

## TRENDS IN SOUTH KOREA'S GRANTS-BASED AID FOR AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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### **Keywords**

agriculture, food security, official development assistance, Korea, capacity building

### **Abstract**

Agriculture is the major income source in many developing countries. Official development assistance (ODA) contributes to agricultural development in those countries to alleviate poverty and hunger. Among the significant ODA donors, the Republic of Korea holds a unique position with its transformation from a recipient to a donor. The main objective of this article is to examine Korea's grants-based ODA disbursements to agricultural sectors for its contribution to agricultural development and food security in its recipients. The data for analysis were collected from the KOICA Statistics Service and OECD DAC Query Wizard for International Development Statistics for agricultural sectors. Results showed Korea continued disbursing the largest share of its agricultural grants to Asia while gradually shifting its investment to Africa. Other regions received relatively small amounts of agricultural aid. However, within regional disbursements to agricultural sectors, each region received distinct shares by aid type, based on their needs and Korea's national interest or aid policy. For agricultural capacity-building, the analysis identified evolution of the training program's main focus over the last 25 years. This shift from technical capacity improvement to software one indicated Korea's efforts to better align its aid policy with international norms for aid effectiveness.

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## I. Introduction

Rapid economic growth and increased agricultural productivity have contributed to the decreasing global poverty and hunger. However, 767 million people or 10.7 % of the global population were estimated in extreme poverty, and 795 million or 10.9 % undernourished in 2013 (FAO IFAD, 2016; World Bank, 2016). The majority of those in poverty and hunger live in developing countries. Across the globe, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are the two regions that suffer from the severest poverty and hunger (IFPRI, 2017). The extreme poverty rate, expressed as the percentage of the population living below USD 1.90 per day in 2011 purchasing power parity, was assessed 15.1 % in South Asia and 41.0 % in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2013 (World Bank, 2016). The two regions also recorded the highest scores of Global Hunger Index (GHI) in 2016: 29.0 for South Asia and 30.1 for Sub-Saharan Africa. The GHI scores between 20.0 and 34.9 indicate a serious level of hunger on a 100-point severity scale. The 2016 GHI score averaged across the developing countries was 21.3 (IFPRI, 2016).

To help mitigate poverty and hunger in developing countries, various forms of global efforts have been made. Of them, food aid is one of the most well-known forms of these efforts. It intends to improve food security and stimulate economies of developing countries (Awokuse, 2011; Murphy & McAfee, 2005). According to the World Food Programme (WFP), Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa received approximately 86 % of the total food aid in 2012, 23 % for Asia and 63 % for Sub-Saharan Africa, respectively (World Food Programme, n.d.). At a national level, food aid enables developing countries to substitute for normal spending on food imports, and generate extra foreign exchange. This extra foreign exchange in turn can be used for non-food imports or repay foreign debts. At a household level, it helps households sustain short-term food security, protect their assets as a safety net, and insure against economic shocks (Tusiime, Renard, & Smets, 2013). However, its critics have raised questions about its contribution to food security and economic growth in developing countries (Awokuse, 2011; FAO, 2006). The critics argue food aid subsidizes donors' domestic interests rather than assists recipient countries to improve their food security (FAO, 2006). One reason for this criticism comes from tied food aid, on which a donor places restrictions. The restrictions may require the food to be obtained from the donor's domestic

market, and the use of transportation and distributional services of the donor country contractors. With such arrangements, the donor country could capture a third of all food aid resources (Awokuse, 2011). Food aid, like other forms of foreign aid, potentially encourages recipient governments to depend on the aid. Consequently, this may discourage necessary policy reforms and create disincentives for their agricultural development. Corrupt institutions also allow local elites to benefit from food aid, instead of channelling it to the intended beneficiaries (FAO, 2006). Given those issues of food aid, a more reliable option to improve food security is to assist developing countries for building self-sufficient agriculture.

Agriculture is the largest employer and major source of income for the poor rural households in developing countries (FAO IFAD, 2016). Growth in agriculture not only favours the poor directly but expands the poverty-reducing effects to other sectors; it generates demands for other agricultural inputs and services, and employs the landless poor (Kaya, Kaya, & Gunter, 2013; Lynam, Beintema, Roseboom, & Badiane, 2016). Yet, developing countries face obstacles to invest in agriculture, including budget shortage, government priorities shifted to other sectors, unfavourable agricultural policies, changing global market, and dependency on food imports and aid (Murphy & McAfee, 2005).

Recognizing the obstacles and potential of agriculture, international donors have invested their resources in agricultural sectors through the official development assistance or ODA, which is bilateral and multilateral aid to promote economic development and welfare of developing countries (OECD, 2008). The collective ODA contributions to agricultural sectors peaked around from 1983 to 1986, and stagnated through 2000. This downward trend in agricultural ODA was attributable to multiple reasons: high global food surpluses, low commodity prices, agricultural aid fatigue, opposition from farm lobby groups, and changes in donor policies to social-sector investments (Kaya et al., 2013; Lynam et al., 2016). However, beginning 2000, donors' interest in agricultural development for food security re-emerged due to the rising food prices and high-profile political commitment with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (Lynam et al., 2016).

As of September 2017, there are 30 members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (OECD, n.d.-a). Of the 30 donor members, the Republic of

Korea (hereafter Korea) holds a unique position as the first country that successfully transitioned from an aid recipient to donor. The country became a member of the OECD in 1996 and the OECD DAC in 2009 to be recognized as a significant donor country (Chun, Munyi, & Lee, 2010). Quantitatively, Korea increased its ODA contribution to 0.14 % of gross national income or GNI in 2016 from 0.10 % in 2009. Qualitatively, Korea introduced a comprehensive ODA bill in 2009 for a legal framework to guide the country's ODA (Chun et al., 2010). The Korea ODA comprises multilateral assistance, bilateral loans and grants. Of the three, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), established in 1991, provides grants that include transfers of cash, goods, and technical services (KOICA, 2011).

With the exceptional emergence of Korea as a new donor, many studies have analysed the time-series data of the country's overall ODA to compare it to other major donor countries, identify determining factors of Korea ODA, or draw policy implications among other research objectives (Choi, 2010; Kim & Oh, 2012; Marx & Soares, 2013). However, specific sectors and types of Korea ODA have not been sufficiently explored. For this reason, the current article aims to examine KOICA ODA with a particular focus on agriculture, forestry and fisheries (AFF) as an aid sector, and AFF training programs as an aid type since the agency's establishment. To examine the sector and aid type, the data for analysis were collected from the KOICA and OECD DAC statistics. This analysis intends to reflect trends in Korea's grants-based contribution to agricultural development in its recipient countries.

## II. Data Sources and Analysis

To investigate historical trends of Korea's grants-based ODA to AFF, the time-series data were collected from the KOICA Statistics Service, KOICA Annual Reports and OECD DAC Query Wizard for International Development Statistics (KOICA, 2016, n.d.; OECD, n.d.-b). The time period for the current study was set from 1991 through 2015; KOICA was established in 1991, and the latest year for the available data was 2015. The KOICA Statistics Service provided data on KOICA ODA disbursements by region, aid type, sector, and other details. The

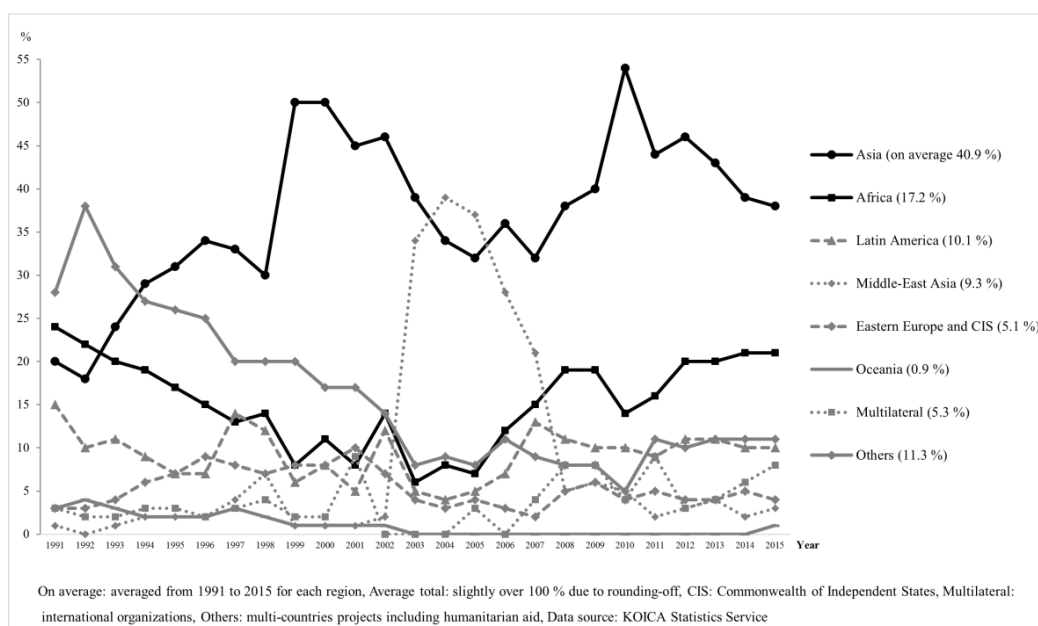
OECD data provided total Korea ODA to AFF including grants, loans and other assistances. The OECD data for Korea ODA are assumed to share the same data source as KOICA; Korea reports and submits its overall ODA data to OECD as a member country (OECD, n.d.-c). All KOICA and OECD data were analysed in USD. Additionally, the AFF training programs were categorized into three based on their main goal. This categorization allowed for the examination of thematic and directional changes in those training programs during the past 25 years. The findings from the data analysis are reported in the following section.

### III. Results and Discussions

#### 1. Overall trends of KOICA ODA disbursement since its establishment

For the regional KOICA ODA disbursement, Asia received the largest ODA or 40.9 % averaged across the years, followed by Africa (Figure 1).

Figure 1. KOICA's ODA disbursements by region and year



In 1991 and 1992 however, Africa received larger shares than Asia did; Africa received 24 % in 1991 and 22 % in 1992 while Asia 20 % and 18 %, respectively. Interestingly, the category, others (for multi-county programs) received the largest shares from 1991 to 1993. It is probable that KOICA disbursed larger shares to the multi-county programs such as humanitarian aid while identifying its strategic regions during the first years of its establishment.

Since 1994, Asia's dominance has continued, as reflected in KOICA's 2016 budget. The largest share or 45.6 % of KOICA's 2016 budget was allocated to Asia and Pacific Ocean (KOICA, 2016). In comparison, Africa was allocated with 31.7 %, Latin America and the Caribbean 11.5%, and Middle East Central Asia 11.2 % (KOICA, 2016). Although the geopolitical importance of Asia to Korea remains strong, KOICA has gradually increased its ODA to Africa in recent years. This increase resonates changes in Korean aid policies and its recognition of greater aid needs to Africa (KOICA, 2016). In line with this trend, Kalinowski and Cho argue that the expansion to Africa reflects Korea's resource diplomacy to gain greater access to the continent's natural resources, and follow China's increase in aid to Africa (Kalinowski & Cho, 2012). Kim (2012) also makes a similar argument that achieving resource security and promoting soft power are some of the key factors for Korea's Africa strategy (Kim, 2012).

Between 2003 and 2007, Middle-East Asia received considerable shares of KOICA disbursement, ranging from 21 % in 2007 to 39 % in 2004 (Figure 1). These drastic increases coincided with the United States (US) invasion of Iraq in 2003. This suggested a temporary shift of Korean foreign policies in Middle-East Asia as a close ally of the US in order to help stabilize the region. With increasing efforts for reconstruction and peace-building in Middle-East Asia, the remaining regions showed inverse trends with KOICA disbursements between 2003 and 2007 (Figure 1).

KOICA distributes its disbursement across seven aid sectors; health, education, public administration, technology, environment and energy, AFF, emergency relief, and others. Of those aid sectors, education received the largest share followed by public administration and health, averaged across the years (Table 1).

Table 1. KOICA ODA disbursements by aid sector as % averaged from 1991 to 2015

Aid sector	Health	Education	Public administration	TEE §	AFF ‡	Emergency relief	Others #	Total
%	16.1	23.5	18.9	13.2	10.6	4.2	13.6	100

§: Technology, environment and energy, ‡: Agriculture, forestry and fisheries, #: unclassified

Agriculture, forestry and fisheries received 10.6 %, only followed by emergency relief (Table 1). Among the sub-sectors of AFF, agriculture received averaged 83.7 %, fisheries 8.7 % and forestry 7.6 % (KOICA, 2017). The Korean agency continues prioritizing education, public administration and health as reflected in its 2016 budget allocations; public administration received 24 % of KOICA total budget, education 22 % and health 20.4 % in 2016 (KOICA, 2017).

## 2. Korea ODA to agriculture, forestry and fisheries

As partly shown in KOICA's AFF ODA (Table 1), Korea did not distribute large ODA disbursements to agricultural sectors. Of the total Korea ODA including loans, subscriptions as well as grants, the AFF ODA ranged from the lowest 1.0 % in 2000 to the highest 15.3 % in 2012 (Table 2).

Table 2. Korea total ODA disbursements, Korea AFF-specific ODA disbursements and shares of AFF sub-sectors as % of AFF ODA disbursements from 1991 to 2015

Year	Korea total ODA §	Korea AFF ODA §	% of AFF in Korea total ODA	Sub-sectors of agriculture, forestry and fisheries (AFF)		
				% of agriculture in Korea AFF ODA	% of forestry in Korea AFF ODA	% of fisheries in Korea AFF ODA
1991	136.0	1.6	1.2	- ‡	-	-
1992	95.7	2.8	2.9	-	-	-
1993	59.8	3.4	5.7	-	-	-
1994	-	-	-	-	-	-
1995	232.4	2.5	1.1	-	-	-
1996	-	-	-	-	-	-
1997	220.0	6.3	2.9	-	-	-
1998	283.8	22.3	7.8	30.4	3.1	66.5

(continued)

Year	Korea total ODA §	Korea AFF ODA §	% of AFF in Korea total ODA	Sub-sectors of agriculture, forestry and fisheries (AFF)		
				% of agriculture in Korea AFF ODA	% of forestry in Korea AFF ODA	% of fisheries in Korea AFF ODA
1999	365.7	4.2	1.1	61.6	14.6	23.7
2000	353.7	3.6	1.0	90.0	6.1	4.2
2001	264.3	5.2	2.0	69.8	13.9	16.2
2002	362.4	6.9	1.9	51.7	35.6	12.6
2003	415.0	47.2	11.4	74.0	4.3	21.7
2004	591.8	15.1	2.6	75.5	22.0	2.6
2005	712.8	44.7	6.3	88.2	10.4	1.3
2006	681.2	11.9	1.7	83.2	12.8	4.0
2007	1013.0	102.8	10.1	89.9	9.0	1.0
2008	1623.2	53.3	3.3	64.1	22.0	13.9
2009	1793.1	46.6	2.6	89.7	6.4	3.8
2010	1967.3	99.7	5.1	82.6	8.9	8.5
2011	1665.2	132.1	7.9	95.4	2.8	1.7
2012	1809.2	277.4	15.3	96.8	2.2	1.0
2013	2226.8	115.4	5.2	81.8	12.1	6.1
2014	2262.8	208.5	9.2	85.0	5.0	10.1
2015	2311.7	98.2	4.2	81.8	7.9	10.2
Average #			4.9 %	77.3 %	11.1 %	11.6 %

§: ODA disbursement in USD millions from the data source, OECD DAC Query Wizard

‡: Data unavailable

#: Average among available data

Two values for 1994 and 1996 in Table 3 were missing from the OECD DAC Query Wizard. In 2003 and 2007, there was a drastic increase in Korea AFF ODA compared to each 2002 and 2006 (Table 2). This might be Korea's response, either voluntary or peer-pressured, to the global food price crises around those years, which affected many of the rural poor in developing countries (FAO, 2009). The segregated data for the three sub-sectors were only available from 1998 to 2015 (Table 2). Among the three sub-sectors, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, agriculture received the largest share ranging from 30.4 % in 1998 to 96.8 % in 2012. The same trend was mentioned with KOICA's grants-based ODA above. On



average, agriculture received 77.3 %, forestry 11.1 % and fisheries 11.6 % of the Korea total AFF ODA. Therefore, the grants, loans and multilateral assistances for AFF mainly supported agriculture over forestry and fisheries. The dominance of agriculture could be a result from the combination of the demands of the recipient countries and Korean aid policies. Compared to agriculture in general, it can be due to the lower appreciation of the two sectors for their contribution to food security, and smaller population sizes engaged in forestry and fisheries.

### 3. KOICA ODA to agriculture, forestry and fisheries

For KOICA's AFF disbursements by region, Asia was a leading recipient with 50.5 % averaged across the years, followed by Africa with 29.4 % (Table 3).

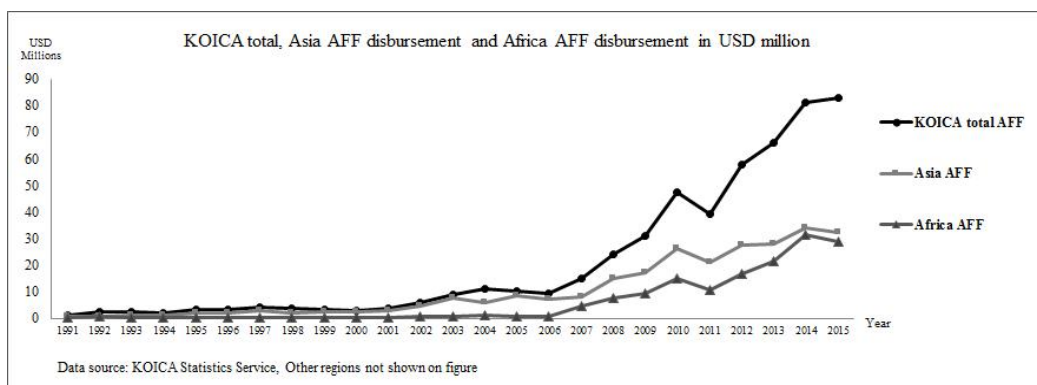
Table 3. Shares of KOICA AFF disbursements by region as % averaged from 1991 to 2015

Region	Asia	Africa	Latin America	Middle-East Asia	Eastern Europe and CIS §	Oceania	Multilateral ‡	Others	Total
%	50.5	29.4	8.0	1.1	2.3	1.2	7.5	0	100

§: Commonwealth of Independent States, ‡: UN agencies and other international organizations

In total, these two regions received about 80 % of KOICA AFF disbursements. While Asia continued receiving larger AFF disbursements than Africa, the gap between the two regions was closing in the recent two years. Africa received 92 % of Asia's AFF disbursement in 2014 and 90 % in 2015 (Figure 2). This trend may continue as the 2017 Korea ODA policy explicitly mentions an overall ODA increase in Africa (Korea Official Development Assistance, 2016).

Figure 2. Disbursements to AFF as KOICA total, Asia and Africa from 1991 to 2015



The AFF disbursements were further dissected by aid type and region (Table 4).

Table 4. Shares by aid type and region as % of KOICA AFF disbursement averaged from 1991 to 2015

Aid type Region	Project type	Development consulting	Volunteer dispatch	Invited training	Small grants §	Expert dispatch	PPP ‡	HA ‡	Total
Asia	60.5	5.0	15.6	9.3	0.3	1.0	8.1	0	100
Africa	52.2	4.8	18.1	16.5	1.4	0.5	6.5	0	100
Latin America	52.3	0	25.3	16.2	1.8	2.0	2.4	0	100
Middle-East Asia	13.3	0	2.0	35.1	47.3	0.9	1.4	0	100
Eastern Europe and CIS #	53.8	0	12.5	17.8	4.2	2.0	9.7	0	100
Oceania	28.7	0	19.6	36.7	14.2	0.8	0	0	100
Average f	43.5	1.6	15.5	21.9	11.5	1.2	4.7	0.0	100

§: Not exceeding USD 0.2 million per year

‡: PPP: Public-Private Partnership, HA: Humanitarian aid

#: Commonwealth of Independent States

f: Average across region among available data

Multilateral cooperation was excluded as only applicable to multilateral organisations.

By aid type in AFF, the project type cooperation received the largest disbursement on average, followed by the training programs and volunteer dispatch,

respectively. These distributions across the aid types in AFF were different from the overall KOICA's spending; across all aid types, KOICA as a whole disbursed its funds in the order of project type (45.2 %), volunteer dispatch (17.6 %), and training programs (10.5 %) averaged from 1991 to 2015 (Data not shown). Thus, a noticeable difference in AFF was the higher shares of the AFF training programs. Since a transfer of appropriate technology to the right targets can increase agricultural productivity in a relatively short-term, the training programs may be regarded more effective in agricultural growth and food security.

By region and aid type, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe and CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) received the largest AFF disbursement, or over 50 % for their project type cooperation (Table 4). The project type cooperation is more comprehensive under a multiyear plan. It may involve construction of agricultural infrastructure such as irrigation systems, dams and roads, provide agricultural machinery, equipment and other inputs, and deploy experts for consultancy. The project type as such requires substantial funding compared to other aid types. Additionally, it produces tangible outcomes comparatively in a short term. This can help convince the public for the ODA expenditure, and increase international coordination with similar programs in the same region.

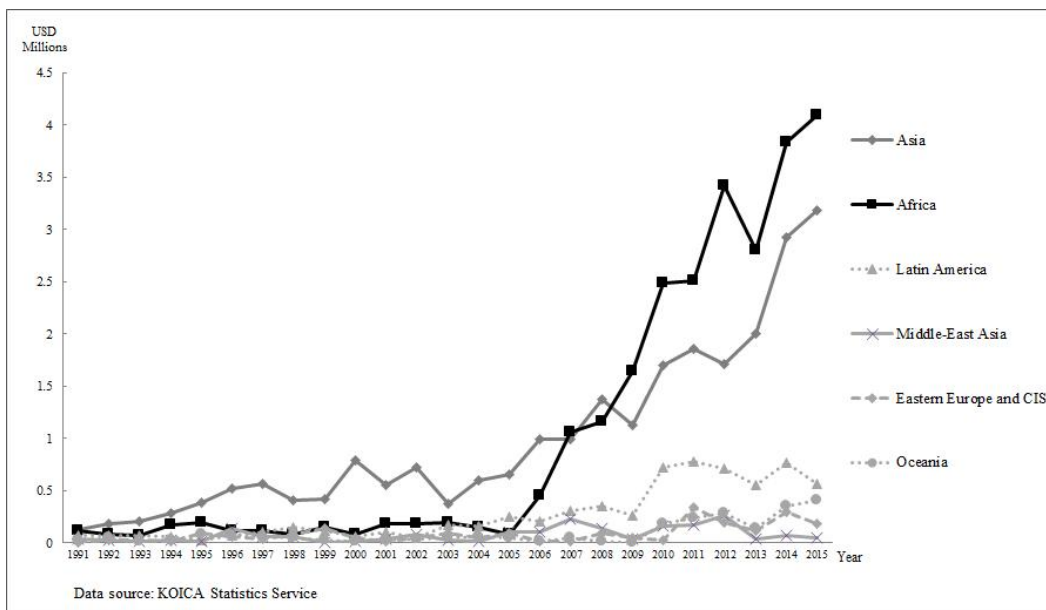
In Middle-East Asia, small grants (not exceeding USD 0.2 million) received the largest share of AFF ODA, and in Oceania the training programs. While most of the regions received the considerable disbursements for the volunteer dispatch ranging from 12.5 % to 25.3 %, Middle-East Asia did only 2 % (Table 4). This low level of the volunteer dispatch to Middle-East Asia was likely due to the safety concerns and entry restrictions in some parts of this region compared to the others. Instead, Middle-East Asia received the large disbursements for the small grants and training programs in AFF. Given that Middle-East Asia received only 1.1 % of KOICA AFF on average by region (Table 3), these two aid types were likely considered more cost-effective without dispatching AFF experts or volunteers for safety concerns.

#### 4. KOICA training programs for capacity-building in agriculture, forestry and fisheries

The AFF training programs are designed to transfer appropriate AFF technology, improve AFF research capacity in a short or medium term, and cultivate human resources for agricultural growth in a long term. The training programs build strong networks between a participating country and Korea as well.

On average, the AFF training programs in Oceania received the largest share against its own regional AFF disbursement, 36.7 % whereas Asia did the smallest, 9.3 % against Asia's own (Table 4). Despite the smallest allocation to the training programs, Asia was given the largest or second largest disbursement in the absolute amount for the training programs, competing only with Africa (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Disbursements of AFF training programs by region from 1991 to 2015



Until 2006, Asia received the largest disbursement for the AFF training programs. However, starting 2007 but 2008, Africa advanced Asia in the AFF training funds. In 2012, KOICA spent almost twice on AFF training programs in Africa against Asia (Table 5).

Table 5. Percentage of Africa's AFF training program disbursement against Asia's

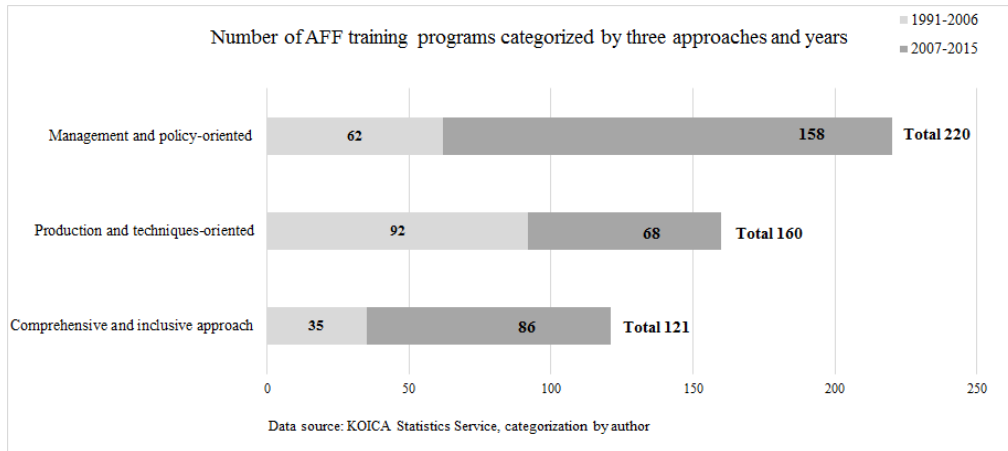
Year	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
%	84.0	42.4	32.4	58.9	49.4	21.7	29.0	19.7	37.3	19.0	33.3	25.8	51.0
Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
%	25.4	12.9	45.3	107.1	84.8	146.3	146.5	134.5	199.6	139.5	131.3	128.7	

Data source: KOICA Statistics Service

This trend is notable because the total AFF disbursement in Asia was always larger than Africa. It indicates KOICA supported greater local needs or demands for capacity improvement for agricultural growth in Africa. Or from a political angle, the increase in the AFF training for Africa reflects Korea's national interest in gaining better access to export markets and natural resources in Africa. The training programs invite trainees whom the recipient country and KOICA jointly select. Thus, inviting high-level government officials from agricultural line ministries can initiate or strengthen political ties between them. This is a reason some critics question effectiveness of training programs, often one-off, short-term and mixed with political intentions (de Rosa, Nadeau, Hernandez, Kafeero, & Zahiga, 2016).

From 1991 to 2015, KOICA implemented total 501 AFF training programs (Figure 4). The AFF training programs were categorized based on their main objective. This categorization allowed for the examination of changes in the AFF training programs over the years. The first category is the management and policy-oriented approach. Training programs that fell into this category emphasize soft skills in policy formulation, management, leadership, or system building for agricultural growth and food security. This category tends to invite policy-makers, and high-ranking government officers and community leaders. The second category is the production and technique-oriented approach. This category prioritizes improvement in agricultural skills and technology for production or processing. The training programs in this category train working-level officers, technicians and field researchers who are actually involved in technical operations of agriculture and food. The third category covers the comprehensive and inclusive approach. This category offers training programs for a broad rural development. These programs provide more comprehensive courses for rural community and social development. As such, they cover a wide range of stakeholders including officials at local or central governments, high or working levels, and community leaders or members in rural communities.

Figure 4. Categorization of AFF training programs by three approaches and by two periods



Of the 501 AFF training programs, 220 programs fell into the managerial and leadership-oriented approach, 160 into the production and technique-oriented approach, and 121 into the comprehensive and inclusive approach (Figure 4). Among the explanations for this distribution are; the managerial and leadership-oriented programs had greater demands from the recipient countries; KOICA considered capacity improvement in this area more critical than the other two; implanting the training programs in this category was more cost-effective; and it provided better opportunities for political networking.

To examine chronological changes in the main focus, the years were further divided into the two periods, 1991 to 2006, and 2007 to 2015. The year of 2006 was selected for the two reasons: first, the 2005 Paris Declaration with emphasis on aid effectiveness and capacity building and second, KOICA's 15th anniversary with its self-reflection and strategic rearrangement. For the first period, the agency directed the training programs towards the production and technique-oriented approach. Of the total 189 training programs during the first 15 years, 92 programs or 48.7 % covered the production and technique-oriented approach, 62 programs or 32.8 % the managerial and leadership-oriented approach, and 35 programs or 18.5 % the comprehensive and inclusive approach (Figure 4). The agricultural sectors require hardware skills that increase productivity, decrease inputs and operational costs, and improve market quality of produce. Those outcomes from the technical training make a result-based evaluation of a training program clearer. Therefore, when KOICA was pressured to show its aid effectiveness dur-

ing its early years, investment in the technical fields could appear more rewarding than investment in longer-term impacts from improved software skills.

During the second period, or 2007 to 2015, total 312 training programs were implemented. And the programs for the management and policy skills were noticeably increased to 50.6 %. For the technical-skill, its share was 21.8 %, and for the comprehensive and inclusive 27.6 % (Figure 4). This indicated a shift toward software-skills building for agricultural development and food security. In a short term, training for software skills can assist the trainees and their organizations to better design and manage AFF programs. In a long term, they can strengthen national AFF capacity through favorable policies and institution.

The number of the training programs with the comprehensive and inclusive approach increased during this second period. Integration of the 'Saemaul Undong' or new village movement to the agency's AFF program possibly contributed to this increase. Saemaul Undong is the Korean rural development program during the 1970s and 1980s. This program led to the successful increase in agricultural productivity and reduction in the income gap between the urban and rural areas of Korea. Accordingly, the model was promoted as an AFF training program component. Although widely successful in Korea, introducing its own rural development model runs the risk; Korea's own development model may fail to consider contextual factors and challenges that are unique to rural regions in developing countries (Chun et al., 2010). For instance, Lee and Lee (2014) and Abafita et al. (2013) each identified differences in factors between Rwanda and Korea, and Ethiopia and Korea for the successful implementation of the Korean model from the social, political, economic, and cultural perspectives (Lee & Lee, 2014; Abafita, Mitiku & Kim, 2013). For Saemaul Undong to provide a useful guideline over time, the model itself needs a transformation to be more relevant to the current era and target areas (Kwon, 2010).

## IV. Conclusions

The ODA by nature is temporary and volatile. Yet, the international donor communities continue evolving for better aid programs to mitigate poverty and hunger. Of the different aid sectors, agriculture can be the engine of growth especially at the early stages of economic development, and in the regions where reliance on agriculture is high in economic terms. Thus, agricultural growth assisted by international aid provides an effective way to reduce poverty, enhance food security, and accelerate social development. At the same time, donor aid policies are often political choices, thus their aid policies may not mirror the needs and demands of recipient countries for agricultural development and food security.

Of the new donors, Korea outstands for its unique development experience. Many developing countries benchmark Korea for its transformation, from a recipient to a donor, and from an agriculture-based to a knowledge-based economy. For this reason, Korea ODA became the subject of this study to reflect the historical trend and reality of Korea's grants-based ODA to agricultural sectors during the past 25 years.

While Asia was a leading recipient of KOICA's AFF grants, the details of AFF disbursements were distinct by region and aid type probably from the mixture of agricultural needs and demands of different regions, and Korea's national interests. For the AFF training programs, their main objective appeared evolving from the technical-oriented to software-oriented approach. This evolution indicates that software capacity for good agricultural policies, effective leadership and management skills became as important as technical capacity for agricultural growth. This shift may better align with Korea's goal to sustain aid impacts in the long run. Capacity development through training programs can be effective. But power imbalance and political interests have a potential to abuse training programs particularly at the trainee selection stage. Besides, it is challenging to evaluate effectiveness of the training programs, given the one-off and short-term nature of many AFF training programs.

The current study explored part of Korea AFF ODA executed by KOICA and its agricultural training programs. The results offer some valuable insights on the trends of the specific sector and type of Korea's grants-based ODA as many studies have been carried out with the overall Korea ODA. Nevertheless, for a



comprehensive understanding of Korea AFF ODA, this study has limitations. First, it did not fully analyze causes or relations of the trend changes made over time. For instance, specifics of the investment increase in Africa need be identified with such questions as; whether this increase in disbursements is concentrated only in a few African countries, or simply more African countries are included; if then, what the causes or criteria of the changes are; and how relevant the changes are to their agricultural development. To investigate these questions, the AFF disbursements could be dissected by each recipient country, its AFF status in economic terms, or national AFF policies. Second, the AFF training programs can be further analyzed by program duration, or gender ratio of participants. Such information captures additional characteristics of the AFF training programs. Third, any changes in bilateral loans and multilateral assistances for AFF should be examined for a fuller picture of Korea's contribution to agricultural development in its recipient countries. If a country received smaller AFF grants from KOICA, yet larger bilateral loans for its AFF sectors, an exclusive look at the grants can underestimate Korea's contribution. Further research therefore would provide deeper insights on Korea AFF ODA to better assist its recipient countries and conform to international aid norms.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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