

Executive Summary

Humanitarian assistance plays a vital role in protecting human dignity and alleviating the suffering of people in crisis; as members of the international community, states collectively share a moral and political responsibility to respond to humanitarian needs. Although earlier debates often linked humanitarian assistance to questions of sovereignty and intervention, the codification of the core humanitarian principles—**Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, and Independence**—has fostered a global consensus that humanitarian assistance should be provided on a universal, needs-based basis. These principles function both as distinctive **operational benchmarks** and as **criteria for performance assessment**. Policy frameworks of major donor governments—such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union—explicitly anchor these principles to reinforce the legitimacy of their assistance. At the same time, donor governments calibrate their choice of target regions and populations, intervention modalities, and delivery mechanisms to align with global humanitarian needs while reflecting their foreign policy goals, strategic priorities, and comparative advantages. As Korea’s official development assistance **ODA for humanitarian assistance** has expanded to a meaningful scale, the demand for greater effectiveness has intensified. Advancing policy and implementation requires sustained investments in implementation capacities and enabling conditions—skilled personnel and organizational arrangements, financing, data and knowledge systems, domestic and international networks, and the systematic accumulation of practice-based expertise. Over the longer term, Korea should develop a strategic and sustainable delivery architecture for its humanitarian portfolio—one that ensures coherence between international norms and national foreign policy priorities, while also shaping a **distinctive identity** for Korean assistance. This study reviews international and Korean humanitarian assistance landscapes and, with a view to strengthening the foundation for Korea’s systematic advancement, proposes recommendations across the support architecture—institutions, policy, and operations.

I . Background and Methods

Contemporary humanitarian crises are growing in scale, complexity, and protraction, underscoring the need for an effective and sustainable support architecture. This study examines international and Korean humanitarian assistance systems and explores options for Korea to deliver assistance that both aligns with international standards and becomes more systematic and effective.

We employed a multi-method design combining literature review, case studies, key-informant interviews, and surveys. For comparative analysis, four major donors—the United States, Japan, Sweden, and the Netherlands—were selected based on their diverse approaches to humanitarian assistance. The analysis focused on their implementation base (legal frameworks and policy/strategy), principal implementing actors, resource volumes and allocation, delivery arrangements, and performance management. Where notable strengths were identified—such as funding operations, evaluation systems—we assessed their applicability to Korea and distilled policy implications. We also conducted in-depth interviews through direct visits to relevant international institutions and agencies, including the World Bank, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In addition, we conducted focus group discussions and surveys with domestic and international stakeholders in the humanitarian sector to collect perspectives and proposals on project selection and resource management, adherence to norms and collective commitments, partnership strategies, performance management, and Korea's comparative advantages. Based on this evidence, we derived implications and recommendations—including options to enhance the visibility of Korea's humanitarian action.

II. International Legal Frameworks, Policies, and Strategies for Humanitarian Assistance

Before examining institutional and policy arrangements, this study first reviews the key actors engaged in humanitarian assistance. At the frontline are primary actors who work most directly with affected populations. A second tier comprises UN entities and specialized agencies, international NGOs, and donor governments that finance and coordinate responses. A broader third tier encompasses militaries, peacekeeping operations, and international financial institutions, which interact with the humanitarian ecosystem under specific mandates.

Types of humanitarian aid actors

Type	Actor
Primary actor: Affected Communities and Responders of First Resort)	Affected populations and their communities, national and local governments in affected countries, local NGOs and community-based organizations in the affected country, and diaspora groups
Secondary actor: Traditional Established Humanitarian System)	International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the UN and its specialized agencies, international NGOs, NGO coordination and advocacy organizations, humanitarian learning networks, and humanitarian donors
Tertiary actor: Wider Humanitarian Network	Militaries, peacekeeping forces, media organizations, voluntary and grassroots groups, religious and faith-based organizations, local intergovernmental bodies, private donors, development actors, and international financial institutions

Source: Maxwell & Gelsdorf(2024)

Given the multiplicity of actors across these tiers, effective coordination is essential. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) plays a central role in the global coordination architecture, facilitating coherent, needs-based responses among governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and other partners. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)—with OCHA as its secretariat—brings together UN agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, and the private sector to develop common policies, standards, and guidance for humanitarian action. Coordination is further operationalized

through the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) function and sectoral clusters at global and country levels, with complementary roles across institutions and personnel to strengthen collective effectiveness.

The international legal and normative underpinnings of humanitarian assistance comprise International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Human Rights Law (IHRL), International Refugee Law (IRL), and International Disaster Law (IDL).

- **International Humanitarian Law (IHL)** governs the conduct of armed conflict with the aim of minimizing human suffering. It prohibits attacks on civilians, requires humane treatment of all persons, forbids the forced displacement of civilian populations, ensures access to survival measures, and mandates special protection for particularly vulnerable groups.
- **International Human Rights Law (IHRL)** is grounded in the UN Charter and core treaties, complemented by minimum standards and general principles. Unlike IHL, it applies both in peace and in conflict, subject to limited derogations in situations of emergency.
- **International Refugee Law (IRL)** is constituted by the 1951 Refugee Convention, its 1967 Protocol, and related instruments, safeguarding persons who cannot return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution on specified grounds.
- **International Disaster Law (IDL)** draws on domestic legislation, international agreements, and institutional recommendations to articulate common principles governing the initiation, conduct, and termination of disaster relief operations for affected populations.

Across this legal foundation, the UN General Assembly has affirmed the four humanitarian principles—Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality, and Independence—which are operationalized through initiatives such as the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) nexus, the Grand Bargain, Good Humanitarian

Donorship (GHD), and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.

Humanitarian Principles

Humanity	Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for human dignity.
Neutrality	Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature.
Impartiality	Humanitarian action must be guided solely by needs, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and avoiding discrimination on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class, or political opinions.
Independence	Humanitarian action must remain autonomous from the political, economic, military, or other objectives pursued by any actor in areas where humanitarian operations are carried out.

Source: UNOCHA, 2022

Humanitarian policies and strategies have progressively adapted to shifting contexts and emerging needs. Recent shifts include a transition from single-year to multi-year programming; reinforcement of locally led humanitarian action; a move from in-kind modalities toward market-based programming and the expansion of Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA); growing demands for system-wide accountability and recognition of the centrality of protection; and greater emphasis on evidence-based programming alongside increased use of technology within the humanitarian innovation agenda.

Reflecting these trends, the international community has issued a range of policies and strategies, with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)—the principal humanitarian coordination forum—playing a leading role. The IASC provides guidance and policy across areas such as operational protocols for humanitarian action, inclusion, protection of affected populations, humanitarian access, and linkages with development and peace. Priority guidance encompasses response to public health emergencies, gender and disability inclusion, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), improvements to humanitarian access, addressing the impacts of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures, and operational guidelines for implementing the HDP Nexus.

III. Legal Frameworks, Policies, and Strategies of Major Donors

This study examines four donors—the **United States**, **Japan**, **Sweden**, and the **Netherlands**—and synthesizes their key features as follows.

United States. Grounded in legislation such as the Foreign Assistance Act and the Global Fragility Act, U.S. humanitarian assistance has been implemented consistently with foreign policy, supported by substantial human and financial capacities. Through early 2025, USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) served as the principal lead for humanitarian action, and the State Department and USAID operated under the Joint Strategic Plan 2022–2026 to delineate roles and strengthen cooperation. Following the inauguration of the second Trump administration, broader foreign-policy shifts—including steps toward integrating USAID into the State Department—have led to abrupt changes affecting foreign assistance, including humanitarian programming. Even so, the United States—long the world’s largest humanitarian donor—continues to provide instructive examples through its legal underpinnings, functional role division, and dedicated operational structures. In particular, its approaches to locally led responses in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, the linkage between emergency relief and resilience, and collaboration with multilateral agencies and local partners offer useful reference points for policy design and institutional arrangements.

Japan. The Development Cooperation Charter and the Basic Policy on Humanitarian Assistance constitute the primary policy bases. Japan advances humanitarian assistance as part of its ODA’s core principle of human security, explicitly encompassing not only emergencies but also disaster risk reduction (DRR), relief, and recovery/reconstruction. It emphasizes support to refugee-hosting countries and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Drawing on experience in a multi-hazard environment, Japan has distinct strengths in disaster response and recovery and played a leading role in the adoption of the Sendai Framework (2015), while operating dedicated DRR initiatives (e.g., the DRR Cooperation Initiative). Recent trends include expanded humanitarian support in conflict settings such as Ukraine and Afghanistan,

and exploration of linkages with security policy, including an enhanced role for the Self-Defense Forces (SDF).

Sweden. Under the Policy framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, Sweden maintains a long-standing, stable humanitarian system that places strong emphasis on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the core humanitarian principles. It exhibits high shares of unearmarked/partially earmarked funding, multi-year support, and rapid, flexible disbursements. Sweden operates structured needs assessment and allocation criteria, and features a differentiated division of labor between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (policy formation and multilateral funding) and Sida (implementation and bilateral assistance). Since the emergence of a center-right coalition government in 2022, however, a shift has been observed toward giving greater weight to national interests and closer linkages with security policy relative to Sweden's traditional principle-driven stance.

Netherlands. The Netherlands is recognized as a leading implementer of the Grand Bargain. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides block grants totaling €374 million over five years—constituting 15% of the overall government budget and often supplemented through parliamentary special funds—while entering into numerous multi-year funding agreements that enhance predictability and sustainability. Collaboration with civil society is particularly strong. Through the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), the MFA partners with 14 NGOs to advance localization not only through funding but also through resource and information sharing and joint efforts to address systemic challenges such as rule of law, civic engagement, and gender equality. The Netherlands utilizes instruments such as HO (Humanitarian Organizations) indicators and Molpan (an internal self-assessment standard) to inform subsequent funding decisions. The MFA's evaluation unit aims to evaluate all projects within a seven-year cycle. At the same time, the overall scale of Dutch assistance has recently contracted, including significant ODA reductions in 2024.

Implications for Korea. A cross-country review of statutes and policy/strategy

suggests that, while the role of dedicated humanitarian legislation tends to be limited, there is marked variation in legal functions across donors. In a multipolar environment—where humanitarian action is tightly coupled with foreign policy and demands for flexible, timely response are high—it remains essential to explore legal and regulatory adjustments that, within Korea’s institutional remit, would enable more stable and efficient humanitarian action.

In terms of policy and strategic orientation, the United States and Japan place relatively stronger emphasis on civil-military cooperation for stabilization and on geostrategic considerations. Sweden and the Netherlands, long recognized for principle-driven approaches, have also shifted toward national interests in response to the European refugee situation and the war in Ukraine. Overall, each donor has developed distinctive strengths shaped by historical experience, political context, and comparative advantage. For Korea, this implies a policy direction that reflects foreign-policy priorities and areas of comparative advantage while upholding the universality and balance of humanitarian principles.

Governance and Operational Implications for Humanitarian Assistance

First, while the division of labor between ministries of foreign affairs and development cooperation agencies varies by country, there is a common need to strengthen domestic bases and professional expertise over the long term to enhance competitiveness in the humanitarian sector. In Japan, JICA’s role is largely confined to deploying the Japan Disaster Relief (JDR) teams, whereas USAID (United States) and Sida (Sweden) assume broader humanitarian functions. In the United States—prior to recent administrative changes following the launch of the second Trump administration—the Global Fragility Act (2019) clarified institutional roles between the State Department and USAID, reinforcing partnerships for field-centered engagement in fragile contexts and building specialized capabilities among institutions and personnel. Sweden differentiates roles between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which leads policy formation and multilateral funding, while Sida oversees implementation and bilateral assistance. For Korea, the key question

is how to organize human resources and institutions more efficiently so that expertise and experience accumulate over time, while also cultivating capable implementing actors with a sustained humanitarian mandate.

Second, partnerships with experienced and accountable civil society and NGO actors—those with established operational track records and demonstrated coordination capacity with local authorities—are receiving growing emphasis, alongside heightened expectations of NGO accountability. Notable platforms include the United States’ InterAction, Japan’s Japan Platform (JPF), and the Netherlands’ Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA). InterAction engages actively in global policy fora such as the IASC; JPF consolidates information from member NGOs and corporate partners and enables rapid coordination and decision-making for multi-agency responses; and the DRA operates based on a high-trust partnership with the Dutch MFA. At the same time, as seen in the United States, strict grant procedures remain in place despite civil-society criticism, underscoring the primacy of transparency and accountability in humanitarian financing.

Implications for Implementation Capacity

1) Localization. Donors pursue localization through diverse approaches. In the United States, localization is often framed in terms of cost efficiency and long-term capacity strengthening. In Japan, some within the MFA regard localization as having limited visibility, which dampens enthusiasm for its adoption. The Netherlands adopts a more proactive model, going beyond funding to share resources and information, and even assessing partners on contextual results (e.g., humanitarian narrative, innovation narrative) when selecting local partners. Effective localization presupposes due diligence on partner capacity and accountability. For Korea, a pragmatic pathway would be to develop domestic intermediaries capable of supporting localization functions—such as, partner screening, compliance, and accompaniment—while iteratively refining context-appropriate localization approaches.

2) HDP Nexus. Effective implementation requires integrating prevention, resilience

building, social cohesion, and local capacity strengthening. While most donors express commitment, concrete best-practice models remain limited. The U.S. ER4 (Early Recovery, Risk Reduction, and Resilience) portfolio is often cited as closest to an HDP approach, though it is not applied in a consistent or systematic manner. Japan references HDP in policy, but meaningful operationalization is difficult to verify. Sweden—where Sida is recognized as a leader on the HDP Nexus—has issued a dedicated strategy, identifies component linkages, and is working to scale pilots in phases. Nevertheless, detailed operational guidance on how to translate HDP principles into programming remains scarce across the international system.

3) Quality funding. Collective efforts to improve quality funding—notably unearmarked or partially earmarked contributions, multi-year commitments, and rapid, flexible disbursement mechanisms—are evident. Sweden’s high share of flexible contributions and multi-year support, along with the Netherlands’ €374 million five-year block grants (about 15% of the government’s overall budget, often supplemented by parliamentary special funds), as well as its numerous multi-year agreements, offer salient reference points.

4) Data and evaluation. Insecurity and crisis dynamics complicate reliable data collection, a persistent limitation for humanitarian evaluation. Unlike development cooperation, humanitarian action is frequently rapid and event-driven. Even so, accountability-anchored evaluation architectures exist: Sweden’s Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA)—an independent committee under the MFA—and the Netherlands’ IOB—an independent evaluation unit within the MFA that conducts systematic reviews of humanitarian assistance on a four- to seven-year cycle—provide instructive models for Korea’s evaluation system design.

IV. Options to Improve Korea's Legal Framework, Policies, and Strategies for Humanitarian Assistance

Korea's statutes relevant to humanitarian assistance include the **Overseas Emergency Relief Act**, the **Framework Act on International Development Cooperation**, the **United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Participation Act**, and the **Korea International Cooperation Agency Act**. Among these, the Overseas Emergency Relief Act is most directly linked to humanitarian assistance; however, its focus on "emergency relief" entails limitations with respect to disaster prevention, response, and recovery/reconstruction. The Framework Act on International Development Cooperation incorporates emergency disaster relief within grant-type cooperation but does not systematically govern humanitarian assistance. The United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Participation Act is confined to humanitarian tasks within UN PKO mandates and is therefore of limited use for independently conducted humanitarian action. While the Korea International Cooperation Agency Act authorizes KOICA to undertake "disaster relief and other humanitarian assistance projects," it primarily concerns KOICA's establishment and operation rather than constituting a system-building law for humanitarian action. Accordingly, legal improvements are required to ensure a more coherent and efficient humanitarian architecture; the following issues merit attention.

First, a clear division of roles is needed between statutory provisions and policy or strategy documents—specifically, which matters require legal regulation and which should be defined through policy instruments.

Second, the interrelationship among relevant statutes must be clarified. A prominent proposal has been to amend the Overseas Emergency Relief Act into the Act on Humanitarian Assistance for Overseas Disasters. However, unless its interface with related laws—such as the Framework Act on International Development Cooperation—is adequately defined, such an amendment alone may

not secure the efficiency or coherence of Korea's humanitarian action.

Third, reforms should take into account the characteristics of international norms while ensuring effective linkage with Korea's national context and foreign policy.

Synthesizing these considerations, several options are reviewed in the main text. At present, the most pragmatic pathway is a sequenced approach: first, advancing the comprehensive amendment of the Overseas Emergency Relief Act currently under deliberation in the National Assembly (Option 1); and second, over the longer term, considering enactment of a separate Basic Act on Humanitarian Assistance (Option 2).

Both options would establish a distinct legal basis for humanitarian assistance, enabling differentiated ODA programming tailored to the specific characteristics of humanitarian action and offering a more stable foundation for budgetary and organizational arrangements. In particular, enacting a Basic Act on Humanitarian Assistance and inserting provisions in the Framework Act on International Development Cooperation to define the relationship between the two statutes would help avoid legal conflicts. If Option 2 is adopted, provisions unique to overseas emergency relief should be separated from general humanitarian provisions at the drafting stage. A comparative summary of the advantages and disadvantages of Options 1 and 2 is presented in the table that follows in the report.

Option	Pros	Cons
Option 1: Expanding the Overseas Emergency Relief Act to establish a single law for humanitarian assistance	- Establishing a single law focused on humanitarian aid can establish a legal basis to conduct humanitarian assistance projects more systematically. - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) can play a central role in ensuring consistency for humanitarian assistance.	- If a Basic Act on Humanitarian Assistance is crafted to also encompass overseas emergency relief, there is a risk that provisions governing overseas emergency relief and those for general humanitarian assistance will be conflated and regulated without clear differentiation. - If a single, omnibus statute is drafted in excessive detail, it may constrain

Option	Pros	Cons
		the flexibility needed to implement humanitarian assistance in line with foreign-policy objectives, making agile, context-responsive operations more difficult.
Option 2: Enact a separate BASIC Act on Humanitarian Assistance while retaining the Overseas Emergency Relief Act	- By enacting a Basic Act on Humanitarian Assistance that focuses on general humanitarian action while preserving the distinctive features of the Overseas Emergency Relief Act, the regulatory scope of the Basic Act can be delineated more clearly. - Humanitarian assistance can be delivered more efficiently and coherently under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).	- The relationship between the Basic on Humanitarian Assistance and the Overseas Emergency Relief Act may remain insufficiently defined, creating potential complexity in the legislative framework. - If the single basic act is drafted in excessive detail, it could constrain the flexibility needed to implement humanitarian assistance in alignment with foreign-policy objectives.

Korea's humanitarian assistance strategy—like its legal framework—has undergone progressive development since the 2007 enactment of the **Overseas Emergency Relief Act**. Key strategic documents include **Korea's Strategy for Humanitarian Assistance** (March 2015), the **Revised Strategy for Humanitarian Assistance** (July 2019), the **Multilateral Cooperation Strategy** (2016, updated 2022), the **Fragile States Support Strategy** (2017), and the **HDP Nexus Implementation Strategy** (2021).

The key policy, strategy, and governance challenges—and corresponding improvement measures—are as follows.

First, Korea should codify humanitarian principles and systematically align policy documents to those principles. The current baseline document, Korea's Strategy for Humanitarian Assistance, lacks specificity in its foundational principles and implementation arrangements, rendering its intent ambiguous. A revised strategy should articulate a clear philosophy and medium- to long-term vision, along with defined goals, priority sectors and tasks, and phased strategies with concrete implementation measures.

Second, linkages among law, policy, and strategy must be strengthened. Because relevant statutes, policies, and strategies have been developed piecemeal within separate contexts, coherence across instruments is limited. For instance, the Overseas Emergency Relief Act and its derivative Basic Plan for Overseas Emergency Relief are largely confined to disaster response and emergency relief. By contrast, the 2025 Comprehensive Implementation Plan for International Development Cooperation designates humanitarian assistance as a priority but does not clarify its relationship with the humanitarian strategy or ensure consistency across policy documents.

Third, the strategy requires a more robust evaluation and learning system. Because humanitarian action demands flexibility to adjust policies in real time and to authorize rapid decision-making during crises, as a result, criteria, targets, and plans are often underspecified, which complicates implementation and evaluation. Looking ahead—and while acknowledging the specificities and constraints of humanitarian assistance—the strategy should specify measurable targets, clarify implementing entities, outline phased implementation plans, and institutionalize regular review cycles and feedback mechanisms.

Fourth, Korea should establish a more appropriate governance architecture for humanitarian assistance. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) should remain the lead agency, collaboration mechanisms with relevant domestic institutions are needed to support the long-term development of Korea's humanitarian system. At present, a government-wide operational council convened under MOFA strengthens technical capacities related to the Japan Disaster Relief-type overseas emergency relief teams, but its scope is limited to those deployments. A more comprehensive coordination mechanism is needed to cover the broader humanitarian portfolio.

As humanitarian assistance is increasingly recognized as a shared responsibility of the global community, major countries are using humanitarian policy expansion for strategic diplomatic positioning. Since the 2007 enactment of the Overseas

Emergency Relief Act, Korea has expanded its humanitarian efforts and recorded progress in both policy development and operational implementation. At this juncture, Korea should consider which direction and operating posture would secure a distinct identity and differentiation in the global humanitarian landscape. To that end, this report proposes options to align humanitarian policy and programming with Korea's strategic foreign-policy objectives.

First, as a policy direction, we propose the principle of “coupling international peace with human dignity.” This universal framing can serve as a meaningful compass for Korea's humanitarian policy by embedding a peace-oriented identity and the value of human dignity into concrete tasks. To operationalize this direction, humanitarian policy should be closely aligned with foreign policy, while core humanitarian agendas should be tailored to Korea's national identity. For illustration, if Korea's identity is framed as “growth-democracy-peace,” humanitarian policy domains can be disaggregated and developed accordingly.

Options for Securing a Korean Identity in Humanitarian Assistance Policy (Examples)

Identity Pillar	Priority Humanitarian Policy Domains	Logical Basis for a Korean Identity
Growth	Poverty reduction, climate change response, public health, and ICT-based solutions	- Korea is widely recognized as a representative economic-growth model in the international community. - Lessons learned from Korea's rapid growth trajectory can be applied to the design and delivery of humanitarian assistance. - Humanitarian issues such as climate change and public health can be addressed through a lens that links them to growth and development dynamics.
Democracy	Freedom, Human rights, Protection	- Korea is a leading example of transforming economic growth into democratic progress. - There is a deep, practice-oriented understanding of the values of freedom and human rights, including how to apply these values in low-income and developing contexts.

Identity Pillar	Priority Humanitarian Policy Domains	Logical Basis for a Korean Identity
Peace	Disaster response/relief, Protection from violence, promotion of human dignity	- Given the Korean Peninsula context, Korea can consolidate its identity as a peace-oriented nation in the international community. - Korea can strengthen the experience and capacity needed to identify and implement policies and programs that operationalize peace at the individual, community, national, and regional levels. - Such efforts can generate a virtuous cycle in which international support for peace on the Korean Peninsula is reinforced. - Korea possesses substantial academic, policy, and operational expertise in addressing protection issues, specifically for women's and children's.

Second, because humanitarian assistance is both a reflection of national standing in the international community and a means of strengthening national identity and external credibility, long-term policy continuity aligned with universal humanitarian principles is essential. Equally important is cultivating domestic public understanding and support by strengthening the expertise of relevant institutions, consolidating institutional memory, and reinforcing the broader ecosystem. Accordingly, the national humanitarian assistance strategy should include domestic capacity-building tasks and, on that basis, establish a clear division of labor between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and KOICA.

Third, to elevate Korea's international standing through humanitarian policy, we propose strategic options across three levels:

- (1) Foreign-policy governance — Strengthen the domestic humanitarian ecosystem, enhance the usability of field capacities, and establish a robust monitoring system;
- (2) Policy entrepreneurship — Lead humanitarian agendas in international fora and leverage Korea's role as MIKTA Chair; and
- (3) Non-governmental and private-sector capacity — Bolster the global capabilities of domestic NGOs and other private actors.

V. Measures to Strengthen Korea's Humanitarian Implementation Capacity

Implementation capacity ensures effective policy delivery and enables a timely, appropriate response in emergencies. Beyond efficient responses to sudden-onset emergencies and protracted crises, Korea should build long-term foundations and professional expertise while reinforcing accountability and public support. To this end, the following measures are proposed:

First, prepare detailed implementation documents to bridge policy and operations, and develop a medium- to long-term roadmap that embeds international humanitarian norms, clear implementation targets, priorities, and focus sectors. Tasks should include strengthening domestic delivery capacity to support MOFA's humanitarian action and identifying operational measures that reflect key trends—localization, the HDP Nexus, climate change, and disaster risk reduction. Clarifying lead entities and role-sharing through the implementation papers and roadmap should be the starting point for stronger execution.

Second, reinforce consultation and coordination mechanisms at the delivery level to increase effectiveness. Structured communication and clear role division between headquarters—as the policy and strategy control tower—and field implementers are essential for improving program effectiveness and coherence. Regularize communication channels among government, UN agencies, and public-private humanitarian partners to strengthen policy understanding and maintain consistency in action.

Third, strengthen human resources and competencies. Current staffing is insufficient relative to program scale, and frequent rotation undermines continuity and the accumulation of expertise. Korea needs an HR strategy that safeguards continuity and specialization, coupled with structured training programs to build professional capacity.

Fourth, to advance localization, Korea should expand the use of intermediary modalities and strengthen field-based analysis. Because direct funding to local organizations can be challenging, cooperation with UN agencies and NGOs should be enhanced to leverage intermediary roles. In particular, capitalize on the strengths of Korean NGOs to identify and collaborate with intermediaries closely connected to local contexts. Ultimately, localization requires context analysis, broader participation, and capacity strengthening of local partners to advance accountability.

Fifth, implementing the HDP Nexus requires both macro-level crisis analysis and micro-level field analysis. In addition to metrics such as the Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) and the Fragile States Index (FSI), Korea should establish field-centered platforms linking MOFA missions, KOICA country offices, and Korean NGOs. These platforms would enable joint diagnosis of political-economic-social drivers, formulate effective short-, medium-, and long-term responses, and strengthen professional systems.

Sixth, expand partnerships. As most Korean humanitarian assistance is delivered via international organizations and the budget for public-private partnerships remains limited, scale up cooperation while diversifying programs and capacity-building modalities. Broaden collaboration models and domains—including initiatives such as the RAPID program—to support implementation.

Seventh, establish fit-for-purpose monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. Humanitarian contexts differ in urgency, approaches, and environmental constraints, making standardized systems challenging. Nevertheless, for MOFA- and KOICA-led programs, Korea should define appropriate evaluation criteria that reflect humanitarian specificities and evolving internal/external conditions—people-centered support, inclusive “leave no one behind” approaches, and flexible financing. For multi-year programs, expand joint monitoring and evaluation with international organizations and reinforce field monitoring capacities.

Finally, use limited resources efficiently and enhance visibility. Although Korea's humanitarian budget has grown, it remains smaller than that of major donors. To emerge as an advanced donor, pursue a strategy of selectivity and concentration: launch signature initiatives, lead pooled-fund mechanisms with multilateral partners, reduce fragmentation by limiting stand-alone projects, and integrate portfolio management. Building signature initiatives around Korea's comparative advantages and proactively establishing pooled funds to attract other donors will increase visibility while aligning with international norms—multilateralism, the Grand Bargain, and the HDP Nexus. Given the global shift toward systematic and sustainable humanitarian approaches, Korea also needs a strategic alignment with these trends.

In sum, by improving legal frameworks, policy and strategy, and implementation capacity, and by building a more refined delivery system, Korea can further elevate its humanitarian capability and contribution internationally. Advancing humanitarian, development, and peace simultaneously—while increasing visibility through strategic selectivity—will strengthen Korea's role as a Global Pivotal State.