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SOUTH KOREA'S SCRAMBLE FOR DIPLOMACY IN AFRICAN  
DEVELOPMENT

By  
Binta Dem Fadiga

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford, Mississippi  
May 2024

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*Dedication Page*

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, whose own academic journeys have inspired me to embark on my own.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis analyzes South Korea's motivations for growing engagement in African development hypothesizing that diplomacy is a main driver in Korean interest in Africa. South Korea conducts official development aid through the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). Korea contrasts itself against conventional donors of official development aid, portraying itself as a model of economic development to emulate to recipient countries. Yet, KOICA discloses little regarding developmental methodologies it exports to recipient nations beyond its use of its development expertise and experience. I conducted qualitative analysis using country partnership strategies, official Facebook pages of KOICA Senegal and Rwanda offices, and mid-term sectoral strategies to uncover KOICA's development strategies in partnership. Furthermore, to analyze the criteria used to select core partnership strategies, I analyzed the country profiles of Senegal and Rwanda. This thesis investigates Senegal's and Rwanda's importance to Korea in international politics. Overall, this thesis aims to illuminate Korea's diplomatic drive in fostering diplomatic relations with African nations using official developmental aid.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Since 2006, the year of South Korean and African cooperation, the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) Rwanda Office has called for scholarship applications to fund studies in South Korea (hereafter Korea) (KOICA Rwanda 2024). The program is exclusive to those seeking a degree in a field beneficial to their country's economic development. It intends to provide Rwandan students with an education at a Korean university. The scholarship hopes to cultivate more than just the human capital of recipients. Following their study in Korea, recipients are both unofficial cultural ambassadors for their home country in Korea and unofficial cultural ambassadors for Korea in their home country (Varapahovskis 2021). KOICA offices in each of its African core partnership countries to fund study in Korea. In 2012, KOICA also began its Capacity Improvement and Advancement for Tomorrow (CIAT) program (KOICA 2024). This fellowship program allowed public officials, engineers, researchers, and policymakers to receive training from KOICA officials and the opportunity to study abroad in Korea. Going as far as to fund study and training in Korea may seem random. However, these annual scholarship programs hope to "provide capacity building...with a focus on sharing Korea's developmental experience and technology" (KOICA 2024). Still, these initiatives are a part of the umbrella of projects that KOICA does in African nations. Korea's role in all forms of African development and outreach is unconventional. The scholarship and fellowship program is this program in addition to other economic and rural development projects that implement "Korean" development in partnership nations while simultaneously promoting Korean soft

power. The year of South Korean and African collaboration, development forums, official developmental aid, and education opportunities are methods used by Korea to create strong, lasting partners in African nations. KOICA pilots economic and rural development projects using *Saemaul undong* (hereafter referred to as the New Village Movement) ideas and many other projects under the mission to invest and collaborate with core partnership nations for development. The KOICA Rwanda Office is one of seven offices on the African continent (offices also located in Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Uganda, Senegal, and Tanzania) (KOICA 2024), all committed to working hand in hand with local governments to spurring development. In an arena of numerous state organizations also vying to collaborate to develop African nations, KOICA emphasizes a commitment to help African countries develop using Korean development expertise in a way that contrasts with conventional development methods. What sparked Korea's interest in the endeavor? What does the middle power hope to gain from development cooperation with its seven core partnership nations?

This thesis aims to demystify Korean developmental aid in Africa. Its involvement is strategic and intentional, striving to enhance diplomatic relations with partnering African nations. Korea reaffirms its commitment to African countries and its development through the various forms of aid granted to partnership nations. Korea is not alone in its interest in African development and diplomacy, vying against conventional and new donors on the continent. In this thesis, I will further analyze Korean developmental outreach in two partnership nations, Senegal and Rwanda, and examine the reasons for Korea's continued interest in its seven African partnership nations.

### *Turning East: Africa's Development Journey through East Asian Inspiration*

In developed nations, Africa is frequently characterized as a land of untapped potential, with its wealth of natural resources and human capital lacking the infrastructure to realize its full capability. European colonization of the African continent ushered European infrastructure in addition to the oppression of Africans in their native lands. Anti-colonial sentiment swept the continent in the 1950s and 1960s, culminating in decolonization. However, the expulsion of formal European power did not end colonial renderings of Africa as Western powers forged economic development and diplomatic relations with former colonies. Following decolonization, prevalent rhetoric about Africa and development was tainted with neocolonialist ideals, emphasizing the need to civilize the continent to fulfill its capabilities (Ferguson 1990). As illustrated by James Ferguson (1990), scholars construct Africa as an object that needs to be modernized and developed in dominant discourse, followed by many international development organizations. Aid organizations focus on issues such as unmodernized agriculture and poorly functioning bureaucracy and seek out other vectors of development. Ferguson's critique of African development discourse opens the possibility of considering how aid-granting nations serve their interests in their engagements with Africa.

Africa's post-colonial status and the 1990s Washington Consensus shaped development projects in Africa. After decolonization, Western expectations placed the burden on newly independent African nations, which historically served as sites of colonial extraction, to develop like the West (Garcia-Arias & Mediavilla 2023). Post-colonial states incurred enormous sovereign debts to the Global North, primarily due to structural adjustment policies in the 1980s and 1990s. This concern led to the deepening of neo-liberalization—reduction of state involvement, an ideological imperative to foster a "free" market (Hurt 2003)— through the

Washington Consensus. The Washington Consensus marked a shift from direct provision of basic needs—food, healthcare, education, technology, and infrastructure—to dispersed aid, which left nations and organizations to implement development initiatives using Western funds. Implementing the Washington Consensus in Africa yielded variable and inconsistent results. They appeared to some as a neocolonial tool to exert hegemonic influence within the continent, especially as developed nations forged lucrative relations with the rich continent. With the ineffectiveness of conventional Western economic development methods and their use to maintain a colonial-era-like presence on the continent, African nations began looking toward other development avenues.

Today, African nations forge aid and development relations with nontraditional partners, particularly rising Asian powers. Japanese aid, for example, emphasizes the narrative that Japan is not a former colonial power of Africa, thus contrasting Japan with Western powers whose motivations in Africa stem from colonial guilt. Traditionally motivated by potential economic benefits, Japan began expanding diplomatic relations in 1989. Japan usually donates aid through third-party government organizations, similar to how Korea utilizes KOICA to conduct Global South cooperation initiatives I discuss below. However, Japanese developmental aid focuses on particular aspects needed for development, whereas Western aid (and Korean aid) focuses on framework and mindsets for development (Ohno 2013). What differentiates Japan from Korea and China is their selection of countries to cooperate with and extend developmental aid. Japan has a history of selecting more Western-aligned nations, which later proved costly to the success of their developmental assistance to Africa. While Japan highlights the lack of colonial history in Africa and Africa-Asia collaboration as its advantages (Raposo and Potter 2010), Japan does not utilize the aid recipient, war-torn experience as one of its advantages against Western powers.

In contrast, China favors working directly with governments and does not rely heavily on third-party government organizations. Chinese developmental aid depends on the nation's current status as a world economic powerhouse to appeal to the Global South, especially to African countries. Chinese discourses on aid and investment in Africa juxtapose Chinese against Western aid, interests that stem from economic and diplomatic aspirations with African nations, and colonial guilt. China is a model for many developing nations, given its rise from the Century of Humiliation to becoming a formidable opponent of Western hegemony in world politics and the economy (Lisimba and Parashar 2020). However, Chinese involvement in Africa raises concerns. Conventional Western aid donors worry that China-African collaboration also exports political ideology and cosigns autocracy for economic development. Also, the long-term goals for Chinese-African development are ambiguous (Bräutigam 1998).

China plays a crucial role in the Belt and Road initiative. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a Chinese infrastructure project that seeks to create better infrastructure and trade routes for better trade. Nearly all African nations have collaborated with China under the BRI, accepting large loans for Chinese infrastructure (railroads, highways, etc.) within their respective nations. Senegal, the first West African nation to sign a BRI deal with China in 2018, cooperated with China to build better highways and trade routes to take advantage of the country's "unique geographical location" (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018). Rwanda, like Senegal, also signed BRI deals with China in 2018 to complete railways. China's BRI deals in Africa exist amidst numerous deals and development aid donors give to recipient African countries. However, unlike Korea, China seeks to deal with African nations primarily for economic benefit, hoping to cultivate resources from the continent in exchange for infrastructure. China's BRI

seeks economic ties with African nations, whereas Korea seeks diplomatic ties with partnership nations through developmental aid.

Meanwhile, Korea portrays itself as an attractive partner for developmental cooperation in Africa. It is a once war-torn nation in immense poverty that has successfully developed into a large economic power. Korea's history includes similar issues that hinder African nation's development capabilities through a shared history of colonization, civil war, autocracy, and struggle for democracy (Mawdsley 2012). The likeness between Korea and many African nations makes it an appealing model. Korea currently finds itself among several aid donors seeking legitimacy and future gain through international cooperation on the African continent; the 'rags to riches' narrative touted by China and Japan highlights non-Western developmental methods as reasons for their swift economic development. Chinese cooperation in Africa positions it as Korea's most prominent opponent in expanding grassroots developmental knowledge to the continent. While Korea currently utilizes a liberal-democratic political system that differentiates it from China's communist system, it developed under strict autocratic leadership. It took steps towards a liberal democracy following its economic development.

### ***Korean Soft Power***

A term coined by Joseph Nye, "soft power," is utilizing culture, society, and policies to shape beneficial policy outcomes for their national interests. Soft power theory rests upon the idea that world politics aligns more with liberalism than true realism. Actors use institutions independently or as government extensions to achieve political goals and agendas in world politics. Soft power relies upon a country's culture, foreign policies, and political values to its perception abroad (Nye 2008). The mutual leverage of the donor-recipient foreign aid

relationship exemplifies how all nations can use soft power (Gallarotti 2022). Foreign aid creates an atmosphere for positive qualities (e.g., generosity, virtue, and compassion) to be promoted and associated with the donor nation. Foreign aid becomes an effective method for boosting soft power both within and internationally, showing a commitment to the recipient nation's success. Furthermore, foreign aid provides the opportunity for ideals of liberal democracy to be transmitted as well (Blair et al. 2021).

Aid to developing nations is a means where developed nations can garner support in the aid-recipient country and eventually be receptive to the donor's policy goals (Blair et al. 2021). Soft power relies upon a country's foreign policies and willingness and commitment to aid the recipient country (via money, infrastructure, and knowledge), which will benefit the donor country globally (Nye 2008). Aid from a nation that models the values—and prestige—of the developing nation's citizens bolsters support within the country of the donor. The use of aid is motivated by international cooperation as well as self-interest in the potential of the aid recipient. Western aid has long been an example of attempts to foster these relationships with lesser developed nations through gifting developmental aid. Differing from a loan, these "gifts" do not warrant a repayment on borrowed money but underscore an expectation by the donor country to receive reciprocation in the future for their generosity (Mawdsley 2012). Hence, while developmental aid is an investment by the donor nation in the recipient nation for its development, it also propels soft power by garnering lucrative support for future use.

In contrast to Western aid, South-South international development cooperation stresses the rhetoric of partnership between donors and recipients. Formerly, lesser developed nations' rise in economic and political status to a position where they can now serve as donors fuels an implicit moral obligation to aid the recipient country's development. As a recently developed

nation, the donor can emphasize similarities between the nations, such as experiences under colonial rule, geographic similarities, rejection of hegemonic hierarchal relations, and mutual benefits for donors and recipients (Mawdsley 2011). Brazil, for instance, participates heavily in international cooperation with Lusophone countries in Africa, underlining a shared history of Portuguese colonization (Nganje 2009). However, South-South cooperation contains similar motivations for national interests as their Western counterparts; these intentions are subdued by the promotion of South-South developmental cooperation as an alternative to conventional avenues of development.

In this thesis, I lay out the argument that Korean South-South developmental aid and cooperation in Africa portrays a Korean commitment to Africa's development to create an environment to foster closer diplomatic and economic relationships with African nations. I suggest Korea garners soft power in Africa through developmental aid and international cooperation. Moreover, Korea operates out of economic interest in the resource-rich continent and out of diplomatic interest. As a middle power, Korea repeatedly seeks avenues and platforms to advocate for international policy concerns. To do so, Korea must seek ways to build its international image and legitimize its presence among world powers. Korea's geopolitical position pushes the country to seek to develop its soft power over hard power. Korea achieves this in a two-pronged approach. First, it develops its cultural exports, elevating the nation as a culture diplomacy powerhouse through transmitting Korean dramas, music, food, language, and beauty. Moreover, in addition to its cultural exports, Korea has boosted its international prestige by actively participating in official development aid.

In each country's partnership strategy, KOICA highlights its developmental experience to legitimize its status as a collaborative partner in Africa. When promoting its developmental



experience, it emphasizes select aspects from Korea's developmental history. For instance, KOICA does not export the entirety of its developmental strategies when it transfers these policies into the African context. It utilizes certain aspects of the Korean development experience, focusing on the self-reliance model, one part of a decades-long rural economic development strategy carried out in Korea at the height of the authoritarian era in the 1970s. Korea selectively promotes certain aspects of its experience, particularly those that portray the country as a model country for African nations to follow. Inadvertently, these associations with Korea create positive perceptions of Korea and its developmental prestige and bolster relationships with and within African nations.

Korea's selection of core and peripheral partnership countries has yet to be disclosed. Not limited to geographical region or economic prowess, its core partnership countries include Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Uganda, Rwanda, Senegal, and Tanzania (KOICA). Each country differs vastly from the next, with no explicit correlation between their selection. However, when analyzed from a diplomatic standpoint, their selection becomes intuitive. The deliberate selection of nations based on their country profile (political stability, role in regional geopolitics, and international prestige) is done to cultivate Korean perceptions and soft power to its greatest potential. Korea's interest in regional African geopolitics is limited to peacekeeping's role in gaining recognition from international organizations and great powers. In the context of the two case studies, Senegal and Rwanda both use peacekeeping to establish their integral role in regional security and, more broadly, global politics. South Korea's diplomacy has no interest in geopolitics but rather the way it bolsters the international esteem of the two nations.

The perspective on Korean soft power offered here departs from dominant readings of the country's global soft power strategy, focusing on *hallyu* (Korean Wave). *Hallyu* cultural

production emphasizes Korean identities, values, and ideals, including family-oriented cultural consumption, in contrast to Western media portraying individualism, violence, and other unpalatable ideals (Oppenheim and Hindman 2016). Emphasis on Korean dramas' conservativeness allowed the drama to find success beyond Asia in the Middle East and Africa (Malik 2019; Ochieng & Kim 2019). Due to its chameleon nature, Korean dramas find success in communicating Korea's development rhetoric from post-war stricken poverty to a developed nation (Ochieng & Kim 2019). Korea's soft power globally is unmistakable and mainly accredited to its famous *hallyu*. However, I argue that, in Africa, Korea utilizes developmental aid, particularly knowledge-sharing programs, to transmit the nation's soft power by marketing Korea's developmental experience. Moreover, Korea uses the organization KOICA to propel soft power to foster amicable diplomatic relations with core partnership countries, preferring those of geopolitical significance within their respective regions.

This thesis will be split into three sections. First, I will discuss and analyze Korea's official developmental structure, Korea's growing interest in Africa, the competition between North and South Korean diplomatic relations with African nations, the Korean miracle, Korean developmental aid and KOICA, and new objectives for Korea-Africa diplomatic relations. In the second chapter, I will analyze KOICA's role as a tool to cultivate soft power in core partnership nations. I will also examine the core partnership strategies published by KOICA for Senegal and Rwanda to portray Korea's intentions in cooperating with these nations. Finally, in the third chapter, I will analyze the significance of Senegal and Rwanda for diplomacy and Korea's need for global diplomacy as a middle power.

In this thesis, I have found that Korea's aspirations for diplomacy in Africa are not recent, stemming from competition for recognition against North Korea. The reasons for Korea's

developmental success are very complex. Contributing to the success of the developmental state, the Korean military complex, the New Village Movement, and other factors. However, these crucial aspects of Korean economic development are removed when transmitted abroad. When KOICA applies Korean developmental expertise in a recipient nation, it chooses only parts of its developmental past that portray it positively. This allows the organization to tout Korea as a development model without addressing the political and social baggage associated with development-era Korea, evident through its publications and core partnership strategies. Korea's developmental goals in core partnership countries (here, Senegal and Rwanda) are lofty and empty. The documents never mention the success of projects piloted by KOICA and give no insight into the methodology to attain developmental goals beyond Korea's development expertise. Thus, Korea hopes to gain more than international development cooperation from its outreach to African nations, seeking stronger diplomatic relations with recipient African nations. Their aspirations for diplomatic relations with core nations are evident through KOICA's outreach. Good governance and amicable conditions, exemplified through political stability and regional significance, are quintessential for Korean interest in African nations. Hence, Korea's official developmental aid aims to foster more than economic development in recipient nations and promote good relationships with Korea.

## **CHAPTER ONE—KOREA’S ODA INFRASTRUCTURE**

Beginning in the late twentieth century, Korea began to hail its developmental expertise and status as a rags-to-riches nation. Korea aimed to promote the nation, its government, and its developmental strategies to foster strong connections with developing nations--notably, in 2006, setting its sights on Africa when President Roh Moo-hyun introduced Korea's Initiative for African Development, explicitly stating a desire to become a friend to Africa through development (Park 2006). Korea's interest in Africa seemed sudden, given that other countries had long been interested in the continent's resources. Before the initiative, diplomatic ties between the Republic of Korea and African nations were dormant, especially during the decades when the Korean government practiced a One Korea Policy, blocking diplomatic ties with African nations that recognized North Korea. Following the Cold War, Korea abandoned this approach and began to consider Africa as an essential partner (Yoon 2014).

Commitment to establishing and maintaining relations with African nations continued after President Roh's administration. His successor, Lee Myeong-bak, further emphasized Africa's significance during the 2009 Korea-Africa forum and his 2010 New Year address (Lee 2010). Continuing the precedent set by President Roh, Korea increased developmental aid to African nations through knowledge-sharing programs and dispatched volunteers to African partnership nations. KOICA began establishing regional offices for all on-site work and programs in Africa. As the agency had done in other countries, it began to offer numerous scholarships for African citizens to travel to Korea and earn certifications and knowledge about their industry, hoping to return to their country and implement development inspired by what

they learned there. For each partnership country, KOICA outlined goals and objectives of development for sectors of development outlined by the nation's government. For example, they developed plans such as Vision Rwanda 2020 and Emerging Senegal. In KOICA's Country Partnership Strategies, Korea's developmental experience is always emphasized (KOICA 2022). Through KOICA, Korea works with partnering African nations to share its development methods through various knowledge-sharing programs like fishery development in Senegal and ICT infrastructure development in Rwanda.

This chapter lays a foundation for understanding how Korean overseas development aid and cooperation are a vector of soft power in African nations of diplomatic interest to Korea. It first discusses theories of the Korean economic development "miracle." Noting the evolution of North and South Korean relations with Africa since the Cold War era, it suggests that KOICA portrays South Korea's economic development journey as a model that can be replicated in Africa and is tied to the geopolitical significance of key African nations for Korea.

### ***The Korean Miracle***

From a war-torn developing nation to a developed nation, Korea hailed for its quick developmental success, joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1996. Coined the Miracle on the Han River, Korea made leaps and bounds in infrastructure, education, industry building, and development in a generation. Korea's developmental success is due to a variety of factors. It developed under a developmental state led by former President Park Chung Hee. After the Korean War from 1950-1953, the southern half of divided Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world, ravaged by war. Taking office in 1961 through a coup d'état, Park implemented extensive economic reform including providing

preferential loans to large enterprises (*chaebol*), especially in heavy industries, and supporting the large firms by reestablishing diplomatic and economic ties with Japan. The rapid economic growth widened the disparity between rural and urban Korea. In response, the Park administration enacted the New Village Movement to modernize Korea's underdeveloped rural and agricultural. The program promoted a self-reliance model that incentivized rural communities to develop first, hoping to receive government incentives later.

The roots of Korea's "miracle" development are a matter of debate among scholars. The World Bank issued a controversial report in 1993, diminishing the Korean developmental state as the main propelling force in ushering economic success in such a short time. In this report, the World Bank boiled down the intricacies of the developmental state, claiming that the Asian nations that achieved swift economic development followed market fundamentals (World Bank 1993). As Alice Amsden (1994) pointed out, the report advocated neoliberal economic practices and admonished the role of government support in the rapid economic development utilized by these nations. Although the World Bank once supported the methods used by Korea and other East Asian developing economies, extensive government support and intervention contradicted ideals emerging in Washington of a market-friendly approach under neoliberal governance (Amsden 1994).

Like Amsden, other scholars in the developmental state school emphasized vast government intervention in the national economy; Korea's developmental state relied on state support to levy the debts of *chaebol*, export-centered economic policy, and the promotion of industries necessary for nationwide economic growth (Vogel 1994; Amsden 1993). Aiming to decrease Korea's reliance on exports and bolster the domestic economy, the developmental state preferred to support *chaebol* with industries focusing on import substitution and comparative advantage. The

Korean developmental state was forced to incur rapid economic growth and increase international competitiveness. It invested heavily in specific industries (steel, textiles, shipbuilding, etc.) to spur economic growth (Evans 1995). Companies like Hyundai, Daewoo, and Samsung, likened to the Japanese *zaibatsu* (Johnson 1982), could prosper under the developmental state due to the state's preference for large conglomerates. Some businesses in Korea under the developmental state were incentivized to expand as much as possible and incur "mammoth loans" from banks; when faced with the possibility of default, the government would bail them out (Woo 1991). Korea exercised a high level of state dependency in the economy, commonly referred to as "Korea, Inc.," through banks that were controlled and often bailed out by the state.

More recently, scholars in the geopolitical economies school have challenged the developmental state thesis and emphasized the geopolitical factors of development (Glassman and Choi 2014). In addition to domestic economic success, Korea's economy grew internationally by using Korean companies to supply the military, military supplies, and labor during wars on behalf of other nations, notably the United States. Korean conglomerates benefitted the most from the US Cold War state and its role in the Vietnam War, securing large amounts of offshore procurement (Glassman & Choi 2014). Companies like Hanjin benefited from policies set forth by the United States to cut costs for war supplies. With the eagerness of the Park regime and Korean conglomerates to benefit from the War, Korean companies were favored. Military contracts cemented relationships between the US military, foreign states, and private enterprises, providing a unique environment for Korean companies to achieve economic success and bolster the domestic economy through US military operations (Chung 2019; Kwon

2024). In addition to debates about Korea's economic success and the role of the developmental state, the role of offshore procurement for Korean conglomerates is indisputable.

Although the factors that led to Korea's success are a matter of debate between neoliberal, developmental state, and geopolitical economies perspectives, today, Korean governmental organizations emphasize the replicability of the Korean "model" as a vector of soft power. Korean soft power in developing nations emphasizes Korea's past and its rise to economic success, especially in connecting with citizens of developing nations. Its rise from its status as a former aid recipient to a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as an aid donor country is attractive to nations hoping to emulate the same success as Korea (Kalinowski and Park 2016). Korea wields its past to its advantage when establishing diplomatic relations with former developing countries, contrasting with other aid donors that have historically acted as aid donors.

While Korea's past as a developing nation is its advantage against other aid donors, concerns over the context in which Korea's aid occurred dampens its credibility as an adequate alternative to other donors. Its economic development occurred under Park Chung Hee's authoritarian rule, in which economic development was prioritized over political liberalization (Hundt 2012). The authoritarian developmental state limited the civil liberties of citizens, at times subjecting them to violence and political suppression for those who spoke against the government (Lee 2007). After the assassination of Park Chung Hee and the democratic struggle under the presidency of Chun Doo-hwan, Korea transitioned into a liberal democracy in 1987, gaining democratic governance and economic prestige on the world stage. By focusing on authoritarian-era strategies such as the New Village Movement as a model for African nations, the Korean "model" may inadvertently support authoritarian rule in pursuit of economic



development (Kalinowski & Park 2016). While these concerns are valid, as I suggest in this thesis, KOICA development programming in Africa is less about instituting an authoritarian development model and more about securing Korea's geopolitical positioning by strengthening ties with key partners using modular strategies.

### ***History of Korean Development and Soft Power***

Korea's soft power strategy in Africa follows a long history of North-South Korean competition for African ties, focusing primarily on how African nations vote in the United Nations—following the Korean War, North and South Korea sought to make allies globally, both setting sights on Africa ripe with recently decolonized nations. North Korea quickly forged diplomatic ties with newly decolonized African nations, emphasizing anti-imperialistic views with its African counterparts. North Korea provided military forces, monuments, and technical training for scholars from Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Tanzania, Madagascar, Zambia, Lesotho, Mali, and Ethiopia (Young 2015). Diplomatic relations by North Korea were maintained in the pursuit of fostering nationalism domestically and exporting *juche*—North Korean ideology of self-reliance—to newly decolonized African countries. After the nation experienced the 1994 famine, support for *juche* in Africa decreased substantially, creating an opportunity for South Korea's diplomatic relations with Africa. However, North Korea maintains relations with African nations through Mansudae Overseas Projects, providing affordable construction works and erecting monuments in Senegal, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and many other African nations (Young 2021).

South Korea has also long understood the importance of African nations in world diplomacy, most notably when the nation sought UN membership in the 1970s. South Korea

practiced a "one-Korea policy," only seeking diplomatic ties that did not recognize North Korea and solely acknowledged South Korea (Yoon 2014). However, these policies became detrimental to South Korea when attempting to garner support among African nations, many of which had already established diplomatic ties with North Korea. When South Korea aimed to seek UN recognition, it faced the challenge of its policy towards African nations, which mostly remained impartial between the two Koreas. The African continent with the most significant number of UN member states was critical for South Korea to gain recognition from the United Nations (Park 1978).

The geopolitical economies' perspective on development also illuminates the importance of South Korean developmental success to the American Cold War project. American investment in South Korea was a formidable example of capitalistic success rising from the challenges of dire post-war conditions (Woo 1991; Shin 1994). American investment in the success of South Korea has allowed the nation to observe economic success domestically and shift to export its "developmental expertise and prestige" to other developing nations. Korean interest in Africa has shifted from seeking legitimacy to marketing their developmental success to core partnership countries to further diplomatic and political interests on the continent.

### ***Rise to Prosperity: KOICA and Korea's Journey***

In 1991, Korea began the second phase of the developmental and authoritarian-era New Village Movement, shifting the focus from domestic rural economic development to international cooperation through developmental aid and the export of knowledge-sharing programs to developing nations worldwide. However, it was not until 2006 that Korea began to set its sights on the African continent. Diplomatic ties between Korea and African nations had

been dormant for years, especially during the decades when the Korean government practiced a One Korea Policy that blocked diplomatic ties with African nations recognizing North Korea. When the Cold War ended, Korea considered African nations essential partners (Yoon & Moon 2014). In 2006, President Roh Moo-hyun introduced Korea's Initiative for African Development and explicitly stated a commitment to developing African nations.

Currently, the African continent is the second largest recipient of official Korean developmental aid, both bilateral (foreign direct investments and Korean ODA) and multilateral (knowledge sharing programs and KOICA), portraying a long-standing commitment to establishing and maintaining relations with African nations continued after President Roh's administration. His successor, Lee Myeong-bak, further emphasized Africa's significance during the 2009 Korea-Africa forum and his 2010 New Year address (Lee 2010). Continuing the precedent set by President Roh, Korea has continued to increase developmental aid to African nations through knowledge-sharing programs and the dispatch of volunteers to African partnership nations. Some scholars argue that Korea's need for resources, especially oil, fueled the increase of developmental aid to Africa (Lumsdaine & Schopf 2007; Kalinowski & Cho 2012). While the nation's need for resources contributed to the initial pursuit and interest in the continent, continued interest in African nations also aligns with Korea's geopolitically driven soft power strategy.

Korean South-South development and aid cooperation in Africa emphasizes Korea's authoritarian-era rural development scheme, the New Village Movement (*Saemaul undong*). Post-war Korea was an urbanizing society with rural populations left behind in a stratified economy. In response, the Park administration enacted the New Village Movement to modernize and develop rural areas. Under the program, the government promoted mantras of self-reliance

through incentives that promoted a commitment to development with rewards to villages and towns that achieved greater development. Rural villages and towns were incentivized to implement development and modern agricultural techniques within their community first, fostering a strong sense of community in rural villages and towns. The communities were self-reliant, employing modern practices that were later rewarded by the national and local governments, further incentivizing them to achieve more development within their communities. The program applied traditional Korean community values, emphasizing small individual sacrifices to attain greater public gain (Abafita et al. 2013; Kim 2020; Park 2022). Although the roots of South Korea's "miracle" are a matter of debate, the Korean aid apparatus, including KOICA, treats schemes such as the New Village Movement as replicable, positioning the country as a model for developing nations across the Global South. Marketing its prestige in Africa, Korea paints itself as an attractive alternative to other developmental models by bolstering its soft power.

Korean interest in Africa has shifted from seeking legitimacy to marketing their developmental success to core partnership countries to further diplomatic and political interests on the continent. Korean developmental aid is not distributed equally across all African nations. Under its continent-specific country partnerships, KOICA identifies seven core partnership countries within the continent: Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania, Senegal, and Rwanda (KOICA 2024). In each of these countries, extensive developmental outreach exists. An analysis of partnership strategies published by KOICA reveals a promise to collaborate closely with the African nations in pursuit of their outlined goals. KOICA poses nothing revolutionary for the nations, only reiterating goals already set forth by their governments with a guarantee to aid them using their developmental prestige. KOICA works to disseminate knowledge about

Korean developmental success in healthcare, agriculture, ICT, and fishery projects. While KOICA may be committed to developing its partnership nations in Africa, it also places significant importance on establishing and maintaining connections with governance, signaling a desire for diplomatic relations in Africa, especially those of geopolitical importance. Core partnership countries are selected for their geopolitical importance for future diplomatic gain rather than potential economic gain. I thus examine the geopolitical importance of two core partnership nations, Senegal and Rwanda, and highlight their diplomatic importance for Korea and the core partnership strategies for each nation.

## **CHAPTER TWO—KOREAN DEVELOPMENTAL AID AS A VEHICLE OF SOFT POWER**

Since 2006, Korea has partnered with African nations through developmental aid and outreach, selling its 'rags to riches' experience as a model for developing nations to emulate. Korean presidents Roh Moo-hyun and Lee Myeong-bak emphasized the importance of international cooperation between Korea and African nations. KOICA's mission is to "support the balanced growth of Africa through systematic strategies tailored to each country's challenges and needs...by address[ing] the political instability, food shortage and pervasive diseases ... to realize a more peaceful and prosperous region in consideration of Africa's ownership and potential" (KOICA 2024). Korea and KOICA are some of the many nations and organizations whose sights are set on the African continent. Former colonial powers, the US, Japan, and China, are eager to participate in Africa's development with similar intentions of maximizing the continent's full potential.

While Korea's developmental partnership in Africa may cite developing the continent as its goal, its primary goal is to forge diplomatic relationships with African nations. Developmental aid is solely a means to forge lasting relationships in Africa and bolster its soft power among these nations. Korea markets its developmental experience, making it attractive to developing nations and, in turn, bolstering its soft power and Korean prestige within these nations by establishing a commitment to the developing nation's success. To answer this hypothesis, this chapter will be divided into the following sections: first, developmental aid as

soft power; next, Korea's unique developmental aid and soft power; and finally, an analysis of two case studies in Senegal and Rwanda.

### ***Korea's Developmental Aid Soft Power***

KOICA is a Korean government organization undertaking policy transfer projects with the Global South. Policy transfers is a method of international cooperation between developed and developing nations that two governments can facilitate but, more commonly, actors on behalf of the government (organizations, NGOs, etc.) or businesses enacting these policy exchanges through knowledge and policy sharing (Evans 2004). KOICA emphasizes Korea's history as a developing nation to make it a multifaceted model for development that appeals to governments and entities in the Global South. Unlike conventional Global North-Global South policy transfers, KOICA refers to its role in these policy transfers as a partner, furthering the rhetoric of it as an alternative to collaboration with hegemonic aid donors (Kim & Gray, Mawdsley, KOICA). Through its African trials, KOICA partners with communities rather than governments directly, preferring to collaborate with intermediary organizations.

Since 1998, KOICA has promoted multiple pilot projects of the New Village Movement in Africa. New Village Movement knowledge-sharing programs have succeeded in increasing productivity, modernizing agricultural practices, and establishing beneficial relationships between African nations and Korea. These studies boast that the root of its success is its self-reliance ideology that fosters motivation among populations long demoralized due to the state of their community (Doucette & Müller 2016). However, the ambiguity of the lasting success of the New Village Movement begs the question of why the model would be exported in the first

place. If modernizing the agriculture sector to boost the national economy is the answer, the New Village Movement only boosts the agricultural sector for so long (Doucette & Müeller 2016). Deemed an alternative to conventional agricultural aid, the inability to address this issue lessens its appeal. A willingness to modernize through cultivating morale in the community allowed for success in the African context. Emphasizing self-reliance makes the New Village Movement more applicable in the global context. Furthermore, consideration for the developing nation's customs and using them in culmination with the *saemaeul* (New Village) spirit proved more successful than some trials where issues arose regarding lack of cultural sensitivity (Jung 2016). The exportation of the New Village Movement abroad has emphasized the mindset rather than specific development plans, hence its successful trials in many nations.

Korea's development story provides a means to facilitate international cooperation by touting its developmental expertise to less developed nations (Martin & Geglia 2019). Touting the spirit of self-reliance, Korea engages in policy transfers by extracting a singular aspect of its development history and exporting it abroad (Lee et al. 2022). It oversimplifies the context of Korean development, particularly diminishing the effect of its developmental state on its success, instead opting for singular characteristic from its developmental history that is applicable in virtually any context (Kim 2019; Peck & Theodore 2010). Development is one of many objectives for Korea in its recipient nations. If so, it would emphasize the state's involvement, similar to the development practices of China and Japan. In addition to development, Korea hopes to expand its influence as a middle power by emphasizing its developmental history and similar history with its aid recipients. Hence, Korea uses KOICA to expand its influence and soft



power through knowledge-sharing programs and emphasizes partnerships between itself and its aid recipient nations.

### ***KOICA Core Partnership Strategies***

For each core partnership country, KOICA publishes a partnership strategy, a framework outlining developmental goals in the respective nation, and methods to achieve development in identified areas. These partnership strategies borrow aspects from domestic developmental objectives as well. Contrary to rhetoric promoted by Korea of its alternative developmental style, these partnership strategies and frameworks intended to highlight methodologies of achieving development; KOICA does little to fully articulate how exactly it aims to cooperate with core partnership nations for development. Instead, these strategies highlight Korea's developmental expertise in a particular area as the sole methodology. In this chapter, I will analyze the core partnership strategies for Senegal and Rwanda as well as the official KOICA Facebook pages to portray that KOICA's commitment to African development is surface level, hinting towards greater goals that drive Korea to engage in developmental outreach in Senegal and Rwanda.

### ***KOICA Core Partnership Strategy for Senegal***

Senegal is one of the few politically stable nations in West Africa, where coups have hit in the past three years. In contrast to its neighbors, Senegal has experienced three peaceful transitions of power and fair democratic elections since its independence from France in 1960.

Since colonization, Senegal has historically served as an important country due to its location, seaports, and position as a gateway for the rest of West Africa.

KOICA's goals for Senegal are lofty and idealistic, promising to utilize its developmental expertise to assist Senegal in reaching economic development. Apart from the emphasis on Korea's developmental expertise, the goals of KOICA are very similar to the work of other development organizations. According to KOICA's Country Partnership Strategy for Senegal, KOICA aims to support the Senegalese government in achieving the goals outlined in the Emerging Senegal Plan published in 2014. The country partnership strategy document cites agricultural productivity, rural development, fishery development, education, health, sanitation, and logistics as areas it will focus on from 2016 to 2020. KOICA planned to prioritize rural development through increased agricultural and fishery productivity, water management and health, and transport. With KOICA, they intend to improve education and access to finance and agricultural machinery, promote eco-friendly entrepreneurship, and increase the participation of women and youth in the agricultural industry. KOICA planned to support essential infrastructure and capacity building, social infrastructure to promote local community organizations, and development of policies and techniques to develop Senegal's fishing industry.

Furthermore, the Senegalese government and KOICA strive to increase the youth's access to education by increasing quality and access to education and workforce training. Through its TVET program, it hopes to increase access to education and cultivate the human capital of women and youth. Highlighting access to clean water and sanitation, KOICA planned to collaborate with the Senegalese government to improve healthcare, water, and sanitation in rural

areas. It emphasizes its knowledge of development in creating a national health care system, water supply, and sewerage infrastructure as valuable to Senegal's development. Together with KOICA, it aims to decrease reliance upon maritime transportation and expand to road and railway transportation for trade. KOICA aims to support the diversification of Senegalese transportation infrastructure, again stressing Korea's national transport network development expertise.

The goals laid out in KOICA's country partnership strategies span various areas of development. However, the strategies are hollow, only containing the aspirations of KOICA based on plans previously published by recipient nations in their development strategies (Emerging Senegal). KOICA discloses no methodology for achieving these grand development objectives beyond its "development expertise" (KOICA 2017). KOICA's development outreach in Senegal began in 2011, yet the organization fails to mention success from the first phase of development cooperation from 2011-2015. Since its initial Senegal partnership strategy in 2017, KOICA has published an updated strategy in 2022. The 2022 edition reads very similar to the previous edition, again with no mention of successes, changes, and pivots in strategy (KOICA 2022). Again, the document gives a singular concrete methodology on how it plans to cooperate with Senegal: its development expertise. As mentioned in Chapter One, Korea's development history is vast and multifaceted. Yet, the organization diminishes the complexity of Korea's developmental experience by withholding any insight into the specifics of initiatives, projects, and programs utilized in Senegal, transferred from similar programs implemented in Korea.

Success in economic development is indicative of the efficiency of development. Economic development and aid take time to create immediate results. Given the length of time KOICA has worked with Senegal, the organization has nothing to show for its effort in the nation. As a recipient of \$6.2 million in aid and 13 years of collaboration with Korea (KOICA 2017), the KOICA Senegal office does little to illustrate the effects of aid in Senegal. Outside official publications, KOICA Senegal's Facebook page paints a similar picture to its partnership strategies.

Its Facebook page is filled with photos from volunteer work and programs spearheaded by KOICA in Senegal. From scholarship announcements to study in Korea to photo ops of meetings between KOICA officials and local Senegalese officials, Facebook never discloses what "developmental expertise and experience" it uses. However, under diplomatic outreach, KOICA's Facebook serves as an exemplary record of outreach and cooperation with Senegal. Core partnership strategies and KOICA Senegal's Facebook page fail to explicitly depict its successes, effectiveness, and failures in Senegalese development. However, Korea accurately portrays its commitment to participation in African development through aid granted to Senegal and constant outreach and involvement with local officials. The emphasis on KOICA and Senegal's relationship (KOICA Senegal 2024) signals that development is not the sole goal of KOICA in Senegal. As the Facebook page serves as a promotional space meant to highlight the work done in Senegal, it also inadvertently transmits Korea's pursuit to establish strong relations in Senegal to foster soft power. The heavy promotion of scholarships to study in Korea only further feeds into the goal of cultivating Korean soft power among Senegalese, as education and

prestige are significant vehicles of soft power. Unlike its development methodologies, Korea's diplomatic aspirations are evident through its publications, country partnership strategies, and Facebook pages.

### ***KOICA Core Partnership Strategies for Rwanda***

Post-genocide Rwanda has sustained political stability and economic development since the 2000s. Within the Great Lakes Region, it has been able to become an example of economic development and success despite its history of genocide. Rwanda's current leader, Paul Kagame, has been in office since 2000. Although its government is very autocratic, it is stable and emphasizes the importance of economic growth. Despite economic growth in Rwanda, the ability to sustain economic growth is a cause of concern due to the state's need to control wish to control the economy (Mann & Berry 2015). According to KOICA's Country Partnership Strategy for Rwanda, KOICA aimed to "develop human resources to meet the demands of the labor market, increase rural household income, and improve the use of ICT" (KOICA 2017). At the time of publication, KOICA planned to work in education, rural development, and ICT. KOICA cites Rwanda's inadequate education system as the root of employment issues in the nation due to its underutilization of available human capital, despite initiatives like Vision 2020, which prioritized education as one of its four goal pillars, access to primary and secondary education for its citizens remains low. KOICA plans to partner with Rwanda in the Teacher Capacity Building Program and Institution Enhancement Program.

In rural development, KOICA planned to collaborate with the Rwandan government through the Agricultural Intensification Program and Rural Development Program, aiming to increase agricultural productivity through agricultural product development, improving agricultural products, and improving agricultural technologies. Its rural development program borrows New Village Movement era methods such as self-reliance to promote "diligence, self-help, and cooperation" (KOICA 2017). In ICT development, KOICA will partner with the Rwandan government in the Smart Rwanda Master Plan to use ICT as a "key crosscutting enabler to enhance governance in education and agriculture" (KOICA 2017). KOICA emphasizes the importance of improved ICT infrastructure to develop the nation's agriculture, education, and governance sectors. KOICA has established an evaluation framework and 70% of Official Developmental Assistance to Rwanda to reach its goals by 2020. In a recent publication of initiatives in Rwanda, KOICA, in collaboration with the Rwandan government, intends to reach these goals by 2025. Throughout the document, KOICA harps its experience in its development practices, particularly in modernizing and industrializing its ICT sector, to serve as a leader to help Rwanda through similar industrialization. The goals laid out by KOICA are quite ambitious. The initial partnership strategies were published in 2016, hoping to end its first phase in 2020. Data and statistics on the successes and failures of these projects are not published anywhere. KOICA has taken satisfactory surveys for all countries where it conducts projects, painting KOICA positively with high satisfaction from its collaboration.

Like Senegal, KOICA's developmental objectives in Rwanda are quite ambitious. KOICA Rwanda's Facebook Page focuses on development projects, scholarship opportunities,

and meetings with key figures in local governance. Photo ops of KOICA workers and volunteers exist among posts calling for applications to study in Korea and photos of top KOICA officials speaking with members of the Rwandan government (KOICA Rwanda 2024). KOICA's Facebook page paints an articulate picture of the aspirations of Korean international cooperation in Rwanda. Emphasis on scholarship, meetings with key members of the Rwandan government, and volunteer work in Rwanda demonstrate Korea's aspirations to cultivate positive perceptions of the nation within Rwanda. KOICA publications about projects and goals promise considerable development due to Korea's developmental experiences, but reports must specify how they will do so. Moreover, detailed statistics on projects have yet to be published, meaning that the success of the projects since 2016 is ambiguous and difficult to measure. Senegal and Rwanda identified the priority areas of development in initiatives of the Emerging Senegal Plan and the Rwanda Vision 2020 plan. Strategies published by KOICA read like propaganda, lacking knowledge and transparency about actual projects in Senegal and Rwanda. The lack of transparency signals that development is not the primary goal for Korean partnership in Africa but rather a gateway for further political and economic cooperation between the nations (Gray & Kim 2016).

Ambitions to reduce poverty, improve human rights, gender equality, and sustainable development (ODA Korea) are meant to promote political and economic cooperation. Promoting soft power in the core partnership countries is the primary objective for KOICA and ODA Korea. The selection of the six core partnership nations is deliberate in prioritizing relationships with countries of both governmental stability and geopolitical importance. Even in updated country partnership strategies for Senegal and Rwanda published in 2022, the claims and plans laid out

by KOICA in previously published country partnership strategies have remained the same (KOICA 2022).

Further analysis of the respective Facebook pages of KOICA's Senegal and Rwanda offices highlights volunteer activities, scholarships to study in Korea, and meetings with influential national leaders. Rather than publications only emphasizing the progress made in the respective partnership countries, KOICA emphasizes other aspects of its developmental outreach in Senegal. This intentional highlight of diplomacy, scholarship, and development equally signals the interests of KOICA's outreach in these nations. Hence, KOICA outreach in Senegal and Rwanda focuses on developing and fostering positive relations with local governments and promoting knowledge sharing within partnership nations.

Through the analysis of the country partnership strategies of Senegal and Rwanda, KOICA outlines its priority sectors. However, upon further inspection, the priority areas highlighted have been adapted from Rwanda Vision 2020 and Emerging Senegal. KOICA mentions collaboration and support throughout the documents but must provide tangible processes and methods for achieving these goals outside of utilizing its developmental experience. Korea's true goal through development cooperation is to foster an environment for political and economic cooperation. This leads me to believe that development is not a primary goal for Korean developmental aid in Africa, and its motivations lie in potential diplomatic gain. They utilize developmental initiatives in core partnership countries and scholarships to study in Korea to cultivate public diplomacy abroad. However, the nations themselves created the initiatives Senegal and Rwanda set out. Senegal and Rwanda have identified areas of concern



that hold the nations back from development and utilize a variety of developmental aid (not just from Korea) to achieve these goals. Hence, the need for clear direction on goals and methods used to achieve metrics outlined in Senegal's Emerging Senegal Plan and Rwanda's Vision 2020 is due to the country's ambiguity about how it plans to achieve these goals. Furthermore, Korean developmental aid positions itself with more advantages than its East Asian opponents as an ideal model for these two nations to emulate.

## **CHAPTER THREE—SENEGAL AND RWANDA: SMALL NATIONS, BIG PLAYERS**

Under the mission of "continue support for a balanced growth of Africa through systematic strategies tailored to each country's challenges and needs... KOICA will work together with partner countries to realize a more peaceful and prosperous region." KOICA cooperates with its seven core partner countries in Africa: Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Uganda, Rwanda, Senegal, and Tanzania (KOICA). KOICA does not disclose the reasons for choosing its core partnership nations. This lack of transparency leaves observers of its involvement curious about the motivations for choosing these countries and their significance for KOICA. Some scholars have claimed that Korea's search for resources drives the development in Africa (Yoon 2014). However, I argue that the potential diplomatic benefit with core partnership nations motivates Korean cooperation in Africa is greater than the economic potential in Africa. As a middle power, Korea seeks to increase its global prestige. Korea can do so in international organizations like the United Nations (UN). To do so, Korea must establish relationships with African nations. As the UN's largest regional bloc, African nations must leverage favorable policy for Korea. Under this premise, core partnership countries are chosen for their current and potential diplomatic importance in international organizations like the UN. Core partnership countries are also chosen based on their current and potential diplomatic importance for disseminating Korean soft power on the African continent.

This chapter will start by outlining Korea's goals in core partnership countries, suggesting that disseminating Korean developmental aid is a way of speculatively forming diplomatic relationships. Then, I will discuss Senegal's significance in West Africa, analyzing its political stability and diplomatic relations with other nations. Finally, this chapter will discuss Rwanda's regional importance through its journey from post-genocide conditions to its large role in peacekeeping on the African continent. To provide insight into the metrics used to select core partnership countries, I analyze Korea's diplomatic aspirations, particularly its desire to increase its international prestige. With the case studies of Senegal and Rwanda, I analyze their importance in their respective regions and why they are portrayed as attractive partners in African development. Both nations exercise political stability, friendly diplomatic relations, and participation in peacekeeping. In this context, both nations' involvement in peacekeeping cultivates international recognition and esteem, aspects of interest in Korea's quest for diplomacy. This chapter hypothesizes Korea's motivations for country partnership selection in official development aid by outlining the significance of two partnership nations: Senegal and Rwanda.

### ***Korea's Diplomatic Goals in Core Partnership Nations***

Korea's foreign policy spans many issues, from its position between great powers like China and the US to issues with North Korea and its strengthening partnerships with its allies. Its geographical proximity with China and its diplomatic proximity with the US forces the nation to balance its role accordingly to exercise decisions of national interests. Following the Korean

War, Korea has faced peace and security challenges with North Korea. Namely, North Korea's budding nuclear program threatens the security of South Korea and the East Asian region broadly. Thus, North Korea's nuclear proliferation drives Korea to seek and maintain policy and international sanctions against North Korea to lessen its threat to security on the Korean peninsula (Snyder 2018). Forging diplomatic alliances with African nations is also essential to Korean foreign policy. These diplomatic relationships allow them to gain international prestige and cultivate soft power in African nations. These partnerships further legitimize Korea's status globally and in partnering with African nations.

While it is evident that Korea seeks to establish amicable diplomatic relationships in Africa, its forging of these relationships is speculative. Korea has several growing partnerships with African nations but has yet to utilize them in international organizations. Colin Bradford (2015) writes, "Korea's continuing to use its assets to assert global leadership in the years ahead, when stronger international leadership, global governance, and international institutions will be vital in addressing intensifying global challenges." Indeed, Korea has taken on more leadership roles in international organizations: hosting OECD forums, serving as UN Secretary-General, and actively participating in the G20 summits. In these international organizations, Korea can both cultivate and leverage influence. The same pattern is reflected in how Korea engages African nations in cultivating influence to leverage in the future. Korea is a middle power, existing between big powers like China and the United States but possessing more power than smaller powers (Bradford 2015). The UN provides middle powers like Korea with a platform to exercise their political power; however, to leverage their power in this arena, the UN must rely on diplomatic and economic relationships to foster more favorable outcomes for itself.

Achieving global status after its rapid economic development and democratization process, Korea finds itself at the crossroads of many great powers. Thus, forcing the nation to cultivate and harvest power to influence global policy for its benefit (Bradford 2015). Korea's top foreign policy priorities are issues concerning peace between the two Koreas, North Korea's growing nuclear presence, China, and the US. At the same time, Africa is crucial to the country's long-term soft power and diplomatic strategies. Africa holds 54 UN member states, making it a significant player in world affairs (United Nations 2024). For instance, UN votes from African nations could prove instrumental in international sanctions against North Korea regarding nuclear tests and proliferation. To further cultivate relationships with African nations, Korea abandoned its "One Korea" policy, a step to seek diplomatic ties with as many African nations as possible, regardless of their previous affiliation with North or Korea (Nicholas 2020).

Korea's development aid serves as a vehicle to foster these relationships on a continent that contains the United Nation's largest regional bloc. While KOICA and Korean ODA cooperate with African nations to develop and promote good governance, Korea's objectives are for the continent. Korea hopes to create lasting diplomatic relationships with African nations through official developmental aid to use these relationships to advocate for advantageous policy in international organizations. Hence, KOICA chooses its core partnership countries to leverage the diplomatic potential in international politics. Korea strategically selects countries that possess political stability and regional importance. For instance, Senegal is highly regarded for its stable, democratic governance in a politically tumultuous West Africa.

In contrast to neighboring countries, Senegal has a long history of friendly relations with notable powers and organizations like France, the United States, and the United Nations. Similar to Senegal, Rwanda has also exemplified durable governance and political stability. The nation is

highly regarded globally for its post-genocide recovery and active participation in peacekeeping in Africa. Amid growing discontent with the West and the United Nations, Rwanda actively contributes to security concerns on the continent. These two nations have gained regard in international and regional politics, making them optimal partners for Korea, which intends to cultivate diplomatic relations and partnerships with African nations.

### ***Senegal: A Symbol of Political Stability in West Africa***

In a region long been beset by political instability, Senegal remains one of the few nations with political stability and democratic governance in West Africa. Since its independence in 1960, Senegal has democratically elected five presidents and has experienced three peaceful transitions of power. According to the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, which monitors and measures governance performance, Senegal ranked tenth in 2022, highlighting governance improvement that has created domestic economic opportunity, human development, and security. The same 2022 report highlighted other nations within the West African Sahel region where governance has deteriorated, namely Mali and Burkina Faso (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2022). Mali experienced three coups in 2012, 2020, and 2021, respectively. The country has attempted to reestablish civilian rule, only for those presidents to be ousted again in military coups. Political instability in the West African Sahel has extended beyond Mali with coups in Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger as well. Nations beset with political instability and the rise of military rule became a norm in the region. However, Senegal remains one of the few nations in this region with democratically elected civilian leaders, making it an optimal partner in diplomatic relations and development aid thanks to its stable governance compared to its neighbors.

Moreover, Senegal boasts good diplomatic relations with Korea. In 2019, the two countries held a presidential summit showcasing their friendly diplomatic ties. Former Korean President Moon Jae-in formally thanked Former Senegalese President Macky Sall for their continued support in the UN Security Council. Senegal served as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for six years since 1968. The UN Security Council, a governmental body of the utmost importance to Korea, has jurisdiction over policies and resolutions on international peace and security. Concerns regarding security on the Korean Peninsula are greatly affected by decisions made in the UN Security Council, mainly regarding North Korea's nuclear proliferation. Ensuring Senegal's continued support in government bodies is imperative for Korea; thus, Korea guarantees continued support from Senegal through the use of the Korean ODA. In addition to its role in the UN Security Council, Senegal displays many attributes that make it a reliable partner to Korea in West Africa.

Senegal is an influential nation in West Africa due to their role in regional peacekeeping. Senegal served as a pivotal member during the constitutional crisis in the Gambia in 2016-2017. Despite initial attempts to alleviate the Gambian constitutional crisis, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) took a harder stance against President Jammeh. President Jammeh's continued refusal to step down triggered the buildup of ECOWAS military forces (primarily Senegalese forces) on the Gambian border and a maritime blockade. ECOWAS forces continued to Banjul, the capital of the Gambia, where President Jammeh finally stepped down. During this time, President-Elect Adama Barrow fled from the Gambia, seeking refuge in Dakar, Senegal. Through the Gambian constitutional crisis, ECOWAS gained legitimacy from the African Union and UN Security Council for their actions to restore democracy in the Gambia (Hartmann 2017; Ateku 2020). Senegal's role in the restoration of Gambian democracy is

unmistakable. Due to the geography of the Senegambia region, Senegal is the Gambia's only neighboring country, thus allowing ECOWAS troops to surround the nation and march into Banjul to reinstate democracy. The use of Senegalese troops to restore democracy in the Gambia is not a one-time event but rather evidence of a long-standing Senegalese commitment to regional peacekeeping (Dietzman 2003). Senegal has a history of active participation in regional peacekeeping, in interventions to instill and ensure democratic governance, and in collaborative efforts to thwart jihadist and extremist presence in the Sahel (Ally 2018). Senegal's role in peacekeeping makes the nation of key geopolitical importance in West Africa.

More remarkable than its role in peacekeeping, Senegal exercises democratic governance in West Africa, especially compared to its neighbors, who have succumbed to numerous political and military coups in recent years. Moreover, Senegal has experienced four peaceful transitions of power, all occurring following free, democratic elections. The first president of Senegal, Leopold Senghor, set a precedent (Dumont & Kanté 2019), setting Senegal apart from other African nations whose leaders clung to power following decolonization. Senegal's history of political stability and democratic governance continues today, with the nation recently electing a new president after three turbulent years of political unrest (Alsop 2024). Despite issues regarding governance within Senegal, its governance is durable; thus, it continues to elect presidents democratically and works tirelessly until political freedom is attained within the nation. Hence, Senegal's political stability makes it attractive for Korean diplomatic relations. With the aspirations of maintaining alliances with countries with sway in bodies like the UN Security Council, Korea seeks to maintain relations with Senegal. Senegal's political stability and maintaining relations with the United Nations allows it to remain an essential ally to Korea in international politics.



Senegal touts close ties, regard with great powers, and esteem in international organizations. Senegal's neighboring countries are embroiled in constant political crises, with Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Guinea, and Guinea Bissau all experiencing military coups and coup attempts since 2020 (Green 2023; Le Monde 2023; Camara 2023). Since 2020, numerous West African presidents have been ousted and quickly replaced with military juntas, promising an eventual return to civilian rule. Despite international pressures from France, the United Nations and regional blocs (ECOWAS and the African Union) have done little to reinstate civilian, democratically-elected rule in Mali and Burkina Faso. Coups are the pinnacle of domestic political instability, signaling enduring security, economic, and social problems domestically.

Moreover, military rule fuels domestic political instability and stagnates economic growth, creating problems with trade and increased expenditure on the military (Ades & Chua, 1997). Government volatility can significantly undermine the success of developmental aid, as the government plays a critical role in implementing and controlling the use of such funds to increase economic growth to make a return on donor countries' investments. In the case of West Africa, the prolonged government instability in these nations makes them unattractive as partners. Under the gift theory (Mawdsley 2011), Korea seeks to establish lasting relationships with its core partnership nations. Therefore, the recipient nation must maintain political stability and durable governance to reap the benefits of official development aid as a tool of diplomacy. Countries like Mali and Burkina Faso, where political volatility is a constant concern, are not an attractive site for international cooperation through developmental aid. Other nations in West Africa have also become causes of concern in the UN Security Council. Korea seeks stable partners to advocate for its security concerns, making Senegal one of the few nations it can rely

on in West Africa to do so. Hence, Senegal positions itself as a stable democracy to Korea amidst its neighboring countries' political volatility and instability.

In addition to Senegal's political stability, it actively boasts diplomatic relations with many nations. Except for the recent backlash that followed attempts to delay upcoming presidential elections (Hoiye 2024), Senegal enjoys amicable relations with its former colonial powers, France, the United Nations, the United States, and many others. Senegal balances foreign interests from France (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs 2024), the United States (US Department of State 2024), China (Sall 2016, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014), and many other nations. This is in contrast to its neighbors who since the rise of military rule within these nations, have increased efforts to sever ties with France, the United Nations, and the West. Mounting on growing domestic insecurity issues due to jihadist and extremist insurgency, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso have asked for the withdrawal of UN and France peacekeeping troops (Namatovu 2023). These nations have increasingly begun to fuel anti-French and anti-West sentiment, which are detrimental to their geopolitical importance in the world.

Furthermore, these nations are undergoing a rise in pro-Russian sentiment that has raised concerns from their former conventional diplomatic partners. Many nations in the West African Sahel, despite increasing ostracization from regional blocs (Yabi 2023; Asadu 2024) and international pressures, continue to distance themselves from the West and align themselves with Russia and Russia-adjacent groups (Wagner Group) (Murphy 2023). These relations are frowned upon, further worsening diplomatic relations with the West and their status in the UN, making them an unattractive ally in diplomacy. Therefore, Senegal lies in the juxtaposition of increasing isolation and partnering with Russia, which is currently occurring in the West African Sahel Region. Thus, this makes them an ideal starting point for Korean developmental aid to harbor

beneficial diplomatic relations within Africa, a continent known for its diplomatic importance in world politics.

### ***Rwanda: Rise from Genocide to Regional Peacekeepers***

Rwanda has sustained political stability and economic growth since the 2000s (Pham 2016). According to the 2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, Rwanda ranks 12th in governance, making significant progress in foundations for economic opportunity and security and the rule of law. Rwanda's progress since the 1994 genocide laps its neighbors in the Great Lakes Region, with Tanzania ranking 21st, Uganda ranking 31st, Burundi ranking 43rd, and the Democratic Republic of Congo ranking 49th (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2022). Beyond its political and economic progress since the genocide, Rwanda plays an integral role in peacekeeping. As a former beneficiary of UN Peacekeeping, Rwanda now actively collaborates with the UN and engages in routine peacekeeping operations to quell conflict and insecurity in Africa. Hence, Rwanda is a key player. Furthermore, Rwanda possesses close amicable relations with many nations of international importance, leveraging foreign interest to continue to cultivate foreign investment and developmental aid. Thus, Rwanda is an attractive landscape for international cooperation due to its political stability and international prestige from peacekeeping in Africa.

During the 1990-1994 Rwandan Civil War, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rose to power, ultimately culminating in the genocide of Rwanda's Tutsi minority from April to July 1994. Mounting on decades of ethnic tension between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority, the genocide lasted a hundred days. International intervention during this period was inefficient; the UN peacekeeping mission, UNAMIR, was ill-equipped to quell the rising conflict within the nation (Bentrovato 2015). Following the genocide, Rwanda was war-torn and in desperate need

of reconciliation. Leader and current President Paul Kagame rose to power, ushering in a new period of growth and reconciliation (Waugh 2004). Rwanda has significantly developed since his election to the presidential office in 2000. Given Rwanda's history of genocide and the role that effective peacekeeping could have played, the Rwanda Defense Force (RDF) takes on an active role in regional peacekeeping (Government of Rwanda 2024; United Nations 2018). Their active role in peacekeeping signifies their geopolitical importance. Rwanda serves as an interregional model in the Great Lakes Region of reconciliation and progress, boasting economic growth, presence of international donors, and political stability (Molt 2017).

Rwanda's effectiveness in peacekeeping in the DRC is contentious; some scholars see them as a necessary force within the Great Lakes Region, and others call them aggressors in the Rwanda-Eastern Congo conflict (Kasongo 2024). More significant than their role in the DRC peacekeeping, Rwanda is a vital peacekeeping force in Mozambique. Mozambique, suddenly faced with a security crisis due to growing jihadist presence in the Northern Cabo region, called upon Rwandan peacekeeping forces to quell the growing insurgency in the area in 2021. In response, Rwanda sent 3,000 soldiers who suppressed the security concerns within the region (Lepidi 2023; Cheryl et al., 2023). A few months later, President Paul Kagame boasted about the improved security situation in Mozambique. Rwanda's intervention in Mozambique is one of many peacekeeping missions that Rwanda has participated in recently. Despite its small size, the nation is the fifth-largest contributor to global peacekeeping forces and the second-largest in Africa (US Department of State 2024). Citing its moral responsibility due to the role of peacekeeping in the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, Rwanda leverages its contentious history with peacekeeping to become a regional force for Africa's security concerns. From Benin to the Central African Republic, Rwanda has consistently contributed to Africa's security issues,

inadvertently improving the country's perception abroad and in international organizations (Moody 2022).

The country's willingness to alleviate Africa's security concerns, efficiency, and expertise bolsters its international perception. Rwanda is handsomely rewarded for its peacekeeping. The country receives recognition from the United Nations, where it consistently contributes to peacekeeping forces (United Nations 2019), striking beneficial economic and trade deals in nations where it has participated in peacekeeping (Lepidi 2023), and increases in developmental aid from European powers. While the country's history and moral responsibility to serve as a force to ensure security in Africa may fuel its active role in peacekeeping in Africa (Mhute 2014), Rwanda also has other motivations for peacekeeping. It can boast more amicable relations with international partners (intervening in the stead of European powers), gain access to lucrative trade deals and regions, and be rewarded by the international community with increases in developmental aid. Hence, Rwanda's peacekeeping missions in Mozambique are an important example of how the small nation leverages its peacekeeping efforts for benefit within Africa and globally.

Since being officially elected in 2000, Paul Kagame has held the Rwandan Presidential seat for the past twenty-four years. According to Freedom House, Rwanda is ranked as not free, lacking political plurality and a strong authoritarian government (Freedom House 2023). The political climate in Rwanda stifles any opposition guaranteeing the rule of Kagame's regime. Rwanda certainly does not possess the same democratic elections and transitions of power as Senegal; however, the country continues to maintain high levels of foreign interest due to its political stability (Mann & Berry 2015).

Since 2000, Rwanda has experienced higher economic growth than its neighbors, partly due to its political stability (Mhute 2014). Though often criticized for its authoritarian government, Rwanda has exemplified political stability (Mann & Berry 2015), especially compared to other nations in the Great Lakes Region. It leverages foreign investment boasting economic return and development from received diplomatic aid (Brown & Harman 2013, Sundaram 2023). Despite Kagame's authoritarian rule, the nation solidifies strong relationships with the West (Sundaram 2023), China, and other nations, financing most of the nation's budget. Many development organizations' Interest in Rwanda further signals its geopolitical significance as a leader within its region.

Despite Rwanda's dark past of genocide, the small country has progressed significantly within the past twenty years, making it an ideal starting point for diplomatic relations in the Great Lakes Region. Rwanda boasts solid diplomatic relations with many major powers. Partly due to guilt from a lack of willingness to intervene in the Rwanda genocide, the Rwandan government can create and maintain positive relationships with major powers (Brown 2013; Chawala 2023). The country possesses large amounts of international regard in Western nations. The United Kingdom's immigration policy, one that sends denied asylum seekers to Rwanda, bolsters its relationship with the nation (Beswick 2011). France, Rwanda's former colonial power, boasts cordial relations with the nations often benefiting from peacekeeping operations that affect French companies in Africa. Rwanda's role in UN peacekeeping is celebrated as one of the largest contributors to a force often met with scrutiny on the African continent. Despite the authoritarian nation of Paul Kagame's regime, Rwanda is often regarded as a leader in Africa due to its economic growth and political stability. Hence, Rwanda is a lucrative partner for diplomacy because of its ability to create favorable relationships using Western guilt about the

Rwandan genocide and its role to step in as a peacekeeping force on the African continent in the stead of European nations.

Korea's developmental state operated under the strict authoritarian rule of Park Chung Hee, which was similar to the authoritarian rule of Paul Kagame in Rwanda. While Korea exhibits no preference for certain types of governance, this link strengthens Rwanda's appeal as a core partnership recipient nation. Korean developmental aid is "politically odorless" (Kim 2019), removing certain aspects of its economic development that carry undercurrents of its authoritarian developmental states better to apply the Korean model in various nations regardless of governance.

To develop these diplomatic relations with Rwanda, Korea works through KOICA to provide Rwanda with grants to carry out and conduct economic, agricultural, and rural development. According to its country partnership strategy, Rwanda and KOICA have collaborated to develop its education and IT sector. To achieve this development, they have piloted multiple smart classroom projects across Rwanda aimed at increasing student access to increase access to technology in rural education. Under this initiative, secondary teachers received training and technology granted by KOICA to increase the availability and use of technology in rural Rwandan classrooms. In addition, high-level members of the Ministry of Education also received instruction on capacity building. Using a bidirectional approach, KOICA can convey Korea's developmental expertise to various members of the Rwandan community. This approach is only possible in a politically stable environment where diplomacy can be cultivated at both a macro and micro level.

### ***Re-thinking Korean Aid as Diplomacy in Senegal and Rwanda***

Senegal and Rwanda are both stable countries that play significant roles within their respective regions of Africa. Both nations are peacekeeping nations, signifying their commitment to partaking in interregional security. Senegal's role in restoring and installing democracy in the Gambia and its extensive role in ECOWAS amplify its importance in West Africa. Moreso, amid increasing instability and insurgency in West Africa, Senegal remains an example of democratic governance. Rwanda's history of genocide has propelled the nation on a path of progress and reconciliation led by President Paul Kagame, now becoming a model of development within the Great Lakes Region. Also, Rwanda actively and consistently participates in peacekeeping missions in the DR Congo, Mozambique, and other nations, further exemplifying its role as a leading nation in the Great Lakes. Despite their small size, both nations play quintessential roles within their regions.

In contrast to other nations engaged in African development, Korea plays a long game in African development, choosing methods according to international standards and ethics. Korea has yet to utilize these diplomatic relations with Senegal, Rwanda, or other African core partnership countries in African nations. Korea's use of these potentially lucrative relationships in international organizations is speculative. Korea's role in African development elevates its global soft power. This long-term approach creates slow developmental progress but generates large amounts of prestige for the donor country in international organizations if done according to international norms. Korea is often applauded for its role in economic development, in contrast to the controversy that China receives for engaging in African development. China attracts scrutiny from international organizations for its BRI and involvement in Africa. However, Korea engages in African development in its core partnership countries as an OECD



Developmental Assistance Country, adhering to rules and guidelines recognized internationally (Hwang 2014). Hence, Korea's developmental outreach in Senegal, Rwanda, and other core partnership countries adheres to norms recognized in world politics. Participation in the development of less developed countries simultaneously bolsters Korea's perceptions within the donor nation while increasing Korea's global standing through a sustained commitment to economic development to other powers in the global arena and international organizations (G20, OECD, UN, etc.) Thus, Korea's involvement in African development increases Korea's global prestige.

## **CONCLUSION**

Korea's scramble for diplomacy has concerned the nation since its inception. Following the Korean War, Korea approached foreign diplomacy only with nations that did not recognize North Korea. However, when it came time to apply for membership to the UN, Korea sought out greater foreign diplomacy to ensure its admission into the international organization.

Consequently, Korea became aware of the importance of diplomatic relations with various nations. Korea lacked the conventional hard power used to coerce beneficial partnerships and policies. Compelled to cultivate its national power through alternative methods, Korea began to nurture its soft power. Since the 1990s, Korea has become a household name thanks to its extensive efforts to engage in cultural diplomacy. Its successes in cultural diplomacy have elevated its status and prestige in world politics. Seeking other avenues to grow its soft power abroad, Korea turned to official development aid to further boost its image abroad in less developed countries. Consequently, Korea began development outreach to African nations in 2006, naming it the year of South Korean and African cooperation.

Korean ODA portrayed Korea as a formidable partner in recipient nations. KOICA emphasized Korea's development expertise, which is instrumental in creating record economic development. Lesser developed countries viewed Korea as a model to emulate, hoping to inspire similar development elsewhere. Using "Korean" development, Korea contrasts itself with conventional aid donors and rising donors. KOICA rids the transmitted development practices of their original characteristics when transferring Korean development methods to recipient nations. Korea's development is quite complex. The heavy authoritarian rule of Park Chung-hee,

subsidies to *chaebols*, the Korean developmental state, and the Korean military-industrial complex are among the many factors that contributed to its economic miracle. However, these characteristics of Korean development are not apparent in its ODA; instead, it exports a shell of what allowed for economic success in Korea.

KOICA named seven core partnership countries in Africa, publishing individual partnership strategies to tackle the individual needs of each nation. However, upon analyzing these documents and other publications from KOICA, the organization gives no explicit methodology for planning to spur development in partner nations beyond its experience. The only method they disclose in their mid-term sectoral and country partnership strategies is their experience. Moreover, the documents borrow development goals from development plans published by recipient nations. In the case studies of Senegal and Rwanda, each partnership strategy reiterates development goals already emphasized in their Emerging Senegal and Vision Rwanda 2020 plans. Hoping to gain more insight from its Facebook pages, its social media never highlights statistics or metrics to measure the effectiveness of Korean aid in Senegal and Rwanda. Instead, the organization posts photos of meetings with local governance, scholarship opportunities to study in Korea, and volunteer opportunities in partnership nations. Statistics of past and ongoing projects are challenging to find and verify. There is little evidence to compare it to other organizations' development methods, making assessing its performance in recipient nations difficult. Due to the lack of transparency of development methods and effectiveness, I believe development is not KOICA's sole objective in African nations.

As a middle power, Korea strives for international prestige and esteem to advocate for beneficial policies and decisions. KOICA's selection of core partnership countries indicates this desire, selecting nations where soft power can be harvested in international organizations. As is evident in the case studies of Senegal and Rwanda, Korea uses ODA to ensure allyship with the UN. Furthermore, Korea utilizes its involvement in developmental aid to legitimize its international status further. Rather than its success in African development, its presence justifies its inclusion in the OECD, G20, and the UN. Examining Senegal and Rwanda, one can see that their respective regional roles are instrumental. Both nations actively serve in regional peacekeeping, possess friendly relations with great powers and international organizations, and serve as models of stable governance in their respective regions. Hence, Korea's goals in African development expand the economic development of its core partnership nations and include the diplomatic benefit of forging partnerships in Africa.

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