A diverse array of stakeholder engagement programs is being coordinated by the Korean Association for Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals. That group, and the broader efforts it has launched, are helping the country accelerate toward their sustainable development goals’ targets.

Background Information

In 2014, the Republic of Korea (ROK) created a non-governmental organization (NGO) that was given special consultative status under the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The group, known as the Korean Association for Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the United Nations (UN) (ASD), consisted of eighteen members of the Korean National Assembly. The ASD has since launched multiple related organizations and efforts, and it works directly with business and government leaders to get them to consider the SDGs in their decision-making processes.

The ASD established another NGO, the Korea National Assembly UN SDGs Forum (NSD) with forty-three members selected from the ruling and opposition parties from the country’s legislative body. The NSD was the world’s first group of congressional leaders formally established to deliver the SDGs, and in July 2016 it was designated as an official Legislative Research Organization by Korea’s 20th National Assembly. Direct work on the SDGs began with the initiation of the NSD, whose members are responsible for proposing and reviewing legislative opportunities for the goals, developing budgets to support the work, and promoting the ROK’s SDG efforts both within and beyond their borders.

The ASD launched two additional programs to strengthen stakeholder engagement efforts for the SDGs in South Korea. The first one is the SDGs Business Index (SDGBI), which provides guidance to firms on sustainable business management, while helping them drive their operations toward the country’s goals. The ASD also launched the Action Initiative for Youth and Women on SDGs, which introduces the SDGs to young people while also working for gender equality.

Approach, Delivery, & Challenges

The NSD was created to help develop practical initiatives for Korea and beyond, while fostering a sense of ownership of the SDGs in the institutions that were tasked with delivering on the goals. Since forming, the group has engaged in and led a diverse set of SDG-related programs. Between February 2014 and
December 2017, the organization delivered thirteen forums on the SDGs, while also making official visits to the UN Headquarters in New York and meeting with Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, and Assistant Secretary-General Thomas Gass. In addition to this, the NSD receives active support from all levels of the Korean government, as well as major NGOs.

In looking to deliver on the SDG targets, the NSD has worked to establish and update relevant legislation and budgets. It has participated in cooperation with global campaigns that engaged with the private sector in promoting SDG goals and efforts, hosted numerous forums, and participated with UN agency efforts. The group has also met with many of the leaders who are driving the goals, including H.E. Mrs. Erna Solberg, the Prime Minister of Norway and the UN's SDG Advocacy Group’s Co-Chair, with whom they discussed the promotion and implementation of the SDGs.

Furthermore, the NSD developed a system of private sector collaboration, which brings together representatives of major corporations and labor unions to act as advisory consultants. The group created an external network comprised of leaders from around the globe to help foster their efforts and development of the program was supported by Amina J. Mohammed, the UN secretary general’s special adviser on post-2015 development planning.

The SDGBI creates an annual publication that helps Korean corporations shift their businesses toward the SDG targets. The effort began with five global enterprises and fifteen major Korean firms expressing formal support for the index. In late 2016, the SDGBI released its first report with one hundred thirty-four businesses participating. The NSD and the SDGBI collaborated on the development of policies for the SDGs, while encouraging more firms to join the effort. To further increase participation, the SDGBI’s leaders worked with the Korean press to raise awareness of the program's benefits. By the time the SDGBI 2017 was published in November 2017, the project had grown to include three hundred and twenty corporations.

The SDGBI encourages enterprises to take a broader approach to the SDGs by tracking their efforts across four areas: environment (with focus on climate change), society, economy, and partnerships. The performance of participating firms is measured on twelve items and forty-five indicators. To help promote the SDGBI efforts, the index's leaders have partnered with Chosun Biz, a major business press outlet that provides related analysis.

South Korea has engaged stakeholders through additional programs, including one that provided professional consultation and assistance to design and implement green campaigns for individual enterprises to minimize carbon emissions. This program was called the Certified Emission Reductions Initiative (CERI). In doing so, they helped enterprises see the SDGs as an interconnected system, rather than a vague, detached set of goals.

The country also developed the SDGs Economy platform to encourage the development of new industries and technologies that are expected to contribute to the achievement of the goals. Targeted sectors for that program include: information technology (IT) and internet of things (IoT), water, renewable energy, bio-energy, smart education, and future transportation. The SDGs Economy platform works to promote the sustainable management of enterprises towards the achievement of the SDGs.

All these efforts have helped Korean lawmakers to accelerate their learning around the challenges and opportunities related to the 2030 Agenda. This will ultimately enable them to draft relevant legislation for the SDGs, and drive collaboration that will help their efforts, as well as those of other countries, as they all work towards the goals.

**Benefits & Lessons Learned**

The NSD is sharing what it has learned with the UN, while also working to form public opinion through written statements to the UN ECOSOC High Level Segment (HLS), other major conferences, and broader
outlets. Three of the group’s written statements have been adopted by the UN’s official document repository. Korea participated in the UN’s Partnership for SDGs Platform by delivering three programs, including the Youth and Women Initiative, the SDGBI & Sustainability Management Initiative, and the Bio and Water Initiative. These efforts were included in the 2016 and 2017 versions of the UN’s Special Report on Partnerships for the SDGs.

South Korea also has the Action Initiative for Youth and Women on SDGs, an NGO under the remit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which supports youth and women-focused SDG efforts. The program awards enterprises for nurturing female decision-makers, and it brings young people together to share and learn about the 2030 Agenda, while preparing them to help deal with the critical challenges ahead. It also gives participants the opportunity to develop a social network for sharing experiences on SDG implementation and seek support, while providing them with a platform for education and job opportunities. Through the initiative, Korea intends to improve gender equality by fostering job security for women, while lifting more of them into high-level decision-making roles. This program has given 300 young people and 500 working women the chance to collaborate during its first two years, and approximately 20,000 young people and working women are believed to have been positively impacted by it. The group has worked to expand its impact beyond its participants by drafting two reports with their opinions on the SDGs. One of those reports was submitted to the Korean government, and the other was sent to the United Nations.

**Opportunities & Next Steps**

For South Korea, the primary goal of working towards the SDGs is to develop collective resilience. Its leaders are developing several new programs that foster cooperation, while working to improve outcomes. To do so, they’re calling on society as a whole, all levels of government agencies, the private sector, NGOs, civil society organizations (CSOs), and academia to do their part. Alongside this, they’re systematically linking the targets and indicators of the SDGs to Korea’s development projects and programs, and they are strengthening partnerships with Asia-Pacific nations in looking to foster better outcomes across the region. As Ms. Ji-hyun Park, Minister and Permanent Representative to UNESCAP, put it, the Republic of Korea “hopes to build in this region a people-centered, peaceful community in which countries share prosperity together and no one is left behind.” To further facilitate the achievement of this goal, the country is increasing its aid budget for 2018 to $2.8 billion, which represents its largest contribution ever.

Looking at the challenges ahead, Korea’s leaders believe multi-stakeholder partnership and private investment are both crucial to their SDG targets. With that in mind, they are working to induce significant investment for the goals. Korea’s private sector typically focuses on a limited subset of the topics that makeup the goals, such as energy use, water and sanitation, low-carbon green growth, and the empowerment of women and youth. To get business engaging on all the goals, the government needs to find ways to make doing so attractive to business leaders. A recent private sector-led project that used mobile communication networks to identify outbreaks of infectious diseases and stem their spread offers a model for future efforts, as it worked to build ties between companies, government agencies, and international organizations like the United Nations, with the intent of delivering positive outcomes for society.

Moreover, the NSD is working directly with CSOs to ensure their concerns are heard and considered in planning and decision making for the goals. The Korean Civil Society Network for the SDGs was created by a group of CSOs working on a variety of related issues. The group provides opportunities for dialogue between CSOs, and it facilitates communication and collaboration between its members and their government. They also submit opinions on the government’s SDG-related reports, and it has recommended that Goal 8 (safe workplace, labor, the right to work), Goal 10 (social, economic, and political inclusiveness, just legal system and practices), and Goal 16 (effective and reliable institution, open and democratic decision making, greater access to information and fair legal system) are the most urgent SDGs for the Republic of Korea to address.

Environmental CSOs are also active in trying to improve transparency and accountability in the political process. Many CSOs, like Korea’s section of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), have identified opportunities within the SDGs that support their organizational aims and are advocating
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for related efforts to be prioritized. SDSN Korea has collaborated with the Korean government to help implement SDG efforts, while also seeking solutions to the related issues via its network of researchers. The group also connects NGOs and universities to facilitate the spread of knowledge and awareness of the SDGs. The SDSN also includes a youth network that is helping with their advocacy efforts. All of this is fostering transparency and a sense of shared ownership of the goals.

At the local level, government units are working to raise awareness of the country's SDG-related programs with their constituents. Some, including those of Seoul, Gwangju, Jeonju, Cheongju, Suwon, and Bupyeong District have launched local sustainable development strategies and crafted reports to measure and share their progress. Some cities have also joined international networks that are working together on important topics like climate change and other environmental challenges, preserving cultural heritage, and protecting human rights.

The SDGs are a complex effort that requires generative engagement between a diverse array of stakeholders. South Korea's leaders recognize the scale of the challenge, and they're working to foster network of people and organizations that will continue to grow and evolve to meet the challenge.

Sources & Verification


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