperation systems, fragmentation is a challenge and raises questions about issues that include results reporting, the introduction and use of standard indicators, independent evaluations, consistent ODA reporting and ensuring effective cooperation.

Based on the exploration of the countries' respective systems and policy priorities, we recommend a regular **horizontal dialogue** on common operational interests. In addition, we identify scope for enhanced cooperation in **three substantive areas**, which in turn may serve to identify further horizontal dialogue, these being:

- **strengthening the multilateral system**, as well as supporting complementary initiatives that promote the involvement of non-state actors in realising the 2030 Agenda,
- **global health**, specifically the provision of medication – including vaccination – as a global public good, and
- the **green energy transition**, with both countries being committed to increasing climate finance.

## Introduction

This policy brief analyses current development policy trends in Germany and Korea. It explores prospects for further changes in policy and for intensifying cooperation between the two countries. Although they may appear to be unlikely partners due to the considerable geographic distance between them, both countries are export-driven and energy-dependent economies that have thrived during times of relative global stability. Germany's identity is closely related to that of the European Union (EU) as well as defined by its close ties with the United States. Korea's most relevant political and security ally is the United States, while neighbouring China dominates its economic relations. With starkly different outcomes, both countries moreover share the experience of having been divided during the Cold War. Overall, they are important development cooperation actors and strong supporters of multilateral approaches.

Seven years since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, multiple crises have contributed to a situation in which human development declined across the globe in 2020 and 2021, thus erasing the gains made in the preceding five years. These challenging human development trends are taking place in a world characterised by strained international relations, leading to constrained global cooperation. The relationship between Western countries and China – and the latter's more pronounced global ambitions – is a main driver of the shrinking room for global collective action. Geopolitical considerations appear to be increasingly dominating all areas of international politics (Klingebiel, 2022). The Russian invasion of Ukraine is an additional game changer. The aggression is in sharp contrast to international law – including the Charter of the United Nations (UN). It will have a fundamental and long-lasting impact on global cooperation and multilateralism. This includes the UN as well as “mixed” club governance platforms such as the G20, while leaving some potential for “like-minded clubs” such as the G7 and the OECD.

Our central argument is that in today's challenging geopolitical context, although they may be perceived as unlikely partners by some, Germany and Korea stand to benefit from exploring opportunities for further dialogue, mutual learning and cooperation. Such deepened cooperation would have the potential to complement and reinforce the existing partnerships and groupings through which they engage. In the following sections, we further explore this potential by comparing the origins of development cooperation, contrasting recent budgetary choices and policy priorities, as well as describing respective institutional setups. On this basis, we identify and discuss a range of areas and topics where further cooperation could be focussed.

## German and Korean development policy: Origins and foundations

Germany and Korea have followed distinct trajectories in order to become the international cooperation actors that they are today. Whereas the Federal Republic of Germany was a “founding member” of the OECD / DAC (1961) and has more recently grown to become the second-largest bilateral development cooperation provider worldwide, Korea is a recent member and has been regarded as – and presented itself as – a case for effective development cooperation. Germany's Western allies encouraged it to use the socio-economic potential that it gained in the 1950s and 1960s to contribute to the bipolar rivalry between the Eastern and Western blocs. The Cold War conditions thus were a key factor in the establishment and evolution of Germany's development cooperation system. Korea's motivation to enter into the field of development cooperation originates from the same period, as it was in part a response to North Korea's attempt in the 1970s to gain international support in the developing world by providing development support to some countries (Song & Kim, 2022). This explains how Korea's current approaches find their origins in the country's experience as a South-South cooperation provider, as well as its role as a “bridge” between such providers and OECD members – a

function that it successfully fulfilled in 2011, for instance, when hosting the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan.

Korea's own development trajectory over the last three decades has been considerably faster and more transformational compared to all other OECD members. Its post-Korean War period as a developing country is vividly remembered by generations in the country. Thus, the process of "development" is recognised and valued in the country as a recent and "lived" experience. The year 2010 was a turning point regarding development cooperation – the country completed its transition from a former recipient to a key provider of international cooperation. The achievement was marked by its membership in the DAC and by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) closing its office as a "country programme country office" that same year (Hong & Izmetiev, 2020; Kwon, 2022). In the years leading to DAC membership, Korea applied development cooperation as a key means to strengthen its international position and soft power, with the country providing the Secretary-General of the UN in 2007 and becoming the base for the Green Climate Fund in 2012. In 2022, newly elected President Yoon Suk-yeol has defined Korea as a "global pivotal state" and emphasised its mission to promote freedom, peace and prosperity based on its liberal democratic values and invest in international cooperation to this end. Thus, development cooperation continues to be explicitly seen and pursued as an instrument to increase the soft-power capacity of the country.

Korea's own development successes were achieved during a period when the country was receiving considerable levels of development finance, mainly from the United States, Japan and multilateral institutions, including the UN development system. The transformation of the country into what it is today has brought about a strong demand in developing countries to learn from Korea's development experiences. Knowledge exchange platforms and institutions such as the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy and UNDP's Seoul Policy Centre play an important role as entry points for other countries interested in

policies and best practices (Kwon, 2022; Song & Kim, 2022).

Based on its own development experiences and similar to other countries in the region (e.g. Japan and China), Korea gives industrial development and physical infrastructure a high priority. This focus is visible in its policies and public communications. European donors have placed new emphasis on infrastructure only in recent years, with one prominent initiative being Europe's Global Gateway initiative, while Germany has also placed a key emphasis on infrastructure investment in its capacity within the G7 Presidency. Korea's development policy on the other hand has been premised on a co-prosperity concept from the beginning, with direct economic benefits being an explicit objective. Similar approaches are used by Japan as a DAC member and China as the most significant South-South cooperation provider (Kwon, 2022). DAC donors outside of the East-Asia region have typically been less explicit about co-benefits, although here too "mutual benefit" type objectives are increasingly being made explicit in overarching policy statements.

## **Budgets, policy choices and priorities**

Size-wise, Germany's ODA budget is around 10 times that of Korea, in part due to – though not fully owing to – its larger population and economy. Yet both countries have in common that they have seen considerable increases in the size of their ODA budgets during the past decade. Whereas Germany is expected to face pressures to consolidate the levels of ODA provided in 2021 and 2022, the new Korean government intends to continue with gradual increases of the country's ODA budget. Table 1 presents further comparative figures on development cooperation in both countries.

New governments took the stage in Germany and Korea in, respectively, December 2021 and May 2022, with both facing the challenge of setting new directions in volatile global and domestic contexts. Germany announced initial "headline objectives"

for development policy priorities under the new government, which are expected in a few months for Korea, yet the aforementioned volatile global context presents a considerable number of open policy questions for both countries and complicates the defining of longer-term policy priorities. Both countries' societies are characterised by adequate public support for development policy, combined with relatively low levels of public debate as well as broad cross-party support for the policy areas. With respectively 59 per cent and 46 per cent of respondents in the 2022 YouGov survey conveying that although international organisations may not be perfect, they are best-suited to tackle global development challenges, Korea and Germany are also among those countries most optimistic about – and invested in – the multilateral system.

**Table 1: Comparing recent ODA trends (all data 2020)**

	Germany	Korea
ODA budget (million USD)	29,320	2,293
ODA as a percentage of GNI (%)	0.73	0.14
Percentage of ODA spent in LDCs (%)	13.7	39.8
Top five recipient countries	India, Indonesia, Syrian Arab Republic, China (People's Republic of), Colombia	Philippines, Viet Nam, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Ethiopia
Country-programmable aid (%)	45.9	81.6
Percentage of aid non-allocable to countries (%)	44.1	15.5
Percentage of bilateral ODA provided to and through NGOs (%)	Support to NGOs: 6.2 Through NGOs: 7.4	Support to NGOs: 0.1 Through NGOs: 2.8

Source: Authors' compilation based on OECD data (OECD, s.a.)

Germany's current centre-left coalition government entered office on 9 December 2021. Among other key changes, it included the first new chancellor in almost 16 years, a three-party coalition and the first change in development minister in two legislative periods. As the former environment minister had done under the previous government, the current development minister introduced four main priorities for German development cooperation: (i) addressing the structural causes of hunger, poverty and inequality, (ii) providing socially fair responses to the global challenge of climate change within the framework of a Just Transition, (iii) avoiding future pandemics and being better prepared with functioning health systems should the worst happen and (iv) implementing a feminist development policy to eliminate structural inequalities and discrimination. Germany's government has also committed to considerably increasing the provision of international climate finance during the coming years.

Although Germany's coalition agreement commits to providing 0.7 per cent of its GNI as ODA, as well as 0.2 per cent of its GNI to least developed countries in this context, the aforementioned crises put considerable pressure on its budget. Hence, in September 2022 the government's proposal for the 2023 budget included a reduction in the budget for the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). A related challenge for Germany's available ODA is whether the urgent focus on the "symptoms" of today's global governance and global public good failures (e.g. food insecurity, floods, drought) will come at the expense of German ODA investments into their long-term inclusive and sustainable provision.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 prompted strong and far-reaching reactions from the German federal government, including through its development policy. Among other aspects, the invasion affected the development minister's interactions with her European colleagues in various EU meetings, as well as her engagement with the G7 under the German Presidency. It also led to considerable changes to the previous German

federal budget and an increased focus on Ukraine as well as the global food security implications of the invasion.

Korea's new administration, headed by President Yoon, came to office on 10 May 2022 after a close presidential election. Since this conservative candidate won the election, its effects have rippled out to the local elections as well as the appointment of the new prime minister, Han Duck-Soo, who carries the political responsibility for, and leadership over, Korea's development cooperation. At the 42nd Committee for International Development Cooperation (CIDC), he stated that even in these taxing times amidst the pandemic and other global crises, Korea's development cooperation seeks to grow stronger under the new administration. This was also backed by President Yoon's address on 22 September 2022 at the UN General Assembly, where he stated that such a focus on development cooperation will be supported with increased assistance for global health, a low-carbon future and green technologies. As presented in Korea's Annual ODA Implementation Plan for 2023, announced in June of 2022, the country intends to increase its ODA volume and has proposed a total budget of approximately EUR 3.4 billion for 2023, which is a 12.4 per cent increase from that of 2022 (EUR 3 billion). This would continue the ODA growth path of the previous administrations, with Korea's ODA budget growing at an average rate of 11 per cent per year since it joined the DAC.

Starting with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019, unforeseen external calamities have struck Korea as well as the rest of the world, which have prompted changes in development cooperation. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and other unceasing conflicts in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Syria have brought the need for additional humanitarian assistance, which is reflected in Korea's actions to increase the proportion of the humanitarian aid budget. Furthermore, the Korean Green New Deal ODA Strategy, announced in 2021, will continue to be emphasised as climate crisis issues become more prominent. In line with the aforementioned strategies, another priority for the new development plans is addressing the food crisis in-

flicted by both supply chain disruptions and climate change by cooperating closely with the UN, the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization. Other priorities include strengthening partnerships with other development actors such as civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academia; innovating projects and programmes by embracing a digital transformation; and ensuring transparency of development systems that will encourage knowledge-sharing.

## **Organisational approaches and structures**

The organisational approaches and structures for ODA management differ strongly between the two countries, which have both made efforts to address organisational fragmentation. The German development cooperation system includes a self-standing ministry in charge of development cooperation: BMZ, which was established in 1961. As a dedicated development ministry, Germany's BMZ stands out from the development ministries of other DAC member countries, yet its coordination mandate is rather "soft". In addition, other federal ministries using ODA resources from the national budget are quite important as well. This, for instance, includes the budget for humanitarian assistance that is managed by the Foreign Office. The 2021 DAC Peer Review of Germany reported that BMZ provides 50 per cent of Germany's gross ODA, while 13 other federal ministries provide around 19 per cent and the rest is managed by the 16 federal states, financial cooperation agencies and various other areas of expenditure. Another key feature of the German development cooperation system is the strong position of its two main implementing agencies: KfW Development Bank and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). KfW Development Bank is in charge of Germany's financial cooperation in terms of large grants, loans and investment promotion, whereas GIZ is responsible for implementing various forms of technical cooperation that, among other goals, seek to contribute to capacity development.

Since 2006, the CIDC, chaired by Prime Minister Han, ultimately guides and makes decisions on Korea's development cooperation policies and works to ensure that the involved ministries and agencies operate in a coordinated way. At the implementation level, each ministry can operate its own ODA projects, but the two pillars of Korea's ODA are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – with its implementing agency called Korea International

Cooperation Agency (KOICA) overlooking grant aid – and the Ministry of Economy and Finance with the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) in charge of concessional loans. In contrast to GIZ and KfW, KOICA and the Export-Import Bank of Korea (Korea Eximbank), which is in charge of the EDCF, are both staffed with civil servants.

**Table 2: Organisational structures of ODA management in Germany and Korea**

	Germany		Korea		
General coordination	Federal minister of development policy		Committee for International Development Cooperation (CIDC) <i>Chairperson: Prime Minister</i> <i>Members: Ministers of relevant ministries and civil experts</i>		
Policy and supervision	The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ): <i>Overall coordination, reporting</i>	Foreign Office: <i>Humanitarian aid</i>  Other line ministries: <i>Climate finance and other ODA expenditure</i>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <i>Oversees grant aid</i>	Ministry of Economy and Finance: <i>Oversees concessional loans</i>	
Implementation	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ): <i>Technical cooperation</i>	KfW Group: <i>Financial cooperation</i>	Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)	Korea Eximbank; Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF)	Other implementing ministries, agencies and local governments

Source: Authors

In recent years, Germany's development policy has put considerable emphasis on bringing investment – and notably German companies – to developing countries, with a key focus on small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Notably, since the 2017 G20 Presidency, Germany has introduced various funds and initiatives seeking to promote external investment, with a specific focus on the private sector and the African continent. Korea's new government appears to have similar ambitions, as Korea's Ministry of SMEs and Startups has proposed a nearly tripled ODA budget in 2023, increasing significantly from

approximately USD 2 million in 2022 to USD 6.2 million in 2023, with the main goal being to promote sustainable economic development in cooperation with SMEs and startups in developing countries such as Uganda, Laos, Indonesia and Viet Nam. Moreover, other ministries and agencies have also recognised the importance of the role of SMEs in the socio-economic development of both Korea and the partner countries. This has placed special attention on cooperation in this field in terms of sharing knowledge, building technological capacities and providing consultations for development.

With the implementation of the Strategic Plans, which started in 2010 and are updated every five years, Korea selects priority partner countries and formulates Country Partnership Strategies that consider each individual country's ODA volume, priority areas and national development strategies to improve aid effectiveness. According to Strategic Plan 2021, Korea selected 27 priority partner countries (12 countries in Asia, 7 in Africa, 4 in Latin America and 2 in the Middle East) out of 130 partner countries and aims to channel at least 70 per cent of total bilateral ODA to these countries. This has been reflected in the Annual ODA Implementation Plan for 2023, and Korea will continue to focus primarily on Asia (37.7 per cent) and Africa (18.9 per cent), especially low- and middle-income countries.

Germany's reform strategy "BMZ 2030", decided in June 2020, introduced a focus on 65 partner countries. The country list consists of three main categories: 47 bilateral partners (including 7 "reform partners" with a significant cooperation offer), 8 "global partners" (cooperation on shared global challenges) and 10 "nexus and peace partners" (conflict-affected and fragile states).

While centralising political responsibility for development policy, both countries see an increasing number of line ministries getting involved in managing development cooperation projects, and a corresponding increase in various agencies and organisations involved in implementing these. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for instance, recently observed that 44 different agencies were involved in implementing Korean projects. For both countries – though to different degrees and with different priorities – this level of fragmentation raises questions about issues including results reporting, the introduction and use of standard indicators, independent evaluations, consistent ODA reporting and promoting effective cooperation.

## **German-Korean cooperation: Opportunities for deepening cooperation**

Germany and Korea strongly support the 2030 Agenda, both domestically and through international cooperation, yet their policies and operations are confronted by a challenging global geopolitical and economic setting and a decline in human development across the globe. In a way, many countries are returning to a situation similar to the time of the Millennium Development Goals, when direct needs and public services were a key requirement – food security being a very evident one. The need for an additional focus on basic needs and humanitarian aid will be a reality of cooperation, also given the rising levels of inequality and the disproportionately distributed effects of climate change.

This policy brief has argued that in this challenging global context, there is significant scope for strengthening cooperation between Germany and Korea. Both countries face a challenging learning curve in responding to a crises-ridden world. Further cooperation could complement the various partnerships and groups through which they conduct their international development cooperation.

We identify the case for **a horizontal development policy dialogue as well as four specific opportunities**, which concern development policy dialogue, global health, green energy and horizontal cooperation towards strengthening multilateral solutions to global challenges.

First of all – as the above analysis of current policy priorities and the institutional setup and challenges of the two countries has shown – there is an interesting degree of convergence in their current policy and operational priorities. The former may involve engaging in a **horizontal dialogue** and knowledge-sharing on various topics of common interest, such as (digital) innovations in project management and transparency. A second area where mutual learning can be sought is in exploring operational reforms that address

fragmentation in the institutional structures for development cooperation in terms of strengthening efficiency and results reporting. These horizontal discussions would also benefit cooperation in specific areas, which we argue could include the three areas mentioned below. **Conversely**, concrete cooperation concerning the four opportunities mentioned above could serve as “pilots” to inform reflections on overall reforms and innovations in this horizontal dialogue.

First, both countries should continue their commitment to **strengthening the multilateral system**, yet also supplement this by supporting key global cooperation initiatives. The latter includes finding ways to structurally involve non-state actors – including civil society and the private sector – in key global development challenges. As regards the multilateral system, both countries have experienced the challenges of seeking to be a “bridge” between OECD and non-OECD states in a situation where the latter neighbouring states undermine the global order on which continued stability and development depend.

Second, significant opportunities for working together are found in the area of **global health**. Both countries are leading producers of medical expertise and infrastructure, with Germany having placed considerable emphasis on this topic under its G7 Presidency and Korea having embraced the provision of medication as a global public good. Additionally, on 16 August 2022, Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Health and Welfare signed a memorandum of understanding with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to strengthen their cooperation for global health (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). It highlighted several objectives, including promoting the importance of multilateral health cooperation in ODA policies while promoting knowledge exchanges among the relevant institutions. Such interests in global health can help build the foundations for partnerships between Germany and Korea.

Third, in the interest of searching for potential areas of cooperation between Korea and Germany,

another prospective area is the **green energy transition**. As announced in the 2021 P4G Seoul Summit, Korea vowed to boost the proportion of Green New Deal ODA in total ODA from 19.6 per cent in 2021 to 28.1 per cent in 2025, promising to support the green transition with renewable energy, green mobility and low-carbon energy. Moreover, the Yoon administration’s energy policy aimed to generate 30 per cent of total energy in Korea from nuclear power by 2030, which is indeed ambitious and embraces Korea’s pathway towards achieving carbon neutrality. “Green ODA” is an emerging paradigm for the Korean development approach. Germany similarly places considerable priority on – and invests in – promoting renewable energies, access to sustainable energy and furthering energy efficiency. Together with the EU, the United Kingdom and the United States, Germany has been a driving actor of the Just Energy Transformation Partnership with South Africa while also exploring cooperation with Indonesia and India. One more key initiative concerns the multi-donor Global Energy Transformation Programme, through which European actors join forces in mobilising private investment in decentralised power generation and in advising countries and regions on the energy transition. Such cooperation efforts could also be taken forward together with Germany’s international partners, including Korea.

## Conclusions

In the digital age, geographical proximity is no longer a requirement for cooperation. Instead, converging norms, ideas and interests should reinforce cooperation, as cross-border cooperation remains a precondition for establishing the only path to ensure global sustainable development. This policy brief has explored the case for cooperation between two countries that have made efforts to promote the 2030 Agenda, both domestically and internationally, and sought to describe how engaging in further horizontal dialogue and cooperation on shared priorities could be of mutual benefit.

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