



OPINION

Counterpoint: Park Won-soon

Powered by Citizens



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In a bid to reduce its nuclear energy dependence, Seoul embarked on a massive energy reduction initiative—shaped by citizen participation—in 2012. The result was a drastic drop in energy use as citizens and corporations embraced the switch to energy-efficient alternatives and took charge of their energy usage. Mayor of Seoul **Park Won-soon**, elected in 2011 with the slogan “the citizens are the mayor”, shares how citizen power ignited the city’s energy innovations.

What can cities and citizens do together for the Earth that is heating up? The 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster in neighbouring Japan gave a great sense of crisis to South Korea. Climate change response begins with energy reduction, hence, Seoul began pursuing the One Less Nuclear Power Plant initiative with its 10 million citizens in April 2012.

Operating on the principle of first communicating with citizens before choosing policy directions, the government began by initiating large-scale discussions.

To do this, we created the Citizens Committee—comprising citizens from all walks of life, including professionals, academic circles, religious circles and civic groups—to lead the discussions and the civic governance. Eighteen events were held to hear what citizens and organisations had to say about energy reduction. A government team, whose sole role was to communicate with citizens, was also created. It used online communication channels like Twitter and Facebook, as well as offline communication channels, such as policy workshops, deliberation processes

and citizens’ podiums to get feedback. To involve senior citizens who lacked internet access, the government reached out to organisations, associations and communities that already worked with them.

The One Less Nuclear Power Plant initiative was therefore led by the citizens, for the citizens, and with the citizens. Civic governance was, and continues to be, the essence of our One Less Nuclear Power Plant initiative.

Reflecting all of the opinions of the citizens in our policies was not an easy task. At times, it caused delays in the decision-making process and the implementation process. There seemed to be endless discussions on how to elicit the participation of the citizens. It was a challenge.

But it brought together the wisdom of 10 million citizens, and it brought about changes in the direction of our policies and improvements in existing regulations.

The public discussions generated ideas on tapping alternative or renewable forms of energy: mini solar panels were installed

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on the rooftops of houses, schools and public buildings while sewage water heat, chimney waste heat and other forms of wasted energy were converted to renewable energy. To boost energy efficiency, buildings, which accounted for 56% of energy use, were retrofitted.

Even though energy is a crucial part of our daily lives, it was difficult to promote the value of policies or to encourage participation, as it is “invisible”. The government tried to raise awareness of our energy policies with the Eco Mileage Programme, which rewarded households that voluntarily reduced energy usage by lowering their electricity bills. More than 42% of households took part.

As a result, energy reduction has become a part of our citizens’ daily lives in homes, schools, and workplaces—it has become a part of Seoul’s culture. Currently, 22,000 students in 500 schools are energy guardian angels who help to prevent energy wastage in homes and schools, and 34 universities are green campuses that have reduced energy usage by 10%.

Small changes in the habits of the citizens in their daily lives have brought about big changes in the energy future of the city. We achieved the first phase goal of reducing 2 million tonnes of oil (the energy generated by one nuclear plant) six months ahead of schedule in June 2014. Many people believed it to be impossible. But we have not stopped there. We have set a second phase goal of reducing the energy equivalent to two nuclear power plants by

2020 and reducing 10 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions as well.

The changes brought about by Seoul are spreading to other cities across South Korea. Last November, four local governments in South Korea, including Seoul, recognised the importance of local energy policies, and announced in a joint statement to cooperate on the wise and frugal use of clean and safe energy for a mutually prosperous future.

The changes driven by the citizens are inspiring not only for cities in South Korea but also for cities around the world. Many representatives of cities and organisations around the world are coming to Seoul to learn about our One Less Nuclear Power Plant initiative. Many ask me: How did Seoul do it? My answer: The citizens did it. The citizens are the energy. Civic governance, powered by the energy of the citizens, drove the changes.

Seoul now looks beyond the changes in Seoul and the changes in South Korea to the changes in the world. We now look beyond civic governance to urban governance. We aspire to cooperate with cities around the world for a sustainably prosperous future.

Small actions lead to small changes, which lead to bigger changes. Our actions will form the Earth’s future. A dream we dream together will come true. I hope that the climate action story of the citizens of Seoul will become an important chapter in the history of the earth. ●