

SEOUL DEBATES 2021

**“Development Cooperation and Knowledge Exchange:
Taking Stock and Moving Forward”**

- Synthesis Report -



**Summary of Seoul Debates 2021 on
“Development Cooperation and Knowledge Exchange”**

Held on 15th June 2021,

**Jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea
and UNDP Seoul Policy Centre**

The biannual ‘Seoul Debates’ forum, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and UNDP Seoul Policy Centre (USPC), has been a global platform for dialogue and collaboration since 2013. This year’s edition is the fourth installment. The themes from previous years include the challenges of middle-income countries, anti-corruption, and gender-based violence.

The theme for this year was ‘Development cooperation and knowledge exchange.’ To provide some context, the COVID-19 Pandemic clearly accentuated how crucial it is for policy makers to have access to state-of-the art knowledge on best practices. Indeed, as global issues such as climate change become ever more pressing, the need to create new forms and corridors of knowledge sharing is constantly growing. Seoul Debates 2021 thus discussed the recent evolution of development cooperation, particularly the changes in the global ecosystem of knowledge for development. Participants of Seoul Debates 2021 provided their insights on the role of ROK and its development cooperation actors in this evolving global context and its implications towards USPC’s future programming opportunities.¹

[Session 1] High-level policy dialogue: Development cooperation in times of global turmoil

Development cooperation is changing rapidly in two ways. First, there has been a sharp increase in global challenges, many of which are inherent even in middle to upper-income countries. This can be affirmed as the COVID-19 Pandemic has pushed one million people into extreme poverty while having devastated the livelihoods of many more. As these challenges cannot be addressed by a single entity, they must be overcome through an integrated approach that tackles the common drivers of many inter-connected issues such as climate change and inequality. Second, there has been a drastic change in the modalities through which solutions are shared. The role of the private sector, civil society, and south-south cooperation (SSC) providers has become more important than ever.

In this sense, development cooperation is no longer about the unilateral transfer of resources. Rather, it is increasingly about co-investment in and co-creation of nationally led development trajectories. As such, it is imperative to recognize the entrepreneurial capacities of other countries and the potential opportunities that may arise through them. Accordingly, knowledge exchange in development cooperation should be facilitated in a manner that promotes mutual learning. Indeed,

¹ The main purpose of this report is to provide a synthesis on selected aspects of the opinions expressed during this event. None of these messages can be attributed to any of the panelists nor to the co-organizers.

‘development’ is not an ‘end-state’ that is achieved after surpassing a certain income threshold; it is a constant search for expanding the ability to make choices.²

The implication of this is that high-income countries also have much to learn, as they also have economic, social, environment, and governance issues to address. This also holds true for the middle-income countries that are instrumental in overcoming challenges such as poverty and climate change. Hence, although the traditional ODA system categorizes countries in accordance with income-level, this can no longer serve as the standard for providing development cooperation. Rather, development partnerships should continue as long as there are development needs to be fulfilled. This should take place in a manner that does not lead to the proliferation of ‘aid orphans.’ In this sense, development agencies need to go beyond the role of a ‘provider’ and become an ‘agent of change.’

[Session 2] Implications for knowledge exchange in the context of development cooperation

Due to the high uncertainty of the contemporary era, knowledge sharing is at a crossroad of crisis and opportunity. On the one hand, the practice of knowledge exchange is approaching a crisis as ‘donor’ countries are not well positioned to provide solutions to their ‘recipients.’ This is because both donors and recipients often experience the same development challenges in a concurrent manner, as can be affirmed through the example of the COVID-19 Pandemic. On the other hand, knowledge sharing can also benefit from this context as better policies are emerging through the competition caused by the surging emergence of new ideas. Indeed, the potential value of this opportunity is enhanced as technological improvements have strengthened society’s ability to access such information.

In this regard, it is evident that knowledge is no longer the exclusive domain of ‘developed’ countries. Rather, the insights of partners from the global south, and the local actors within them, also play a significant role. Moreover, to whatever extent that northern knowledge is used, it cannot simply be copy-and-pasted into different contexts. It must be adapted to local contexts based on partnership principles such as long-term sustainability, cross-cutting thematic integration, people-centricity, and ownership. The challenge going forward is to combine the expertise, experiences, and contexts of both the north and south in a nuanced manner. Although this may be ubiquitously known in theory, its application in practice has further room for improvement.

[Session 3] Experience of the USPC work on development cooperation at country level

To support developing countries in becoming effective providers of their own knowledge solutions, USPC launched the “SDG Partnership on Development Cooperation” in 2020. In doing so, it selected Bangladesh, India, and Rwanda as the first set of partners. All three countries have experienced a unique development journey and thus have become emerging knowledge providers in Global South.

Through this discussion, it was made clear that the ROK and USPC’s three partner countries have positioned themselves as knowledge providers in development cooperation. In addition to the

² This refers to Amartya Sen’s ‘Capability Approach’, which posits that development needs to go beyond simply increasing income levels. Rather, it should embody the action of enhancing substantive freedoms, that is, the ability of individuals to choose from different states of being and doing. His work significantly influenced the formulation of the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP)’s Human Development Index (HDI).

Development Experience Exchange Partnership, the ROK operates its signature Knowledge Sharing Program, which uses K-Developedia as a part of its approach to knowledge exchange. Bangladesh is institutionalizing various inter-governmental networks and developing a web-based knowledge hub. India is creating SDG Coordination Centres to promote SDG localization and to support its engagement with other countries. Finally, Rwanda has established the Rwanda Cooperation Initiative, which has recently developed the e-Learning platform 'Rwandapedia.' In short, the discussion highlighted that web-based knowledge platforms have become a common modality of emerging SSC providers, which is a niche area that ROK could contribute to.

As this affirms that the ROK's development cooperation modality is worthy of being benchmarked, it is clear that the ROK is well-positioned to support the SSC approaches of emerging providers, thereby serving as a bridge between the global north and south. This is particularly true as its successful experience in overcoming the COVID-19 Pandemic has strengthened the ROK's status as a knowledge provider. Accordingly, the ROK could support the knowledge solutions of southern providers through Triangular Cooperation modalities based on strong civil society and private-sector partnerships.

Conclusion

Seoul Debates 2021 addressed the future of development cooperation, particularly focusing on the role of knowledge exchange in the post-COVID-19 era. In short, there were three cross-cutting lessons that were accentuated throughout each session. First, it is important for all actors in development cooperation to learn from one another. Second, knowledge-based solutions should be based on multi-stakeholder partnerships. Third, it is crucial to be mindful of local contexts and ownership.

Annex 1: Programme

#	Session	Time
1	Welcoming remarks	9:00-9:05
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stephan Klingebiel, Director, UNDP Seoul Policy Center (USPC) 	
2	Opening remarks	9:05-9:15
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sang-wook Ham, Deputy Minister for Multilateral and Global Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea (ROK) 	
3	Introductory video	9:15-9:18
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-3 min video clip on 10 years of USPC's work 	
4	High-level policy dialogue: Development cooperation in times of global turmoil	9:18-10:10
	<p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achim Steiner, Administrator, UNDP Hyuk-Sang Sohn, President, KOICA Moderation: Youngju Oh, President, IFANS 	
5	Coffee break	10:10-10:20
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food and drinks provided in line with COVID regulations 	
6	Panel: Global turmoil – Implications for knowledge exchange in the context of development cooperation	10:20-11:35
	<p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Haoliang Xu, Director of Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP Eunju Kim, Professor, Hansung University Sandhya Iyer, Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences Bruno Carrasco, Director General of Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department, Asian Development Bank Moderation: Stephan Klingebiel, Director, USPC 	
7	Coffee break	11:35-11:45
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food and drinks provided in line with COVID regulations 	
8	Experience of the USPC work on development cooperation at country level	11:45-13:15
	<p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taekyoon Kim, Professor, Seoul National University Nadia Rasheed, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP India Yasmin D. Amri Sued, Ambassador, Embassy of the Republic of Rwanda to the ROK Nahid Rashid, Additional Secretary and Wing Chief (UN), Economic Relations Division of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Moderation: Artemy Izmestiev, Policy Specialist, USPC 	
9	Closing	13:15-13:30
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stephan Klingebiel, Director, USPC 	
10	Lunch	13:30-14:30
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food and drinks provided in line with COVID regulations 	