

South Korea's Pursuit of African Influence: Changing Realities, Undefined Context, and Vulnerability of Korea's International Development Strategy

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Introduction

The just ended Korea Africa Economic Cooperation Ministerial Conference was an opportunity for Seoul to strike a compelling historical narrative that reconciles its "empathy" laden rhetoric as the baseline framework for its so-called mutually beneficial cooperation with African countries¹. The usual mantra swirling around Korea's desire to support impoverished African nations to break the cycle of poverty is embellished with tinsels of politically correct rhetoric of "mentoring Africans" out of their economic doldrums². This rhetoric is characteristic of every attempt to win the minds of those on the other end of development cooperation, yet in realist practice it often masks clearly calculated strategic interests. However, this appears to be deficient in the Korea-Africa relationship.

It is imperative to note that this cooperative forum is embryonic yet it obtains in a much different era. Whilst this cooperative relationship is still unfolding, now is the most opportune moment to conduct a realistic assessment of the salient expectations that define this process, as well as the most likely impact on both parties. Managing expectations, by both sides, is of itself an indispensable prerequisite of every

¹ Started in 2006, the KOAFEC was launched by a partnership between the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) and the Government of Korea and the Export-Import Bank of Korea (Korea Exim Bank). See details of the 2012 Forum from

http://koafec2012.koafec.org/2012_KOAFEC_Ministerial_Conference_Brochure.pdf

² One of the core tenets of the KOAFEC policy is hinged on the Knowledge Sharing Program (KSP) which has "Building and Enhancing Policymaking Capacity" as its principal objectives for engaging with developing countries. Refer to <http://www.koafec.org/en/actionplan/experience2012.jsp?menu=AC22>

cooperative framework (See Schweitzer, 2006). We live in an era where international development primarily occupies the international agenda. This is evinced by the stalled Doha Rounds of negotiations at the WTO, the emerging preeminence of the G20, and the increasing influence of South-South Cooperation through the BRICS.

The world is changing at a magnificent speed, ushering us into a critical moment in world economic history--seismic shifts in economic orthodoxy. Whether such changes will mark another phase of historical endism in international development remains to be seen. Moreover, Europe's and America's precarious economic conditions are in many ways indicative of the profound changes taking place on the global economy and by extension the international development agenda as a whole. This changes the playing field for the KOAFEC and has implications on how Korea goes about its policy formulation and implementation with regard to the gospel of "poverty reduction."

Yet, Africa's economic vigor presents a paradoxical interphase in the odyssey of being "the forgotten continent" of the 1980s through 1990s to the new global growth engine. Real GDP in Africa has grown by 4.9% during the first decade of this century culminating into a cumulative production output of \$1.6 trillion as of 2008 (Roxburgh et al, 2010). Clearly, the transformation taking place in the continent is phenomenal; largely attributable to fundamental structural reforms with a collective net worth far superior to the simplistic commodity boom mantra. Under this milieu most analysts believe that Africa's recent surge holds good prospects for the long-term. This also has implications for the KOAFEC's policy options and approach.

Our argument herein is that it is imperative to contextualize this cooperation in a very realistic manner without being delusional. First, we argue Seoul's policies will be better served if it is able to correctly define Africa for what it is rather than what it thinks Africa is. Secondly, it must be forthright in its policy orientation, utilizing concrete deliverables. Thirdly, Seoul needs to assimilate its Africa policy with its overall long term strategic goals, bearing in mind that Thomas Friedman tells us that the "World is Flat." Fourth, we draw attention to Africa's passive approach to international relations and how it impacts

international cooperation. We conclude by providing policy recommendations that can best serve both sides.

Conceptual, Analytical and Methodological Framework

This paper does not provide a strong theoretical argument but is based on the neoliberal institutionalism school of thought. Our work is also designed to offer a sustained academic discussion on the subject taking cognizance of the fact there is so far very little scholarly work on the Republic of Korea's policy engagement with Africa.

Neoliberal institutionalism is at its best an interest-based theory. It was developed in response to the neorealist perspective which is essentially a power-based theory. At its meta-theoretical orientation the theory is rationalist, positing that actors in the international stage are fully aware of their procedural undertakings and capable of making rational decisions. In terms of behavior model, it assumes that actors seek absolute gains as opposed to neorealist submissions that the actors seek relatives and would pull out of cooperation when they perceive that their counterparts will threaten their power base (Navari 2008: 39-43). As a theory in international cooperation it appreciates the role of institutions to foster cooperation in an anarchic environment. The KOAFEC forum is the medium forum through which this cooperation takes place. We also assume that both African and Korean policymakers are capable of making rational decisions. We also hold that none of these shall seek to pull out of the cooperation based on power-calculations. Rather, the actors will each seek to cooperate based on their interests that the other partner does not have.

This article adopts analytical eclecticism as a research alternative tool. Analytical eclecticism proceeds on the basis that it seeks to find middle ground between strong theoretical assumptions and practice. In this regard it is strongly tied to pragmatism. It is also meant to discuss subject of a wider scope that closely relate to the messiness of the world as opposed to "more narrowly parsed research puzzles" meant to fit certain theoretical arguments (Sil and Katzenstein 2008: 412). In a nutshell, this approach is "a commonsensical approach to research" that is increasingly gaining prominence among scholars (Friedrich and Katrochwil 2009: 708-709). The selection of this theoretical

stance owes to the fact that although the subject under discussion does not present a radical departure in its practical sense [hence the selected theory], it is nascent and occurs in a diametrically variant environment. It is to that end that we chose to bridge the gap between theory and pragmatic issues.

As a pragmatist approach the study relies on qualitative arguments that make use of both primary and secondary sources of data. The authors have attended KOAFEC summits at different times and thus use their observations and interactions with some Korean and African policymakers. We also tend to rely on discourse analysis to substantiate our arguments.

Background of Africa's Place in International Relations

African economic and political history is punctuated with extremes that stood in contrast to those found elsewhere. Although such assessments were not always correct, when factoring in scenarios from Asia and Latin America, the place of Africa in international history has been unique. First was slavery which although commenced by Arabs and sparsely by the Chinese, reached higher levels under European colonialism (Snow 1989). Second, European colonization presented serious problems that still account for modern failures in governance and state building (Anderson 2006; Herbst 1997:130-132). However, it became apparent that Africa became a free ride vehicle for other emerging powers' strategic interests.

During the Cold War Africa became a contested sphere alongside other regions where the great powers sought to gain influence. It is apparent that the case for influence in Africa always had to do with resources. Countries such as Botswana were of less strategic importance to great powers because they had no resources from the onset of the Cold War and were not heavily contested and thus remained neutral. However, although other countries had no natural resources such as Somalia and Eritrea, they inadvertently fell into the strategic map of great powers due to their proximity to international maritime lanes (see Shah 2000). Some other states which are resource

rich such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were somewhat the most contested. Superpowers unleashed their intelligence agencies on those states to influence policy outcomes as well as sponsor regime change (Devlin 2007). Although the Soviet Union never made headway in Africa, its influence was ideological remnants brought by Africans educated in Moscow, and in some cases the African leaders deliberately adopted communism or socialism in order to antagonize or counter Western influence³.

China's use of its influence began early during the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The NAM fostered a certain level of camaraderie between China and African nations. China was already a member of the UN Security Council. It often used this as a platform for buying votes at the UN. It was during this period that this comradeship eventually developed into a big-brother syndrome. African leaders appeared not to have noticed primarily because there was no African nation in the Security Council and there was no readier country to support African countries than China. Moreover, the NAM did not actively stand for anything other than the collective membership distancing itself from the two superpowers. However, the role of China grew. Current studies trace the currently popular China-Africa relationship to the early assistance that Mao Zedong gave to select African countries under the (indirect) aegis of the NAM (see Ikegami 2009: 28-31). However, China changed a lot under Deng Xiaoping and followed a path diametrically divergent from that of African countries.

Today Africa stands isolated from the international community in terms of poverty and development. Its Asian counterpart has produced a developed country and industrialized countries. South Korea's GDP was equal to that of Ghana at the latter's independence but has since become an OECD country. Singapore also moved in a different direction becoming a developed country within a short period of time (Kuan

³ In his book "The Hot 'Cold War': The USSR in Southern Africa," Vladimir Shubin argues that the crux of the Soviet Union's engagement in Africa was not motivated by the desire to gain influence as Western scholars would have us believe but rather a consistent determination to live up to its obligations to defend the weak against the strong. It explains why the Soviet Union aggressively supported so-called liberation movements especially in Southern Africa, according to Him. In that regard, he says Moscow never "request ideological loyalty from the liberation movements." Nonetheless, Moscow in the process opened its doors to any of those interested in a "move towards Marxism."

Yew 2000). The accounts of The Asian Tigers, which are the Newly Industrialized Economies, are also a testament to the progress made by Asia. The Asian Cubs are also an example of a changed Asia. An example is Thailand which has industrialized and cut poverty from thirty-seven percent to nearly 8 percent. China and India have risen not just as regional but international economic power houses. Latin American countries have also made headway but stagnated by increasing inflation and poor monetary policy management. However, Brazil stands out as an emerging international powerhouse that is making headway into Mozambique, Cape Verde and Angola (Romero 2012; The Economist 2012; The Financial Times 2012). Africa is still at the receiving end and has the largest number of poor countries and an increase of middle-income countries and only one industrialized country called South Africa.

Changing African Political Economy Landscape

Africa is quickly changing and escaping its ugly past both in political and economic terms.

Africa currently has a mixed political outlook that is favorably tilting towards good governance. It is common knowledge that Africa is a huge conglomeration of diverse tribal units. Even without the tribal cleavages, the post-colonial Africa includes the likes of chaotic Somalia on the east coast and the remarkably stable and serene Cape Verde on the West Coast. In Southern Africa, all but one country has democratized. Swaziland remains a monarchy but it is yet to be a critical strategic point for existing and emerging economic powerhouses or South Korea itself. Even the Democratic Republic of Congo has managed to hold free elections despite armed conflict in its far eastern borders with Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda. Rwanda is another country that has improved in terms of governance and political stability following the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. Somalia remains one of the most critical cases in Africa. However, this case is more critical and worth discussing fully in a different forum due to its complexity.

It is important to note that the current nature of emerging conflicts in African countries as well as the fortitude and aptitude of African institutions to confront these challenges are somewhat mixed. The acme of this progress can be traced to the creation of the African Union. At its creation the AU sought to rebrand itself as a people-oriented organization (Moki 2007). First, inter-state challenges have disappeared. Conflicts between states such as between Nigeria and Cameroon as well as Botswana and Namibia have successfully been resolved through the International Court of Justice (Ashton 2003). Current conflicts are primarily a result of internal secession or the spread of religious fundamentalism in countries such as Mali and Nigeria. Cases of inter-tribal animosity, such as was the case in Ivory Coast, have since demised and been replaced by national reconciliation and inclusive governance.

It is also important to highlight the changes that have taken place in the Maghreb region. The Arab uprisings were primarily due to economic concerns for which autocracy was only considered an intervening variable. This was primarily the thesis in Tunisia before the uprisings spread to other parts of the Arab region. However, it is imperative to note the increasing economic changes occurring in the continent.

African economies have been growing since the beginning of this millennium and it is important to note their distribution.

There has been significant economic growth within the Southern Africa region coupled with important resource discoveries. With the exception of the Zimbabwean economic crises and Swaziland's debt, there has been significant economic growth in the region. South Africa is the leading economy with a solid economic base in agriculture, mining and extraction industries, manufacturing and services. Botswana also has experienced significant economic growth although the country faces an uncertain future because it is not a diversified economy. Mineral exploration has increased to include platinum and uranium. However, the country has an investor friendly climate and a good record of fiscal management. Namibia is also very stable with proper social overhead capital and access to sea trade lanes. Moreover, there has been a recent discovery of oil and uranium. Malawi, which has always been the poorest in the region, has discovered oil

and natural gas reserves as well as other valuable minerals (Mkula 2012)⁴. It is also important to note that the DRC is part of this compact. Angola has also made significant use of Chinese investments since its stabilization after the civil war of the 1990s (and after the death of UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi). The SADC is working alongside SACU to creating a Free Trade Zone. This picture and development mean a lot in terms of policy shifts on the part of countries with strategic interest in Africa.

The East African Community (EAC) is undergoing serious changes. The EAC is relatively less known in international relations. It consists of Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Burundi. It is important to note that unlike its Southern African counterpart (of which Tanzania is also part), the EAC is primarily defined by a development mandate. All of these countries except for Burundi are considered emerging African economies. Between 1996 and 2008, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda have had a cumulative real income growth of 60, 46 and 61 percent, respectively (Radelet 2010: 13). Indeed, Rwanda enjoys a very special relationship with Korea and thus primarily benefited from Korea's Knowledge Sharing Program (KSP) element of the KOAFEC framework, although the bilateral cooperation predates KOAFEC. It remains to be seen whether this relationship will extend to the business element encapsulated in the KOAFEC policy. Does Korea intend to increase its influence and cooperation to these other countries in the EAC?

In the ECOWAS region Nigeria is an emerging power house. Nigeria is the most populous African nation and is one of the largest oil producers worldwide. Although there are constant debates about it being the epitome of Africa's oil curse, there are significant developments that are geared to making it more investor friendly. This includes overhaul infrastructural development projects in major cities such as Lagos and Abuja. The public accounts office also signaled intentions to rebase its economy. This will significantly boost its GDP by 40% and bring it closer to that of South Africa and

⁴ These discovered were made recently even though those in the northern lake have caused strife with Tanzania. See <http://www.maravipost.com/business-news/business-development/1546-malawi-uncovers-evidence-of-oil,-gas-reserves-in-shire-valley.html>

able to surpass the latter within a decade (Omankhanlen 2012⁵ ; Utuanya 2012⁶). This will invariably attract a horde of investors from China, Japan and the West. This mandates a rethinking of the Korean strategy towards this economic powerhouse as well as rethinking of its West African strategy. Second, there are other important West African states that have been stable for a long time such as Ghana and Senegal. Ghana recently acknowledged oil discoveries and exploration. How will Korea balance its interests against those of its competitors in this region? Then there is the question of Francophone West African states. How will it approach Francophone West African states whose economic and political ties to France are deeply engraved?

There are small emerging oil-rich nations which are virtually still under developed. Equatorial Guinea and Gabon have a population enjoying one of the highest standards of living in the continent. The GDP per capita PPP income of Equatorial Guinea is higher than that of South Korea but falls far short of being an industrialized country (The World Bank Group 2012)⁷. Gabon is among the countries that have openly confessed their preference of a "Look East" policy. It is also clear that South Korea recently registered increased interest in these countries mandating some of its think tanks (Chun 2011). It remains to be seen what Korea's broader strategy will be for such nations.

The above accounts present a changing and differentiated Africa. We are left wondering what Korea means by Africa. Does it take into account the various regions that are acknowledged by NEPAD's geographical stratification of the African continent? The economic realities are also very different and fast changing since the creation of KOAFEC in 2006. What is its overall ODA program strategy? How does it distribute its knowledge sharing strategy? Where and how does it implement its business strategy?

The Vulnerability of Korea's Africa Policy

⁵ <http://tribune.com.ng/index.php/complete-business-package/40611-gdp-rebase-nigeria-south-africa-to-contest-leading-economy-in-africa>

⁶ <http://www.businessdayonline.com/NG/index.php/economic-watch/39404-gdp-rebasing-and-nigerias-macro-economic-ratios->

⁷ Compare the power-purchasing parity at this link
<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD>

No doubt the African continent has been making positive headlines lately. But behind the staggering numbers of growth lies a clumsy omission of a dispassionate interpretation of what all that means. This could be leverage for South Korea if it really means business. Its general strategy is unique compared to other development cooperation models (KOAPEC 2007). However, it has to take the following into account.

There is reason to take Africa serious. Why? China has footprints all over Africa and the seasoned Zambian development economist Dambisa Moyo wittingly says “The Chinese are our friends.” Unlike, Seoul, Beijing’s Africa strategy is consistent with its emerging clout as a global power and can thus afford to throw its weight about in Africa. African leaders view China as the main alternative to the West. China even built the African Union a new Head Office free of charge. This will go a long way in defining China-Africa relations. To ignore the China-Africa relationship would be a huge miscalculation on the part of South Korea. China has the financial capability to offer African governments open-checke incentives in exchange for influence. Can Seoul afford that? It should reflect a clear counter-strategy if KOAPEC intends to be any more influential than it considers itself to be.

Within its limited space as a middle power, employing the most appropriate strategic levers will be the real way to go. How does Korea sell itself to African countries which are obsessed with bigger economies such as Japan and China? Comparably Japan has used TICAD to its advantage although Japan has so far failed to exert considerable influence (Watanabe 2008). Japan used the TICAD forum to achieve clear goals such as at the International Whaling Commission and vying for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council⁸. What is the grand aim of Korea in forming such a forum? Are there any clear strategic goals or is this aid dispensation altruistic? Is it comparable to Western or Nordic forms of aid and development cooperation? Clarifying these goals will go a long way in providing clarity and direction for both parties.

⁸ One of the authors also sat in some of the conferences and high level meetings organized for visiting African delegates, where the Japanese officials clearly reiterated the terms of

Rather than overstretch itself into a roof that will shelter the whole African continent, Seoul must seriously consider crafting the architecture of its policy more forcefully. Does Seoul realize the distinction that exists according to the various regional economic communities? It is important to note that in 2006 KOAFEC explicitly stated in its website that it was primarily concerned with just nine countries (KOAFEC 2007). However it has expanded the number of countries involved in this forum without significantly shifting its policy approach. This could cause various strains and lead to failures, such as the kind incurred by Japan wherein they were characterized as "one-dimensional economic animals" by West and Central Africa states (Moss & Ravenhill 1985: 61). It is thus important that Seoul clarifies its policy: whether to revert to the original nine or continue pursuing a blanket continental policy.

We take a historical caveat to highlight the vulnerability of Seoul's Africa policy. Indeed, it is worth emphasizing that perceptions are important in international relations. Psychological and sociological concepts have permeated international relations studies seeking to demonstrate the link between perceptions and alliance formation (Jervis 1976; Gartzke 2002). Among other things, the two Koreas have historically resorted to the leverage of diplomacy with the goal of influencing or shaping the international perception about the status of the contentiously divided Korean Peninsula. In doing so, they have each been keen on advancing their stakes on the territorial question of the peninsula. In one such classical case, it will be recalled that the UN General Assembly voted to disband the United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) in 1973, following Pyongyang's ability to overwhelmingly garner support for its cause thanks to the strong endorsement the motion received from mainly the newly independent African nations (Michishita, 2009). According to Owoeye (1991), Pyongyang was successful in currying the favor of the newly independent African states by positioning its rhetoric of a divided Korea to fit into the widespread charged post-colonial and anti-imperialist sentiment that had characterized Africa in the second half of the twentieth century. Pyongyang's logic was strengthened by the presence of US forces in the Republic of Korea, which was portrayed by Pyongyang as an emblem of imperialist occupation of the Korean peninsula. Given the avowed anti-imperialist

posture of the newly independent states of Africa, Pyongyang easily attracted the goodwill of African states en masse.

All this while, Seoul was yet to discover that the pursuit of its Hallstein Doctrine in Africa was steadily estranging it from the continent at about the same time that Pyongyang was gaining significant grounds. In one such horrible blunder attributable to this policy; Seoul unilaterally severed its relationship with both the Republic of the Congo and Mauritania because they both accorded diplomatic recognition to Pyongyang. What is more striking is the fact that, Seoul's retributive actions were taking place at the critical point where the two Koreas were competing for admission into the United Nations ostensibly with each side seeking to stake its claim as the only legitimate political representative of the Korean peninsula.

Seoul's policy in Africa, unlike Pyongyang's was evidence of the former's dearth understanding of Africa. In that sense, the latter proved to be more cognizant of the geopolitical caveats of the times. It is even worth noting that alongside gaining massive support in Africa, Pyongyang was simultaneously making significant inroads into the Scandinavian states of Norway, Denmark and Sweden (Armstrong, 2009). It was increasingly becoming certain that the DPRK stood a better chance of acceding to the UN as the only representative of the Korean peninsula. It also undermined the utility of Seoul's desire to isolate the DPRK internationally. Judging by Pyongyang's subtle diplomatic victory in the UN General Assembly riding on the back of popular support and goodwill of the newly independent African states, Seoul took refuge in a strategic recalibration of its policy of engagement in Africa by unilaterally abandoning its ineffective Hallstein Doctrine (Owoeye, 19991). Nothing in the present approach should reset Seoul to this precedent predicament.

Another case of woeful strategic miscalculation by Seoul in its Africa policy has to do with the brouhaha generated from its recent overseas land acquisition policy, especially in Africa. There is reason to believe that the KOAFEC is the harbinger to Korea's ability to pursue its controversial land grabbing policy in Africa. Its recent rapid industrialization has brought with it enormous pressure on its limited arable land, consequently bringing

to the fore questions about its overall long term food security issues (Mullers, 2011). The recent 2008 food price hikes also highlighted just how vulnerable the country was to global food price instability. As a countermeasure, the government in Seoul decided to embark on an all-out mission to acquire vast swaths of farmlands overseas to meet its domestic food supply. However, this decision was/is detrimental to Seoul's grand Africa strategy.

Since this land policy measure took effect, it has successfully been penned in a couple of notable land deals with the governments of Madagascar and the Sudan, albeit triggering some irking reactions. Of particular concern is the fact that observers contend that the very nature of the content of the deals entered is shrouded in deep mystery (Pearce 2012)⁹. For instance, with the active backing of the South Korean government, Daewoo Logistics was able to work through the process of securing a lease of farm land amounting to 1.3 million hectares for a period of 99 years. So unpopular was the proposal that it triggered massive protests in Madagascar which in part resulted in the toppling of then President Marc Ravalomanana by Andry Rajoelina who immediately cancelled the deal (BBC 2009)¹⁰. Given Sudan's miserable human rights and governance records, like many critical observers have noted, we have reasons to be concerned about the framework by which the 1.7 million hectares deal was entered and the extent to which it is representative of the sovereign will of the Sudanese people. Thus consorting with dictators or tyrants against popular attempts at all-inclusive development also dents the grander strategy.

Korea's land-grabbing faced criticism from many quarters. Former and late Libyan leader colonel Muammar Qaddafi denounced the African land grabbing as a manifestation of a "new feudalism" (APA 2009)¹¹. The same sentiment was further echoed by an Oxfam report which chides the entire policy of land grabs in Africa as yet another race to the bottom against the quest for global poverty reduction. According to

⁹ Fred Pearce (May 20, 2012), "Land Grabbing has More Impact on the World's Poor than Climate Change." Accessed from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/20/fred-pearce-land-grab-interview>

¹⁰ BBC, "Madagascar Leader Axes Land Deal", Thursday 19 March 2009, Accessed from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7952628.stm>

¹¹ See the article "South Korea to Use African Land to Feed Korean People" accessed from <http://emergingminds.org/South-Korea-to-use-African-land-to-feed-Korean-people.html>

the Oxfam report, the poorest among the poor are often the victims of land grabbing through a coordinated process of land dispossession targeting small-scale farmers (Oxfam 2012)¹². Korea's land grabbing policies is analogous to the colonial practice of Imperial Japan in dispossessing Korean peasant farmers of their land. As then, resistance to such policies were born out of the determination to ensure national sovereignty acts as a strong hedge against the mean-spirited thinking of sacrificing the weak and poor for the strong and rich. Similarly the European colonizers disposed Africans of land which is the main causes of crises in Zimbabwe and looming crises in South Africa and Namibia. If not attended to, this will eventually prove very corrosive to Seoul's Africa policy.

Towards a Harmonious and Coherent Development Policy

Rather than joining the chorus of development assistance and aid, Korea should use its Africa policy as a means that will enable it to craft a new international norm. Norm setting on the international stage are often shaped by the existing episteme of the day, most of which ride on the back of multilateral cooperation. Granted Korea seeks to tow this line, it should work towards creating a norm regime that will be consistent with its status as a middle power. International norms essentially craft the framework of the behavior of states, in addition to being the mirror that reflects how a state is assessed by other actors¹³ on the international stage (Armstrong and Lambert, 2007). The extent to which a state maintains or upholds international norms determines the identity it assumes leading to others being able to draw conclusions regarding its credibility or otherwise. For instance, constructivists generally contend that when it comes to the question of the long-term interest of states, it is incumbent on them to be able to

¹² See Oxfam's Report published on October 4, 2012 entitled "Land Sold off in Last Decade Could Grow Enough Food to Feed a Billion People" Accessed on October 4, 2012 from <http://www.oxfam.org/en/grow/pressroom/pressrelease/2012-10-02/land-sold-last-decade-could-grow-enough-food-feed-billion-people>

¹³ Civil society groups have in recent times emerged as a challenge to the traditional state-centered view of actors on the international stage. Therefore, how a state is viewed stretches beyond the limited paradigm of inter-state relations to now include the assessment of non-state actors such as civil society groups championing a myriad of causes.

demonstrate a high degree of credibility and predictability by adhering to established norms (Kegley and Raymond, 2010). Failure in this regard will undermine the overall strategy, given increasing assertiveness of African states.

Seoul's current position measured against indicators such as its economic, political, military and cultural disposition proves that it fits the classical definition of a middle-power. Measured in relative terms, Seoul is positioned between the established traditional great powers of the world and the relatively smaller ones, thus warranting it the status of a middle-power.

That said, the status of a middle-power must be accompanied by a definite determination to act as one. In other words, a state should be able to demonstrate its capacity to exert its weight in accordance with its status in standard diplomatic practice. Therefore within the limited scope of this paper, we contend that Seoul ought to premise its Africa policy on niche diplomacy.

Within the frontiers of its capacity as a middle-power, niche diplomacy will better enhance its ability to pursue definitive goals leading to concrete deliverables. Seoul, like every middle power is strategically constrained in terms of garnering the sort of political capital that can afford it an autarkic influence required to achieve its goals. A case in point is the heavy foot prints that China has engrafted across the entire continent of Africa. Being the great power that it is, it is within China's means and competence to throw its weight about in courting influence. Seoul will certainly find it a tall order to match China's Africa inroads boot for boot.

Nonetheless, diplomatic dexterity is still a viable alternative option for a middle power such as Seoul that has its sights set on Africa. In saying this, we are seeking to contextualize the essence of niche diplomacy as Seoul's best chance of achieving the goals of its Africa policy. The chances for Seoul are so far very promising given its recent record of international good citizenship, spanning from its activism in the area of international development, nuclear security and most conspicuously environmental

consciousness packaged in its signature “Green Growth Policy” (Feldman 2011)¹⁴. Measured against this, South Korea’s record is credible enough to afford it a seat on the table of the international society. This is itself a threshold for norm entrepreneurship.

Basically the whole idea behind pursuing niche diplomacy is to be able to fill a specific niche that has been identified by a state, but most importantly viewed from the perspective of the state’s capacity to address the need in question (Cooper, 1997). Niche diplomacy is further hinged on a consistent display of “entrepreneurial flair and technical competence” (Cooper *et al*, 1993) which makes it for a state to act as a facilitator and a mediator in working towards realizing specific issues and outcome. Both material and non-material incentives including grants, market access and a host of others are typically offered by states pursuing niche diplomacy to the states it seeks to influence.

The time is right for it to seriously consider establishing its own set of norms that will overtime be codified into international principles. Maneuvering through its middle-power constraints will require it to establish coalitions with African states that share its vision. In that respect, its policy makers must begin to seriously consider cherry picking at this juncture of its outward growth. As it seeks a bite from the African resource pie, riding on the momentum of its prowess can enable it to align its long term normative objectives with the quest for building coalitions along its core area of competence and affordability.

Engaging with African countries should not in any way be misconstrued as the goal but more of a means to achieving mutually accepted deliverables at the behest of Seoul. We are also aware that whatever shapes the architectural outlook of this relationship takes, Seoul shall be the one steering the course of the relationship.

Finally, taking cognizance of the fact that the KOAFEC hinges on mutually beneficial cooperation, it is our contention that the realization of this goal will heavily depend on the ability of both sides to agree on what deliverables ought to be pushed through and

¹⁴ Stacy Feldman (Jan 26, 2011), “Green Growth, South Korea’s National Policy, Gaining Global Attention,” Accessed from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/26/idUS148995237220110126>

in that regard forcefully reaching out for it. We recommend that future studies should commit to critically identifying which areas of Korea's remarkable development model cannot be replicated in Africa. It is our view that beneath the euphoria lies some unique and localized elements that can provide useful guides going forward.

Conclusions

Seoul cannot afford to invite every African country to the table, because Africans are diverse and bring this diversity with them to the table, Seoul needs to be forthright with what it wants in Africa then go for it.

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