

KWDI Issue Paper

Research Title: South Korea's Strategy on Gender Equality ODA in the Post COVID-19 Era

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Strategy on Gender Equality ODA in the Post COVID-19 Era¹⁾

Abstract

- ◆ Amidst the unprecedented global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, gender inequality is deepening, thereby increasing the likelihood of delays in achieving Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs). While the crisis response is crucial, there is a growing emphasis on the need for international cooperation in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, viewing it as an opportunity to 'build back better'.
- ◆ Since joining the OECD Development Assistance Committee in 2010, South Korea has consistently made efforts to expand the quantity and quality of Official Development Assistance(ODA). However, the percentage of gender equality ODA remains among the lowest within OECD DAC member countries, indicating a need for improvement. In preparation for the post-COVID era, South Korea also needs to formulate government-level strategies that could contribute to global gender-equal sustainable development.
- ◆ This research aims to formulate a gender equality ODA strategy in preparation for the post-COVID era, ultimately contributing to the global achievement of the 2030 Agenda for SDGs. By doing so, its goal is to contribute to the country's progress being positioned as a leading donor country.

Research Background and Problem

- ① The prolonged pandemic brought about global socio-economic changes. Particularly, the addition of COVID-19 to pre-existing socio-economic inequality structures before the pandemic has further exacerbated gender inequality.
- ② The World Economic Forum(WEF) emphasized that global gender inequality has intensified due to COVID-19, predicting that it would take 135.6 years, rather than the previously estimated 99.5 years (pre-COVID forecast), to achieve gender equality(World Economic Forum, 2021). Particularly, since the outbreak of COVID-19, all forms of violence against women and girls have increased. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing gender inequality issues, leading to decreased access to technology and financial services, as well as an increase in the burden of unpaid care labor.

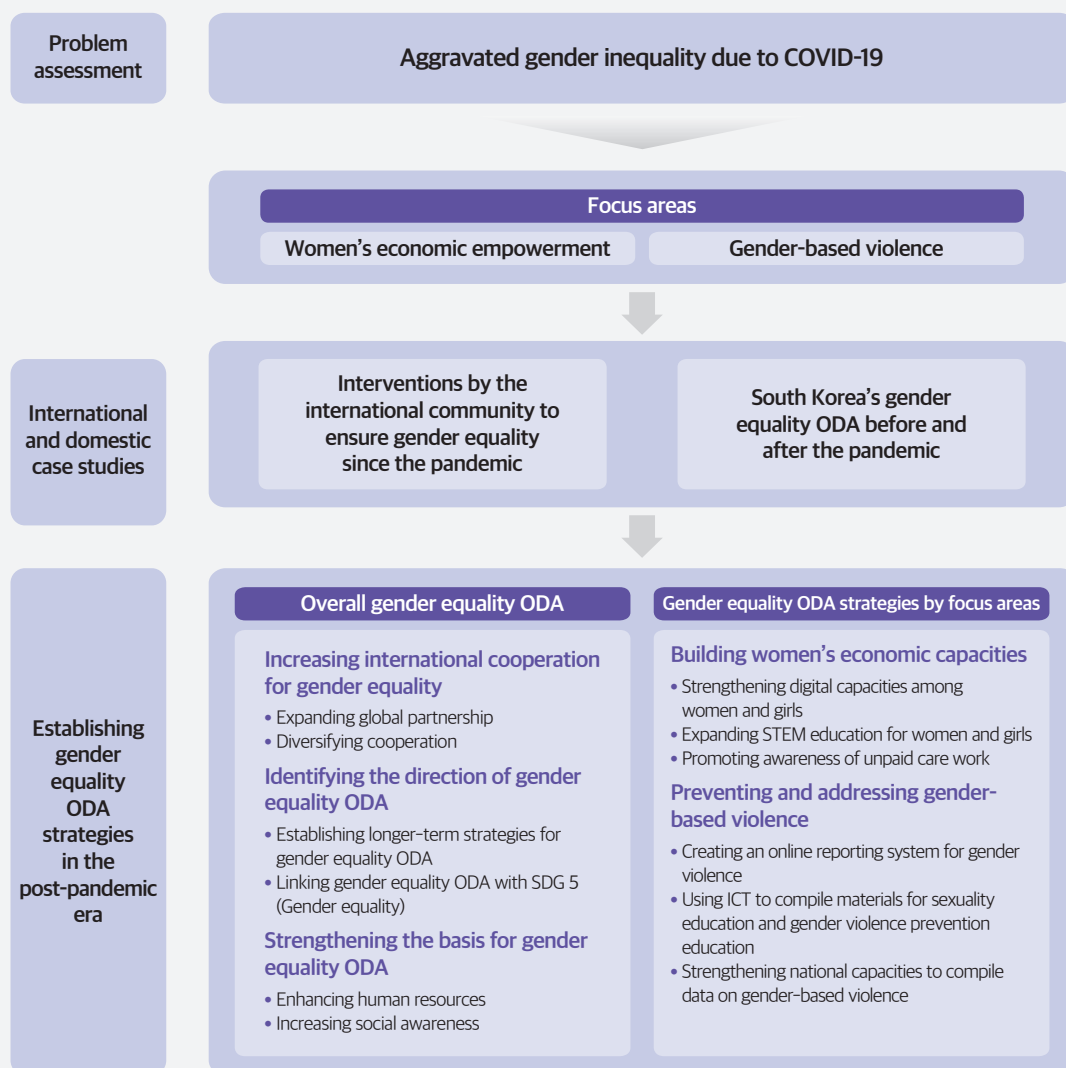
1) The post-COVID era can be characterized as an era where new norms and institutions tailored to the changed circumstances have emerged, given the impossibility of a return to the previous order due to the prolonged or normalized nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gender equality ODA is defined as a project that encompasses two types: 1) where gender equality is the main objective of the project/programme, fundamental in its design and expected results, and the project/programme would not have been undertaken without this objective (Principal); and 2) where gender equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the principal reason for undertaking the project/programme, often explained as gender equality being mainstreamed in the project/programme (Significant).

- Inadequate crisis response can worsen the situation; however, it can also be seen as an opportunity to ‘build back better.’ In this sense, there is an emphasized need for international cooperation in the recovery from COVID-19 and the achievement of SDGs. Accordingly, South Korea needs to develop government-level strategies that would contribute to global gender-inclusive sustainable development in preparation for the post-COVID era.

Research Content and Methods

Research content

<Figure 1> Research content overview



Research methods

- ▶ Review of key overseas and domestic reports, policy documents, and other materials.
- ▶ Analysis of international statistics on COVID-19: Utilizing UN statistical data in analyzing gendered impacts and policy responses to COVID-19.
- ▶ International forum and commissioned research: Co-hosting an international forum with the Swedish Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP) to grasp the main status of post-COVID gender equality ODA in the international community, and conducting commissioned research.
- ▶ Case-sharing workshop: Conducting a case-sharing workshop for domestic ODA implementing agency practitioners.
- ▶ Expert advisory meeting: Holding an advisory meeting with government officials involved in ODA policy, representatives from policy research institutions, and academic experts.

Global gender equality status and leading donor countries' response strategies after COVID-19

COVID-19 and gender equality

- ▶ UN Women conducted research in two areas, employment and care labor, and gender-based violence, to thoroughly analyze the impact of COVID-19 on women. The findings revealed the following patterns (UN Women, 2021a; 2021b).

<Table 1> Post-COVID-19 gender equality status in key areas

Care labor	Violence against women
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• About 1/4 of both women and men lost their jobs.• The proportion of women who reported an increase in household chores and childcare responsibilities was higher than that of men.• Approximately 2/3 of both women and men felt significant burdens on their mental and emotional health.• The percentage of women receiving pandemic-related services and support from the government or NGOs was lower than that of men.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Globally, 245 million women and girls aged 15 and older experienced sexual/physical violence by an intimate partner in the past 13 months.• 45% of women have been directly or indirectly exposed to at least one form of violence against women (VAW) after the pandemic. Specifically, it was found that young women aged 18-49, unemployed women, and single mothers were more vulnerable to violence.

Status of gender-sensitive policy responses

- ▶ UNDP and UN Women collected statistics from the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker to analyze the global gender-sensitive policy responses that were introduced after COVID-19 (UNDP & UN Women, 2021).
- ▶ Based on these statistics, we compared policy responses of Korea's priority partner countries after COVID-19 with those of OECD DAC member countries. In terms of the number of gender-sensitive policy measures, there was little difference between Korea's priority partner countries (338) and OECD DAC member countries (346). However, there were differences between Korea's priority partner countries and OECD DAC member countries in terms of specific aspects of gender-sensitive policy responses. In the case of priority partner countries, a higher proportion of measures were related to violence against women, while in the case of OECD DAC member countries, a higher proportion of measures were associated with social protection.

<Table 2> Comparative overview of gender-sensitive policy measure: Korea's priority partner countries vs. OECD DAC member countries

	27 Korea's priority partner countries		29 OECD DAC member countries	
	N	%	N	%
Economy and finance	21	6.2	20	5.8
Labor market	32	9.5	32	9.3
Social protection	84	24.9	113	32.7
Violence against women	201	59.5	181	52.3
Total	338	100	346	100

- ▶ While COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the global socio-economic landscape, the policy responses in developing countries, which are estimated to have suffered more than developed countries, are still deemed inadequate. Particularly, in the case of Korea's priority partner countries, social protection measures appear to be less comprehensive compared to OECD DAC member countries. The focus in the area of gender-based violence also leans towards immediate responses such as service provision.

Strategies for achieving global gender equality in OECD DAC member countries after COVID-19

- ▶ OECD: After declaring an urgent need for the expansion of ODA for developing countries in the aftermath of COVID-19, major donor countries and institutions in the international community presented measures related to development assistance that can be applied for the benefit of women and girls in developing countries during the pandemic. In particular, OECD emphasizes the expansion of development resources, including ODA, and the incorporation of a gender equality perspective into key policy decision-making. OECD evaluates the responses to COVID-19 by OECD member countries and make efforts to collect policy evidence for effective measures, including sharing examples, to prepare for similar crisis situations in the future.

- OECD DAC member countries: They have analyzed the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality, identified areas requiring relevant responses, and developed and recommended feasible programs and frameworks. Furthermore, they have proactively and systematically addressed changes in the conditions for development cooperation due to the spread of COVID-19, establishing new strategies for development cooperation or gender equality strategies. These strategic responses of major donor countries can be categorized into four groups.

<Table 3> Classification of COVID-19 response strategy documents from major donor countries

Categories	Countries
Development of strategies and plans for COVID-19 response	Australia, Spain
Tools and guidelines for the formulation of COVID-19 programs	Austria, Japan, Switzerland, United States
Revision of development cooperation strategies and gender equality strategies	Denmark, Ireland, Switzerland
Adoption of feminist foreign policy and feminist development assistant policy	Canada, Germany, France, Spain, Sweden.

- The formulation of strategies and plans for responding to COVID-19: Australia and Spain were among the first countries to establish strategies and plans for responding to COVID-19. These countries identified urgent areas, such as gender-based violence, and developed specific plans for each area. They explicitly stated the mainstreaming of gender equality as a cross-cutting element in all response policy formulations.
- The establishment of tools and guidelines for formulating COVID-19 programs: Austria, Japan, Switzerland, and the United States have not developed gender equality strategies or plans specifically for COVID-19. However, in their development cooperation activities, they have presented gender-based analysis tools and specific guidelines for formulating COVID-19 response programs that can be applied to existing programs and projects.
- The revision of development cooperation strategies and gender equality strategies: Most member countries have redefined overall strategies for development cooperation and gender equality in light of the COVID-19 crisis. Denmark, for instance, explicitly prioritized COVID-19 response in its 2022 development cooperation agenda, highlighting sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender-based violence as key areas. Ireland designated gender equality as one of four priority policy areas, specifying the integration of a gender equality perspective across all development cooperation fields and portfolios. Switzerland outlined a flexible, targeted response to needs, building onto its existing development cooperation strategy.
- Adoption of feminist foreign policy and feminist development assistance policy: Sweden, Canada, France, and Spain have adopted feminist foreign policy or feminist development assistance policy that emphasize gender equality across all diplomatic areas. Countries advocating feminist foreign policy highlighted their gender-inclusive responses to COVID-19. Specifically, they strengthened institutional capacity by applying measures such as SRHR to address gender-based violence, urgent feminist humanitarian aid, gender impact assessments in emergency policy responses, gender-responsive budgeting, mainstreaming gender in policies, and supporting feminist civil society.

Current Status and Challenges of South Korea's Gender Equality ODA Initiatives

Background and current status

- ▶ Korea's gender equality ODA has been established through legal frameworks such as the Framework Act on International Development Cooperation, strategic plans for international development cooperation, and its implementation plans. Article 3, Paragraph 1 of the Framework Act on International Development Cooperation, enacted in 2010, serves as the legal basis for implementing gender equality ODA. The strategic plans have consistently included references to Gender Equality ODA. Efforts to mainstream gender in ODA are ongoing within ODA implementing agencies. However, at the level of government agencies and implementing institutions other than the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the Economic Development Co-operation Fund (EDCF), specific institutional frameworks and strategies for gender equality ODA are lacking. To effectively expand and enhance the quality of gender ODA, there is a need for concrete strategies applicable at the implementation agency level and sustained efforts to enforce them.
- ▶ Although the scale and proportion of Korea's gender equality ODA have significantly increased, there is still a need for improvement in both quantitative and qualitative aspects. While the overall scale and proportion of Korea's ODA have been consistently increasing, the scale and proportion of gender equality ODA have experienced fluctuations. Given the relatively small size of gender equality ODA, significant variations in its scale and proportion may occur with the completion or reduction of certain large-scale projects. Overall, there is still a considerable need for significant growth in the scale of Korea's gender equality ODA.
- ▶ The characteristics of Korea's gender equality ODA have consistently focused on the health and education sectors, indicating a lack of presence in various other fields. In the long term, there is a need for the expansion of gender equality ODA into more diverse areas. Policy support should be established to enable more institutions to implement gender equality ODA in the future.

Analysis of gender equality ODA project conditions in the post-COVID era

- ▶ Officials from ODA implementing agencies have experienced significant and minor changes in their working environments during the COVID-19 period. In particular, the pandemic led to lockdowns, quarantines, and travel restrictions for all agencies, making it impossible to carry out some projects. As projects that were traditionally conducted in-person shifted to remote formats, those responsible for project implementation felt the additional burden of adapting to new work styles. They also faced challenges in complying with local government sanctions and guidelines, such as administrative tasks for safety measures, maintaining social distancing, wearing masks, and temperature checks. Furthermore, difficulties arising from the reduced effectiveness of projects due to remote implementation were also noted.

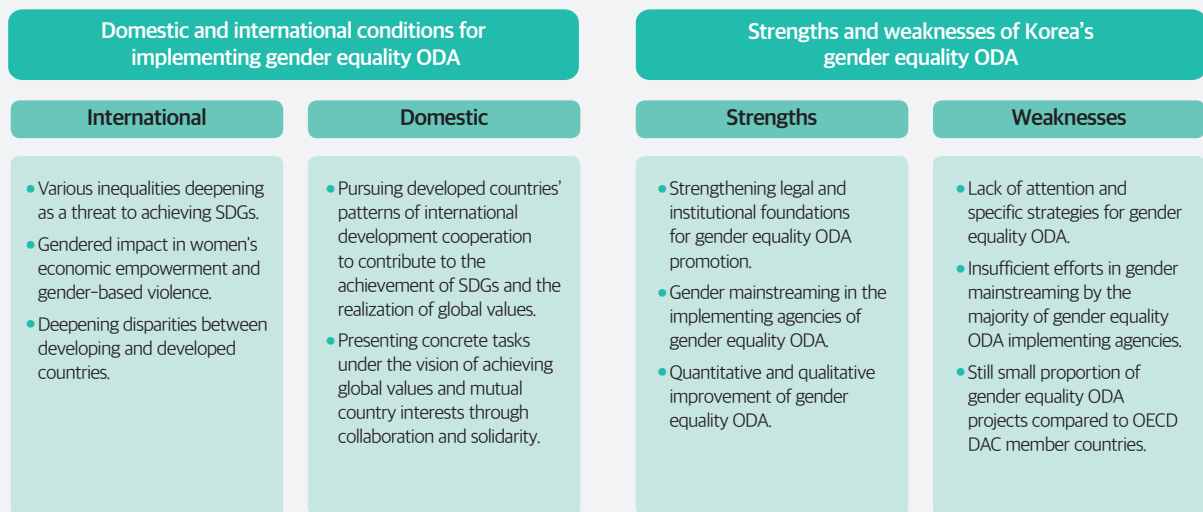
- ▶ To enhance future gender equality ODA in response to the changed project conditions, flexible administrative responses that adequately consider the challenges faced by project managers and the demands in the field during crises such as COVID-19 are crucial. Furthermore, the development of strategies for gender equality ODA after the pandemic should include considerations for expanding gender equality ODA through the integration of ICT and reinforcing strategies for field-centered project operations. Lastly, for the continued improvement in the quality of future gender equality ODA, ongoing efforts are needed, including identifying and implementing long-term projects that consider social and cultural norms, enhancing gender awareness and capacity among project implementing entities, expanding collaboration among gender-specialized institutions, and mainstreaming gender.

Background for Formulating Gender Equality ODA Strategies in the Post-COVID Era

Domestic and international conditions for implementing gender equality ODA

- ▶ In the spring of 2020, the global impact of COVID-19 exacerbated inequality in two aspects, delaying the achievement of sustainable development goals. Gender inequality deepened across all sectors of socio-economic life, including employment and care, gender-based violence, education, and healthcare accessibility. The international community declared an urgent need to expand ODA targeting developing countries in response to COVID-19. Major donor countries and organizations in the international community proposed development assistance measures applicable to women and girls in developing countries amidst the COVID-19 situation.
- ▶ The government under the Yoon Suk-yeol administration, inaugurated in 2022, has pledged to uphold the values of freedom and democracy and contribute to global prosperity, as outlined in the government's announced 'National Goal 5: Achieving the Status of a Global Central Nation Contributing to Freedom, Peace, and Prosperity.' Additionally, the recently established Third Strategic Plan for International Development Cooperation emphasizes the realization of global values through the concrete implementation of the 5P of Sustainable Development (Partnership, Peace, Prosperity, Planet, Partnership). It underscores the creation of national interests through mutually beneficial cooperation between recipient and donor countries, as well as collaboration and solidarity among domestic and international ODA actors to effectively address transnational issues and challenges.

<Figure 2> Background of Gender Equality ODA Strategy Formulation



● Diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses in Korea's gender equality ODA

- ▶ Since Korea's accession to the OECD/DAC in 2010, gender equality has been consistently emphasized in laws and regulations related to international development cooperation. The 1st to 3rd Strategic Plans for International Development Cooperation continuously highlight the strengthening of support for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and refugees, and the enhancement of considerations for gender. Additionally, KOICA, considered one of Korea's leading grant aid agencies, established gender mainstreaming guidelines in 2011 for the implementation of gender-inclusive ODA. Every five years since 2011, KOICA has formulated midterm strategies for gender equality. In recent sectoral midterm strategies, gender equality is explicitly included as a cross-cutting priority, reflecting the agency's commitment to contributing to the achievement of global gender equality (SDG 5) and the mainstreaming of gender in development cooperation projects on an international scale.
- ▶ Korea has gradually expanded its legal and institutional framework for gender equality ODA. However, compared to other OECD DAC member countries, there is a lack of specific plans for gender mainstreaming and a notable absence of interest in gender equality ODA. Korea does not emphasize gender equality across its diplomatic policy areas or publish strategic documents related to gender equality ODA. The proportion of Korea's gender equality ODA remains low compared to other OECD DAC member countries. Despite a diverse range of ODA implementing agencies, there is a systemic lack of efforts in institutionalizing gender equality ODA, excluding KOICA.

Strategies for Advancing Gender Equality ODA in the Post-COVID-19 Era

Intensification of international cooperation on gender equality

- ▶ The expansion of a global partnership is essential for achieving gender equality. To achieve this, it is necessary for advanced donor countries to take the lead in discussions on norm-setting for gender equality through platforms like OECD GenderNet and allocate resources accordingly.
- ▶ There is a need to diversify various actors and collaboration methods. Given the importance of evidence-based data construction that allows for accessibility and real-time monitoring revealed during the pandemic, it can be proposed to strengthen collaboration with local civil society and research institutions. Additionally, considering the concentrated capabilities in education, research, and networking of the UN Women Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality established in Seoul in 2022, it can be suggested to actively utilize and collaborate with it as a partner and platform for future gender equality ODA initiatives, particularly in areas such as women's vocational skills development, gender-based violence, and women, peace, and security.

More specific directions of gender equality ODA

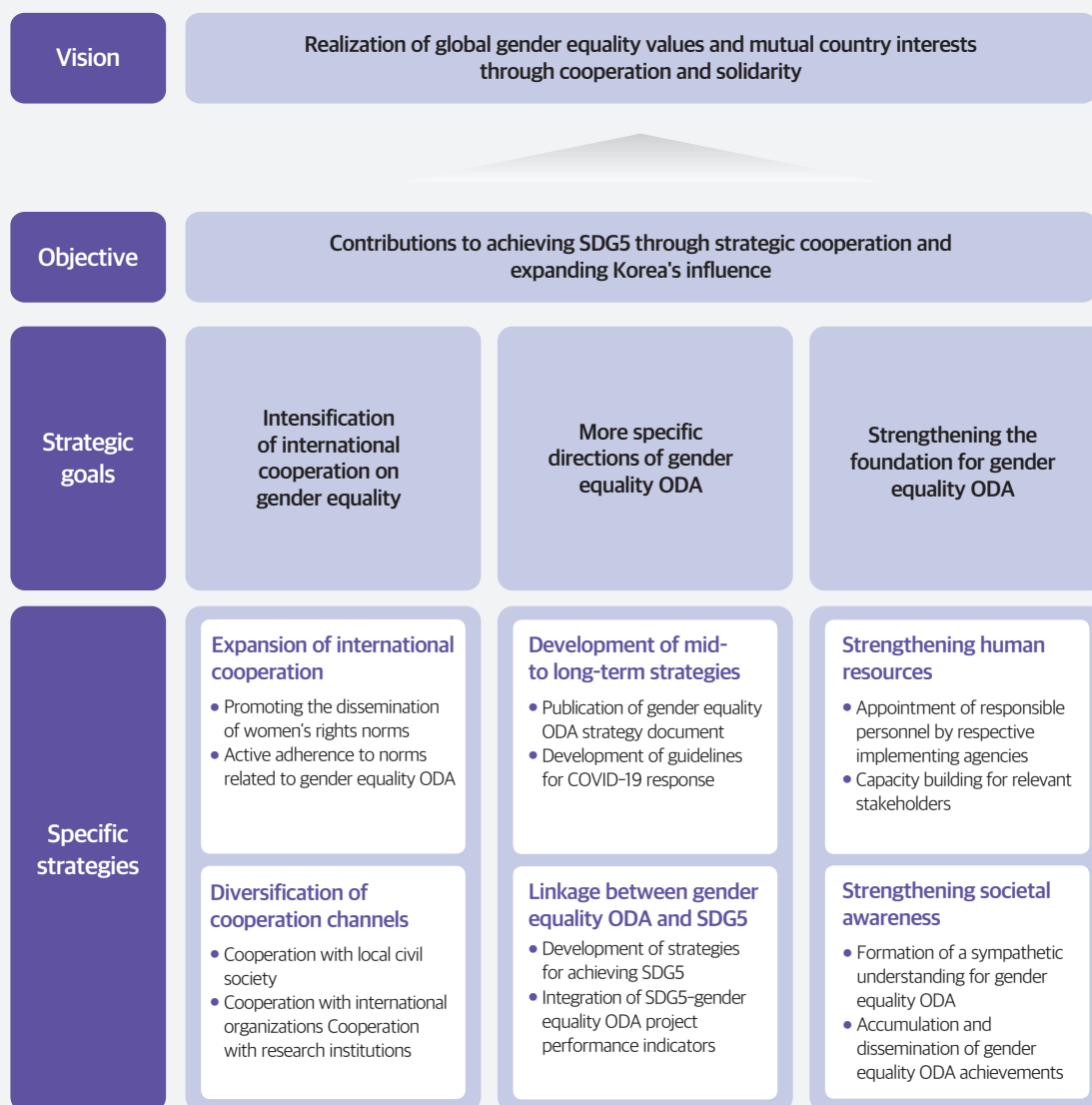
- ▶ The majority of OECD DAC member countries have introduced strategies for gender equality development cooperation. Particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, most member countries have either formulated emergency strategies for gender-sensitive responses or updated existing gender equality development cooperation strategies to strengthen the context related to COVID-19. Furthermore, many have presented specific focal points, such as feminist humanitarian aid, on a macro level. In contrast, Korea has yet to fully address the task of publishing development cooperation strategy documents with a focus on gender equality. Consequently, there is a proposal to introduce policies specifying key areas, strategic countries, budgets, etc., related to gender equality ODA. Moreover, there is a need to establish medium to long-term plans for addressing COVID-19 in the context of gender equality ODA.
- ▶ Considering the essential role of gender equality in achieving the overall SDGs, there is a proposal to integrate development cooperation projects with SDG 5. Additionally, it is suggested to assess the status of individual SDG 5 indicators in priority partner countries and systematically strive to align institutional projects with these indicators to enhance the effectiveness of the projects.

Strengthening the foundation for gender equality ODA

- ▶ To enhance the quantitative and qualitative aspects of gender equality ODA projects, it is essential to appoint dedicated personnel for gender equality ODA within the implementing institutions. Furthermore, there is a need for gender-sensitiveness and capacity-building programs for policymakers and practitioners involved in gender equality ODA projects to facilitate mutual learning.

- It is necessary to systematically compile data on various gender equality ODA projects pursued over the past 10 years since joining the OECD DAC, which have achieved remarkable results. Furthermore, efforts should be made across multiple channels to disseminate these achievements effectively. In addition to this, I propose organizing events at a national level to enhance public awareness.

<Figure 3> strategies for Advancing Gender Equality ODA in the Post-COVID-19 Era



Gender equality ODA strategies by focus areas

- ▶ This research focuses on the increased burden on women in terms of labor and care responsibilities, as well as the rise in gender-based violence, particularly after COVID-19. With attention to these issues, the study proposes specific gender equality ODA strategies, specifically targeting women's economic empowerment and addressing gender-based violence.

Women's economic empowerment

- ▶ Empowerment of women and girls in digital competency: Following the constraints on face-to-face activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the utilization of ICT has significantly increased not only in ODA projects but also in everyday life. ICT has a profound impact on various aspects of women's and girls' lives, ranging from education and healthcare to enhancing agricultural productivity and creating quality employment opportunities. To enhance women's economic participation, it is essential to strengthen digital competencies, enabling access to and utilization of online financial platforms. Furthermore, during this era of digital transformation, encouraging women to enhance their digital skills, aligned with the demands of the labor market, becomes crucial for their participation in relevant fields.
- ▶ Expanding STEM education for women and girls: From a long-term perspective, enhancing women's economic empowerment requires strengthening their capabilities in future industries. In this regard, there is a necessity to foster interest among women and girls in science and technology fields and enable them to consistently pursue expertise. To achieve this, initiatives such as science programs tailored for girls, improvements in educational curricula, mentorship programs, and awareness campaigns need to be expanded.
- ▶ Raising awareness of unpaid care labor: The increased burden of unpaid labor due to COVID-19 disproportionately affects women and girls, exacerbating gender disparities in time inequality. Despite this, government responses to unpaid labor have been inadequate. There is a need to expand gender equality ODA in the form of policy consulting to visualize unpaid care labor, and systematically address the policy improvements required to alleviate the exacerbated burden on women in unpaid care work.

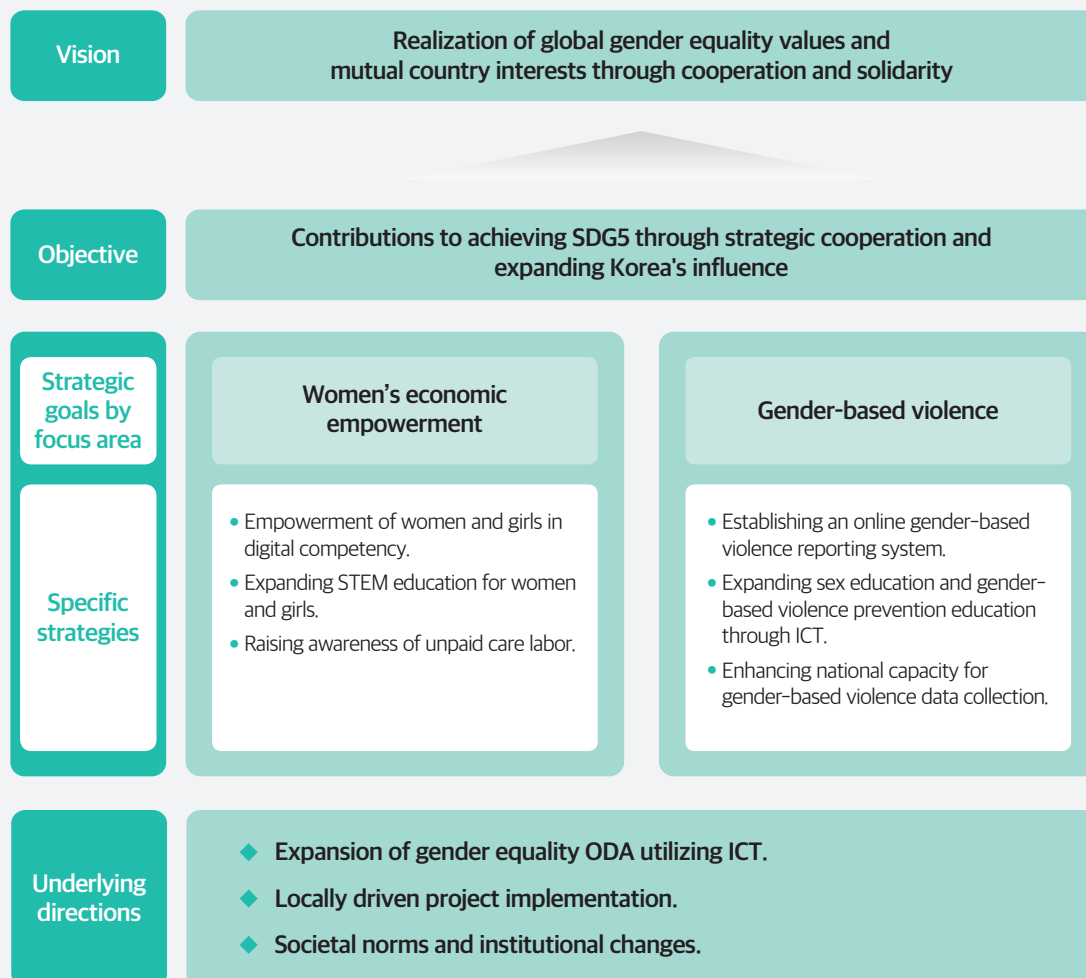
Prevention of and response to gender-based violence

- ▶ Establishing an online gender-based violence reporting system: Currently, gender-based violence projects under ODA primarily support offline systems. However, considering the constraints on face-to-face interactions and mobility, there is a need for support to build and expand an online gender-based violence reporting system, enabling individuals to report incidents freely.
- ▶ Expanding sex education and gender-based violence prevention education through ICT: With the increased use of ICT after the COVID-19 pandemic and the expectation of further expansion, there is a

need to actively utilize ICT for gender-based violence prevention. To achieve this, it is necessary to expand sex education and gender-based violence prevention education through mobile platforms. Furthermore, efforts should be directed towards enhancing prevention of cyberbullying and digital dysfunction through education on cyberbullying prevention and information ethics. Establishing a safe online environment, particularly through measures such as strengthening privacy protection, is crucial for preventing gender-based violence in the online sphere.

- **Enhancing national capacity for gender-based violence data collection:** Despite the increase in gender-based violence due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a significant lack of specific investigations into this issue. However, to comprehensively understand the situation and implement measures based on current conditions and demand, there is a requirement for specific and continuous data collection. Therefore, there is a need to expand support for enhancing the national capacity of partner countries for data collection related to gender-based violence.

<Figure 4> Gender equality ODA strategy in the post-COVID-19 era: Detailed strategies by focus areas



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Responsible Agency : Office for Government Policy Coordination Prime Minister's Secretariat (Office for International Development Cooperation).

Relevant Agencies : Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Development Cooperation Division), Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (International Cooperation Division).