

Volunteering in addressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015. It consists of 17 joint goals that would be implemented by developed and developing countries from 2016 to 2030, with the slogan "Leave no one behind." This reflects humanity's wish to support those who are alienated amid materialistic values and technological advances made by intensive growth, to coexist on a global scale and to achieve lasting prosperity for the next generation. However, the problem is that the UN is a non-profit organization and an international organization run on a contribution of member states. That is why it is not feasible to receive the necessary amount of funding for all regions.

Except for the direct efforts of the UN, of course, the CSR activities of private enterprises and member states' public works are contributing to the implementation of the UN's sustainable development goals. However, private-level volunteering activities are essential to support all who are alienated. This is not only because of the visible results of volunteer activities, but also because the warm heart for the community that is imbued inside each volunteer in the process serves as a driving force for sustainable development. As valuable human resources, volunteers contribute to their neighbors and society in a variety of ways, from simple labor without any required skills to the form of talent donations, and are engaged in activities that meet 17 UN SDGs, including provision of education, infrastructure development and environmental conservation campaigns worldwide.

However, these volunteer activities also have limitations. Volunteer activities are basically based on voluntariness and done without compensation. However, a fair number of volunteer activities are partially enforced in Korea, and exploitation of labor in public institutions has hindered volunteer activities to be lasted. In terms of enforced volunteer activities, recently volunteer activities play a role in entering a college and getting a job. Therefore, they become means for competition that should be done in order not to fall behind. It is hard to anticipate that volunteering activities done for these reasons are sustained. Even worse, since there are many simple labor activities, such as preparation for sending mail that does not involve direct interaction with the alienated, it is not easy for those who inevitably participate in volunteering activities to build a bond with or feel worthwhile. In terms of exploitation of volunteering activities, not to mention nonpayment of minimum wages, there are some cases that incidental expenses such as food and transportation expenses are shifted onto volunteer workers. Willingness to work without compensation does not mean permission to being exploited and exploitation hurt the nature of volunteering activities.

Two approaches are needed to solve these problems. First of all, public institutions should replace simple labor volunteering with part-time work, and provide quality volunteering activities that allow volunteers to build a bond with or feel worthwhile. In this process, since direct volunteering activities to the alienated should be done with expertise, education programs should be prepared for volunteer workers. Another option is to have an intermediary organization that can manage the activities of volunteers and represent their voices. This should increase public access to volunteer activities, enable the necessary personnel to be provided to the right place, and create an environment for activities that meet the nature of volunteer activities.