



## Expanding Korea's Development Paradigm? The Case for Closer Samoa-ROK Relations\*

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In 2010 South Korea became the first country to graduate from aid recipient to aid donor status in the OECD DAC framework. However, since its entry into the development assistance fray, South Korea's development aid program has been criticized for following realist, self-interested goals, as well as a lack of coordination and effectiveness in aid efforts. In response, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), the South Korean development aid agency has focused on select countries and regions to better enhance the effectiveness of its program. This paper uses a mix of primary (interviews) and secondary data to make the case for a wider South Korean development paradigm that looks to the Pacific region in expanding its assistance to Samoa. It argues that fostering an expanded development relationship with the small island nation represents a real strategic opportunity to enhance South Korea's reputation in the region. Additionally, due to its size, increased investment in small amounts can help to improve aid effectiveness from an impact perspective and presents an ideal development partner by way of synthesized development goals.

[Key Words: Korea, Samoa, KOICA, Development Aid, Middle Power]

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## I . Introduction

At the beginning of the 3rd South Korea-Pacific Island Forum, a high-level foreign ministers' dialogue involving 13 Pacific Island countries, held in Seoul, December 2017, South Korean President Moon Jae-in called for "enhanced Korean ties with Pacific Island nations (Yonhap, 2017)." President Moon's typically upbeat and cooperative rhetoric reflects a nation that has been committed to growing its global reputation as part of the international arena for many years (Hermanns, 2013; Kim S, 2000). Top on the agenda would see South Korea (herein used interchangeably with ROK and Korea) work toward increasing development cooperation efforts in helping the islands combat climate change, which is an area of urgent concern that Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are currently grappling with (see: Mackay et al, 2018; Perkiss and Moerman, 2018; Robinson, 2018).

Throughout South Korea's development assistance history, its lack of focus on the Pacific region has been intimated by the low levels of budgetary assistance allocated to the region in comparison to other areas of the globe.<sup>1)</sup> Moreover, South Korea's development assistance program has been criticized on many fronts for being too focused on South Korean interests (realist perspective), in allocating assistance based on economic opportunities and strategic reasons (Kim and Chun, 2017). It has also been criticized for being too dis-coordinated, limited in amount and structurally, tending to be tied, thus, hampering the agency of recipient countries.<sup>2)</sup> Other scholars have also identified the issue of the politicization of the

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1) See figure 5 which shows the relative amount of funding provided by KOICA to the Pacific region in comparison to Asia and Africa. The amount is roughly one percent vis-a-viz the other two regions.

2) This is a criticism that is not unique to South Korea's aid program, see Gunning 2015 for a wider discussion that is levelled at the entire aid community that touches on these issues. The literature review provides more Korean context.

development aid project and how public consensus has not been achieved. A criticism being that it is just an ideological project of the political elite (see Watson, 2011).

This paper examines how an expanded South Korean development relationship with the Pacific enters this fray. It focuses on what impact an expanded bilateral aid agreement between the ROK and Samoa could have on KOICA and the ROK's development aid project. It builds the argument that closer Samoa-ROK relations through a bilateral aid development relationship presents a real opportunity for the ROK in that Samoa's country profile, size, history, culture and geographical proximity to the ROK make it a good candidate to help lift the ROK's positive presence in the Pacific region. We also posit that an expanded development aid relationship formalized in a bilateral aid agreement with Samoa can be achieved simultaneously while mostly side-stepping the criticisms the ROK aid project has been levelled with in the past. Samoa is also a good geo-strategic investment for the ROK being a trusted ally of China (Iati, 2010) and the United States, enjoying a positive leadership role in the Pacific region, with extremely strong ties to Australia and New Zealand.<sup>3)</sup>

## II. Brief Review of Literature on Korean Development Assistance

Over the past few years, South Korea has become visible on the world

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3) Samoa is a former New Zealand colony and Australia has pledged \$47 million WST in aid project assistance in the 2017-2018 financial year. See: Department of Foreign Affairs, Australian Government "Overview of Australia-Samoa Aid Partnership Arrangement 2016-2019" Accessed March 15:

<http://dfat.gov.au/geo/samoa/development-assistance/Pages/development-assistance-i-n-samoa.aspx>

stage as one of the most active donors out of Asia (Atwood, 2012; Kim, 2011; Kalinowski & Cho, 2012 quoted in Kim 2016). South Korea's rise in the development world has been in-line with its Global Korea policy that has been actively pursued as a foreign policy goal by successive South Korean governments since the 1990s (Watson, 2011). A policy that aims to increase South Korea's standing internationally. Official Development Assistance (ODA) policy in South Korea is highly contested terrain characterized by competition and collaboration between a range of stakeholders. These include government ministries, development NGOs, researchers, journalists, labor unions, private sector firms competing and collaborating to project different visions and interests, ultimately contesting policy narratives (Kim, 2016). The following brief review of literature focusing on Korea's ODA practices makes no pretense of being exhaustive, however highlights the dominant critical narratives of the ROK's development assistance program.

The literature on Korean ODA is vast in both English and Korean. Empirical studies have criticized Korean development practices in different regions such as Africa, where clear strategic goals toward securing resources and markets have been identified (Darracq & Neville 2014; Kim, 2013; Yoon & Moon 2014, Lumsdaine & Schopf, 2007). Others have found differentials in amounts allocated to African nations and Asian nations, with the majority of aid given out by KOICA focused in these two areas. Some arguing that this is a reflection of bias toward economic interests (Gun Chung, 2013). More critical yet, were Kim and Gray (2016), who suspected an imperialist streak to South Korean motivations on the continent. However, Hyo-Sook Kim (2017) presents a different perspective. In using a qualitative methodology, Kim claims that an internalization of the international norm toward the reduction of poverty has recently reversed this trend. Thus, resulting in South Korean efforts to increase its

development assistance toward Africa.

Empirical studies reflect a wider consensus in the early literature on South Korean development aid that critiqued it as being primarily focused on its own interests (Kim, 2009; Koo & Kim 2011). As such has tended to have little impact on recipient country's economic growth. This being a result of the structure of its assistance, which tended to be in the form of loans and tied aid (Chun et al, 2010). Another issue for South Korea in the past has been a lack of coordination in aid efforts and goals (You, 2009), as well as small amounts allocated to too many recipients. A situation which KOICA committed to rectifying in 2010.<sup>4)</sup> However, even with KOICA's change in its aid modality to the Pacific in 2010, the level of support offered to the Pacific Islands as a whole is still relatively small in comparison to other regions of the world, and focused on a few countries in the Pacific.<sup>5)</sup>

Moreover, Iain Watson (2011) argued that to understand the present and future directions of South Korean development assistance, it was necessary to focus on how South Korean attitudes toward the foreigner are constructed. It is well-known that for Koreans, the issue of cultural transformation is particularly sensitive, as it is traditionally known as being one of the most homogenous nations in the world (Kyung-Koo, 2007; Lee

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4) According to KOICA (2010) it would narrow down partner recipient countries to focus its resources on a limited number of projects and coordinate responses that focused on poverty reduction and sustainable development as well as scaling up assistance levels. This included plans to reduce the amount of tied aid and increase amounts of assistance provided to development partners.

5) Statistics gathered on flow by region show that KOICA's development assistance to the Pacific Islands has doubled since 2010, from roughly about 2.5 million USD to just over 5 million in 2016. This is small in comparison to Africa and Asia who received over 100 million and 200 million USD in 2016 from KOICA. In addition, this direct comparison does not factor in population size vis-a-viz amount of aid given through KOICA as a ratio, so is not meant as an argument in of itself, that KOICA focuses on other regions too much, rather it just gives an overview of the different flows of KOICA assistance.

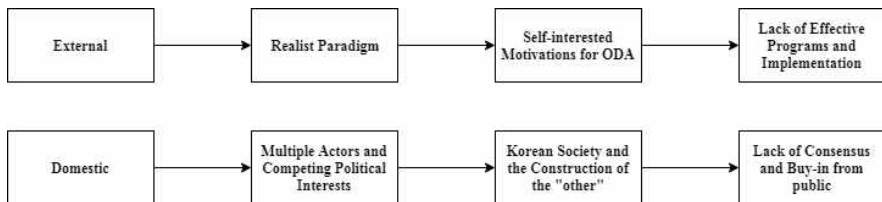
2009). When applied to the lens of development assistance, it is a way of coloring people's perspectives. Quoted by Watson (2011), Chang (2010) argued that a gap is emerging between the elite-led Global Korea policy which aimed for increasing international acknowledgement of the ROK as an active donor, and a more skeptical South Korean public who holding the view that the ROK is becoming subject to the demands of foreign nations at a time of great economic austerity and national insecurity.

Watson's (2011) approach asks for a situated critical positioning, in understanding the circumstances that can help explain the decisions of actors involved in Korea's ODA program. Given that South Korea has had to rely on its human capital due to a lack of natural resources in its own development miracle, South Korea and other Asian nations have been accused of not fully understanding the dynamics and the development paradoxes existing in other places. For example, sub-Saharan African states that are subject to controversial problems like the 'resource curse' (Collier & Goderis, 2009; McFerson, 2010). Moreover, Asian donors like Korea have been accused of not being attuned to the complexities of African history and culture, often underestimating cultural conflicts in recipient countries (Chang, 2010). Kim Dongsuk (2014) argued that ROK aid policies toward Africa needed to also help build cultural infrastructure as well as simplify the conditionality that was placed on ROK assistance.

However, the literature also finds that history has also been instructive. In the sense that ODA is also being used as a way of indirectly showing national prestige through a 'pay back' or a 'rewarding' system. Recipient countries such as Ethiopia, the Philippines and Colombia have received assistance from the ROK explicitly motivated by their assistance provided to the ROK during the Korean War (KOICA 2010). As such, prior research shows that Korea's development assistance program is not only affected by national strategic interests, but by domestic actors as well.

Thus, inferring from prior literature in the field, the criticisms of South Korea's development contributions in the past can be summarized by figure one categorized here as external and domestic concerns. External concerns relating to what some would call a realist paradigm that we use here to represent self-interested motivations for its ODA program. Which in turn affects the effectiveness of its programs and their implementation. Moreover, domestically, the process of setting a domestic political agenda is complicated by a range of actors with competing political interests. This is further muddled by the way in which Korean society views outsiders. Resulting in a lack of consensus between political elites and a wide range of actors around the scope and purpose of Korea's ODA program.

Figure 1: Analytical Framework – Criticisms of South Korea's Development Paradigm



### III. Theoretical Framing and Methodology

In a broader sense, this paper touches on issues to do with motivation of donor countries to give aid and how we can measure the effectiveness of donor contributions. The development aid literature is considerable in size. In simplifying the voluminous array of literature available, it can be said that there are two main explanations given for motivations in giving aid based on aid modalities. Bilateral aid is more tied to donor interests (broadly defined) and multilateral aid is often more needs based loosely

defined as recipient interests (Milner, 2006). In line with donor interests, other studies have shown that size matters. For countries like the US, the motivations are clearly strategic interests where in contrast, humanitarian interests were more important for the smaller donors (Gunning, 2005). Additionally, Alesina & Dollar (2000) found that donor country rhetoric rarely matched aid practices, in that strong historical ties i.e. whether a country was a former colony or not was a more useful determinant of levels of assistance provided by donor countries. Berthelemy (2006) identified clusters in terms of motivations for development aid ranging from altruistic and egoistic in determination by different donors. While there are more layers to this on-going debate, what is clear is that the literature points to multiple reasons and motivations for aid being disbursed.

Thus, the provision of development assistance by a donor as a totality cannot be characterized simply as being motivated by one factor. Additionally, there exists a problem with attempting to delineate what constitutes a single agreed upon measure of national self-interest. It remains a subjective area of definition that is affected by each donor's specific social, historical, domestic politics and geo-strategic context. Therefore, this paper takes the posit that we should accept that pluralistic determinants of aid exist among donor flows, and the pursuit of strategic interests should not be seen as inherently negative. Nor should it be seen as an impediment to the development of new relationships. Rather, for donors, as long as strategic interests meet in mutual territory with the agency of recipient countries, development aid should be able to side-step these criticisms of self-interested motivations.

One such way this can be achieved is focusing on aid effectiveness. In development circles, often, the key determinant of aid effectiveness seems to be poverty reduction, and standards are based on quantifiable statistics (see: Gillis et al, 1992). Measuring levels of development has often been the

domain of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and whether interventions have been successful in helping to raise developing countries' Gross National Income (GNI) (Kelley, 1991). However, as mentioned previously, the motivations for giving aid is diverse across different donors. Thus, the target of poverty reduction is complicated by the pluralistic motivations for donor contributions. Understandably, in measuring development in general, GDP has been criticized as limited and unable to capture life satisfaction and well-being (Costanza et al). Some have argued, that this has not really improved significantly since 1975 (Kubiszewski et al, 2013). Alternative forms of measuring development have thus emerged such as the UN's Human Development Index (HDI), which emphasizes that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone (UNDP: accessed 05/22/2018).

In Samoa's case, Samoa is unique in that it became the first Pacific Island nation to graduate from Least Developed Country status to developing country status in 2014 (UN, 2014).<sup>6)</sup> Therefore, a limited approach that focuses on poverty reduction and increasing GDP and GNP as a measure for aid effectiveness may be inappropriate for Samoa. In Samoa, it has always been recognized that extreme poverty and hunger do not exist in the form envisaged in the SDGs and are not relevant to Samoa (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2016).<sup>7)</sup> To be sure, this does not mean that poverty does not exist in any form in Samoa, rather, that the UN definition

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6) Admittedly this does raise the question of whether Samoa needs more aid for another donor when other countries in the Pacific may be quantifiably better candidates, Samoa is still a developing country and despite major strides being made, it is still in need of support in many areas. Arguing the contrary would be just as counterproductive

7) Samoan cultural customs emphasize a sharing of resources between families and villages. A lack of abundance of food in Samoa for example is not a problem. Rather, issues to do with unequal access to education and employment opportunities, which affects health and general well-being are present in Samoa.

of extreme poverty being people living on less than \$1.25 per day, does not. For the purposes of this paper, and any further analysis of what a hypothetical outcome might be on a Samoan development relationship with the ROK, we argue that more nuanced and wider measures should be employed.

Therefore, for this paper's analysis, we argue that a potential South Korea - Samoa bilateral aid relationship should be hypothesized for effectiveness across other areas beyond extreme poverty reduction. The framing that this provides for our paper is that an opportunity exists here to focus in on strategic motivations for a bilateral arrangement as well as broader social impacts in Samoa.

This paper's data collection methodology is two-fold. We use a combination of secondary sources in the form of statistics and interview data gathered from development aid practitioners across Samoa's government and private sector, which is part of a larger project to build the paper's arguments. As the interviews took place in a Samoan context, the interviews use an indigenous Pacific methodology in gathering data called *talanoa* methodology. *Talanoa* belongs to the phenomenological research family that approaches research by focusing on understanding the meaning that events have for participants (Patton, 1991).

*Talanoa* is a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations. It is a conversation, carried out face-to-face and a multi-layered critical discussion that is culturally situated in a space where researchers holistically intermingle emotions, knowing and experiences with research participants (Vaioliti, 2016). *Talanoa* removes the distance between researcher and participant and provides research participants with a human face they can relate to (p.25). When this distance is removed, informants are more likely to reveal deeper narratives and data that can provide more nuance in approaching research questions.

We also argue that this is a culturally appropriate way to conduct interviews as understanding the Samoan context was not only key in being able to access research participants but also in deconstructing the power dynamic which is embedded within the relationship of researcher and subject (Smith, 2013).<sup>8)</sup> With one of our research team being Samoan and a native speaker of the language, the deployment of *Talanoa* methodology was possible in this case.

Having an insider as an interviewer carries many merits throughout the process of data collection and analysis, as it necessarily requires the researcher to have intimate and direct contact with those being researched. As evidence of the appropriateness of this methodology, participants often agreed to change their schedules, break government protocol of not providing interviews during lockout periods, precisely because the research team had a Samoan who understood Samoan customs and the language. Moreover, given that the interviews were conducted with elite informants, including the Head of Registrations at Samoa's Office of the Electoral Commissioner, Samoa's Development Aid Coordinator and the Prime Minister of Samoa, it was advantageous to have a Samoan researcher who held a Samoan *matai*<sup>9)</sup> title. Thus, the researcher's cultural and educational background formed a positionality that helped them overcome any potential stonewalling from informants as interactions with the researcher

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8) Western research methodologies have been criticized for the inherent power-differentials that they embody by indigenous and Pacific researchers alike. See Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* for more explanation. This distrust is linked to the colonial context, in which informants often repeated to our research team that they were the "most studied" in the Pacific and found it more comfortable and reassuring to not have a Western researcher conducting this work. They felt they could be more honest and trusted our Samoan researcher to be able to tell their narratives in a way that did not misrepresent them.

9) *Matai* is the Samoan equivalent of a chief. Titles are bestowed by Samoan families to individuals indicate their selection as a leader in their family and village life. For an introduction to Samoan political structures, see: Meleisea (2005).

did not compromise Samoan cultural conventions around age, status and seniority.<sup>10)</sup> However, the research team was also cautious about having our ‘eyes open’ and taking the position of “assuming we know nothing about the issues being studied.” This is an approach Asselin (2003) suggested needs to be taken by insider researchers. We minimized the risk of bias in interpretation by inviting a non-Samoan researcher to audit the interviews and discussion, to remove any potential misinterpretation detected throughout the interviews.

Consent for participation was sought before, throughout and after the interviews were conducted. Any items that participants were not comfortable with were taken off the record. In many cases, the quotes used were again cleared with participants to ensure that their quotations would not bring any undue harm to them professionally or personally. The data has been interpreted by the research team to build its arguments. In doing so we take an abductive research approach, emphasizing data which contradicts or does not fit with existing theories, which becomes the starting point of theory construction (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). As Samoa has no existing bilateral aid relationship with the ROK, limited relations overall, this focus of this paper can be seen as “unexpected” in many ways.

#### IV. Chinese Aid and South Korea’s Relationship to the Pacific

The possibility of expanded South-South cooperation has often been

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10) As a highly traditional society, Samoan societal norms require for the status between two people to be respected. This status is often derived from seniority and whether an individual has a chiefly rank. No Samoan can take political office without a title, our researcher in possessing a *matai* title could speak to informants from a position of equal footing. See Meleisea (1987) for more information on Samoan cultural norms.

discussed as a potential challenge to the dominance of Western donor countries and organizations (Quadir, 2013; Gray & Gills, 2016) and hailing the dawn of a “new era” in development aid (Melville & Owen, 2005). The rise of China has become a focal point of concern. China’s rising role in the Pacific has come under increasing scrutiny as the new “banker” in town (Hanson & Fifita 2010) and has suffered from accusations of realist motivations like South Korea, through its high level of tied aid ‘flexing’ and secretive nature of their dealing in the Pacific (Hanson, 2010). Their role has also been examined from within the framework of diplomatic chess with Taiwan (Atkinson. 2010; Zhang, 2007). In terms of effectiveness, Australian Pacific and International Development Minister, Concetta Fierravanti-Wells has harshly criticized the Chinese program in the Pacific calling it useless and leading to countries taking on debt that it can’t afford (Graue & Dziedzic, 2018). The Pacific is now emerging as a key battleground for geo-political posturing with Australia and New Zealand, both countries who have enjoyed a relative hegemony in the Pacific with American backing, scrambling to make sense of an increased Chinese presence in the region.<sup>11)</sup>

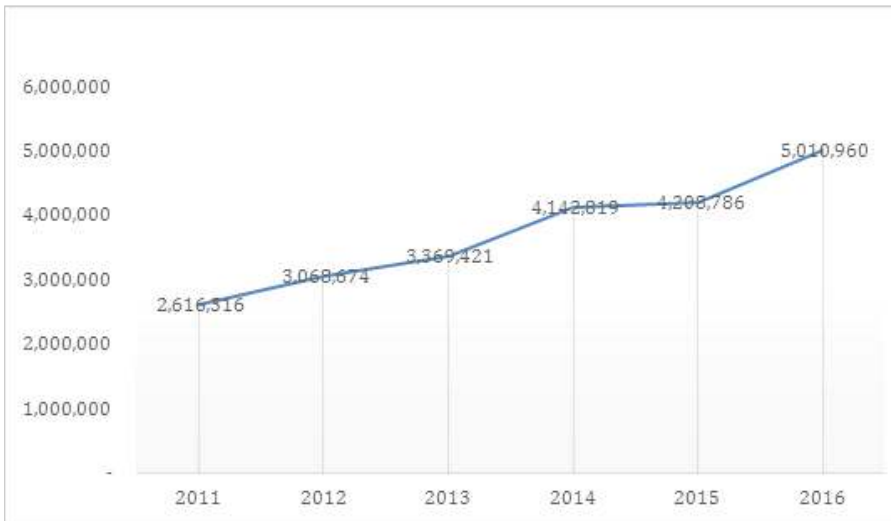
China’s involvement in Samoa includes the construction of government facilities including a new parliament building, hospital, airport, sports facilities, and a training center for Samoa’s police force. This is all part of a number of Chinese backed projects funded from a multibillion-dollar aid package in the region (Radio New Zealand, 2018). In contrast, Korea’s role in the South Pacific is nearly invisible in the academic literature. Although a relatively new area of focus, the Pacific region has received development

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11) The New Zealand government announced an extra \$1 billion (NZD) in funding for its diplomatic missions on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The majority of this funding is earmarked for New Zealand’s “Pacific reset” – a move that has been seen as a way to counter balance the growing Chinese influence in the region. See Stacey Kirk’s article in [stuff.co.nz](http://stuff.co.nz) “Budget 2017: ‘Pacific reset’ will increase foreign affairs funding to \$1b over four years”

assistance from the Republic of Korea in the past. Due to the scant literature focusing on Korea's role as an aid donor in the South Pacific region, the data collected here came directly from KOICA's published statistics and through interview data with Samoan government officials. In 2010, when KOICA began to focus its efforts to a limited number of countries and regions, it has nearly doubled ODA assistance provided to the region. In 2010 KOICA provided just over 2.5 million USD to the Pacific, with that figure rising to over 5 million USD by 2016 (see figure 2).<sup>12)</sup>

Figure 2: Aid Disbursement to the Pacific Islands 2011–2016



Source: KOICA

According to KOICA, the majority of funding to the Pacific has been

12) These figures do not include amounts given by the Korean government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and other government programs such as funding of NGOs that provide project assistance in the region. For example, in 2017, the Association of World Electoral Bodies (AWEB), pledged a \$2 million investment in revamping Samoa's electoral system that was funded through the ROK government, this aid flow is not counted in KOICA's data.

funneled through multilateral organizations with nearly three quarters (73%) of the total amount disbursed to Fiji, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (see figure 3). This funding was spread over specific project-type budgetary support, KOICA's fellowship program, which can be described as technical assistance (TA) in consultancy and training roles, supplemented by small grants. It appears the biggest benefactor in KOICA's streamlined and targeted funding has been the Solomon Islands, whose funding from KOICA increased seven-fold from 2011-2016. During the same period, aid disbursement to Samoa fell by nearly two thirds (see figure 4). The peak in assistance provided to Samoa from KOICA was during the 2013-14 period, due to Samoa hosting special events including the SIDS conference in 2014. KOICA provided assistance in the form of grant money to Samoa for budgetary support during these events.

From a Samoan perspective, Samoa has expressed an interest in developing its relationship with the Republic of Korea. On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, Samoa appointed its first ever honorary consul to South Korea, signaling its intent on increasing trade with the ROK, especially in the area of tourism (Sharma, 2018). In interviews conducted as part of research for another project, we were able to speak to Samoa's Development Aid Coordinator, in Samoa's Ministry of Finance where all development aid into the island is monitored. She expressed a keen desire for Samoa to expand on and formalize a bilateral aid agreement with the Republic of Korea.

*"We do get support from Korea it's quite limited, administered via our office/post in Wellington, the most I believe it to be for \$200,000 annually and has come through more regularly lately<sup>13)</sup> [...] as Samoa is yet to have an official bilateral relationship with Korea. [...] We would certainly*

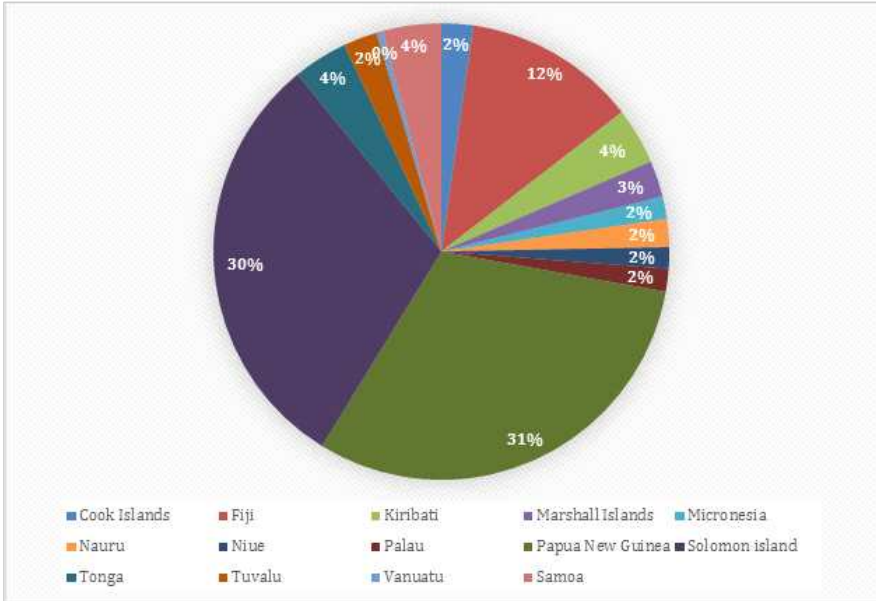
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13) This figure is not included in official KOICA aid flows as it was administered directly through the ROK's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

*welcome an expanded relationship with Korea and are open to South-South cooperation.”*

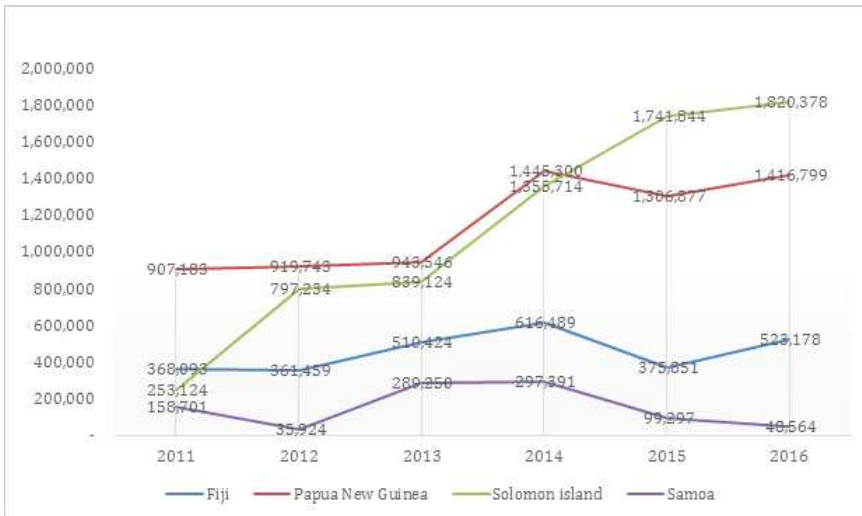
In a meeting with Samoa's Prime Minister that was not digitally recorded for reasons of national interest, the Prime Minister expressed a similar sentiment, relaying in Samoan that the development of a bilateral aid agreement with the Republic of Korea would become an area of priority for Samoa. An expanded relationship with the small island nation and the Pacific Islands at large is most certainly an area of possible expansion for the ROK. If we were to pool together the total amount of funding that KOICA gave to Africa (104.32 million USD), Asia (200.19 million USD) and the Pacific Islands/Oceania (5 million USD), of that total pool of funding, roughly 1% went to the Pacific Islands in 2016 (see figure 5). This means that at a nominal level at least, space does exist for an increase in development aid to the Pacific. The next section will discuss how a bilateral relationship with Samoa could be beneficial for the ROK's development aid project. The aim of this section is to examine the argument that a bilateral development relationship with Samoa may be able to side-step these challenges and open more potential opportunities for the effectiveness and strategic positioning of KOICA's development aid program.

Figure 3: Pacific Islands Aid Disbursement by Country



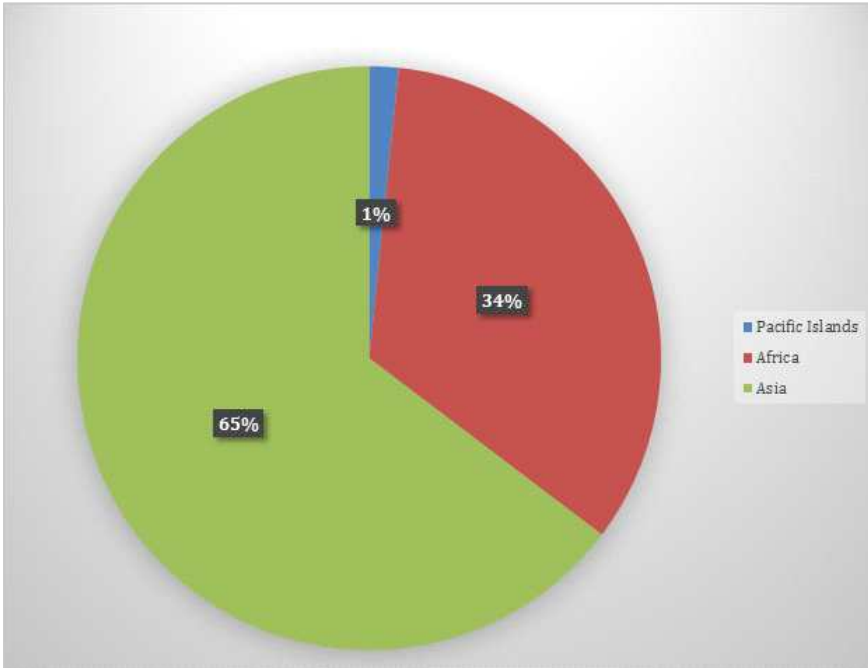
Source: KOICA

Figure 4: Changes in Aid Disbursement Aid Compared to Samoa from 2011 to 2016



Source: KOICA

Figure 5: Comparison of KOICA Aid Disbursement Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands 2016



Source: KOICA

## V. Analysis: A Samoa-ROK Bilateral Relationship and Overcoming Prior Critiques

As outlined in the literature review, South Korea has had its development paradigm criticized as pursuing a realist paradigm which centers its own interests. As outlined in our theoretical framework, we take the position in this paper that development aid should be accepted as a mix of both. Whether the rhetoric matches this or not is irrelevant in that intent does not preclude the outcome being both humanitarian, and advancing the interests of donor countries. Therefore, we purport that a relationship with

Samoa would advance ROK strategic interests and be effective in helping Samoa achieve its own development goals. A situation which can be attributed to the unique characteristics of the Samoan nation, its culture, history and its geographic land mass.

## 1. Size

Samoa's land mass is roughly 2842km<sup>2</sup> with a population that hovers around 200,000. Samoa is relatively small in comparison to other nations in the Pacific that KOICA gives funding to such as Papua New Guinea (land mass: 462,840kms<sup>2</sup>, pop: 8.085million) and the Solomon Islands (28,400kms<sup>2</sup> pop: 599,419).<sup>14)</sup> In the past, the ROK has been criticized for resource grabbing being one of its motivations for developing its aid programs in some regions, Samoa as a land mass has few natural resources that the ROK could gain materially.<sup>15)</sup> When quizzed as to why they believed South Korea had not sought a bilateral relationship with Samoa in the past, top-level officials in Samoa's government believed that being the Pacific nation with the smallest Exclusive Economic Zone, made it far less attractive to donor countries motivated by these factors. Implying that Samoa's lack of fishing waters was an impediment for attracting bilateral investment. This is an important consideration, A Korean relationship with Samoa would at the least be defensible against this resource grabbing

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14) Country profiles were derived from the CIA Factbook through the US State Department.

15) It was suggested by one reviewer that Samoa has a UN vote an EEZ and influence in Oceania, therefore, any development relationship with Samoa, it can be argued is still strategically motivated. However, that is accounted for in the theoretical framing of this paper that argues strategic motivations are part and parcel of donor motivations. This paper does not argue that a relationship between South Korea and Samoa would avoid this. Rather it posits that certain criticisms such as resource grabbing can be answered when contextualized in this manner.

criticism

Another criticism of Korean development aid is that the small amounts of investment that have been given in the past to recipient countries have tended to be ineffective in helping aspire their development. However, Samoa's case provides an opportunity for effective program interventions. The obvious correlate being Samoa's small size, which means that limited amounts of assistance, targeted in the right places can allow Korean money to go further than in places like Africa and Asia. But going one step further, without the appearance of a resource driven motivation, Korean aid contributions in Samoa can be deployed for projects that go beyond a poverty alleviation lens. An example being the recent funding of an Information Communication Technology (ICT) voting system to be introduced at Samoa's next general election. The system is worth nearly \$2 million USD over 4 years that came through the Association of World Electoral Bodies (AWEB) via the ROK's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>16)</sup>

Once again through interviews that were conducted with Samoan officials in Apia, we were able to ascertain the perceived impact it would have on Samoa's development as part of streamlining and strengthening of its democratic processes, a key pillar of the Sustainable Development Goals and identified in Samoa's national strategy. Here is an excerpt from an interview conducted with Head of Registrations at Samoa's Office of the Electoral Commissioner (SOEC). He explains how this new system funded by the ROK via the Association of World Electoral Bodies will help to improve the tracking of deceased Samoans who could now be better monitored and taken off the electoral role. As a result, the efficiency of Samoa's electoral system can be improved. Samoa's unique cultural and historical context means that its very large and mobile diaspora

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16) This information was gleaned from interviews with Samoa's Office of the Electoral Commissioner

complicated the task of keeping accurate records. Something that was becoming extremely difficult to do without biometric measures. When asked if the new system would improve the situation, the head of registrations replied:

*What we did in the past was we went around to every village, we used the pulenu'u - (main village chief), but there's nothing we could do about it, they would show us and we witnessed the graves, but there were no immediate family members (only people authorized by Samoan law to remove a name from the electoral roll), even if we submitted the list to the statistician, sometimes they don't record it, if it hasn't been recorded by the families, they can't do anything about it. But we also had the situation where we reported people and removed them from the roll and they turned up. Or when there's two different people, one name but two different people. So, we remove the son, but it was meant to be the father, we've had a lot of cases like that. [...] You know how it is for us Samoans and people's names [...] We took the pulenu'u's word for it, but it was a mistake. With the new system, we'll be able to eliminate a lot of these problems.*

The electoral commissioner himself also remarked that the system would revolutionize Samoa's voter registration system, in helping to strengthen the security and robustness of Samoa's elections. Moreover, Samoa's government is currently focusing on the establishment of a national identification database. At present there is no national registration system in Samoa. The electoral commissioner revealed that he would be recommending to the Samoan government that this ICT system be used to potentially fill that void. In turn, it could help to strengthen the work of government departments in Samoa:

*If our (National ID) taskforce is willing to use this system, every time our*

*taskforce meets, we all say, look we have a database here, we can start here as a baseline to start this centralized database, and go from there [...] all you have to do is perhaps have some technical people find a way to make the different databases among ministries compatible among each other, I mean we can still protect things under our own ministry's security measures, it will make life easier for us, so I understand we're starting with 3 or 4 ministries to start the process for our national ID.*

In this way, another key criticism of The ROK's aid program, related to aid effectiveness can be overcome. This relatively small investment that was made by the Korean foreign ministry of roughly \$2 million USD, has the potential to have a significantly positive effect on local democratic processes. An added benefit is that an ICT project like this has multiple applications that could be extended to help secure government and personal information.

However, when talking about size, it is important to note that relatively, Samoa receives a lot of development aid from a wide range of countries already.<sup>17)</sup> Some may argue that because of this it should lessen Samoa's appeal to potential donors if the need is not as great as in other locations. However, this argument rests on the idea that development aid should be altruistic primarily. Yet, this presupposition is difficult to sustain and one this paper does not support. A wealth of scholarly research (see literature review) explains that in addition to altruism, self-interest as well as geo-strategic and historic factors all play an important role.

It may appear then that making a case for a Korea-Samoa bilateral relationship relying on geographical size as a key determinant of aid

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17) According to Samoan officials we interviewed, Samoa's main development partners include Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the US and the EU. It also receives a large amount of support from multilateral organizations like the Asian Development Bank, World Bank and IMF. China is also now one of Samoa's largest donors.

effectiveness is novel and a tenuous position to defend. But from an impact assessment perspective, size does matter and clearly holds in this context as demonstrated by our example. The point is not whether South Korea has been motivated by need or altruism, rather that the outcome of this project has allowed for a recipient to implement changes locally, that are effective in meeting their own development goals. If the criticism is that South Korea and other donors tend to impose their will on recipient countries, then this example clearly shows that it does not have to be the case with Samoa when we apply this lens.

## **2. Geo-strategic Value.**

Samoa is strategically important despite its small size in that it has a strong presence in the Pacific as a leader in many fields, as will be explained further in the paper. In the previous section we argued how its relative size is useful for aid effectiveness and in answering the criticism of resource grabbing. Here, we also argue that because Samoa's strategic importance is based on reputation, leadership and networking, a strategic alignment with Samoa can help ROK strategic interests beyond the spire of materialistic criticisms, to one that makes use of more accepted practices of international cooperation through diplomacy. Which helps to bring these two points into alignment.

In keeping with the idea of development aid being also geo-strategically motivated, Samoa does represent an opportunity for the ROK to extend its influence in the region in building a diplomatic relationship that can at least appear to be an attempt at assuaging a-symmetrical power relations.<sup>18)</sup> Samoa's unique positioning and historical development means that its

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18) This point refers specifically to how the relationship between donor and recipient often carries an inherent a-symmetric power relationship in favor of donors. We do not purport that this can be overcome by this type of shift. However, as this

relationship with two of the ROK's most important trade and diplomatic partners, the US and China, is both well-developed and relatively positive. For the ROK, a well-planned and executed development aid program could help to enhance its own relationship with these two nations, as well as position South Korea as a possible middle power broker in the region that China and the US could trust. The Pacific region as a whole, has become an intense area of geo-strategic interest of late. New Zealand and Australia, the traditional powers in the region as well as the US, have become very uncomfortable with the rise in Chinese presence in the region (Medeiros et al, 2008; Lo, 2018).

As a former German then New Zealand colony (A key US ally in the Pacific), Samoa enjoys a very positive relationship with the United States by proxy. In addition, its eastern Islands are still a US territory. According to the US State department (accessed 05/18/2018): “over the years the US and Samoa have enjoyed a close friendship based on trust and mutual interest, strengthened by people-to-people ties between the two countries, particularly among Americans of Samoan descent. Due to cultural and historical links, Samoans share a special affinity for their “brothers and sisters” in the US territory of American Samoa and frequent cultural and other exchanges, as well as close family and personal ties, have underpinned the relationship between the two Samoas and the US-Samoa relationship more broadly.”

Moreover, “The United States also provides significant additional assistance to Samoa, including an annual foreign assistance allocation to provide capacity building and training for the Samoan Maritime Police and

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a-symmetric relationship can be said to be constructed by the context of one more well-off (donor) helping a poorer, less well-off (recipient), that diplomatic strategy can at least make slight shifts in this relationship back toward the recipient, even if it appears to be just cosmetic. Due to the limitations of this paper's focus, this discussion is not taken up in detail here.

frequent invitations for training and mentoring sessions for Samoan government, NGO, media, and private sector individuals. USAID has several projects in Samoa focusing on climate change, food security, and disaster preparedness. The U.S. Embassy also provides grants to civil society and private sector organizations to address issues of economic development, women's empowerment, health, disaster risk mitigation, and education. In October of 2013 the United States finished the construction of a hospital opposite the international airport to aid development in the health sector" (US State Department, accessed 05/18/2018).

China's investment in Samoa financially has intensified recently and represents a renewal of a special relationship that Samoans have had with the Chinese dating back to German occupation (Shankman, 2001). Many Chinese settlers have married into Samoan families and have become integral parts of Samoan society (Siaosi & Sialataua). Today, it is unclear exactly how much Chinese money has flowed into Samoa from China over the past 20 years, however, according to Samoan Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, \$4 billion USD has been earmarked for the Pacific region from China over the next five years, half for grants and half for soft loans (Samoa Observer, 2018).

Critics of Chinese aid to the Pacific also focus on the type of appropriateness of aid provided. Many accuse the Chinese of funding infrastructure projects in Samoa specifically that have the potential to turn into white elephants such as the \$13USD million Samoa Aquatic Centre at the Faleata Sports Complex (Brant, 2013). In interviews with an anonymous source from one of the Western embassies in Samoa, the informant reiterated the well-publicized concerns of most Western donors:

*My problem with all these Chinese infrastructure projects is the maintenance. It's nice the Chinese are giving us all these buildings, or the funding of these buildings, but then when they leave after the project is*

*done, our government is stuck with trying to maintain them. There's also the problem of quality, look at the hospital they built, it already has a lot of problems and it's barely been 2 years since it opened.*

The situation in the Pacific is complicated by the fact that traditionally, the two countries with the most influence have been New Zealand and Australia. Both countries are trying to carefully navigate a path between the US and China (Schleich, 2018). Thus, South Korea's strategy of middle power brokerage can also be used in a situation where tensions between these countries will only continue to rise. Fels (2016) and Giley (2018) both identify the Pacific region as a place where middle power allegiance and posturing during this power transition will be vital in keeping peace in the global arena. Moreover, South Korea has expressed a desire to play a middle power role in the international community (Lee et al, 2015). Here it could act as a bridge between OECD DAC members and China, who sits outside this framework.

The immediate need for middle power presence in the Pacific region is becoming more apparent, with even the United Kingdom signaling its intention to ramp up its own presence in the Pacific region in a push for "free speech and democracy," alongside other Commonwealth nations at a time of growing concern over China's influence in the region. The ambitions not only include new diplomatic posts and aid funding but also possible commercial projects and possibly infrastructure funding (Pacnews, 2018).

An increased South Korean presence, with a moderate bilateral aid investment package in the islands of Samoa in comparison to Chinese and US investments, would likely be reassuring to both countries. South Korea does not possess the resources to challenge either for influence in the region. However, its positioning in the Pacific as a responsible middle power would go a long way in increasing the country's prestige abroad.

This, in-turn, will help to alleviate criticisms that come domestically toward KOICA development aid programs when framed as part of an overall national geo-strategic concern.

### **3. Clean Slate with History and Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals**

A bilateral aid agreement with Samoa represents a fresh opportunity to build a new relationship with a developing nation that has no major historical relationship with the ROK. Despite this paper adopting the view that strategic concerns are rightfully a part of development aid determinants, it can be detrimental to donor countries who appear to be doing this too overtly. To recall, Watson (2011) claims that KOICA were viewed as cynical in their practice of prioritizing development aid to countries that had helped in the Korean war. Something seen as not only self-interested, but also counterintuitive to development goals. Thus, if we consider that another criticism of the ROK's aid practices is that its highly strategic motives are evident, this "clean slate" with Samoa can be considered a possible benefit.

Moreover, one of KOICA's visions is to increase the number of development cooperation partners that it has based on innovative technology and diversify their areas of possible collaboration. This is part of KOICA's recently articulated focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in assisting countries' ability to achieve them (KOICA, 2018)

On these counts Samoa presents an opportunity for the ROK to develop a bilateral aid agreement that could fulfill these pillars. Samoa's lack of a relationship with the ROK in the past removes the critique of a rewarding framework of development assistance. However, this point does not come

without trade-offs. Setting up a bilateral relationship with Samoa on these grounds alone are unlikely to sway those who see little benefit of South Korea divesting its limited ODA budget to yet another country. Thus, the benefits to South Korea must be emphasized in other ways that take the focus directly away from ROK strategic interests without having to compromise them in other areas. As Samoa is recognized as one of the leaders and champions of the SDGs framework in the Pacific, shifting the nuance to Samoa's reputation as a champion of the SDGs brings South Korea's strategic interests into a multilateral arena. South Korea's own goal of being a leader in the implementation of the SDGs framework may be in-line with the Global Korea policy of the past, but it may also be useful here to further enhance the idea that this relationship with Samoa would not be prefaced on a rewarding type framework.

Samoa's credentials here are well known. For example, in hosting the 2014 United Nations Small Island Developing States conference (UNSIDS), Samoa shone the spotlight on its efforts to tailor the SDGs framework to its own needs. In November 2017, Samoa hosted the SDGs Taskforce special meeting in Apia, which discussed the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway, the outcome document from the UNSIDS conference Apia hosted in 2014 (UNESCAP, 2014). Also, Samoa's Prime Minister was appointed as a Special Ambassador of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development during the United Nations World Tourism Organization Oceans meeting in June 2017 (UNWTO, 2017).

In interviews with Samoa's ACEO for development aid in the Ministry of Finance, the SDGs focus of Samoa's development plans were evident, and Samoa's positioning as one of the leaders in the region has been put down to a natural alignment with its own development strategies that began at least a decade before the 2030 Agenda came into existence.

*"Samoa switching to the SDGs was nothing particularly difficult for us, Samoa's focus on the SDGs is reflected in our National Plan, which have been made to align with the SDGs. Everything that's in the National plan was designed to be that way. All of these things we had been doing already before the SDGs framework was clearly defined."*

Samoa's ACEO for budget in the Ministry of Finance would later add that the SDGs had been useful for Samoa in terms of accessing support for areas such as Non-communicable diseases. A major issue for Samoa:

*"NCDs being included in the SDGs framework has been really helpful for the Ministry of Health in particular, which has been able to access a lot of resources from donors to be able to fight this rising problem. [...] And like I mentioned earlier, our national plan has the SDGs streamlined into it, so whatever we do is related to the SDGs."*

Therefore, it can be seen that Samoa's reputation as a leader in the SDGs implementation in the region serves as a good springboard for a relationship with the ROK. In addition, speaking directly to areas that South Korea may be able to find alignment, the electoral commissioner as well as in talks with the CEO of Samoa's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Samoa intimated a desire to find development aid projects that focused on expanding uses for technological innovation. This is an area that KOICA has specified that it wishes to target in extending South Korean development interventions in supporting the implementation of the SDGs (see KOICA, accessed May 25, 2018). This aligns with Samoa's intention to become a regional tech hub, as evidenced by the recent decision by the Samoan government to be the center for submarine cable connections for the Pacific to the US and abroad (Fegaimaali'i-Luamanu, 2017). Technology is an area that KOICA highlights in its mid and

long-term strategy 2017-2021.

*"We're particularly interested in ways that we can improve our use of ICT in our processes to not only promote democracy, but to also improve our work, and with South Korea being so ahead of the game in so many areas, we would definitely like to collaborate further if the opportunities to do so arise." – Samoa's Electoral Commissioner.*

Samoa represents another opportunity for the ROK in that due to the country's lack of historical baggage with the ROK, it has the advantage of allowing fresh relationship to be built along these axes of cooperative development that align with KOICA's mission. Moreover, despite there being no major historical connection between independent Samoa in comparison to other countries like China and Japan, which Samoa has an extensive relationship with, Samoa's history of a former colonized state like the ROK may provide a point of cultural and historical commonality.

#### **4. A Trusted Partner**

Samoa as a potential development partner can be trusted. A criticism of development aid processes in the past have come down to poor local governance, which has become a focus of World Bank development efforts toward improving aid effectiveness (Santiso, 2001). Understandably this is a major concern for any donor. Ultimately, this centers on the question of whether recipient countries can be trusted? According to a New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade report (2015), Samoa represents a low to moderate fiduciary risk, in that Samoa has some of the most robust and transparent government structures in the Pacific (Saldanha, 2004).

In fact, Samoa's credibility as a trustworthy development partner has earned itself a reputation strong enough to allow it to sign up all of its

traditional development partners to agree to budgetary support in development projects that are prioritized along Samoan defined areas. Where in the past, development partners were able to more often than not dictate the way aid projects would be funded. Samoa brought its processes and practices to a standard in which development partners would be comfortable enough to trust. Samoa's ACEO for budget:

*"A lot of developing countries asked development partners to follow our processes, the compromise was, the development partners would follow our processes, if our processes improved. We had a public finance management reform project which is currently in its third phase. Our development partners have agreed to follow our processes in terms of where we want the money spent, which is prioritizing them based on our national plan, instead of what the priorities are in that country. [...] our reforms have satisfied international donors, which basically means they're happy to follow our procurement standards."*

Samoa's ability to earn the trust of the international development community is highlighted by this glowing extract from a 2012 UNRISD report on Samoa's social services, which it described as being "primitive" in the years immediately following its independence in 1962.

*"In recent years, Samoa has won the admiration and recognition of the international community for its economic and social achievements despite having to combat a series of crises in the 1990s, including the taro blight, Polynesian Airline's financial problems and two cyclones. In fact, Samoa is widely known in the region as a 'role model' for the Pacific. This is in addition to other accolades such as the 'shining star' and 'grand jewel' of the region. These are colorful labels and while some may demur, it is a fact that Samoa has made great progress in improving the quality of its social services since independence." (UNRISD, 2012).*

## 5. Concluding Discussion and Overcoming Domestic Criticisms

Samoa's status as graduating from LDC status to just a developing country is significant for the ROK as it means focus on development assistance to Samoa would not be contingent on poverty eradication, which is an approach that KOICA could look to use more in its own aid development paradigm. Removing poverty reduction as a precursor for development aid projects and relationships in appropriate circumstances can help to change the nature of domestic discussion on the feasibility and reasons for giving aid to a country like Samoa. Already, with the identification of projects like that provided by AWEB for voting technology, through the funding of the ROK government, more projects that falls in-line with SDGs targets in improving democracy and transparency globally can be found. This is also in-line with Korea's own development aid goals and strategic positioning. The decision to "aid" Samoa in this case, would be a decision that could help KOICA and South Korea in the long run at least diplomatically in achieving strategic goals.

Moreover, alluded to throughout the analysis, Samoa's relative size is a strength that could be exploited by KOICA to enhance effectiveness, to increase opportunities for more middle power diplomacy and assertive Korean posturing. In doing so, extend South Korean presence into a country that aims to become a central hub for technology and democratic progress in the Pacific region. In assisting Samoa, the ROK would be creating a new paradigm of recognized strategic reckoning combined with the more altruistic reasons given for a development project in a developing nation. Although no development aid relationship is capable of satisfying all the concerns of domestic actors and stakeholders in South Korea, some potential benefits of this relationship can still be identified as the following:

1. Precisely because of Samoa's small size the impact of any development aid arrangements goes beyond mere effectiveness. It's a value for money bilateral development aid partnership as Samoa's return on development investment has already proven to be fruitful for the ROK. From each election moving forward, the Samoan people will be aware that it was a grant from the ROK that helped to improve their democratic processes. This is a type of "soft power," that the ROK could exploit further.
2. ROK development aid intervention if aligned in areas like ICT will be able to deliver not only strong levels of effectiveness in terms of impact, it can also help present investment opportunities for South Korean businesses in Samoa and the region as whole when taken into consideration with point 3.
3. Samoa can become a prototype for how South Korean aid projects can be true drivers of economic growth in a new technologically driven era. This would be an attractive proposition for development aid projects that could allow for greater private sector buy-in in the ROK.
4. Samoa's central role as a leader in the Pacific region as a "safe pair of hands" in that it has developed robust development aid channels for effective monitoring and transparent processes that have been approved by other donors. This would help to alleviate any concerns over transparency.
5. As Samoa and the Pacific as a region has become a focal point of concern for many major international countries like the US, China, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and Japan, Korea's global outlook policies can be enhanced through a more active role as a middle power in the region. This is important in recognizing the geo-strategic interests that South Korea's development aid program should also fulfill.

This paper has discussed the many reasons why an expanded development relationship with the Pacific and Samoa makes sense

strategically, and in terms of explored potential ways criticisms that have been levelled at the ROK's development aid project in the past could be answered. Samoa provides a good possible investment for KOICA and the ROK in that Samoa holds an internationally recognized reputation for making development aid work well. In addition, could be a strong opportunity for the ROK to build a greater profile in the Pacific region. If it chooses to use its position in middle power status and diplomacy to its advantage, the ROK can once again engage in another international theater in the politics of modern day reality vis-à-vis China and the US.

The purpose of this paper, exploratory in nature, was to investigate the benefits of a bilateral aid arrangement between KOICA, the ROK and the Independent State of Samoa. It has concluded that such an expanded relationship could provide ways in which KOICA and the ROK could overcome some of the critiques that its prior development aid efforts have garnered in other nations around the world. What this paper has not provided is a feasibility study that considers possible quantitative approaches or attempted to model what type of development aid may fit this type of aid partnership as this would require specific project-based data. Moreover, another limitation of this paper is that we have not presented an answer to why Samoa and why not somewhere else for KOICA? In summation, that question is best answered in a comparative study and was not our focus here. However, these are all areas that require further investigation and would form worthy subject matter in carrying out more studies.

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## 한국 개발원조 패러다임의 확장: 대한민국-사모아 협력관계를 중심으로

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한국은 2010년 OECD-DAC 가입을 계기로 개발원조 수원국에서 공여국이 된 첫 국가이다. 그러나 한국의 개발원조 배분 방식은 사업의 효과, 수혜국과의 협력에 집중하기보다 현실주의적 측면인 외교수단이나 정치적 이익을 중시한다는 비판이 꾸준히 제기되어 왔다. 본 논문은 심층면접을 통한 1차 자료와 2차 통계 자료를 사용하여 남태평양지역, 특히, 사모아 독립국에 대한 한국의 개발정책이 상술한 비판점에서 자유로울 수 있는가, 또한 나아가서 한국의 기존 개발원조 배분방식의 패러다임을 확장하는데 기여할 것인가를 고민하였다. 본 논문은 사모아 독립국과 같은 소규모 섬나라와의 개발원조 관계는 작은 규모로도 큰 효과성을 낼 수 있는 잠재력이 있으며, 공여국의 정치·경제적 이익을 우선적으로 고려한다는 비판으로부터 비교적 자유로울 수 있을 것이라는 점을 논의한다.

[주제어: 한국 개발원조, 사모아 독립국, 중급국가, 코이카]

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