

# 21세기의 새마을운동<sup>1)</sup>

## : 개발협력의 관점에서 본 새마을운동사업의 분석 Saemaul Undong for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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### [ 요약 ]

1970년대에 실시된 새마을운동은 시행 10여년만에 도농간의 개발 격차를 줄이는데 크게 기여한 한국의 통합적 농촌개발 프로그램(Integrated Rural Development Programme)이다. 새마을운동의 성취는 당시 한국의 사회, 경제, 문화적 배경을 활용하여 그에 맞춰 농촌주민들에게 힘을 주고 기회를 제공하는 빈곤감소 전략을 추진함에서 기인한다. 30여년전 새마을운동을 기획하고 추진한 한국의 정책입안자들은 현재 개발협력에서 사용되는 전문용어와 개념을 알 수 없었지만, 그들이 추진한 전략과 실행한 사업들은 현재 개발협력 전문가들이 사용하는 방식, 목표와 크게 다르지 않다. 즉, 새마을운동이 우리에게 주는 가장 큰 교훈은 성공적인 개발협력 파트너십을 위해서는 사업대상국가 및 지역의 특수한 정치적, 경제적, 사회적 문맥을 활용하며 이를 반영하는 적절하고도 실행 가능한 전략과 방법들을 개발해야한다는 점이다. 따라서, 성공적인 개발 및 성장을 위해서는 개발대상국들은 스스로의 개발 상황을 주의 깊게 연구하여 각각의 상황에 맞는 추진가능하고 실용적인 방안을 수립, 실행해야 할 것이다.

### [ Abstract ]

Saemaul Undong, a community based integrated rural development programme of the Republic of Korea in 1970s, contributed to narrow the developmental gap between urban cities and rural communities in a decade. Its success can be attributed to its implementation of basic strategies of poverty reduction adapting to and making use of the Korean contexts promoting opportunity and facilitating empowerment for rural people. Thirty years ago the people who designed and implemented Saemaul Undong did not have a clear understanding of the concepts and vocabularies that are broadly used in development today, what they promoted, achieved, and implemented, however, was not different from the goals, objectives, and methodologies that development practitioners promote today. The most important lessons learned from Saemaul Undong are that it devised appropriate strategies and measures reflecting and making use of the specific political, economic, and social contexts. Developing countries should carefully study their own situation and devise workable and practical solutions of their own.

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## I. Introduction

More than 1.2 billion people in the world are still in extreme poverty living on one dollar a day. Three quarters of them live in rural areas and more than two thirds of them are in Asia. Though much progress has been made, reducing poverty remains a colossal task. The case of the Republic of Korea in this circumstance is worth observing. Korea has achieved remarkable socio-economic development, practically rebuilding the nation after regaining independence from the Japanese colonial rule after the end of the Korean War. Korea reduced extreme poverty which had plagued the country for a very long time. Until now, Korea is the only country in the world which has overcome the three common hardships observed in most developing countries civil wars or internal conflicts, a colonial legacy, and extreme poverty. In the 1950s, the per capita GDP of Korea was \$45 and increased to some \$14,000 in 2004. In 1965 40.9 per cent of the population suffered from absolute poverty but the poverty rate was reduced to 7.6 per cent in 1991.

The economic development policy of Korea focused on industrial development. The first and second Five-year National Development

Programme was about focusing available resources on industrial development and export growth. As the statistics show, however, Korea effectively reduced rural as well as urban poverty. From 1970, the Korean government turned their attention to the balanced growth between urban cities and rural communities and in a decade managed to develop rural community conditions to match those of the cities. At the center of this lies Saemaul Undong (SU), the integrated community development programme of Korea.

Though Saemaul Undong contributed much to the rural development of Korea, it has not received the attention it deserves from researchers with a development perspective. The appraisals have been also polarized according to time and ideology reports produced in 1970s or 1980s praised Saemaul Undong for its great material success while reports after 1990s criticized it heavily for its linkage to dictatorship. With the demise of President Park Jung-hee and the increasing criticism of his dictatorship, Saemaul Undong did not hold the interest of many researchers.

This paper attempts to re-evaluate Saemaul Undong focusing on its value as a rural development programme, identify what it really is and draw lessons applicable in current

development practices. To do so, in the next chapter, we will first review the two precedent rural development programmes implemented before 1970 and look at the general background situation at the time of its inception. In chapter three, the initiation, annual progress, and results of Saemaul Undong will be explained along with its objectives, outputs and outcomes. Based on this assessment, chapter four will draw some key factors of its success, and chapter five will identify some limitations and criticisms. Finally chapter six will present some applicable lessons learned and implications of the programme in today's development contexts.

In conclusion, this paper will identify Saemaul Undong as a community based integrated rural development programme. It will also conclude that its success can be attributed to its implementation of basic strategies of poverty reduction adapting to and making use of the Korean contexts promoting opportunity and facilitating empowerment for rural people. Thirty years ago the people who designed and implemented Saemaul Undong did not have a clear understanding of the concepts and vocabularies that are broadly used in development today, such as good governance, capacity building, participatory approach,

accountability, empowerment, vertical integration, or ownership. In fact, some of these concepts did not even exist at that time. What they promoted, achieved, and implemented, however, was not different from the goals, objectives, and methodologies that development practitioners promote today.

## II. History of Rural Development in Korea

Two rural development programmes similar to Saemaul Undong had been implemented before its formulation. The first one, "Rural Development Promotion Movement (RDPM)," was initiated after rice price plummeted in 1933. The colonial government feared that the slump might exacerbate the anti-Japanese independence movement and destabilize their rule over Korea. The Japanese colonial rulers promoted revitalization and self-sufficiency of farming households. They promoted diversification of rural household income sources, tenancy reform including the reduction of excessive rent burden of tillers, and utilization of extra-labor forces such as women and children.

RDPM shared some similar characteristics with

Saemaul Undong in its management structure and methods (Table 1). For example, in each level of the government, Rural Development Promotion Committees were established to develop, implement and monitor their plans, as was the case with Saemaul Undong. The government also selected a village leader named the “Core Person” for the village level implementation, who could be compared with “Saemaul Leader.” Unlike Saemaul Undong, however, RDPM failed to achieve its goals and faded away in 1936.

A few reasons can be ascribed to this failure. RDPM did not deal with the fundamental

problems of rural Korea, such as the disproportionately excessive Japanese land ownership with huge rental burdens on Korean tillers. The collapse of rural economy was not because farmers were lazy and dependent, but because they received nothing even when their hard work produced large yields. RDPM seemed to have been doomed to fail given the widespread repulsion and skepticism among Korean people toward any of the Japanese colonial policies. The oppressive implementation methods by the colonial government aggravated hostility against them and discouraged people from participating.

The other programme, “National Re-

( Table 1 ) Rural Development Promotion Movement and Saemaul Undong

|              | Rural Development Promotion Movement   | Saemaul Undong   |
|--------------|--|--|
| Background   | Appeasement of Rural Community Devastated by Rice Price Plummet                              | Narrowing the Gap between Urban-Rural Income discrepancy   |
| Organization | Japanese Government-General<br>Provincial Special Committee<br>District Special Committee    | Central Government SU committee<br>Provincial Special Committee<br>District Special Committee<br>Community Special Committee                 |
| Agent        | Core Person  | Saemaul Leader   |
| Training     | Peasant Training Center providing Short-course for Core-Persons                              | Saemaul Leader Training Center providing various short-course training for various people including government officials and Saemaul leaders |
| Objective    | Agricultural Production Increase,<br>Debt Reduction,<br>Household Income/Expenditure Balance | Self-reliance, Diligence, Cooperation  |
| Goal         | Promotion of Loyalty to the Japanese Empire  | Achievement of a better life   |

Source: Jin-ah Choi, Research on Self-help in Saemaul Undong, Seoul National University, Master Dissertation, 2003, Aug. p.23

construction Movement (NRM),” which was the first rural development programme initiated by President Park Jung-hee, also failed to meet its objectives. The military elites who acquired power after the coup diagnosed the pessimistic attitude and laziness of rural village people as a source of rural poverty. They prescribed extensive education and training as a solution to build a stricter work ethic and make them more responsible for their lives. NRM focused on educating about the need for a strict work ethic and raised morale campaigns through special organizations established in parallel with local administrative authorities.

Though large scale training was conducted to boost the spirit of self-help, the responses were neither promising nor positive. With most of the small government investment focusing on industrial development, the government campaigns lacked substantial or tangible assistance necessary to help farmers get out of their abject situation. Village people, without tangible changes, did not see any benefits coming nor did they see the practical linkage between the moral education and their real lives. For them it was more government propaganda which had little value in their daily life.

### Ⅲ. Saemaul Undong : Progress and Results

It is very difficult to define Saemaul Undong due to the constant changes in its scope and agenda. Even its initiation was not clear since the programme originated from President Park's improvisation in coping with the overproduction of cement. However, if one focuses exclusively on activities performed in rural areas of Korea from 1970 to 1979, it is possible to find some common denominators shared throughout the entire movement. Its goal was the promotion of better living for rural people with three objectives: income generation; living environment and basic rural infrastructure development; and capacity building and attitudinal change. To achieve this, it adequately combined capacity building programmes and rural physical infrastructure development activities with village people's participation. It also comprehensively addressed challenges which rural communities faced by vertically and horizontally linking and engaging all the line ministries at each level of government.

In short, Saemaul Undong was a community based integrated rural development programme designed and implemented to provide better

opportunities to rural people and empowering them in an inclusive and comprehensive manner. As each of the governments of developing countries named their development programmes in their own way, Saemaul Undong was a brand name given by the Korean government. The methodology used, approaches taken, and objectives and goals set, however, were not much different from any of the other community based rural development programmes of today. The rest of this chapter will review the initiation and progress and compare the objectives with the results.

## 1. ~~Initiation~~

The Korean government achieved successful economic development in the 1970s with the adequate usage of selective industrial policies and export-oriented trade policies directing its resources heavily on a few selected industries. This selective strategy, however, put rural development on hold and widened the gap between urban and rural living standards. Discontent of the Park regime grew among the rural population and in the national election of 1969, the approval rate of the ruling Democratic Republican Party of President Park fell by 15 per cent even in the rural areas, which traditionally had been regarded as a

favorable voting constituency for President Park.

Saemaul Undong was initiated to ameliorate the widening gap by utilizing resources accumulated with industrial development. In the winter of 1970 the government received a report on over-production of cement and improvised a plan to distribute the excess to rural people. The government first distributed 355 packs of cement to each of the 34,665 rural communities free of charge with one restriction: usage for the welfare of the entire community. Since the cost of storing it was too expensive, the plan was akin to killing two birds with one stone; settling the storage problem as well as helping the rural population. The plan received a favorable public reaction and achieved significant results beyond the government's prediction. The cost of free cement was 4.1 billion won but the estimated monetary value of the projects carried out by the rural community was three times the cost, 12.2 billion won (Park & Lee, 1997). Encouraged by the success and incorporating the lessons learned from the previous rural development programmes, President Park elaborated a new rural development programme, naming it Saemaul Undong.



## 2. Objectives

Saemaul Undong was not initiated based on a solid analytical framework or theoretical background. There was no official definition of Saemaul Undong until 1973. The words most close to definition could be found in President Park's impromptu comments at the National Convention of the Village Leaders held in 1973, "We may call this movement as the movement for a better living" (Park, 1998). It was later interpreted by Dr. Park Jin-whan, the special assistant to the President for Saemaul Undong, as a movement to develop the work ethics of farmers by participating in village projects to accelerate rural modernization (Park, 1998). The overarching goal was later defined as "improving the living conditions of individuals through cooperation and self-help among community people." Though different interpretations existed as to how to define the objectives of Saemaul Undong, most agreed that the aim was to generate economic, social, and attitudinal improvements. The most broadly accepted objectives are (1) income generation, (2) living environment and basic rural infrastructure improvement, and (3) capacity building and attitudinal change.

## 3. Management System

To tackle various challenges and issues in rural villages, Saemaul Undong had a distinctive whole of government approach. Relevant ministries and agencies were horizontally coordinated through the newly established committees to prevent duplication or overlapping between ministries and address interlinked challenges that rural villages faced. Later to effectively address the local situations and changes, the local administration of Saemaul Undong became the direct responsibility of the head of each local government. Relevant divisions planned, implemented and evaluated the programme in cooperation with village people. The vertical chain of government linked the strategies from Seoul to the activities in the field. In addition, President Park coordinated the various strategies and activities in the special reporting session.

One mechanism created for this whole of government approach was the Saemaul Undong Committees created in 1973 with the presidential decree 6104 at each level of government. In the central government, the National Saemaul Undong Committee was created and chaired by Minister of Home

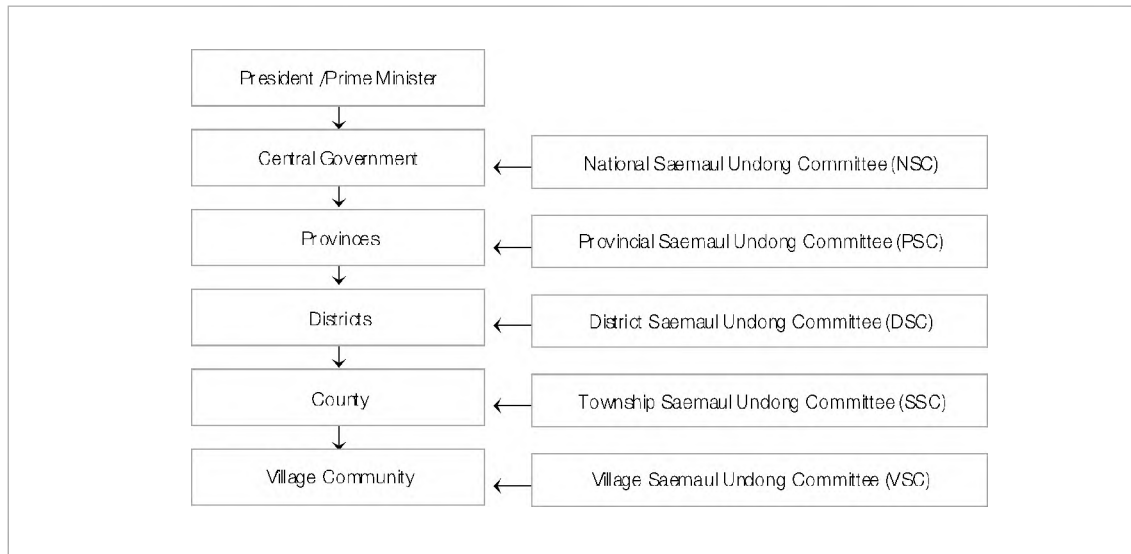
Affairs. The committee consisted of deputy ministers from relevant ministries and presidents of various governmental organizations on agriculture. The National Saemaul Undong Committee served as a coordinator as well as an evaluator with three main functions: development of comprehensive annual, mid-term and long-term plans; analysis and evaluation of local level performances; and provision of support and coordination for the lower level committees. In local government, each provincial, district, and township level government organized committees overseen by its heads (Figure 1). Each of them coordinated activities of lower level government and supervised and monitored the progress under their jurisdiction.

As the scope of local level development projects expanded, the central government realized the increasing necessity to better address the different needs and conditions of various villages. To adapt to the local conditions and strengthen the relations between the central level policy and local activities, the government designated the responsibility to manage Saemaul Undong to the head of each local level government. Each of the divisions inside the local administration took responsibility for

developing and implementing sub-programmes of the Saemaul Undong in their jurisdiction. Based on the issues drawn from rural village assessment, relevant divisions developed and managed sub-programmes, all of which were coordinated and authorized by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

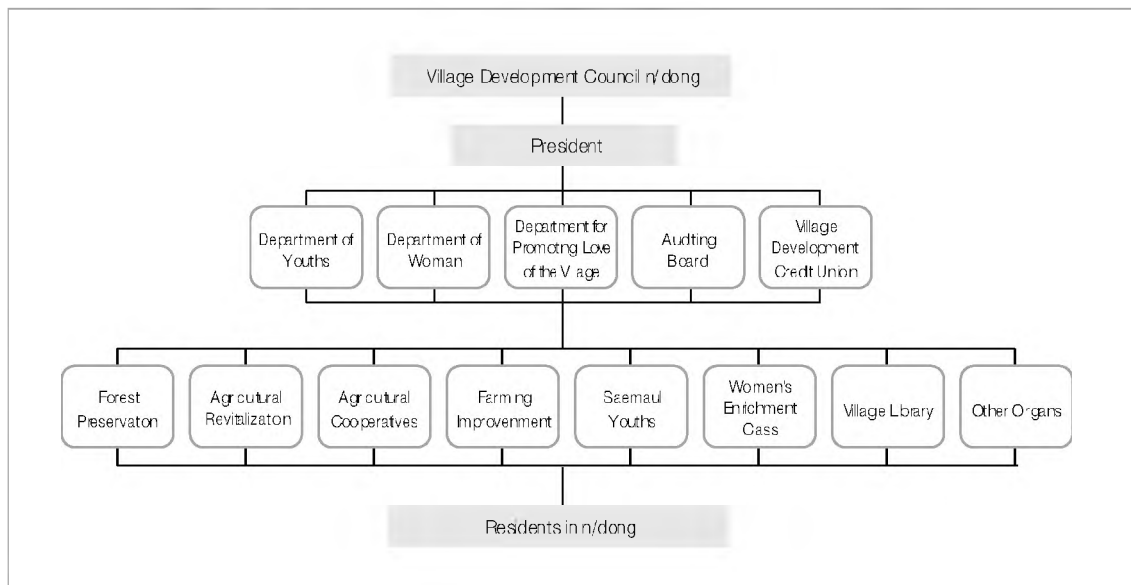
In order to supervise the progress and facilitate coordination among ministries, President Park also created a special reporting session in the Monthly Economic Review, which had been held once a month at the Economic Planning Board with all the cabinet members and leaders of the National Assembly. Each ministry reported to the president directly on the progress and results of Saemaul Undong. Ministries also discussed and devised plans for cooperation and coordination to tackle various issues which could not be solved by any single ministry. It also served as a forum to channel the voices of the poor directly to the top level decision makers. From 1970 to 1979, Saemaul leaders who received awards for their success presented their experiences to all the members of the Review so that the members could understand and better address the difficulties and challenges in rural villages.

Figure 1. Organization Chart for Saemaul Undong Implementation



Source: Reproduced from Cheong-il Hwang, "Logics of Development in Saemaul Undong" Saemaul Undong Research Review Vol. 3 (1986, Feb) P. 72.

Figure 2. Organization Chart for Community Development Committee at the Village Level



Source: Saemaul Undong in Korea, P.38, The National Council of Saemaul Undong Movement in Korea p.3/ , 1999 (Accessed on March 25 2008)

[http://www.saemaul.com/center/www/caups/download/issue/세마울운동\(영문\).pdf](http://www.saemaul.com/center/www/caups/download/issue/세마울운동(영문).pdf)

#### 4. Annual Progress

In accordance with the change in the focus and scope of village level projects, Saemaul Undong could be divided into three phases (Table 2). In the initial phase of Saemaul Undong, the priority at the village level was given to the improvement of physical infrastructure. The government thought that if villagers actually achieved physical changes, they would build confidence in themselves and believe in the possibility of more changes, which would enable broader and more active participation. At this stage, a list of exemplary projects was developed by the government and provided to

the villages as a guideline to help villagers develop general ideas on what they could do for themselves. The list included relatively simple and small projects which were easy to implement and addressed the basic needs of rural villages (Box 1). Village people could see the tangible benefits of implementation. At the same time, the changes brought by themselves stimulated their self-reliance spirits and increased cooperation.

As village people gained more confidence in their ability to bring changes and the basic infrastructure necessary to improve agricultural productivity, Saemaul Undong shifted its focus and Phase II began from 1974. In phase II, income generation projects were gradually initiated while the scope and size of each living condition improvement project increased. Projects focusing on improving infrastructure and living conditions were also continuously implemented to support economic activities of village people by creating easier access to markets, resources and assets. On the other hand, from the year 1972, Saemaul training was initiated for the Saemaul leaders. It should be noted that the training was proposed not by the central government but by Saemaul leaders in villages with successful experience.

##### < Box 1 > List of Saemaul Projects

1. Village access roads to be straightened and widened
2. Old bridges over streams to be reconstructed
3. Village roads to be widened and straightened
4. Sewage systems in village area to be improved
5. Thatched roofs to be replaced by cement made tiles
6. Old fences around farm houses to be repaired
7. Traditional wells for drinking water must be improved
8. Village hall to be constructed
9. Banks of brook to be repaired
10. Feeder roads to fields to be developed
11. Rural electrification to be sped up
12. Village-owned telephones installed
13. Village-owned bathhouse to be built
14. Children's playground to be constructed
15. Riverside laundry place to be improved
16. Trees and flowers planted for beautification

Source: The Saemaul Movement, Park Jin-Hwan p.55

< Table 2 > Three Phases of Saemaul Undong

|            | 1970   | 1971 | 1972 | 1973 | 1974  | 1975 | 1976 | 1977                                    | 1978 | 1979 |
|------------|--|------|------|------|---|------|------|---|------|------|
| Phase      | Initiation and Groundwork  |      |      |      | Self-helping Proliferation                            |      |      | Self-Sustaining Maturity                |      |      |
| Objectives | Living Environment Improvement<br>Rural Infrastructure Development |      |      |      | Income Generation<br>Rural Infrastructure Development |      |      | Attitudinal Change<br>Income Generation |      |      |
| Scope      | Village Development  |      |      |      | Intra-Village Development                             |      |      | District Level Development              |      |      |

Source: Developed from Lee, Bang-whan, Saemaul Undong and Rural Economy Development, P.3 Saemaul Research Vol. 4 1981, Institute of Saemaul Undong, Cheonbook University [online] <http://www.riss4u.net/link?id=A1926727>

During the last phase, based on the achievement of the previous phases, the focus was shifted toward capacity building and attitudinal changes, while the scope of projects became broader. For economies of scale, the basic unit of implementation and scope of projects were expanded as villages developed links with one another. Activities in urban areas, factories and corporations became more common, which changed Saemaul Undong into a national campaign, not a rural development programme. With the demise of President Park in 1979, the new government decided to privatize Saemaul Undong. In 1980, the non governmental Central Headquarters for Saemaul Undong was established and with that Saemaul Undong as the government-led rural development programme ended.

## 5. Outputs, Outcomes and Achievements

Different reviews presented different interpretations on the achievement of Saemaul Undong. On one side, some argued that Saemaul Undong achieved most of its objectives and brought unprecedented success in rural development based on government statistics which showed most of the objectives had been achieved.

On the other extreme, some have claimed that surveys and data including the impact of Saemaul Undong after 1979 showed a different picture. They argue that though it was true that Saemaul Undong accomplished the quantifiable objectives directed from the central government with massive resource mobilization and the enforcement of the authoritarian government, the impact was not sustained, and was, therefore, not successful.

This section will review different arguments and data on the three objectives of Saemaul Undong. In conclusion, it will show that

Saemaul Undong brought about meaningful improvements in the social development dimension: improvement in basic infrastructure; increased accountability of local government; and empowerment of village people while producing limited impact on income poverty reduction and economic development.

### **Income generation and Income Poverty Reduction**

Various income generation projects were implemented with the aim of increasing rural household income and reducing poverty. New agricultural technologies and improved crop varieties were introduced via extension workers. More farms started to utilize machines taking advantage of improved infrastructure due to Saemaul Undong. Usage of chemical inputs and fertilizers became more widespread. In addition to those improvements in agricultural cultivation methods, agriculture was more commercialized by introducing and diversifying cash crops. Improved physical infrastructure in villages helped productivity increase and income grow by opening a new window of opportunity for villagers to venture into new activities and by providing efficient access to markets, resources, and assets necessary for their work.

The absolute poverty rate decreased in 1970 and especially in 1978 the portion of rural people in total absolute poverty was less than that of urban people (Table 3). In terms of income, rural household income recorded a six-fold increase from 255,800 won in 1970 to 1,531,300 won in 1979, even at one point exceeding that of urban households in 1976 (Table 4). Income sources for rural people became also diversified and the portion of non-agricultural income also rose (Table 5).

The impact of Saemaul Undong on rural poverty reduction and income increase, however, was a limited success. The relative poverty rate of rural areas shot up again to 11.2 per cent in 1978 (Table 3). The fluctuation of the ratio between per capita rural income to that of urban income from 1963 to 1985 would also indicate the weak linkage of Saemaul Undong to income generation (Table 6). What is more important is the pertinacious low level of agricultural income. From 1963 to 1985 the ratio of per capita agricultural income to per capita urban working income constantly remained below 40 per cent (Table 6).

Rural village people seldom linked Saemaul Undong with income generation. Various studies showed that rural village people

recognized Saemaul Undong as an infrastructure development programme while their assessment on its contribution on income generation was not significant. In fact, the increase in rural household income in 1970s was mostly due to the heavy subsidization of rice prices by the government and a steady increase in off-farm employment opportunities, neither of which were directly linked to Saemaul Undong. The high rice price policy substantially increased farmers' incomes. It was, however, later criticized as the main reason for the budget deficit accumulation. Though income generation projects listed above contributed to agricultural productivity growth and income increase, the causal relation between the two was not as strong and direct as that of the high price policy.

The decrease in the number of poor people in rural areas could also be due to the transfer of poverty to urban areas. As the portion of urban population to total population increased from 34 per cent in 1966 to 57 per cent in 1980, the portion of urban people in poverty proportionately rose from 34 per cent in 1965 to 56 per cent in 1978 (Seo, 1981). This implied that despite Saemaul Undong urban migration continued and subsequently, rural poor people, seeking high labor wage, migrated to form part of the urban poor.

In conclusion, while Saemaul Undong helped alleviate absolute poverty in rural villages providing better access and opportunity, it was not sufficient to address structural problems of agriculture, which required much more

〈 Table 3 〉 Change in Poverty Rate and Number of People Living in Poverty

|   | 1965  |       |        | 1970  |       |       | 1978  |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|   | Urban | Rural | Total  | Urban | Rural | Total | Urban | Rural | Total |
| No. of People in Absolute poverty (Thousand People) | 4,244 | 7,505 | 11,749 | 2,006 | 5,548 | 7,554 | 2,552 | 1,995 | 4,547 |
| Distribution of People in Absolute poverty (%)      | 36.1  | 63.9  | 100.0  | 26.6  | 73.4  | 100.0 | 56.1  | 43.9  | 100.0 |
| Absolute Poverty Rate                               | 54.9  | 35.8  | 40.9   | 16.2  | 27.9  | 23.4  | 13.75 | 10.80 | 12.28 |
| Relative Poverty Rate (%)                           | 17.9  | 10.0  | 12.2   | 7.0   | 3.4   | 4.8   | 16.6  | 11.2  | 13.9  |

Source: Constructed from Seo, Sang-mok, Definition of Poverty and time series analysis on pp.27-28. [http://www.kdi.re.kr/kdi/report/report\\_read05.jsp?pub\\_no=00003580](http://www.kdi.re.kr/kdi/report/report_read05.jsp?pub_no=00003580) (Accessed on March 21 2008)

Note: In this study, absolute poverty is defined as a monthly household income which is below 20,000 won for an urban household 17,000 won for a rural household. Relative poverty is defined as a household income lower than the 1/3 of the average national household income level. (All the incomes are estimated in 1980 won)

〈 Table 4 〉 Ratio of Rural Household Income to Urban Household Income

(Unit: Korean won)

| Year | Avg. Monthly Income of Urban Household (A) | Avg. Monthly Income of Rural Household (B) | Ratio (B)/(A) (%) |
|------|--|--|-------------------|
| 1967 | 20,720                                     | 12,436                                     | 60.1              |
| 1970 | 31,770                                     | 21,317                                     | 67.1              |
| 1973 | 45,850                                     | 40,039                                     | 87.4              |
| 1976 | 95,980                                     | 96,355                                     | 100.4             |
| 1979 | 219,133                                    | 185,624                                    | 84.7              |

Source: Constructed from Seo, Sang-mok, Definition of Poverty and time series analysis on pp.27-28.  
[http://www.kdi.re.kr/kdi/report/report\\_read05.jsp?pub\\_no=00003580](http://www.kdi.re.kr/kdi/report/report_read05.jsp?pub_no=00003580) (Accessed on March 21 2008)

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〈 Table 5 〉 Farming Household Income in the 1970s

(Unit: Korean won)

| Year | Household Income | Agricultural Income |           | Non-agricultural Income |           |
|------|------------------|---------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|
|      | Amount           | Amount              | Ratio (%) | Amount                  | Ratio (%) |
| 1970 | 255,800          | 194,000             | 75.9      | 61,800                  | 24.1      |
| 1973 | 480,700          | 390,300             | 81.2      | 90,400                  | 18.8      |
| 1976 | 1,156,300        | 921,200             | 79.7      | 235,100                 | 20.3      |
| 1979 | 1,531,300        | 1,531,000           | 68.7      | 696,200                 | 31.3      |

Source: Saemaul Undong in Korea, P.38, The National Council of Saemaul Undong Movement in Korea p.23. 1999  
[http://www.saemaul.com/center/www/caups/down/issue/새마을운동\(영문\).pdf](http://www.saemaul.com/center/www/caups/down/issue/새마을운동(영문).pdf) (Accessed on March 25 2008)

〈 Table 6 〉 Comparison of per Capita Rural Income to Urban Income

(1,000 won)

| Year | Urban Household       |                               | Rural Household       |                                    | Ratio |       |
|------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-------|-------|
|      | Per capita Income (A) | Per capita working Income (B) | Per capita Income (C) | Per capita agricultural Income (D) | (C/A) | (D/B) |
| 1963 | 12                    | 60                            | 15                    | 24                                 | 1.22  | 0.40  |
| 1965 | 16                    | 92                            | 18                    | 28                                 | 1.09  | 0.31  |
| 1970 | 55                    | 254                           | 43                    | 67                                 | 0.79  | 0.28  |
| 1975 | 140                   | 538                           | 155                   | 250                                | 1.11  | 0.43  |
| 1980 | 558                   | 2,144                         | 527                   | 705                                | 0.94  | 0.33  |
| 1985 | 1,087                 | 3,912                         | 1,220                 | 1,492                              | 1.12  | 0.38  |

Source: Lee etc. 2004 KREI p.72

Note: The income is calculated in nominal price



physical and financial investment and drastic changes in agricultural policies rather than massive mobilization of human labor.

### Living Environment Improvement and Basic Rural Infrastructure Establishment

In view of the second objective, it seems that Saemaul Undong produced considerably

substantial improvements in rural infrastructure (Table 7). In fact, while there were many disputes on the characteristics, motivations, and results of Saemaul Undong, most studies concur that Saemaul Undong brought significant improvements in the rural living environment and infrastructure. The traditional image of rural villages lagging behind with kerosene lamps, thatched roofs,

〈 Table 7 〉 Major Achievements of Some Saemaul Undong Projects in the 1970s

| Project                                   | Unit      | Target    | Performance | Ratio (%) |
|---|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Village Roads Expansion                   | Km        | 26,266    | 43,558      | 166       |
| Farm Feeder Roads Construction            | Km        | 49,167    | 61,797      | 126       |
| Small Bridge Construction                 | Ea        | 76,749    | 79,516      | 104       |
| Small Reservoirs Construction             | Ea        | 10,122    | 10,742      | 106       |
| Traditional Small Irrigation (Channel)    | Ea        | 22,787    | 28,352      | 124       |
| Traditional Small Irrigation (Raceway)    | Km        | 4,043     | 4,442       | 109       |
| Traditional Small Irrigation (Embankment) | Km        | 17,239    | 9,180       | 53        |
| Village Center Construction               | Ea        | 35,808    | 37,012      | 104       |
| Public Warehouse Construction             | Ea        | 34,665    | 22,143      | 64        |
| Housing Improvement                       | Ea        | 544,000   | 225,000     | 42        |
| Village Layout Renovation                 | Ea        | -         | 2,747       | -         |
| Sewage System Upgrade/Construction        | Km        | 8,654     | 15,559      | 179       |
| Electricity Supply System Installation    | Household | 2,834,000 | 2,777,500   | 98        |
| Telephone Lines                           |           | -         | 345,210     |           |
| Saemaul Factory Construction/Operation    | ea        | 950       | 717         | 75        |
| Reforestation                             | ha        | 744,354   | 347,153     | 47        |

Source 1: National Council of Saemaul Undong (1999) Saemaul Undong in Korea p.24 cited in Table 1, P. 5 of Key Factors to Successful Community Development: The Korean Experience, Discussion Paper No.39, by Chang-soo Choo, Institute of Developing Economics, JETRO, Chiba, Japan (2005 Nov)

2: Appendix Table 1, Accomplishments of Major Projects by Saemaul Undong 1970-1979 p.321 in Sung-hwan Ban, "Development of the rural infrastructure and the Saemaul Undong" in Toward a New Community Life SNU Institute of Saemaul Undong Studies (1981, 12) Ed. Man-gap Lee

Note: Table was constructed by combining data from the two sources

and outhouses changed drastically with fluorescent lamps, slate roofs, and clean toilets and bathrooms with hot water. Enlarged and extended roads made mechanized farming possible while the extension of telephone lines and electrification provided timely information and enabled village people to cope with changing market situations.

This success can partly be ascribed to the efficient management and monitoring system as well as to the adequate linkage of

inducement for the government officials and participants. The government set quantifiable indicators to gauge and monitor the progress and achievement and the officials at each level of government were accountable for progress in their jurisdiction. Their performance was linked to the evaluation of their work, which meant that their private interests, whether getting a promotion or an incentive bonus, or being penalized by poor performance, depended on achievements in their work. Village people also saw the benefits of participation since they

〈 Table 8 〉 Incidence of Communicable and Water-borne Diseases from 1964 to 1979

| Year | Total Death | Cholera |        | Typhoid Fever |        | Paratyphoid |        | Dysentery |        |
|------|-------------|---------|--------|---------------|--------|-------------|--------|-----------|--------|
|      |             | Cases   | Deaths | Cases         | Deaths | Cases       | Deaths | Cases     | Deaths |
| 1964 | 144         | 20      | 2      | 4,380         | 124    | 35          | 2      | 434       | 16     |
| 1965 | 104         | -       | -      | 3,760         | 94     | 22          | 1      | 355       | 9      |
| 1966 | 68          | -       | -      | 3,454         | 66     | 34          | -      | 133       | 2      |
| 1967 | 61          | -       | -      | 4,230         | 53     | 33          | 1      | 139       | 7      |
| 1968 | 45          | -       | -      | 3,931         | 38     | 59          | -      | 251       | 7      |
| 1969 | 202         | 1,538   | 137    | 5,404         | 57     | 20          | -      | 282       | 8      |
| 1970 | 80          | 206     | 12     | 4,221         | 42     | 33          | -      | 927       | 26     |
| 1971 | 40          | -       | -      | 3,146         | 33     | 5           | -      | 306       | 7      |
| 1972 | 30          | -       | -      | 2,030         | 30     | 9           | -      | 215       | -      |
| 1973 | 8           | -       | -      | 787           | 8      | 2           | -      | 110       | -      |
| 1974 | 8           | -       | -      | 656           | 7      | -           | -      | 72        | -      |
| 1975 | 8           | -       | -      | 535           | 8      | -           | -      | 21        | -      |
| 1976 | 9           | -       | -      | 672           | 7      | -           | -      | 78        | 2      |
| 1977 | 1           | -       | -      | 304           | 1      | 1           | -      | -         | -      |
| 1978 | 2           | -       | -      | 427           | 2      | 4           | -      | -         | -      |
| 1979 | 2           | -       | -      | 215           | 2      | -           | -      | 38        | -      |

Source: Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Yearbook of Republic of Korea health and Social Statistics from Health Care and Community Participation, Toward a New Community Life, P. 328

could choose and implement the projects that they wanted under the broad guidelines provided by the government utilizing additional resources it provided.

In conclusion, the improvement created a virtuous circle of human development. Improved basic infrastructure helped increase productivity and income with better access and wider opportunities while also creating a healthier environment with better sanitation. Incidences of major water-borne communicable diseases, for example, dropped significantly during the Saemaul Undong period and in 1979 there was no death caused by any of the four major diseases (Table 8). Their experience of cooperation with the government provided learning by doing opportunities for building capacities in project management. It also boosted confidence and changed attitudes, which led to the empowerment of people in the villages and transformations in local governance.

### **Capacity Building and Attitudinal Change**

The Ministry of Home Affairs' conception of rural village people was not very different from the stereotypical traditional interpretation of them that outside development agents held at

that time. The ministry's view on Korean farmers was that they were conservative, unwilling to participate in cooperative efforts, reluctant to embrace agricultural innovations, hedonistic, lazy, and obsessed with extravagant lineage rituals. The ministry pointed out that these bad habits and negative attitudes were one of the reasons for low agricultural productivity and chronic poverty. Based on this assessment, the ministry argued that rural development was only possible with significant changes in rural people's attitudes and attempted to change their pessimistic and fatalistic attitude and build confidence among them. To create a sustainable environment for development in rural villages, the ministry promoted modern values focusing on three core values—diligence, cooperation, and self-reliance, and, through large scale training, seminars, and workshops, abolished obsolete conventions and practices based on fundamental Confucian beliefs.

Quantitative records, some case studies, and surveys showed that large scale training was conducted and some positive responses were received from the people. More than 500,000 people took part in Saemaul Undong Trainings from 1972 to 1979 (Table 9). On a survey of the 150 Saemaul Undong leaders conducted in

1974, 38 per cent of them chose increased cooperation spirit among villagers as the most positive result brought by Saemaul Undong (Park, 1974). In another survey, villagers chose changes in behavior, spirit of cooperation, and confidence of a better future as positive changes made possible by Saemaul Undong (Brandt & Lee, 1979).

It should be noted that other scholars have offered a different assessment on changes in rural areas and the cause of rural poverty. They point out that attitudinal change among rural people could be observed even before Saemaul Undong and that all it did was provide a legitimate atmosphere for the continuation of traditional village cooperative practices. Profound changes in rural attitudes and in the operation of village institutions had been taking place since the 1950s and 1960s (Brandt, 1981). As many rural farmers in developing countries of these days, what Korean farmers lacked at that time was not an innovative, diligent, and cooperative modern spirit but the resources and opportunities necessary for enduring the risks involved in development. Most farmers were eager to look for help in order to raise their income and they were highly conscious of the extent to which the rural economy and the quality of their lives

were lagging behind the rapid improvements of the urban environment and the development of the industrial sector (Brandt, 1981).

Even before Saemaul Undong, relatively affluent and competent farmers who could carry the risk and cost of their experiments in change sought technical advice from government agents or other sources and attained financial resources from the local agricultural cooperatives. They raised cash crops with new technologies and loans and invested the profits in acquiring more advanced technology. This small number of innovators acted as a model for other villagers to imitate the pattern so far as their circumstances allowed. For subsistence farmers with little land, no surplus, and no money to invest, however, the lessons of such innovation were too risky to take (Brandt, 1981). What changed after 1971 was that the scarcity of financial and physical resources was relieved by Saemaul Undong. Thanks to increased investment by the government particularly rural credit, the provision of high yield rice seeds, expanded extension services, and higher subsidized grain prices farm productivity and income increased relatively rapidly (Brandt, 1981).

In conclusion, Saemaul Undong received some

〈 Table 9 〉 Annual Saemaul Undong Training Performance

(unit: '000 people)

| Year  | Total | SU leaders | Businessmen & other Professionals | Government Officials |
|-------|-------|------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Year  | Total | SU leaders | Businessmen & other Professionals | Government Officials |
| '972  | 5.5   | 3.7        | 0.5                               | 1.3                  |
| '973  | 29.2  | 4.9        | 6.4                               | 17.9                 |
| '974  | 33.7  | 8.9        | 8.1                               | 16.7                 |
| '975  | 44.3  | 10.8       | 5.6                               | 27.9                 |
| '976  | 48.7  | 13.4       | 6.9                               | 28.4                 |
| '977  | 54.8  | 19.4       | 6.2                               | 29.2                 |
| '978  | 79.3  | 25.9       | 21.7                              | 31.7                 |
| '979  | 272.2 | 27.0       | 168.7                             | 76.5                 |
| Total | 567.7 | 116.0      | 233.1                             | 229.6                |

Source: Park Jong-ho, (1985,2.), An Analytical Study on the Performances Accomplished through the Practicing Processes of the Saemaul Undong, Saemaul Undong Research Review, Vol.2, Chungju: Chungju University SU Research Institute (p. 36 Table 17-2)

favorable responses and achieved some meaningful results in its campaign for promoting cooperation, self-reliance, and diligence. It deepened the pre-existing tradition of cooperation to result in a calculated cooperation with clear objectives and methods. It also effectively removed some outdated practices and increased self-confidence among the people.

The bad habits and old attitudes, however, were not the main causes of rural economic difficulties. The sluggish agricultural productivity growth and persistent poverty had more to do with the failure of the government to deliver essential assistance and resources such as credit or technologies to the

people or to provide effective measures to cope with deteriorating terms of trade. Some of the spirits and attitude that Saemaul Undong tried to promote, moreover, did not need further encouragement. Rural farmers had been diligent and hard workers cooperating with each other for communal rituals and farming. Farmers became more self-reliant with improved infrastructure and broadened access to credit but were not fully self-sufficient.

The culmination of all those so-called attitudinal changes was not in the promotion of the spirit of cooperation, diligence, and self-reliance. It was instead in empowerment of people and improvements in local governance.

Saemaul Undong created an enabling environment where rural people voiced their opinions and made themselves heard. Government agencies and officials became regarded as potential sources of assistance rather than as feared exploiters. The latter part of this chapter will first examine the meaning of changes in three core values that Saemaul Undong promoted and will review the actual attitudinal changes that were inadvertently brought forth but contributed to social development in rural villages.

### **Diligence**

It seemed that designating laziness as one of the main causes of rural poverty was overstretching logic. Korean farmers, as with other farmers in developing countries, seemed to have lived a very challenging life. Korean farm wives, for example, had to raise children, make clothes, do the laundry, cook meals, collect fire wood, fetch water, work all day in the fields, and do some additional side jobs such as making straw string for sale. It was even more absurd to assert that before 1971 farmers held values that made them lazy, while at the same time workers in the city, who were mostly of farm origin, created the Korean industrial “miracle” (Brandt, 1981). If there was

new industriousness linked to the success of Saemaul Undong it would be caused by the new opportunities and resources provided for profitable agriculture rather than by a change in values (Brandt, 1981).

### **Self-reliance**

Saemaul Undong contributed to rural farmers becoming self-sufficient, free from shortage of food by being able to produce enough food for themselves, and more confident about their capability. There was, however, a built-in contradiction associated with the goal of self-reliance since the changes brought about by Saemaul Undong required further outside assistance (Brandt, 1981). Commercial farming required continuous technological development and adaptation to the market situation. It also had intrinsic vulnerability to external shocks. Self-reliance became difficult for the farmers due to the increased uncertainties that accompanied their shift from subsistence to commercialized agriculture. It also required updated technology, expert knowledge and continuous financial investment, which were only obtainable from the outside. Dependency on the government actually increased in many ways, and government officials complained that villages were always asking for help

instead of trying to help themselves, while farmers complained of patronizing bureaucratic superiority (Brandt, 1981).

### Cooperation

Most Asian rural communities including Korean rural villages shared the traditional values of cooperation developed throughout a long history of agricultural cultivation. Saemaul Undong linked traditional sense of cooperation to individual gains and modified the concept to fit into the modernization process. At the beginning the government increased “participation” by mobilizing village people through coercive pressure. Later, as people gradually realized the benefit of village activities, voluntary cooperation started to take place. In village meetings, house visits by village leaders, and informal group meetings, village people discussed the benefits and disadvantages of each activity. Farmers did not just passively listen and do what the government officials and village leaders told them to do. They observed what went on in neighboring communities and compared ideas with many other people during periodic visits to the local market town (Brandt, 1981). Farmers worked together for clearly defined goals, and each individual expected to derive

specific benefits from his or her participation. They were not reluctant to pool their resources either on a village-wide scale or on the scale of a freely selected sub-group, when a collective good was clearly available (Reed, 1981). Over a period of several years people learned how to work together to develop estimates on the resources required, to get necessary assistance from outside, and to motivate some reluctant farmers.

This calculated cooperation, however, later became obsolete in the new society built by Saemaul Undong itself. The increase of cash crop farmers and commercialization of agriculture, which was less dependent on cooperation with each other and more on machines and technologies, undermined the cooperation and solidarity found in the village institutions in the past (Brandt, 1981). Individualism steadily penetrated rural society, fostered by the mass media, commercialized agriculture, and rampant commercialism (Brandt, 1981).

### Thrift and Simplification of Old Conventions

The campaign against extravagant expenditures on rituals produced meaningful success in reshaping the values and customs of

rural villages. On occasions like weddings or funerals, it had been a custom to provide extravagant entertainment and lavish food and beverages to the village people to show off or promote the social status and personal reputation of the host. Over the course of a few years, Saemaul Undong encouraged a shift away from this pattern (Brandt, 1981). It provided guidelines, conducted seminars and introduced simplified ways of holding traditional rituals. The debt incurred by the extravagant rituals reduced from 7.2 per cent of household income in 1962 to 2.2 per cent in 1973 (Kim, 2000 p.26). According to a survey, more than half of the respondents indicated that after Saemaul Undong, villagers had abandoned superstition and fatalism while more than ninety per cent expressed that they became more future and task oriented (Boyer & Ahn, 1991).

### **Participation and Empowerment of People**

As much as it was top-down and centralized, Saemaul Undong was almost equally bottom-up in some ways despite the political and social atmosphere of Korea at that time. Although there were limitations, Saemaul Undong provided the village people with increased opportunity to voice their opinions to and

engage with the government. From the previous rural development attempts, the Korean government was already well aware of the fact that for the success of rural development programmes, all the activities should be initiated by and in line with the interests of the village people.

As explained in the previous chapter, the government limited their role as a guide and an evaluator and allowed much autonomy for matters related to Saemaul Undong. Village people were increasingly involved in decision-making processes and project implementation inside their villages and gradually built a more balanced relationship with local government officials. While the main role of the central government was limited to leading and coordinating the nation-wide activities of the various stakeholders, village people, at the opposite end, took responsibilities for village level activities, tailoring them to the needs and circumstances of the communities. Between these two levels, the local governments assumed the role of a facilitator linking the villages with the central government. The central government, for instance, would announce a plan to develop physical infrastructure in a certain areas such as feeder roads or water supplies. This general plan



would be sent down to the villages via the local governments, but the operational decisions such as where, how, and when to develop them would be made by the villagers in consultation with local government officials (Goldsmith, 1981).

Saemaul Undong also introduced a new kind of community-based leadership, which was different from that of the traditional village chiefs. While village chiefs had been paid and appointed by the government among old villagers, Saemaul leaders were elected by the villagers usually among relatively young people in their thirties or forties and served the villages without any compensation. They represented the interests of their villages to the local authorities and sometimes did not hesitate to challenge or confront the local officials while delivering the decisions and plans made by the village people. Under this new leadership, the village people discussed and decided what they wanted to do for themselves. A consensus needed to be reached for the selection and implementation of a particular project as well as the responsibilities to be taken by each of the villagers. Disagreements were usually resolved with persuasion, or sometimes with majority rule in various village meetings.

The new experience allowed the people to realize their capacity and empowered people vis-à-vis the government. A survey conducted by Boyer and Ahn showed that villagers preferred a democratic style of leadership for village meetings and decision-making, though authoritarian style was preferred in project implementation once the decision had been made after democratic discussion (Boyer & Ahn, 1991).

The empowerment, however, was a limited experience with regard to development issues and was never further developed or transferred to become fully fledged political activism. Village people were well aware that they were participating in a campaign initiated and implemented by the government. Their participation was also strictly limited to the activities relevant to the objectives of Saemaul Undong. The villagers also acutely knew that though the local government agents were helping them, the agents could always turn into watchdogs for the government.

### **Change in Local Governance**

The government officials historically regarded rural village people as subjects of their rule, while village people tended to perceive the

officials as exploiters imposing difficult rules upon them. This mutual discordance created distrust between the two sides, which had been a serious obstacle to the introduction of government-led campaigns in rural villages during the 1950s. With Saemaul Undong, the traditional role of local governments changed from being an instrument of the central government for the control of local resources and the execution of law and order to a rural development agent assisting village people. Local government policies accordingly became more representative of their constituents.

The local government linked village people's needs to central government directives and channeled the voice from the field to be incorporated into government policy. With the help of Saemaul leaders, it delivered government services and assistance to rural villages. It also coordinated various kinds of government support including mobilization of extension workers, family planning workers, voluntary organization personnel, owners and managers of private agro-industries under its jurisdiction to avoid any confusion, unnecessary duplication and conflicts in implementation at the village level. The package of services and assistance from government agencies streamlined under the

total scheme of Saemaul Undong was implemented in cooperation with each village.

Interlocking performance evaluation for the local government officials with the outputs of Saemaul Undong helped increase accountability and capacity of the local officials by tying their personal interests with those of the village people. Each of the local government officials was assigned a certain number of villages whose performance they were accountable for. To ensure better performance, officials frequently visited their assigned villages. They exchanged views and discussed progress of the work with the village people to identify issues and modify plans for assistance. Government assistance was delivered in time in accordance with the schedule developed by villagers. Local officials became more accountable to their services, which improved in quality, and created interdependent and mutually beneficial relationships between the local people and the officials. After observing six years of Saemaul Undong, Vincent Brandt and Man-Gap Lee (1979) wrote:

In every case there is far more interaction between villagers (particularly village leaders) and local government officials than in the past. On the one hand officials are more concerned

with, and more active in influencing village affairs. On the other, villagers ... now recognize the importance of outside support for the success for [of] both community and private ventures.

### Gender and Saemaul Undong

As in many other developing countries, women in Korea were not traditionally welcomed to engage in social issues. They were viewed as home makers responsible for raising children, assisting their husband, and managing household chores. A Korean proverb, “A crying hen ruins the family”, succinctly depicted the traditional view of the role of women in Korea. Women were not allowed to publicly speak their opinions and obedience to their husband was regarded as one of the virtues of a good housewife. Saemaul Undong, however, opened a small window of opportunity for rural women to officially participate in social activities and engage with the government. The tenacious efforts made and outstanding achievements accomplished by women made the public appreciate their capacity and positively changed the general view on women's role in society.

Before Saemaul Undong, women in many villages already established small organizations

and had been doing minor activities such as saving rice, organizing collective savings, simplifying family rites, and beautifying villages. More than fifty per cent of Korean rural villages had mother's clubs and in most villages there existed a variety of women's organizations such as the Living Improvement Club or Parents' Associations, some of which were built up by extension workers from different ministries.

With Saemaul Undong, the work and opinions of village women became more organized and officially recognized. The various activities became streamlined and coordinated under the Saemaul Women's Association. Village women had a chance to officially voice out their opinion both to the local governments and in the village via a Saemaul woman leader. The government also encouraged women to continue these small activities which were in their view associated with the duties traditionally reserved for women and regarded as women's work.

Initially, their participation was limited to continue the so-called “women's work” however, they gradually increased their involvement in village activities, sometimes leading and urging other unenthusiastic

villagers. Some of the Saemaul woman leaders proactively initiated and successfully implemented projects which were considered part of the men's domain such as road or bridge construction, river bank installation, or tideland reclamation. Though woman leaders faced double the difficulties of male leaders, their accomplishment was beyond government expectations. As shown by a case study on Saemaul women leaders, women leaders not only had to fight the cynicism and disregard of village people but also had to persuade their husbands and in-laws who objected to their engagement in social work (Cho & Tinker, 1981). Not until their persistency and endeavor produced huge success did the public opinion on women's role become positive. Their accomplishments were so exceptional that on 10 December 1976 President Park complimented their role in his speech (Cho & Tinker, 1981).

"In all successful villages, women are known to have played prominent roles. Let us once again realize the importance of securing full and enthusiastic support from the female portion of the community."

Women's potential as change agents gradually became recognized and the negative attitude toward women's participation in social activities

was ameliorated. One survey showed that many respondents replied that they observed increased participation of women in village decision-making processes while some 90 per cent of them responded positively to the rise of the social status of women (Kim, 2000).

Though the contribution and achievement of women in Saemaul Undong positively changed the conservative attitude against women, it did not lead to sustainable awareness of women's rights in Korean society nor did it create systematic institutional changes inside the government for the empowerment of women. The encouragement by the government on further engagement of women was partly to address the feminization of agriculture and rural villages caused by massive migration of men to urban areas (Cho & Tinker, 1981). Urban-oriented male extension workers tended to dismiss women altogether, telling them what to do when women's participation was required (Cho & Tinker, 1981). From the beginning, there was no such strategy developed for gender mainstreaming to address the deep-rooted social bias and discrimination against women. The positive changes were solely brought by women's own efforts, which were not scaled up into policy or institutional change.

## IV. Factors for Success

Many factors can be attributed to the achievements of Saemaul Undong. While some of them are context specific circumstances which created a favorable environment for community-based rural development programmes, others are policies deliberately designed for Saemaul Undong. The principal lessons learned from this Korean experience are not different from those of other successful rural development programmes: devise and implement the policies and guidelines which reflect and complement rural community situations and contexts. Saemaul Undong successfully combined social, historical, and cultural background conducive to community-based rural development with deliberate policies and strategies reflecting and utilizing the contexts. This chapter first identifies favorable pre-conditions specific to the Korean context, lists policies and strategies developed specifically by the government for Saemaul Undong and finally details village level contributions.

### 1. ~~Pre-conditions~~

#### Homogeneous Communities with Strong Tradition of Cooperation

Rural communities in Korea had some distinct features: a long history of settlement by people usually related to each other by kinship; rice farming as their main economic activity sharing traditional customs and autonomous norms based on Confucian teaching. Ethnic homogeneity also contributed much for cohesive cooperation thus reducing the possibility of disputes and conflicts.

Like many other rural villages in Asian countries, Korean rural village people had, for a long time, already known and realized the benefits of cooperation. A majority of rural people had raised rice as their staple crop. They had known each other for decades and had helped each other in many aspects of their life from farming to renovating public infrastructure; sowing, weeding, harvesting, rice-transplanting, preparing traditional rituals and ceremonies, maintaining agricultural roads and reservoirs, and changing the thatched roofs of their houses.

Each village also had its own autonomous rules and customs for cooperation called Doorae, Gyae and Hyang-Yak. Doorae is more than five hundred year old tradition of cooperation to do the difficult work that could not be done by one household. Gyae is a small savings

scheme especially popular among housewives. Each month, five to ten people deposit certain amount of small money to one chosen leader for a certain period of time and every month the leader gives the money raised to each member in a pre-organized order. The idea is that people in need of fast money but lacking collateral can get it in time while the ones who receive the money later get some extra as an interest paid by the ones who have already received their share. The age-old tradition called Hyang-Yak is an autonomous customary norm promoting cooperation and good deeds among villagers, based on its Confucian tradition.

This rich social capital in Korean rural villages such as pre-existing traditions and homogeneity made rural people feel less hostile against Saemaul Undong since collaboration for the common good was not a foreign idea. Saemaul Undong in turn further developed the traditional exercise of cooperation to be more deliberate and sophisticated.

### **Egalitarian Society with Land Reform**

One of the pre-conditions facilitating participation is the relatively equal social structure of Korean villages. It has been noted

that large inequalities in assets, such as property, land or prestige, have a tendency to reduce community solidarity, and often make the task of creating viable participatory organizations and projects impossible (Goldsmith, 1981). Disproportionate control of assets and resources by a small number of local elites increased the risk of local capture, the domination of benefits of a development programme by the local elites, hindering possible impact of any community-development programme.

Undoubtedly, one of the major reasons for the relative success of Saemaul Undong is the egalitarian rural village structure created after the comprehensive land reform. After independence from Japanese colonial rule, the new Korean government ambitiously launched a drastic Land Reformation Programme, based on the land-to-tiller principle. In 1950, the Korean government enacted a Land Reformation Law, which prohibited tenant farming and put a ceiling on land ownership up to only three hectares of land per person. Since most of the major absentee landlords were Japanese who fled back after the end of World War II or their Korean collaborators who were regarded as traitors, the resistance against the reform was relatively weak. The landlords

received nominal compensation for its takeover while the tiller also paid nominal fees for acquisition. The land reform practically got rid of major absentee landlords from rural villages, which coupled with migration to the cities of both rich peasants and landless and near-landless tenants, and had the effect of leveling incomes and homogenizing the rural population.

In 1970, when Saemaul Undong was initiated, ninety-four per cent of the rural households in Korea held farms smaller than two hectares, while sixty-four per cent held less than one hectare. With the demise of traditional ruling

elites, the social and political structure in the village became more equitable. The relatively egalitarian structure was favorable to Saemaul Undong, since most of the villagers were in similarly poor situations and there were few possibilities for local power elites to take disproportionately large amounts of the benefits.

### Solid and continuous economic growth

Many governments in developing countries often face difficulties in pursuing their development programmes due to budgetary constraints. Needing to overcome the multi-

〈 Table 10 〉 Annual Expenditure of Saemaul Undong, Tax Revenue and GDP

(Unit: billion won)

| Year | Community Contribution (A) | Government Assistance (B) | Others (C) | Total Contribution (A)+(B)+(C) | Revenue | Govt Assistance/ Revenue (B)/(D) | GDP (E) | Community Contribution /GDP(A)/(E) | Govt Assistance /GDP(B)/(E) | Total Contribution /GDP |
|------|----------------------------|---------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|---------|----------------------------------|---------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1971 | 8                          | 4                         | 0          | 12                             | 1,065   | 0.39%                            | 3,142   | 0.24%                              | 0.12%                       | 0.36%                   |
| 1972 | 27                         | 4                         | 2          | 33                             | 1,374   | 0.26%                            | 4,218   | 0.65%                              | 0.09%                       | 0.77%                   |
| 1973 | 77                         | 17                        | 2          | 96                             | 1,976   | 1.24%                            | 5,454   | 1.41%                              | 0.31%                       | 1.76%                   |
| 1974 | 84                         | 31                        | 18         | 133                            | 1,993   | 1.55%                            | 7,778   | 1.08%                              | 0.40%                       | 1.71%                   |
| 1975 | 129                        | 165                       | 2          | 296                            | 3,197   | 5.17%                            | 10,386  | 1.24%                              | 1.57%                       | 2.85%                   |
| 1976 | 150                        | 165                       | 7          | 323                            | 4,392   | 3.76%                            | 14,305  | 1.05%                              | 1.15%                       | 2.26%                   |
| 1977 | 217                        | 181                       | 69         | 467                            | 4,927   | 3.67%                            | 18,358  | 1.18%                              | 0.98%                       | 2.54%                   |
| 1978 | 295                        | 233                       | 106        | 634                            | 6,416   | 3.63%                            | 24,745  | 1.19%                              | 0.94%                       | 2.56%                   |
| 1979 | 328                        | 227                       | 203        | 758                            | 8,541   | 2.66%                            | 31,732  | 1.03%                              | 0.71%                       | 2.39%                   |

Source: Annual Expenditure for Saemaul Undong is from p.51 of "Saemaul Undong and Yushin Regime" by Park, Jin-whan and Ahn, Do-hyun.

Note: Tax revenue data is from the statistical website of the National Statistics Bureau and Gross Domestic Production (GDP) data is from <http://www.kosis.kr> (Accessed on 22 February, 2008)

faceted challenges of poverty and constrained by limited sources of finance, developing countries could not usually commit themselves to long-term development programmes. Having learned the importance of physical assistance after the failure of the first rural development programme, the Korean government utilized resources made available by sustained economic growth to support Saemaul Undong. The third favorable condition was constant economic growth of Korea which mitigated the extra burden of expenditure incurred by Saemaul Undong. The ratio of the government assistance for Saemaul Undong to tax revenue has an average 2.48 per cent and did not go above five per cent at any point except in 1975 (Table 10).

The portion of total expenditure to GDP was on average less than two per cent and did not exceed more than three per cent of GDP during the nine-year period. Strong and continuous economic growth increased tax revenue, which allowed the government to continuously support and lead the programme with little budgetary concern.

On the community side, the burden was not too heavy, either. The average share of community contribution to GDP was around one per cent and was never higher than 1.5 per cent of GDP.

Sustained economic growth also helped increase the market for agricultural products by raising the income of urban industrial workers who were at the same time major consumers of rural products.

### **National Leadership and Political Commitment**

It is given that no policies or programmes can be successfully implemented without the commitment of the government, and Saemaul Undong was no exception. Strong commitment and leadership from the very top played a crucial part in its success. It was President Park with his strong will and commitment who initiated, designed, and provided continuous support for Saemaul Undong. He made Saemaul Undong a top priority of his government, checking monthly progress, inviting villagers to cabinet meetings to give presentations, and abruptly visiting villages and training centers.

Strong commitment from the top leader enabled effective vertical integration linking all the levels of government and created a holistic approach horizontally mobilizing resources and coordinating plans among the relevant ministries. With Saemaul Undong a top government priority, government officials



made significant efforts for the programme's success since they knew their personal gains, such as promotion, were dependent on their performance.

## 2 Policies and Strategies of the Government

### Holistic Approach

Many rural development programmes focused on specific sector development such as water and sanitation or education. Some of them concentrated on providing various types of training and workshops with a view to building capacity for their own development. With lessons learned from previous experience, Saemaul Undong took a distinctive holistic approach by combining training in capacity and institutional building with physical development activities based on the village people's needs.

The government ascribed some of the reasons for the failure of their previous rural development attempts in the 1960s to the excessive focus on enlightenment of villagers without providing tangible assistance. It also anticipated that participation of people would be encouraged and their pessimism against rural campaigns would decrease once they saw

the actual benefit and changes that were brought about. To promote people's participation, Saemaul Undong first started with relatively small projects which could produce distinctive changes in the village but be accomplished relatively easily so that the village people could realize their capacity and build confidence in themselves. At the same time, it provided training on sharing practical experiences of Saemaul leaders in successful villages and delivering practical knowledge and technical skills necessary for project management. Village people could better manage their activities with newly acquired knowledge, which in turn produced better results and strengthened their confidence even further, creating a virtuous circle of development.

The government, in addition, did not confine the activities of Saemaul Undong to one specific sector. Village people could implement the activities that they wanted whether they were related to healthcare improvement, agricultural productivity or infrastructure development. Saemaul Undong comprehensively dealt with various challenges that the villagers identified by themselves, coping with the multi-dimensional challenge of poverty. By not focusing on a specific challenge, it efficiently dealt with the diverse but inter-linked

adversities that rural villages faced. Under broad government guidelines, priorities were determined by the people and were carried out step by step. Unlike other rural development programmes with strict control on management and planning imposed by outsiders, Saemaul Undong let the villagers determine the direction for their village, while the central and local administration played a guiding and supporting role.

#### Horizontal Coordination

To effectively address the multi-dimensionality of poverty and to deliver the comprehensive development plan package in cooperation with the rural villagers, the Korean government devised a distinct approach of horizontal coordination among the relevant ministries. The central government realized that effective coordination among the ministries was crucial since no single ministry could deal with all the development issues alone. For example, rural electrification or extension of health services which were crucial for rural development could not be delivered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the traditional authority for rural development, since they were outside its jurisdiction. Furthermore, the ambitious plan for promoting commercial agriculture and

farming mechanization by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery had failed many times to achieve desired results due to the insufficient consideration of rural village infrastructure, the crucial prerequisite for mechanization and commercialization of agriculture.

Several ideas were contemplated for coordination. Creation of a new ministry of rural development was ruled out because the government assessed that it would only increase the administration costs with a good chance of creating more confusion among the ministries involved, resulting in delayed implementation. The government came up with an option of utilizing existing resources. It delegated authority of coordination to the Ministry of Home Affairs, under which all relevant ministries were mobilized. A committee, chaired by the Minister of Home Affairs, was formed in the central government and relevant ministries and organizations discussed and coordinated their plans under the guidance of the Ministry of Home Affairs. In each level of local government, a special committee for coordination was also created. Comprehensive development plans for each village were managed by the relevant department congruent to their work and

channeled up to the relevant ministries in the central government, effectively covering all the issues concerned.

### Vertical Integration

Using the centralized and hierarchical administrative system, Saemaul Undong effectively created vertical integration linking villages, the local governments, and central government. Each level of government managed programmes under their control and reported to the higher level authority. The central government provided general guidelines and directions and coordinated the overall management of the plan. Local government acted as a pipeline conveying the voices from the villages to the top and transferring directions from the top to the village. Each level of local government was also accountable for monitoring and coordinating the activities of its lower level governments under control. Local governments were allowed to modify at their own discretion the action plans under their jurisdiction to some extent reflecting local conditions and opinions of the village people. From the central government in Seoul to the villages, government officials and villagers were linked vertically, which made effective communication and cooperation possible.

### Incentive System and Competition

The selective approach taken by the government acted as a strong motivation for the people to be actively involved. In 1973, based on performance evaluation, the government disqualified 6,108 villages out of a total of some 30,000 villages in Korea from receiving further assistance for the next year. Government policy sent a clear message that the villages would be held responsible for their efforts and results. Some of the disqualified villages voluntarily continued their work by themselves in the hope to be re-included after the next evaluation (Kim, 2000). The principle of “more assistance to more successful villages” acted as an effective stimulator increasing competition among villages and promoting more participation for better achievement (Kim, 2000).

Later the government classified all the rural villages into three categories and selectively provided assistance favoring the villages advancing toward “self-sustainable community” while spurring the lagging villages to catch up with other villages (Table 11). Conversely, the government also provided rewards to the successful villages and their leaders. Villagers and their leaders with outstanding performances

〈 Table 11 〉 Conditions for Advancement in Community Level Classification

| Criteria                    | Basic Community                         | Self-reliance Community                          | Self-Sustainable Community                       |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|
| Criteria                    | Basic Community                         | Self-reliance Community                          | Self-Sustainable Community                       |
| Village Road Construction   | From the main road to the Village       | Inside the village                               | -  |
| Agricultural Road Expansion | From the field to the villages          | Within the field                                 | -  |
| Small Bridge Construction   | small streams in the village            | Inter-village rivers                             | Streams and rivers near the village              |
| Agricultural Water Mgt.     | More than 70 % dredged and developed    | More than 70 % dredged and developed             | More than 85% dredged and developed              |
| Agriculture Mechanization   | -                                       | Automatic Extremitities Spread                   | Cultivator and Thresher                          |
| Cooperative Agriculture     | Establishment of Cooperative Work Force | Establishment of Cooperative Production Business | Establishment of Cooperative Production Business |
| Village Fund (per village)  | More than 300,000KRW                    | More than 500,000 KRW                            | More than 1,000,000 KRW                          |
| Household Income            | More than 500,000KRW                    | More than 800,000 KRW                            | More than 1,400,000 KRW                          |

Source: Table 6 from p. 33, Choi, Jin-Ah, *Research on Self-help in Saemaul Undong*, 2003, Aug. Seoul National University, Master Dissertation

received medals and orders from the president to honor their efforts. Every week the mass media broadcasted the story of a leader who overcame adversity and managed to change his or her village. They were regarded as national heroes and presented their stories in cabinet meetings, schools, and the training courses. Those incentives acted as a stimulus for others to work harder and cooperate more.

Local government officials with their personal interests at stake regularly, sometimes everyday, visited rural villages and kept detailed records of village achievements. The strong message from the top was that rural development was a national priority and it was to be implemented through Saemaul Undong,

and that they would be held accountable for its success (Goldsmith, 1981).

### Capacity Building Training Programmes

Practical and experience-based training was given to more than 500,000 people during the course of Saemaul Undong. Programmes provided practical skills and technologies on project management and new tools and technologies in agriculture. Practical knowledge gained from training programmes helped improve their living standards, which in turn led the village people to change their traditional attitude and strengthen the lessons of attitudinal change provided by other training.

Training played important role in Saemaul Undong in that it provided the participants with not only practical and technical project management skills but also with a forum for sharing knowledge and exchanging views on their failures and successes. It also served as a communication channel relaying the suggestions and opinions of the participants, which were reviewed and incorporated by the government. Training was also complemented by evaluations and follow-up courses. Evaluations were conducted for each of the training courses. Various follow-up measures such as trainer's visit to trainees' home, one day refresher training courses, or alumni gatherings were also conducted to ensure better understanding of training content and strengthen the linkage between the training programmes and village activities.

Though it received positive reviews, the various training programmes were not without limitations. They were delivered in a standardized format with few differences in the contents and methodology. Subjects and materials were already fixed and not modified in accordance with the differences among trainees (Whang, 1981). Each training course had too many trainees, probably due to the need to achieve the quantitative goals set by

the government as fast as possible and reduce the administrative cost (Whang, 1981).

## Public Relations

Mass media from television and radio to newspapers and magazines were widely and extensively utilized for disseminating information on, drawing more attention to and participation in Saemaul Undong. Under the management of the Ministry of Home Affairs, all three domestic television channels frequently broadcasted updated news and success stories. Radio channels were also used extensively as many Koreans at that time did not own televisions. Every day early in the morning, all the radio channels broadcasted the Saemaul song and special programmes on village news and stories. In many small towns and most of the villages in rural areas where many of the residents did not own radios or televisions, the local government offices or Saemaul leader's house, equipped with an integrated central receiver-amplifier, relayed radio programmes through a loud speaker for the whole village to hear.

The Office of the President, Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Culture and Public Information also produced various kinds of

movies and slides to be used at either Saemaul classes in schools or in cinemas (Cheong, 1981). Later, in August 1973 the Saemaul Broadcasting Coordination Committee was created to further propagate Saemaul Undong even through commercial broadcasting stations. This massive public relations drive certainly helped deliver the necessary information to the village people and promote broader participation and engagement. The messages, however, were disproportionately dominated by dramatic success stories and mostly served the interest of the government rather than channeling the voices of the bottom to the top.

### 3. Village Level Efforts

#### Community Participation

It is a given fact that for any rural development programme to be successful, active participation and ownership among village people is a prerequisite. The Tradition of cooperation developed to become calculated participation with the experience of consensus building, collective decision-making and implementation in managing village projects.

According to a report by the Ministry of Home Affairs, between 1971 and 1979, each rural

person contributed twelve days of work per year, totaling 1.1 billion work days, for Saemaul Undong. The annual labor contribution, moreover, increased about 33 times during the same period. Other studies showed the quality of participation was increasingly deepened. A large-scale survey done by the Korea Rural Economic Institute (KREI) in 1978 showed that sixty-seven per cent of the respondents answered that they attended all the village meetings held in their villages, while another twenty-eight per cent said they attended often (Boyer & Ahn, 1991). Only five per cent indicated they rarely or never participated in the meetings. The same survey showed that fifty-seven per cent of the respondents reported that villages selected their own projects themselves. Only six per cent suggested that the officers from the county or town governments selected what projects to be implemented, while the remaining thirty-seven per cent indicated that the officials and the villagers were equally responsible for such decisions.

Close linkage between personal interests and village projects can be ascribed as the main reason for active participation. At the beginning, village level participation was mobilized by the local government and was limited to the passive provision of labor to the

projects designed and ordered by the government. Having observed the positive changes and realized the possible benefits, village people gradually became more proactive. Under the limited autonomy they had in implementing projects, they became actively engaged in village level decision-making and the implementation process through rigorous meetings and discussions. They also actively engaged with local government officials and voluntarily submitted project proposals for further assistance and suggested modification of the local level policies and plans to better suit the village situation.

The selective assistance approach and public relations drive by the government increased village people's interest and competition among them. The more assistance to more successful village policies led to a spirit of competition among villages, resulting in increased participation of villagers. Television shows, radio programmes and newspapers delivered touching stories of Saemaul leaders describing how they overcame seemingly insurmountable challenges and difficulties and rescued their villages from abject poverty to prosperity. The massive dissemination of success stories also attributed to promoting amore competitive

spirit and positive attitude and hope for change among the village people.

The active participation that the government intended to promote was probably not for promoting grass-roots representative democracy in villages. It was rather a tool to rapidly achieve more outcomes in a short period time by mobilizing people. Inadvertently, the experience of participation provided village people a chance to experience grass-roots democracy and to have increased influence, though with some reservation, on the local governments. This increased influence, however, did not lead to a pro-democracy movement against the regime.

### **Devotion and Commitment of Saemaul leaders**

Much research has pointed out the crucial presence of an organizational or political “entrepreneur” that mobilized and led people for collective activities as one of the key factors of successful local development. Saemaul leaders, the democratically selected young male and female leaders for Saemaul Undong, played an important role in promoting participation and eventually introducing democratic leadership to the villages. One common

denominator shared by almost all of the success cases was the devotion and dedication of the leaders in the villages. When asked the main factor for successful Saemaul Undong in their villages, most villagers pointed to the devoted and diligent Saemaul leaders as the number one factor of success. As with President Park's leadership of the whole programme from the top, in each village young and ambitious leaders brought reluctant villagers in, challenged and cooperated with the local government officials, and led the implementation with endless consultations and persuasion.

It is interesting that though they were the potentially powerful local leaders often with strong local support, Saemaul leaders never became a challenge to government authority. The government, though it was not clear whether it had predicted the possible threat and exercised a precautionary measure, banned Saemaul leaders from joining any political parties and through training programmes and the media continuously stressed the importance of their work as a development agent leading their home villages. On the other hand, people, who must have been fully aware of the commanding involvement of the government in Saemaul Undong, would not dare to use the

very opportunity provided by the government to turn against it.

## V. Limitations and Criticisms

The advocates for Saemaul Undong assert its exceptional success achieving all three objectives in a relatively short period of time. They also argue that the social and economic development that Koreans now enjoy is owed heavily to Saemaul Undong. Others criticized Saemaul Undong for its ulterior political purposes, particularly the sustenance of the dictatorship of President Park. They further argue that Saemaul Undong actually produced negative consequences and destroyed rural economies. While intervention and support by the government in part created a dependency syndrome among rural people, they claim that the standardized government support ignored different local situations and that the emphasis on the immediately visible and tangible results of projects led to increased financial and physical burden for village people (Whang, 1981). This chapter will review the validity of the main criticisms and limitations of Saemaul Undong and show that though Saemaul Undong, like many other government policies, was politically motivated and had some



shortcomings, the positive changes and outcomes produced by Saemaul Undong should not be dismissed altogether.

### 1. Failure in Adaptation

As described in the previous chapter, Saemaul Undong brought many changes and improvements in a relatively short period of time. In the late 1970s, after completing most of its planned activities, it was in need of transformation in order to better help farmers adjust to the different rural environments produced by none other than Saemaul Undong itself. The Ministry of Home Affairs re-identified the new role of Saemaul Undong as helping farmers adapt to commercialized agriculture and industrialized society.

It, however, failed to make necessary changes in accordance with the newly designated role and consequently lost momentum.

The spread of individualism and commercialization of agriculture brought by Saemaul Undong, ironically, reduced the importance of communal cooperation and self-reliance in rural economic activities and daily lives. Further income increases required more material inputs and more advanced technology

which needed to be acquired from outside of the village rather than from increased human labor or cooperation. In other words, Saemaul Undong became a prisoner of its own deed. By the late 1970s, it attempted to revive the spirit by shifting its focus on enlightenment and promotion of self-reliance ideology and by broadening the target group including urban residents, factory workers, students and even soldiers, which only resulted in diffusion of focus and confusion (Aqua, 1981).

Lack of a decent exit strategy, though, could be easily found in many government-initiated programmes. Uplifted by their success, the government often dragged and prolonged the termination of some programmes until they fizzled out. It seemed that Saemaul Undong did not have a clear ending. The undefined ending can also be seen as a lesson learned. It is, however, not enough to completely deny it all of its achievements.

### 2. Ambiguity in Scope

Even before Saemaul Undong, each ministry in the government had already developed and implemented its own plans directly or indirectly related to rural development, which was later incorporated under the name of Saemaul

Undong. It was, therefore, difficult to clearly distinguish pre-existing programmes from the newly initiated programmes for Saemaul Undong, leaving the possibility of exaggeration of its achievements. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, for example, independently initiated a programme introducing new high-yield rice breeding. The actual introduction to each farm, however, was implemented under Saemaul Undong. It is, therefore, difficult to discern to what extent Saemaul Undong contributed to the increase in rice production and subsequent income rise. Though it was evident that rural development in Korea was accelerated by Saemaul Undong, it might be difficult to isolate the activities and programmes of Saemaul Undong and its exact outcome and impact.

The difficulty of clear assessment, however, did not negate positive changes brought about by Saemaul Undong. The successful mixture and coordinated activity in some way could suggest the scope of work was comprehensive enough and the horizontal coordination among ministries was adequate and appropriate.

### 3. Politically motivated for sustaining dictatorship

The most widely accepted criticism of Saemaul

Undong is that it was not a rural development programme but rather a propaganda campaign to mobilize the public for President Park's political gain. On 17 October 1972, President Park took a series of drastic measures to give himself life-long presidency. He declared a state of emergency, proclaimed martial law, dissolved the National Assembly, and suspended the constitution. He then promulgated a new constitution called the "Yooshin (revitalizing) constitution," launching the Fourth Republic. The change ultimately concentrated all power of the Korean government to President Park, and deeply damaged the civil liberty and democracy movements.

Some have claimed that President Park used Saemaul Undong to sustain his illegitimate fourth Republic and to gain much needed political support from his traditional advocates in rural areas against growing criticism and protests in urban cities. They also argued that to advertise the changes brought by Saemaul Undong that development efforts were often concentrated on more visible villages close to highways, while remote communities were neglected and given less assistance.

Including development policies, however, there

seemed to be no such government policy that is neutral and free from political influences and interests. The word development itself has political connotations. One can not criticize government policies and programmes just because they are politically motivated, since they are most times produced either by the politicians or by the bureaucrats who are administered by the politicians. They should be evaluated on the extent to which they benefitted the targeted people.

On the other hand, others have argued that President Park never had the intention of using Saemaul Undong for political ends. He actually prohibited Saemaul leaders, potentially valuable political assets, from joining the ruling party to keep Saemaul Undong from political entanglement. Moreover, contrary to the argument concerning neglected remote villages, at the end of Saemaul Undong more than 97 per cent of all the rural villages in Korea achieved the “self-sustainable village” status while the rest became the “self-help villages” (Lee bang-whan, 1981).

#### 4. Top-down model under authoritarian regime

Critics also claim that since Saemaul Undong lacked theoretical background and was

implemented depending solely and heavily on President Park's dictatorial leadership, it would not work in a democratic political context. It is quite true that without a strong leadership and drive it would have been very difficult to mobilize all the resources in such a short period of time and make various stakeholders with as many different agendas such as government officials, different ministries, and traditionally wealthy landlords cooperate closely. Especially in the first phase, top down directives and even in some cases coercion were used to mobilize resources and induce rural people to participate. It could also be said that in some developing countries with frequent regime change it would be difficult to continuously and sustainably support such a policy.

It is not impossible to provide sustained support for a programme in a democratic regime. Regardless of the type of regime, moreover, it is not that case that all programmes which receive strong support from the leader achieve success. Commitment and leadership from the top may be one of the prerequisites for a successful development programme, however, that alone is not a sufficient condition. We could not ascribe all of the achievements of Saemaul Undong to

President Park, which would be an overstatement which ignores the efforts of other stakeholders. As shown in previous chapters, it was village people who actually produced the changes. Voluntary and active participation in cooperation with the local authorities played a key role in the villages. Effective combination of top down guidelines and bottom up participation are in fact the dual pillars for success in community-based development programmes.

#### **5. Lack of systematic ideology and philosophy**

Saemaul Undong was originally a contingency plan to address the overproduction of cement. Only after having produced unexpected results was it developed into a rural development plan. It, therefore, lacked a systematic set of objectives, goals or execution plans, nor was it based on profound philosophy and analysis. Major decisions were made on a "learning by doing" basis and the programme was continuously revised and elaborated in accordance with the progress and changes in the villages. The lack of along-term streamlined plan and strategies resulted in digression at its end and its final demise right after the assassination of the President Park. Though having some validity, such criticism,

however, is not enough to completely overshadow the positive changes brought about by Saemaul Undong. Carefully constructed strategy and elaborate theory may be helpful for development programmes but they are not necessary and sufficient conditions that guarantee success. In fact, the absence of carefully constructed theory might have helped Saemaul Undong be flexible enough to adapt to the changes and progress in the field, and not confined it to one specific theoretical framework.

#### **6. Marginalization of Poor People**

Though Korean rural villages were relatively egalitarian, there still existed villages with significant inequality and people in absolute poverty. Despite some measures taken, Saemaul Undong did not fully incorporate the poorest of the poor. In villages with relatively wide economic disparity, villagers experienced greater difficulty in reaching consensus because their interests tended to be more varied. Conflict often developed over how and to whom the responsibilities should be divided. In several villages, for example, cases were observed that some poor families consistently resisted participating, particularly in the "private good" projects, such as roof renovation

or flush toilet installation.

When funds had to be collected or labor donated, the burden was typically heavier for the poorer villagers, who certainly had less cash and were probably less inclined to give their labor away for free, especially when they relied heavily on wage labor to make a living. In some villages, efforts were made to make the burden proportionate to a villager's ability to pay or capacity to work. Elderly or ill people, for instance, might be exempted altogether. Some poor people might have their contribution reduced in proportion to their lower income or might be permitted to substitute a labor donation for cash. Subsidizing the poor, however, became more difficult when the portion of the extreme poor was high.

It is worth noting that the landless or nearly landless poor who formed some 15 or 30 per cent of the rural population at that time, depending on how poverty was measured, did not generally receive any significant benefit from Saemaul Undong (Brandt, 1981). With some form of social pressure inside the village, they participated in Saemaul Undong projects usually in the form of labor contribution even though they were often wage laborers and had little stake in improving the village

environment. They had no or little farm land to cultivate and the cost of replacing roofs or installing electricity was too heavy a burden for them to take. There had been little value or attitude change among this group, and they generally did not speak favorably of Saemaul Undong (Brandt, 1981). With a growing shortage of agricultural labor and subsequent raise of their wage at the end of Saemaul Undong, a poor household with a healthy male could get by in the long run. Such people, however, would leave for towns and cities (Brandt, 1981).

Addressing the poorest of the poor proved to be quite a challenging task for most of the development programmes. Though the average income of rural households had increased and the general living standard had elevated, there were few or none of the proactive measures exercised to prevent further marginalization or incorporate needs of the extremely poor in Saemaul Undong. Given the severe disparities and the vast number of people in absolute poverty in developing countries today, careful attention should be paid and delicate strategies should be formulated before any replication of Saemaul Undong.

## 7. Increased Burden on Rural People

At first, community contributions were mostly found in the form of labor provision, but the form of contribution changed from labor donation to cash contributions as the focus was shifted from rural infrastructure development to income generation, which required more financial resources. From 1969 to 1979 the average household income increased some 9 fold from 0.22 million won to 2.2 million won while at the same period the average household debt rose 13 times from 13 thousand won to 173 thousand won (KOSIS, 2008).

More than fifty per cent of the household debt was, however, taken on as a means of increasing production, which could be in turn contributed to increased productivity and income (Kim, 2000). With more physical capital such as agricultural machinery, it may have been inevitable that there would be increased debt for investment and this could be acceptable as long as it led to an increase in income. In 1979, the ratio of debt to income was still around eight per cent, a two per cent increase from six per cent in 1969. It should be noted that in 1980 the debt to income ratio drastically increased to 13 per cent by an amount of 340 thousand won per capita. It is, however, not clear whether this sudden

increase is due to the de facto demise of Saemaul Undong or to other factors.

## 8. Continued Urban Migration

Despite some improvements in rural living conditions and increases in income, Saemaul Undong did not reverse the trend of urban migration. The rural population continued to decrease during and after Saemaul Undong with rural villages filled with the old and the young (Table 12, Figure 3, and Figure 4). In the early 1960s, the average urban migration rate was 1.3 persons per every 100 persons, but in late 1970 it rose to 3.7 persons (Park & Han, 2002). This continuous decrease in the rural population indicated that despite some positive changes, Saemaul Undong was not extensive enough to address the deep-rooted structural problems of rural villages. People constantly suffered from problems such as deteriorating terms of trade for agricultural products, artificial price distortion of agricultural products partly imposed by the government, and increasing rural household debts.

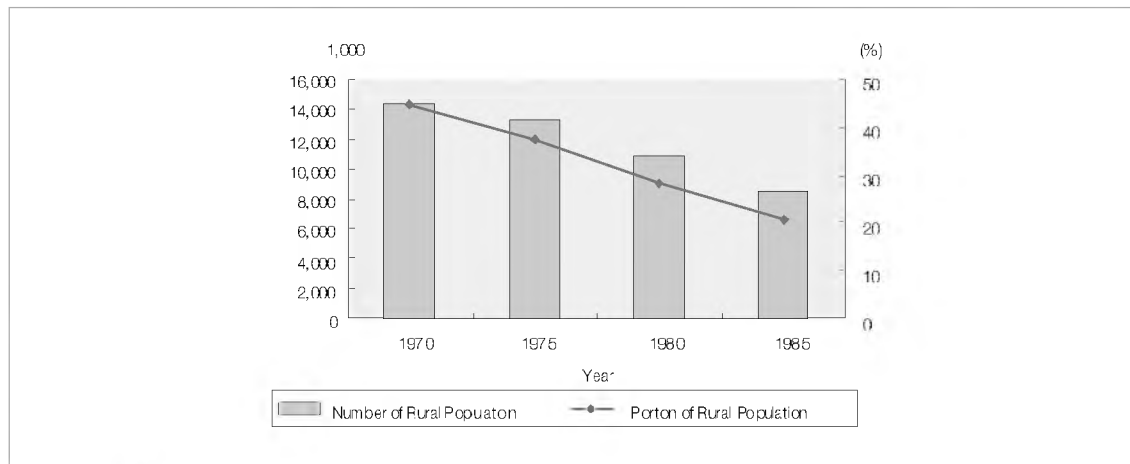
While Saemaul Undong managed to ameliorate some of the rural problems, from its inception, it was not designed to address those persistent problems, which rather required systematic and

< Table 12 > Population Growth Rate

| Period    | Total | Urban | Rural |
|-----------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1955-1960 | 2.88  | 5.51  | -1.96 |
| 1961-1965 | 2.71  | 5.96  | -1.29 |
| 1966-1970 | 1.90  | 7.16  | -1.16 |
| 1971-1975 | 1.98  | 5.37  | -0.81 |
| 1976-1980 | 1.84  | 4.89  | -1.12 |

Source: KIM, Sun-Woong, "Urbanization Pattern of Korea and Urban Population Increase Component, Korea Development Review, 1980, Spring, p.151

Figure 3. Rural Population Change from 1970 to 1985



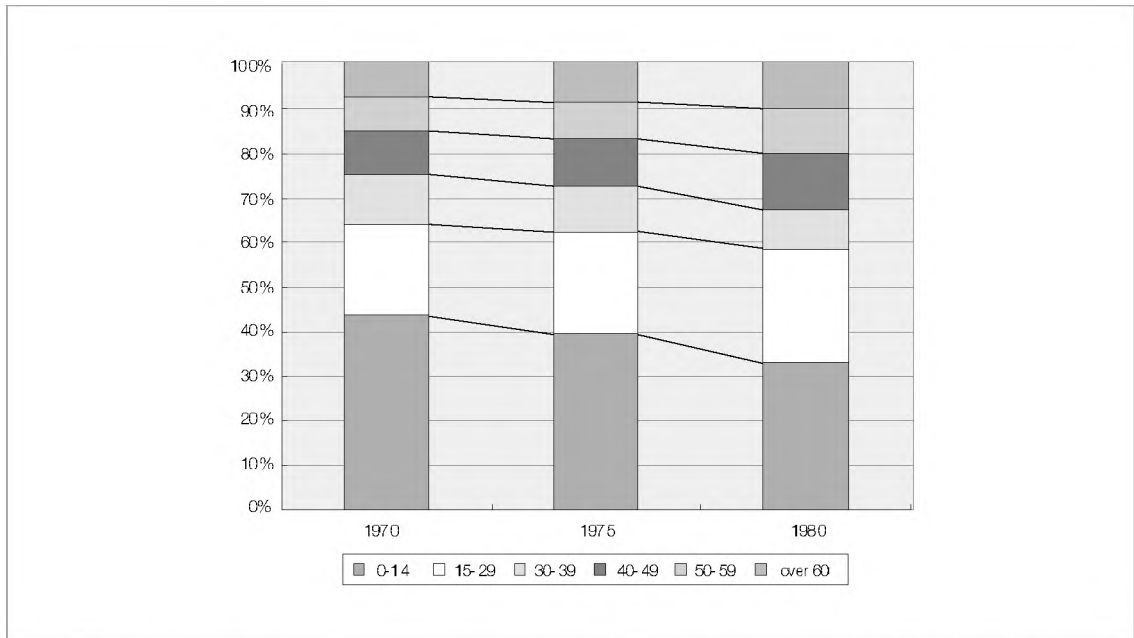
Source: Data from the National Statistics Information Service at <http://www.kosis.kr> Accessed on 7 March 2008

comprehensive strategies and drastic changes in agricultural policies. The government intended to increase the productivity and improve the rural living standard to some level by mobilizing existing resources, but it did not complement Saemaul Undong with additional capital investment which is essential for substantive productivity increase and structural adjustment

(Kim, 2000). During the Saemaul Undong period, the portion of the government expenditure on agriculture and fisheries from the treasury loans and investments continuously decreased (Kim, 2000).

Others, on the other hand, have argued that Saemaul Undong was never meant to replace

Figure 4. Change in Rural Population Composition



Source: Data from the National Statistics Information Service at <http://www.kosis.kr> accessed on 7 March 2008

industrial development or to deflect the subsequent urban migration. Korean economic development was based on industrialization and policy makers never intended to change that course. What they wanted to do was lessen the negative impact of industrialization and the rural urban gap. Saemaul Undong was designed to prepare the rural population to adapt to urban life and minimize the impact of their migration by providing rural people with technical training in various fields and employment opportunities in Saemaul factories in rural areas.

## VI. Lessons Learned for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Some have argued that Saemaul Undong, having been implemented some thirty years ago, would not fit in the new millennium. Others have pointed out that the rural development model has evolved with new findings and Saemaul Undong might be outdated. It is true that Saemaul Undong happened a long time ago. It is, however, also true that we all learn from history and our past experiences.



Though it was an old model, the objectives that Saemaul Undong achieved and the principles on which it was based are not different from the ones that rural development programmes of today aim to accomplish and on which they are founded. Despite limitations and criticisms, Saemaul Undong promoted social and human development in the rural areas of Korea. The improvement in rural infrastructure and the living environment reduced the vulnerability of people to natural disasters and disease pandemics and provided easier and broader accesses to and widened opportunities for markets, better education, and resources. Saemaul Undong also contributed to reducing absolute poverty and increasing the income level of rural people. It also brought some favorable changes in abolishing archaic customs and empowered women to become development agents. Increased accountability and capacity of local government officials and the empowerment of village people can also be listed as desirable changes though most of these were brought about unintentionally.

As previous chapters showed, those improvements and changes were possible as Saemaul Undong utilized the same policies and strategies that most development agencies emphasize and utilize today for their own rural

development programmes. The World Bank has developed ten principles for supporting sustainable and effective community-driven development, most of which were linked to the success factors indicated in this paper (Box 2). The research paper, based on case studies in

**< Box 2 > Principles for Supporting Sustainable and Effective Community Driven Development**

1. Establish an enabling environment through relevant institutional and policy reform
2. Make investments responsive to informed demand
3. Build participatory mechanisms for community control and stakeholder involvement
4. Ensure social and gender inclusion
5. Invest in capacity building of CBOs
6. Facilitate community access to information
7. Develop simple rules and strong incentives, supported by monitoring and evaluation
8. Maintain flexibility in design and arrangement
9. Design for scaling up
10. Invest in an exit strategy

Source: World Bank Community driven development 2003 p.22

**< Box 3 > Some Key Facets for Scaling Up**

- ▶ Strong political commitment
- ▶ Sophisticated, context-specific procedures incorporated in simple and transparent manuals
- ▶ Detailed planning from the micro to macro dimension
- ▶ Good systems for sharing and spreading knowledge
- ▶ Appropriate incentives
- ▶ Utilization of past experience

Source: Hans P. Binswanger and Swaminathan S. Aryar, Scaling up community-driven development, Policy Research Working Paper 2039, May 2003 The World Bank

Africa, pointed to six key factors for scaling up, all of which were listed as the success factors of Saemaul Undong (Box 3).

The International Fund for Agricultural Development argued in its Rural Poverty Report 2001 that the rural poor need legally secure entitlements to assets, especially land and water, technology, access to markets, opportunities to participate in decentralized resource management and access to microfinance (IFAD, 2001). It consequently claimed that it is necessary to create pro-poor policy environment and allocate significant resources to the poor for alleviation of poverty and economic growth. The policy recommendation and assessment on the needs and challenges of the rural poor in that report are not so different from the challenges and strategies explained in this paper.

Kechamatan Development Programme, jointly implemented by the World Bank and the Indonesian government, is providing assistance to villages (Kechamatan) based on the priority and assessment developed by village people in consultation with extension workers. The New Village Movement Programme in China and Gamma Neguma programme in Sri Lanka, in summary, are community based rural

development programmes initiated by the central government to promote and develop rural communities based on a plan devised in a participatory manner. In other words, though the terminology was archaic and methodology and approaches were not clearly defined in the ways that today's development programmes are, what and how Saemaul Undong achieved its goals was not different from the goals which rural development projects and programmes aim to accomplish today.

In fact, the distinction between Saemaul Undong and other successful rural development programmes and unsuccessful ones is that the successful programmes developed and implemented workable, practical, and specific plans and strategies in accordance with and making use of the local specific contexts. Few people dispute or disagree with the importance of key principles of development such as building an enabling environment or promoting inclusive participation of local people in community development or in any other development programme. What is more difficult is the substantive development of detailed plans and tools to realize those abstract principles in specific local contexts. What "enabling environment" means and how it can be

achieved are totally different from context to context.

Saemaul Undong, for example, managed to establish an enabling institutional environment by making use of its administrative structure. At that time Korea had a centralized governmental system with all the government officials at the district level selected and appointed by central government. Using the centralized structure, it horizontally and vertically linked relevant ministries and coordinated their activities and plans with each other. Making use of meritocracy at that time, it connected the performance of the government officials to the progress of Saemaul Undong.

Saemaul Undong also combined favorable social contexts with practical and workable policies and strategies. In other words, it interlinked the right policies with the right conditions. As the success factors explained in the previous chapter show, it combined a favorable social environment with cleverly designed tools and strategies promoting the involvement of people while at the same time being in line with government policies. Based on strong social capital and an egalitarian rural social structure, the government promoted

village people's participation and encouraged government officials with incentives and competitions. While continued economic growth supported the programme financially, strong leadership provided political support.

The most important lessons learned from Saemaul Undong are that it devised appropriate strategies and measures reflecting and making use of the specific political, economic, and social contexts. Following the model blindly, therefore, will definitely not achieve the same results in other countries. Developing countries should carefully study their own situation and devise workable and practical solutions of their own. The rest of this chapter will draw key policy suggestions which could be applied in other development programmes and further issues to consider in current development contexts.

### 1. Importance of political commitment

Many studies listed the political commitment of the leader or the government as one of the key success factors of community development programmes. In fact, many successful community development programmes started with the initiative of top level politicians such as the president, the state governor, or the

provincial governors. Given the fact that community development programmes require long periods of time for planning and implementation and significant funding, strong and strenuous commitment from the top is a prerequisite for budget allocation and resource mobilization.

Political commitment is also important in managing development programmes. Since most development programmes are devised and implemented by government officials, active participation of government officials is a key condition for success. Government officials tend to put more effort and pay more attention to the policies and programmes that the top leader considers top priority.

For ten years, President Park emphasized the importance of Saemaul Undong and emphasized it as a top governmental priority. The unwavering commitment of the top leader enabled the Korean government allocate five per cent of its tax revenue every year for the programme for ten years. In this hierarchical and centralized government system, the commitment from the top leader led high level government officials to make significant efforts since their personal interests, such as chances of promotion, depended on the results they

delivered to the president. High level officials urged the low level officials by linking their performance evaluation to Saemaul Undong delivery. It would have been difficult to sustain and manage the nation-wide programme for a decade without the continuous commitment from the top leader.

## 2 Creating an Enabling Environment Based on Meritocracy and Vertical Integration

Reflecting the focus on democratization and good governance which are central in the development agenda of today, many countries have adopted or moved toward decentralization of governance (Boyer & Ahn, 1991). While centralization has disadvantages, decentralization is not a panacea for curing poverty and underdevelopment of the rural areas in developing countries(Boyer & Ahn, 1991). In many developing countries, the local poor heavily depend on the local elites while resources and power were dominated by them. Abrupt decentralization without a well laid plan and insightful consideration of the existing power structure may end up reinforcing the vested interest of the local elite. Decentralization and devolution may not always be better for rural community development programmes in the absence of delicate

coordination between the central and the local government and a systematic mechanism to fend off too much influence among local elites and to hear the voices of the poor.

To avoid the local capture of benefits within the villages, the Korean government selected leaders separate from the traditional village leaders who usually represented vested interests. Competency based recruitment of government officials was also important to lessen the influence of the local elites. Local government officials at the time, including provincial governors and district chiefs, were the people who passed the national civil service examinations and were dispatched from central government. Those measures effectively reduced the influence of or domination by the local elites during the course of the Saemaul Undong period. The government also placed the government officials with high performance records to be responsible for Saemaul Undong and promoted or relocated them based on the evaluation on their work.

Delicate coordination between the central and local government reduced overlapping and duplication and resulted in effective management. As explained in the previous chapters, each level of government had a clear

sub-programme of work within Saemaul Undong. While the central government set the guidelines and strategies for the whole programme, each level of local government planned and managed its sub-programmes under its jurisdiction. The lower levels of government submitted progress and completion reports to the higher levels of government, all of which were reviewed by the central government. Competent and devoted government officials and Saemaul leaders worked as change agents. Their experience in the field was channeled up to the central government, which then reflected the lessons learned in their assistance plan accordingly and in turn disseminated best practices to the villages. Developing countries should devise ways to build capacity of their governments with careful consideration of their own institutional structure.

### 3 Providing Motivation and Utilizing Personal Interests

Although the selection of new leaders in the villages and the competency based recruitment and advancement system were helpful for the programme, it was not enough to ensure effective implementation. As with other social programmes, community development

programmes are heavily dependent on the devotion and efforts of the people. Saemaul Undong motivated and increased participation by raising the confidence of the village people, aligning their personal interests with the projects and stimulating competition among people.

At the initial stage, the village projects were small and easy to manage, addressing basic needs such as water and sanitation. The government intended to boost their confidence with relatively easy projects. Observing the benefits and realizing their capacity, the village people built up self-confidence and belief in the usefulness of the programme. Confidence in themselves and in the project naturally led to increased participation.

Secondly, the government linked the personal interests of the people with the success of the programme. All the village projects were designed to address the basic needs that village people chose as most urgent and serious. Implementation of the projects, therefore, was in their own interest, which reduced the rejection of having to use their own resources for implementation. As explained before, government officials also worked hard for the project since their personal interest was partly

aligned with the progress of Saemaul Undong.

Thirdly, the government boosted morale and stimulated competition among village people by selective assistance and information distribution. It provided more assistance to the villages with more outputs and the differences in assistance between villages was publicly announced. Villages with less assistance tried to catch up with those with more assistance, increasing overall performance. The dissemination of success stories via nationwide broadcasting also gave hope and raised confidence among people and led to more active participation and higher outputs.

#### 4 Understanding and Incorporating Local Context

Numerous research studies have pointed out the importance of local contexts in community development programmes. As addressed in the previous chapter, Saemaul Undong also owed its success to the incorporation of the social, cultural, and economic contexts of Korea at that time. The notion of diligence and cooperation promoted by Saemaul Undong was based on traditional Korean values. The massive mobilization of resources and strong chain of command from the top level of

government to the villages was made possible due to strong leadership and an authoritarian regime. Strong and continuous economic growth sustained the resources required for rural development while at the same time expanding the market for rural agricultural products. The relatively successful land reforms also created a favorable environment for community based rural development.

On the other hand, Saemaul Undong, unlike other rural development programmes, did not have plans for primary education. Even before 1965, the primary school enrollment rate of rural areas in Korea excluding Seoul and Pusan was around 97 per cent. These are country- and time-specific conditions which other developing countries may or may not have. From the choice of village projects to the capacity building of local governments, careful analysis and assessment on specific conditions and contexts should be conducted first to ensure successful rural development. Programmes should be rooted in their own socio-cultural contexts at any point in time.

## 5. More Issues to consider

### Cooperation with Civil Society, Aid Agencies and the Private Sector

In most developing countries today, civil societies and bilateral as well as multilateral development aid agencies are working rigorously with village people with their own agendas and methodologies. To be successful, any project or programme, therefore, would have to coordinate and collaborate with others, trying to produce a synergy effect. On the other hand, the importance of the private sector in rural development also is getting stronger, with many rural farmers working as part-time wage workers and commercial production of agricultural produce increasing. Working with other stakeholders in rural development and assessing the impact and implications of private sector trends would produce broader and more sustainable effects.

### Rural Urban Linkage

As the Korean experience and other studies have shown, without a careful consideration of urban as well as rural environments and the relations between the two areas, rural development programmes will not produce expected outcomes and can end up shifting the rural poverty issues to urban areas. Though about two-thirds of the poor living on less than a dollar a day reside in rural areas in the Asia and the Pacific region, the linkage and

interdependence between the urban and rural areas is increasing due to improvements in communication and transport (ESCAP, 2005). Careful assessment on the linkage has become increasingly important considering that many studies have predicted fast urbanization of poverty in the next decades. Integrated approaches reflecting the dynamics and interdependence between urban and rural areas will produce better results and help mitigate urban migration.

### Gender

The role of women in rural villages is more diverse than and different from that of men; therefore, efforts should be made to address the different development needs of women and to actively engage them. While Saemaul Undong Women's Association and Saemaul women leaders played an important role, there were few systematic efforts to understand and incorporate different needs of women from the outset, not to mention the lack of assessment on different impacts. Though many women participated actively and in many villages played a key role as leaders, their voices were often unheard and activities were segregated from those of men. Therefore, strategies and methodologies to

empower and fully develop women's potential should be developed first in consideration of local socio-cultural contexts.

### Environment

Though afforestation and clean refuse disposal schemes were included, Saemaul Undong did not incorporate environmental concerns in other activities. This is not surprising considering that at that time little importance was attached to environmental issues. Considering the degraded environment of developing countries today, incorporation of environmental concerns and mainstreaming environmental issues should be an essential element of any rural development plan. Environmental impact assessments and guidelines can be formulated before implementing projects. Ways to identify and adopt traditional knowledge and environmentally friendly ways of living preserved among local people can be adopted when developing assessment reports and guidelines for the programme.

### Notes

1. In a broad sense, Saemaul Undong, which can be translated as New Village Movement



in English, was not only aimed at rural development but also, in its latter stages, at various enlightenment activities implemented in industrial factories, the military, and urban cities. It is still maintained in some cities and villages under the administration of the privatized organization called National Council of Saemaul Undong Movement in Korea. In general, Saemaul Undong is associated with the rural development

activities in 1970s and many studies also confine their research scope accordingly. In this paper, Saemaul Undong only refers to the rural development activities and projects from 1970 to 1979 under President Park's regime before the privatization of the programme by the successive government.

2. For further details, refer to chapter 9 of CDD toolkit by World Bank

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