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From the mid-1970s, alternative development theories and approaches appeared in response to the recognition that western-based approaches failed to provide solutions to the challenges the people in developing countries have faced. The participatory approach is one of these alternatives, and it highlighted the need to take account of and use the knowledge of local people in development. More participatory approaches advocated for the involvement of the recipients of development by accessing and culminating their knowledge of local issues. Since then, there has been a great increase in interest in local knowledge for development as well as initiatives to share local knowledge on a global scale by development agencies such as the World Bank and UNESCO. Such growing emphasis on local knowledge for development was also due to the recognition of international human rights and indigenous and traditional peoples in international law.

The study aims to: firstly, identify the definition, background, features, and applicable fields of local knowledge to help the readers' understanding on it; secondly, identify the importance and necessity of local knowledge for development, analyze the relevant issues such as politics of knowledge, sustainable development, ownership, biodiversity and cultural diversity, and human rights-based approach; thirdly, analyze the challenges of introducing and applying local knowledge to development cooperation projects and find a way to deal with those challenges; fourthly, identify the efforts and contributions made to promote local knowledge for development from case studies of DFID, CIDA, and IFAD; and fifthly, draw the implications that Korean aid agencies and institutions including KOICA should consider and apply in the decision-making and implementation processes of projects in development cooperation.

Defined as “dynamic archive of accumulation of knowledge, technology,

attitudes which have existed and belong to specific local communities, passed down from generation to generation,” local knowledge could be applicable to various fields like agriculture, health, community development, and poverty reduction. Especially, local knowledge is available to provide solutions to problems of the poor, increase the efficiency of development programs, and promote the participation and ownership of local communities, leading to the success of project implementation.

Local knowledge seems to have certain and specific relevance to issues such as politics of knowledge, biodiversity and cultural diversity, sustainable development, ownership, social capital, and human rights-based approach in development cooperation. From the issues with local knowledge, it is concluded that local knowledge is closely linked with those issues and could be promoted if it is agreed and based on the principles which each issue emphasizes.

However, there also have been a lot of challenges when development practitioners and aid agencies have tried to introduce and adopt local knowledge to the project decision-making and implementation processes of projects. First, much of the earlier research on local knowledge tended to romanticize the notion of local knowledge. Second, there is a problem with assuming that local knowledge is always appropriate for local development. Third, the political dimension of local knowledge cannot be neglected. Fourth, separating local knowledge and western (modern) knowledge has been criticized. Furthermore, in terms of the efforts to accumulate and systemize local knowledge since the mid-1970s, the way to document and store local knowledge is inappropriate due to the feature of local knowledge (link to human life and local specificity). Local specificity also begs the question of how practitioners can scale up in terms of “universality.”

To deal with these challenges, it is suggested that: firstly, decision-makers

need to recognize the role and importance of local knowledge at every level in development cooperation projects; secondly, aid agencies should identify the insight and knowledge of local communities and enhance their efforts to adopt local knowledge to the projects; and thirdly, local specificity could be an opportunity to support local communities to participate in the projects according to equal partnerships with aid agencies.

In the study, DFID, CIDA, and IFAD have been selected as aid agencies that have recognized the importance of local knowledge and tried to utilize them in projects for a long time. At DFID, it is recognized that there is the need to leverage local knowledge, and local knowledge needs to be maintained and updated over time in order to develop it into know-how. CIDA, on the other hand, has published a guideline and handbook with basic principles and strategies to integrate local knowledge in project planning and implementation. Lastly, IFAD has identified lessons from their good practices; they emphasize the participatory approach and have tried to find ways to support local knowledge in each project. As the community-driven and participatory approach has been emphasized, it is believed that respect for diversity and recognition of local specificity are commonly agreed upon by practitioners and aid agencies.

In accordance with the efforts of the development agencies, the question of how aid agencies can introduce local knowledge and apply it to projects has been raised. First, a detailed research on the target area and local people is needed in advance. Second, during the feasibility study, aid agencies should construct project contents systematically while considering local knowledge on the areas. Third, at the project implementation stage, experts who are well aware of the local area (including local knowledge) and have an understanding of development cooperation projects are needed. Fourth, local communities should be encouraged to participate in the project by identifying them as active actors and knowledge bearers. Lastly, at the project assessment stage, by adding the issues related to

local knowledge to the assessment list, it is needed to consider whether technology in the project could be matched to local knowledge and how it works to ameliorate the livelihoods in local communities compared to the situation before the project.