

Policy Implementation Process of Korean Government's Public Diplomacy on Climate Change

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Abstract In 2015, the State Council of South Korea finalized its goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by “37% from the business-as-usual (BAU) level” by 2030 across all the economic sectors. Of that reduction, 4.5% will be achieved overseas by leveraging Emission Trading Systems (ETS) aided by international cooperation. In line with this, considering both the demand for and supply of the carbon market increased after the Paris agreement, the importance of public diplomacy in negotiating climate change actions also rose. This study aimed to analyze the impact of international discussions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on domestic policies and the types of public diplomatic climate change policies pursued by different government agencies, and draw implications from them. This study attempted to find implications from the Korean government's public diplomacy on climate change for developing countries. Lessons learned regarding Korea's public diplomacy would provide a practical guidance to the Asian developing countries, which are suffering from environmental crisis at a phase of rapid economic growth.

Keywords Public diplomacy, Climate change, Public Relations, GHG emission reduction, INDC

I. Introduction

The global community signed the Paris Agreement in 2015, followed by the Kyoto Protocol, which regulates (voluntary) reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from all the participating countries. In response to this, the Korean Government released 『Post-2020 Long-term Mitigation Target and

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Implementation Plan』in 2015. This aimed to the submission of Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). After long-term debate and its modification, the Korean government promised the international community its commitment to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 37% from the business-as usual (BAU) level by 2030 across all the economic sectors (see Figure 1). Of that reduction, 32.5% will be achieved through domestic reductions and the remaining 4.5% will be achieved through carbon credits from international market mechanisms (1.9%) and forestry management activities (2.6%). In order to meet this national target, a new market mechanism is needed to support mitigation objectives from Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. The market mechanism is highly expected to fulfill the contributions intended by Parties, on the basis of the majority of the INDCs submitted by the Parties that claim use of international, regional, and bilateral market mechanisms (Koakutsu, Amellina, Rocamora and Umemiya, 2016). Considering both the demand for and supply of the carbon market increased after the Paris agreement, the importance of public diplomacy in negotiating climate change actions also rose.

With the emergence of the new climate regime, Korea is also preparing for a national and local implementation system with the aim to take the initiative in a proactive response. The Korean government has selected a set of developing countries as key cooperation partners, with which it is pursuing the conclusion of bilateral agreements and the establishment of frameworks for bilateral cooperation. As such, there are growing expectations for climate technology transfers and cooperation with developing countries via the bilateral cooperation channels. Given this situation, the application of the concept of ‘public diplomacy’ will provide a new perspective on Korea’s climate change policymaking.

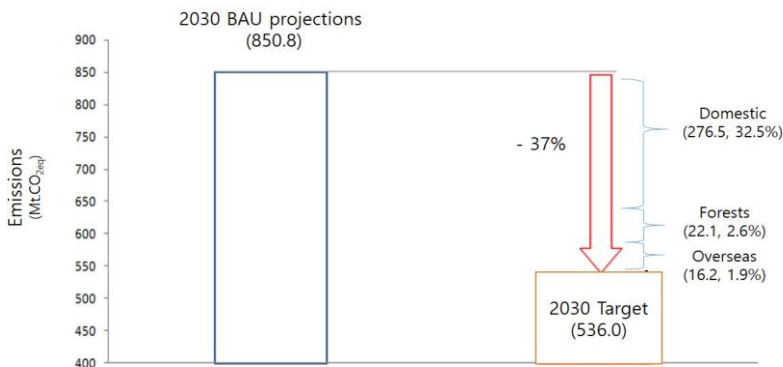


Figure 1 Korea's GHG Emission Reduction Target

Most of studies on climate change and international cooperation have preliminary focused on international policies or regimes in the fields of political science, international relations, and public administration. However, the damages caused by climate change have profound impact on people all over the world, so many different parties are interested and entangled in the problem. For the Korean government to present a more compelling and effective solution to the international community, it would need to ensure whether each government agency has its own policy to engage in public diplomacy on climate change. This study aimed to analyze the impact of international discussions such as the UNFCCC on domestic policies and the types of public diplomatic climate change policies pursued by different government agencies and draw implications from them.

II. Theoretical Backgrounds

1. UNFCCC

Public diplomacy on climate change has been the subject of debate over the last 40 years in the international community and the United Nations. Climate change was first recognized as a dire problem at the First World Climate Conference in 1979. In this conference, the majority of countries agreed that the governments should take appropriate measures to prevent the adverse effects that climate change would bring on humans. The First Assessment Report (FAR) submitted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) scientifically proved that climate change is actually happening mostly caused by human activities (IPCC, 1990). As a result, the UN General Assembly formed Intergovernmental Negotiation Committees in 1992 to adopt and sign the UNFCCC.

Article 3 of the Convention defines the basic principle (UNFCCC, 1992). First, all countries should take responsibility for the climate system on the basis of “common but differentiated responsibilities,” where developed countries with historical accountability and technological capability will take the lead. Second, developing countries’ special circumstances will be given full consideration. Third, all countries will take precautionary measures to anticipate and prevent further climate change. Fourth, all countries have a right to—and should promote—sustainable development. As such, it clearly requires that developed countries support developing countries.

From the continuous global discussion and frameworks to respond against climate change including the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol (1997), the Bali Roadmap (2007), and the Paris Agreement (2015), it is evitable that both

developed and developing countries should put more effort into reducing GHG. In this context, Porter and Brown (1991) stated that over the next few years, the public should be informed that the need for an immediate reaction to protect the natural environment is an unceasing and strong global political trend.

The Kyoto Protocol, often called the current regime on climate change, limits developed countries' accountability with regard to climate change. However, after the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, both developed and developing countries are now required to set their own goals to reduce greenhouse gases. The Protocol emphasized more detailed principles for the long-term goals, reduction in emission, the carbon market, enforcement, adoption, financial resources, and technology. This measure seeks to encourage more participation from developing countries based on the principle of international cooperation and collaboration backed by actual diplomatic, environmental, economic, and technical support from developed countries.

2. The Korean Government's Response

Korea signed the UNFCCC at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992 and deposited the instrument of ratification in December 1993. From this point onward, the government initiated diplomatic efforts and negotiation on climate change. By principle, the government was willing to share responsibility as a member of the international community to follow the spirit of the Agreement. This is more of a passive reaction to the international agreement as an aspect of foreign policy than all-government efforts and response.

In April 1998, chaired by the Prime Minister, the government established the Climate Change Committee, which formulated and executed the Comprehensive Plan on Countermeasures to Climate Change that combined all government agencies' policies to reduce greenhouse gases in 1999–2001(see Figure 2).

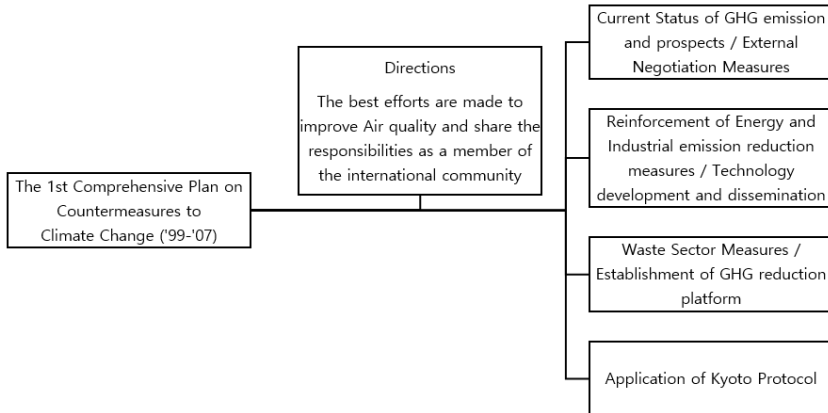


Figure 2 The 1st Comprehensive Plan on Countermeasures to Climate Change

The Plan aimed to give the utmost effort to reduce GHGs and play the correct role in the international community. Since then, the second (2001–2004), third (2005–2007) and fourth (2008–2012) plans have been formulated and adopted (see Figure 3). Finally, the 1st Master Plan on Countermeasures to Climate Change (2017–2036) has been adopted as a 20-year plan. Although the first plan was established in December 2016, the second plan was established earlier than previous plan to reflect the reduction targets and implementation measures of the ‘2030 National Greenhouse Gas Reduction Roadmap’, which is adopted in July, 2018 (Joint Ministerial Committee, 2019).

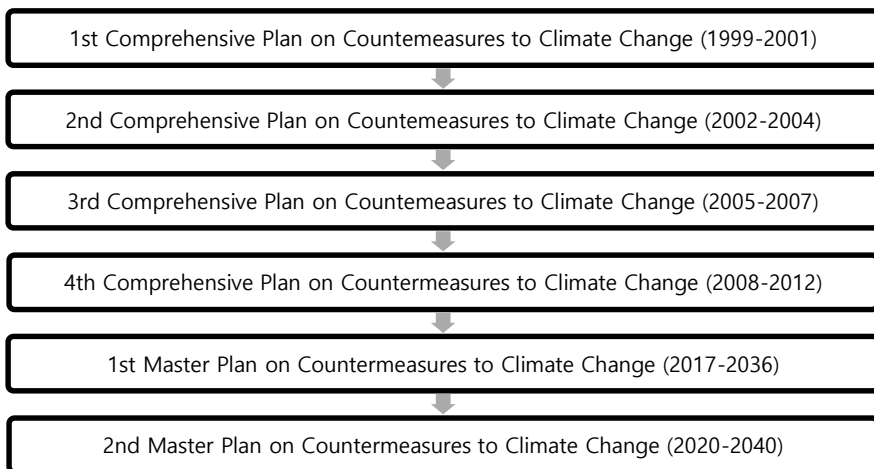
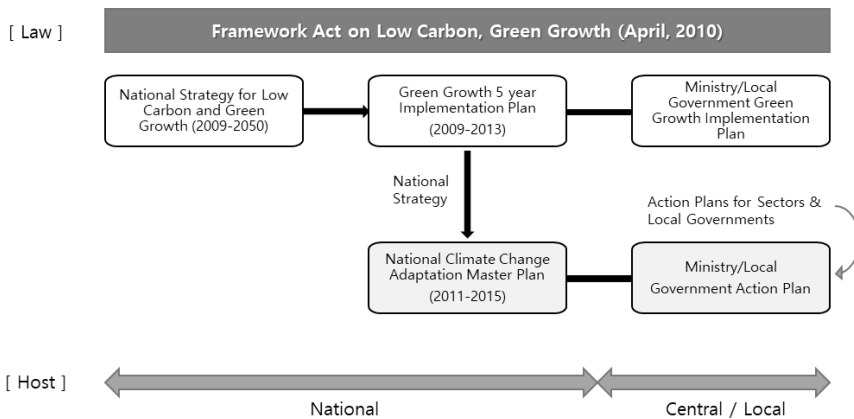


Figure 3 History of the National Climate Change Policy

As seen above, the Korean government has established and is actively pursuing a comprehensive plan to respond to climate change that all sectors including GHGs reduction, climate technology development and climate change adaptation. Based on the Law of “Framework Act on Low Carbon, Green Growth” and the “National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (CCAS), which is adopted in 2010, the government is trying to create plans that would encourage the industry to reduce greenhouse gas emissions voluntarily using markets and technology rather than direct government regulations. As shown in Figure 3, examples of such strategies and policies initiated by the government include “Green Growth 5 year Implementation plan, National Climate Change Adaptation Master Plan, Action Plans for Each Sector and Local Governments”



Source: (Myeong, 2012)

Figure 4 Korean Government's Policy on Climate Change

3. The Public Diplomacy and International Promotion (PR)

Public diplomacy transcends existing between-country foreign diplomacy to incorporate the concept of new public diplomacy that focuses on strategic public communications via multimedia, and vertical, and bi-directional channel. (Kim, 2011). According to Ahn (2011), public diplomacy is defined as a bi-directional and balanced form of communication in which diverse stakeholders – including governments – targeted communities and groups in counter-countries with different cultures. Since the current Kyoto Mechanism clearly stipulates developed countries’ obligation to reduce greenhouse gases, most efforts have focused on official diplomatic channels or Official Development Assistance (ODA). However, since both the demand for and supply of the carbon market

increased after the Paris Agreement, the importance of public diplomacy on climate change actions also rose.

Climate change is an area of public policy in which the Korean government can prove its leadership on the environmental and economic fronts. Considering that middle power have more international credibility with the use of non-threatening public diplomacy as soft power, and yet there is also a tension with matching international roles with domestic policy for credibility.

Developing countries would need Korea's help to achieve both economic growth and environment protection; conversely, the developed countries would try to create more favorable conditions for them using Korea, a developing country, and its climate change public policy. Recently, more developed countries have shifted from hard diplomacy to soft policies to extol the importance of public diplomacy (Signizer & Wamsler, 2006). This supports Ma (2011) argued that "the understanding and support on foreign policy from the people has increased, which means that the public is now included as a part of the public policy."

Once Korea secures more detailed enforcement mechanisms for climate change, it would be able to propose essential milestones on climate change and sustainable growth to the international community. In addition, it would move beyond public policy to achieve a more of global policy in which its industries and market can expand into different countries. Sung (2006) argued, "Globalization is where the economic interdependence among countries increases through the movement of goods, services, and knowledge beyond geographical borders." The four factors that accelerate globalization are: 1) the spread of liberal market ideologies, 2) technological advancement, 3) shifts in economic burdens from developed to developing countries, and 4) the opening of countries to allow trade and technological transfer.

As such, climate change has gone from a global threat to a topic studied by scholars in the international PR field. Recent PR scholars have proposed theories that encompass both general and specific theories considering political, economic, social, cultural, and technological differences (Verčič, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1996; Sung, 2006). Shin et al. (2017) mentioned the importance of strengthening communication capacity and expertise in international public diplomacy to increase Korea's role in the international community. Therefore, in terms of international PR, studies that combine climate change and the international market are noteworthy.

III. Research Method

The study leveraged a qualitative approach to undertake content analysis that includes processing information based on pre-defined units or categories. Furthermore, it is close to information collection in search of uniformity. The Korean government's public diplomacy on climate change was not carried out based on a pre-defined purpose or specific plans; it was more a government-level reaction to an international issue. Therefore, quantitative analysis was performed on the content by reviewing the documents from the UN policy, Korean government policy, and press releases.

The documents collected by the Korean government to review public diplomacy efforts on climate change included government statements, policy reports, and press releases throughout 1990 (establishment of IPCC) – 2017. The targeted government agencies included the Prime Minister's Secretariat, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, and the Ministry of Science and ICT. The Secretariat is a cross-governmental agency where policies are formulated, and the Ministry of Environment is primarily responsible for issues responding to climate change. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in charge of negotiating and conducting foreign diplomatic efforts on climate change, and the Ministry of Economy and Finance formulates and encourages cooperation for domestic and international climate change funds, whereas the Ministry of Science and ICT tends to oversee climate technology development and cooperation. Other ministries, including the Ministry for Food, Agriculture, and Fisheries, the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy, the Ministry of Land, Transport, and Maritime Affairs, the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, and the Korea Forest Services also carry out activities related to climate change. However, they have been excluded from this study because their policies are more closely related to domestic policies than public diplomacy.

IV. Results

The Korean government remained passive on the topic of climate change since it was taken as a serious threat by the international community until adopting the Kyoto Protocol. During the first campaign, the Third Comprehensive Plan on Countermeasures to Climate Change clarified that the Korean government did not have an obligation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions due to its status as a developing country. However, it mentioned its motivation to proactively participate in international efforts to respond to global warming. The government campaigned to promote public diplomacy in its own way, is as

follows: “strengthen cooperation with major countries to collectively respond on the pressure to share the obligation and actively support to produce a Korean expert in the international organizations” and “leverage clean development framework to secure capital and technology of developed nations to reduce greenhouses gases and prepare for the participation in carbon market in the future” (Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change: CFCCC, 2007).

From 2010, the government was able to mark its position in the public diplomacy discourse on climate change by establishing Green Global Growth Institute and building Global CF in Songdo, Incheon. By hosting climate change-related international organizations and international climate funds, Korea has been taking a role as bridging and mediating between developed and developing countries in public diplomacy fronts, including global climate policy, finance, and cooperation. However, as the ruling party was replaced, ongoing efforts on green growth waned and Korea regressed to a more passive public diplomacy route.

From the adoption of the Paris Agreement, Korea is no longer a developing country and takes on more responsibility on climate change. As such, it has produced a more detailed plan to promote market and international cooperation beyond just a medium for international diplomacy and policy negotiation. The Framework Act on Low Carbon, Green Growth that led to the formulation of the first master plan to Counteract Climate Change is an official declaration that climate change will be addressed in terms of inter-governmental efforts. The first master plan includes a specific action plan on medium- to long-term climate change strategies in response to the post-2020 climate change regime including greenhouse gas emission reduction, climate change adaptation, and global cooperation. These policies are a part of the government’s efforts to switch the existing reduction-based paradigm to a market and technology-centered paradigm. The master plan also emphasizes the role of the private sector and improves policy adoption by harmonizing economic, environmental, and societal factors.

In terms of public diplomacy, CFCCC (2007) aims to “expand international partnerships to prepare for international cooperation on carbon markets and establish verification system, as well as an increase in support to maximize technological development, including financial and tax support.” Furthermore, it “aims to build a support system for developing countries and expand ODA for developing countries to support and achieve overseas reduction goals.” In addition, the “2030 National Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Roadmap” stipulates that “reduce overseas plan outside the country depends on the international community’s agreement, expand global Emissions Trading schemes, and secure financial procurement plans.” In conclusion, the Korean government has moved away from its lack of interest and passive response to

climate change in the 1990s to both actively promoting the issue to foreign governments and encouraging partnerships with international businesses through its public diplomacy.

V. Conclusion and Discussion

The paradigm shift on climate change requires international cooperation. Since the Paris Agreement was signed, the Korean government has started paying more attention to sustainable growth and climate change and recently, Korea's public diplomacy on climate change has strategically responded to the international concerns and requests. By initiating and hosting an international organization, the Korean government made efforts in its public diplomacy and conducted a comprehensive execution in the international community while leveraging diverse policy mechanisms.

For the last decades, Korea has achieved profound economic development and became from one of the world's poorest countries to one of the wealthiest, having undergone the Korean War and financial crisis. As Korea experienced the rapid economic transformation, it created imbalanced development between economic development and environment. The Korean government implemented economic development-oriented policies, which resulted in continuing environmental pollution and harming quality of life. Taking into consideration of environment, Korea is striving to enhance public diplomatic measures for sustainable development, harmonizing environment and development.

This study attempted to find implications from the Korean government's public diplomacy on climate change for developing countries. Lessons learned regarding Korea's public diplomacy will provide a practical guidance to the Asian developing countries, which are suffering from environmental crisis at a phase of rapid economic growth.

We are living in an era where sustainable environment is a necessity for survival, not an option. This calls on a nationwide awareness that goes beyond the conventional view to the economy and environment as a matter of choice: resolving environmental issues is a prerequisite to sustainable growth. Environment was overlooked during the economic growth stages in Korea. Other countries in Asia should take a lesson from this, giving consideration to environment as early as the growth stages. In particular, the new climate regime actively encourages cooperation between advanced and developing countries, which highlights the importance of strategic preparedness and endeavors for climate diplomacy.

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