

## ANALYSIS OF SAEMAUL UNDONG: A KOREAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN THE 1970s

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*Saemaul Undong was a community-based integrated rural development programme of the Republic of Korea in the 1970s which contributed to narrowing the developmental gap between urban cities and rural communities over 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 opportunities and facilitating empowerment for rural people. Forty 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 lesson 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.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, more than 1.2 billion people are still living in extreme poverty on one dollar a day.<sup>1</sup> Though much progress has been made, reducing poverty remains a colossal task (World Bank 2000, p. 17). The case of the Republic of Korea in this circumstance is worth mentioning. The Republic of Korea has achieved remarkable socio-economic development and reduced extreme poverty, which had plagued the country for a very long time. Until now, it is the only country in the world that has overcome the three common hardships observed in most developing countries: civil wars or internal conflicts; a colonial legacy; and extreme poverty. In 1953, the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of the Republic of Korea was \$73, and this increased to \$21,695 in 2007.<sup>2</sup> In 1965, 40.9 per cent of the population suffered from absolute poverty, but the poverty rate was reduced to 10.9 per cent by 2007.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The level of extreme poverty was estimated by 1993 purchasing power parity.

<sup>2</sup> Bank of Korea Economic Statistics System, accessed from <http://ecos.bok.or.kr>.

<sup>3</sup> The 1965 poverty figure is from Sang-Mok Seo (1981). "Definition of poverty and time series analysis" pp. 27-28, accessed from [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) on March 21 2008; the 2007 poverty figure is from Myung-Jae Sung (2008). "Analysis on the impact of fiscal policy on Income distribution structure and poverty rate", *Monthly Public Finance Forum*, Korea Institute of Public Finance, No. 148, October, pp. 8-28.

Though its economic development policy focused on industrial development, the Republic of Korea effectively reduced rural as well as urban poverty. From 1970, the Government turned its attention towards balanced growth between urban cities and rural communities and within a decade managed to develop rural community conditions to match those of the cities. At the centre of this lies Saemaul Undong,<sup>4</sup> the integrated community development programme of the Republic of Korea.

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, the initiation, annual progress and results of Saemaul Undong will be explained, along with its objectives, outputs and outcomes. Based on this assessment, chapter three will draw some key factors of its success, and chapter four will identify some limitations and criticisms. Finally, chapter five will present some applicable lessons learned and implications of the programme for today's development contexts.

## II. SAEMAUL UNDONG: PROGRESS AND RESULTS

It is very difficult to define Saemaul Undong due to the constant changes in its scope and agenda. If one focuses exclusively on activities performed in rural areas from 1970 to 1979, however, it is possible to find some common denominators shared throughout the entire movement. In short, Saemaul Undong was a community-based integrated rural development programme. As each Government of a developing country names its development programmes in its own way, Saemaul Undong was a brand name given by the Government of the Republic of Korea. Its success can be attributed to its implementation of basic strategies of poverty reduction adapting to and making use of the Korean contexts—promoting opportunities and facilitating empowerment for rural people. Forty 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.

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<sup>4</sup> In a broad sense, Saemaul Undong, which can be translated as “new village movement” in English, was aimed not only at rural development but also, in its latter stages, at various enlightenment activities implemented in industrial factories, the military and cities. It is still maintained in some cities and villages under the administration of the privatized organization called the National Council of Saemaul Undong Movement in Korea. In general, Saemaul Undong is associated with rural development activities in the 1970s and many studies also confine their research scope accordingly. In this paper, Saemaul Undong refers only 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.

## Initiation

The Government of the Republic of Korea achieved successful economic development in the 1970s with the adequate usage of selective industrial policies and export-oriented trade policies. This selective strategy, however, put rural development on hold and widened the gap between urban and rural living standards. Discontent with the Park regime<sup>5</sup> 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 favourable 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 the overproduction 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. The plan received a favourable public reaction and achieved significant results beyond the Government's prediction. The cost of free cement was W4.1 billion<sup>6</sup> but the estimated monetary value of the projects carried out by the rural community was three times the cost, at W12.2 billion (Park and 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.

## Objectives

When Saemaul Undong was initiated, it did not have an official definition of Saemaul Undong. This did not happen until 1973, when the words closest to a definition could be found in President Park's impromptu comments at the National Convention of the Village Leaders: "We may call this movement as the movement for a better living" (Park 1998, p. 47).

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<sup>5</sup> Jung-Hee Park led a military coup on May 16, 1961 and became the Chairman of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction, which incapacitated the Jang Myun administration. He later discharged himself from the army and won the 1963 presidential election as the leader of the newly created Democratic Republican Party. With economic development as a main priority of his administration, he legitimized his rule with strong economic growth and the alleviation of abject poverty, and won the elections in 1967 and 1971. Though the Constitution of 1963 only allowed a person to serve as president for two consecutive terms, Park ran for the presidency a third time in 1971 by amending the constitution and had narrowly winning over Dae-Jung Kim. In October 1972, he declared a state of emergency, dissolved the National Assembly and suspended the Constitution. In December, a new "Yooshin" Constitution was approved, which opened the way for Park to be a lifetime president. Protests calling for the end of Park's dictatorship grew larger among students and later became nationwide. On October 26, 1979, Park's regime was ended with his assassination by Jae-Gyu Kim, the director of the National Intelligence Agency.

<sup>6</sup> Approximately \$6.8 million (using the exchange rate of \$1=W310.58, from <http://ecos.bok.or.kr>)

This was later interpreted by Park Jin-whan, 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). Though different interpretations existed regarding 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 (a) income generation, (b) living environment and basic rural infrastructure improvement, and (c) capacity-building and attitudinal change.

### **Annual progress**

In accordance with the change in the focus and scope of village level projects, Saemaul Undong could be divided into three phases. In the initial phase, the priority at the village level was given to the improvement of the physical infrastructure. A list of exemplary projects was developed by the Government and given to the villages as a guideline to help villagers to develop general ideas on what they could do for themselves. As villagers gained more confidence in their ability and the basic infrastructure necessary to improve agricultural productivity, Saemaul Undong shifted its focus, and income-generation projects were gradually initiated while the scope and size of each living condition improvement project increased. In the last phase, the focus was shifted towards capacity-building and attitudinal changes, while the scope of the projects became broader. Activities in urban areas, factories and corporations became more common, which changed Saemaul Undong into a national campaign. 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.

### **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 that most of the objectives had been achieved.

On the other side, 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 show that Saemaul Undong brought about meaningful improvements in the social development dimension: improvements in basic infrastructure; increased accountability of local governments; and the empowerment of villagers, 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 and the usage of chemical inputs and fertilizers became more widespread. Improved physical infrastructure 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 the markets, resources and assets necessary for their work. The absolute poverty rate decreased in 1970 and especially in 1978, when the proportion of rural people in total absolute poverty was less than that of urban people (table 1). In terms of income, rural household income recorded a six-fold increase from W255,800 in 1970 to W1,531,300 in 1979, even at one point exceeding that of urban households in 1976 (table 2). Income sources for rural people also became diversified and the portion of non-agricultural income also rose (table 3).

The positive impact of Saemaul Undong on reducing rural poverty and increasing income was, however, limited. The relative poverty rate of rural areas shot up again to 11.2 per cent in 1978 (table 1). What is more important is the pertinaciously 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 4). In fact, the increase in rural household income in the 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. Though income-generation projects contributed to agricultural productivity growth and increasing incomes, the causal relation between the two was not as strong and direct as that of the high price policy (Park and Ahn 1999).

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 a high labour wage, migrated to form part of the urban poor.

In conclusion, while Saemaul Undong helped to alleviate absolute poverty in rural villages by providing better access and opportunities, it was not sufficient to address the structural problems of agriculture, which required much more physical and financial investment and drastic changes in agricultural policies rather than the massive mobilization of human labour.

**Table 1. Change in the poverty rate and the number of people living in poverty**  
(Thousands of people, percentage)

	1965			1970			1978		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
Number of people in absolute poverty (thousands)	4 244	7 505	11 749	2 006	5 548	7 554	2 552	1 995	4 547
Distribution of people in absolute poverty (percentage)	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 (percentage)	17.9	10.0	12.2	7.0	3.4	4.8	16.6	11.2	13.9

*Source:* Data based on Sang-Mok Seo (1981). "Definition of poverty and time series analysis", accessed from [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) on March 21 2008.

*Note:* In this study, absolute poverty is defined as a monthly household income which is below W20,000 for an urban household and W17,000 for a rural household. Relative poverty is defined as a household income lower than one third of the average national household income level (all incomes are estimated in 1980 Korean won).

**Table 2. Ratio of rural household income to urban household income**  
(Unit: Korean won)

Year	Average monthly income of urban household (A)	Average monthly income of rural household (B)	Ratio (B)/(A) ( percentage )
1967	20 720	12 456	60.1
1970	31 770	21 317	67.1
1973	45 850	40 059	87.4
1976	95 980	96 355	100.4
1979	219 133	185 624	84.7

*Source:* Soon-Won Kwon (1997). "Korean experience in poverty alleviation with special reference to the Saemaul Undong", *Social Security Review*, vol. 13, No. 1, June (Korean Social Security Association), p. 194.

**Table 3. Farming household income in the 1970s**  
(Unit: Korean won)

Year	Household income	Agricultural income		Non-agricultural income	
	Amount	Amount	Ratio (percentage)	Amount	Ratio (percentage)
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: National Council of Saemaul Undong Movement in Korea (1999) "Saemaul Undong in Korea", p. 38, accessed from [www.saemaul.com/center/www/caups/down/issue/새마을운동\(영문\).pdf](http://www.saemaul.com/center/www/caups/down/issue/새마을운동(영문).pdf) on 25 March 2008.

**Table 4. Comparison of per capita rural income to urban income**  
(Unit: thousands of Korean 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	0.26
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, Dong-Pil and others (2004). *Analysis on Cause and Trend of Rural-Urban Gap in Income and Development Level*, Research R490-1 (Seoul, Korea Rural Economics Institute).

Note: The income is calculated in nominal price.

### Living environment improvement and basic rural infrastructure establishment

It seems that Saemaul Undong led to substantial improvements in rural infrastructure (table 5). In fact, most studies concur that Saemaul Undong brought significant improvements in the rural living environment and infrastructure. Enlarged and extended roads made mechanized farming possible, while the extension of telephone lines and electrification provided timely information and enabled villagers to cope with changing market situations.

The improvement consequently created a virtuous circle of human development. Improved basic infrastructure helped to increase productivity and income, with better access and wider opportunities, while also creating a healthier environment with better sanitation. 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.

**Table 5. Major achievements of some Saemaul Undong projects in the 1970s**

<i>Project</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Performance</i>	<i>Ratio (percentage)</i>
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 centre construction	Ea	35 608	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		-	345 240	
Saemaul factory construction/operation	Ea	950	717	75
Reforestation	Ha	744 354	347 153	47

*Sources:* Chang-Soo Choe (2005). "Key Factors to Successful Community Development: The Korean Experience", Discussion Paper No. 39, November, Institute of Developing Economies (Chiba, Japan, JETRO), p. 5, as cited in National Council of Saemaul Undong, "Saemaul Undong in Korea" (1999), p. 24, table 1; and Sung-hwan Ban, "Development of the rural infrastructure and the Saemaul Undong", appendix table 1 in Man-Gap Lee (1981). ed., *Toward a New Community Life*, Seoul National University Institute of Saemaul Undong Studies p. 321, as cited in appendix table 1.

*Note:* Table is based on data from articles by Sung-hwan Ban and Chang-Soo Choe.



## Capacity-building and attitudinal change

The Ministry of Home Affairs' conception of rural villagers was not very different from the stereotypical traditional interpretation of them that outside development agents held at that time. The Ministry's view of farmers was that they were conservative, unwilling to participate in cooperative efforts, hedonistic and lazy. The Ministry ascribed these bad habits and negative attitudes to low agricultural productivity and chronic poverty and argued that rural development was only possible with significant changes in rural people's attitudes. The Ministry attempted to change their pessimistic and fatalistic attitude and promoted modern values focusing on three core values—diligence, cooperation and self-reliance through large-scale training, seminars and workshops.

Saemaul Undong received some favourable responses and achieved some meaningful results in its campaign for attitudinal change. More than 500,000 people took part in Saemaul Undong trainings from 1972 to 1979. Based on a survey of the 150 Saemaul Undong leaders, conducted in 1974, 38 per cent chose increased cooperation spirit among villagers as the most positive result brought about by Saemaul Undong (Park 1974). In another survey, villagers chose changes in behaviour, spirit of cooperation and confidence of a better future as positive changes made possible by Saemaul Undong (Brandt and Lee 1979).

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 or to provide people with 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.

The culmination of all those so-called attitudinal changes was in the 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 were considered 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 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 the logic. Korean farmers, as with other farmers in developing countries, seemed to have lived a very challenging life. Farm wives, for example, had to raise children, make clothes, do the laundry, cook meals, collect firewood, fetch water, work all day in the fields and do some additional side jobs. 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 industrial “miracle” (Brandt 1981). If there was a new industriousness linked to the success of Saemaul Undong, it would be caused by the new opportunities and resources created for profitable agriculture rather than by a change in values (Brandt 1981).

### *Self-reliance*

Saemaul Undong contributed to rural farmers becoming self-sufficient and free from shortages 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 an intrinsic vulnerability to external shocks. Self-reliance became difficult for farmers due to the increased uncertainties that accompanied their shift from subsistence to commercialized agriculture. 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 the traditional sense of cooperation to individual gains and modified the concept to fit into the modernization process. In the beginning, the Government increased “participation” by mobilizing villagers through coercive pressure. Later, as people gradually realized the benefit of village activities, voluntary cooperation started to take place. 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 the commercialization of agriculture, which was less dependent on cooperation with one another 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).

### **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 in the Republic of Korea at that time. While the main role of the central Government was limited to leading and coordinating the nationwide activities of the various stakeholders, villagers, at the opposite end, took responsibility for village level activities, tailoring them to the needs and circumstances of the communities.

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 from among old villagers, Saemaul Undong leaders were elected by the villagers usually among relatively young people 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. Under this new leadership, the villagers worked together for a common goal. The new experience allowed the people to realize their capacity and empowered them vis-à-vis the Government.

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. Villagers 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 Saemaul Undong. They also 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 villagers as subjects of their rule, while villagers 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. With Saemaul Undong, the traditional role of local governments changed from being an instrument of the central Government to a rural development agent assisting villagers. The local government linked villagers' needs to central Government directives and channelled the voice from the field into Government policy. With the help of Saemaul leaders, it delivered Government services and assistance to rural villages and coordinated various kinds of Government support to avoid any confusion, unnecessary duplication and conflicts. Local government policies accordingly became more representative of their constituents.

### **Gender and Saemaul Undong**

As in many other developing countries, women in the Republic of Korea were not traditionally welcome to engage in social issues. Saemaul Undong opened a small window of opportunity for rural women to officially participate in social activities and engage with the government. Initially, their participation was limited to continue the so-called "women's work"; however, they gradually increased their involvement in village activities. Some of the Saemaul woman leaders proactively initiated and successfully implemented projects which were considered part of men's domain. The tenacious efforts made and the outstanding achievements accomplished by women made the public appreciate their capacity and positively changed the general view of women's role in society.

Though the contribution and achievement of women in Saemaul Undong positively changed the conservative attitude towards women, it did not lead to sustainable awareness

of women's rights in society, nor did it create systematic institutional changes inside the Government for the empowerment of women. The encouragement by the Government for the 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 and 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 about by women's own efforts, which were not scaled up into policy or institutional change.

### III. FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Many factors can be attributed to the achievements of Saemaul Undong. While some are context-specific circumstances which created a favourable environment for community-based rural development programmes, others are policies deliberately designed for Saemaul Undong. This chapter first identifies favourable 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.

#### Pre-conditions

##### *Homogeneous communities with strong tradition of cooperation*

Rural communities in the Republic of 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; and sharing traditional customs and autonomous norms based on Confucian teaching. Ethnic homogeneity also contributed much towards cohesive cooperation, thus reducing the possibility of disputes and conflicts. Like many other rural villages in Asian countries, rural villagers in the Republic of Korea had, for a long time, already known and realized the benefits of cooperation. Each village also had its own autonomous rules and customs for cooperation called *doorae*, *gyae* and *hyang-yak*. *Doorae* is a more than 500-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. 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 rural villages made rural people feel less hostile towards 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*

It has been noted that large inequalities in assets, such as property and land, and 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 and the domination of benefits of a development programme by the local elites, hindering the 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. In 1950, the Government enacted a land reformation law, which prohibited tenant farming and put a ceiling on land ownership of only three hectares of land per person. 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, had the effect of levelling incomes and homogenizing the rural population. In 1970, when Saemaul Undong was initiated, 94 per cent of rural households held farms smaller than two hectares, while 64 per cent held less than one hectare (Goldsmith 1981). With the demise of traditional ruling elites, the social and political structure in the village became more equitable. The relatively egalitarian structure was favourable to Saemaul Undong with villagers in similarly poor situations and few possibilities of local capture.

#### *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 multifaceted challenges of poverty and constrained by limited financial sources, developing countries could not usually commit themselves to long-term development programmes. Having learned the importance of physical assistance after the failure of the previous rural development programme, the Government of the Republic of Korea utilized resources made available by sustained economic growth to support Saemaul Undong. The constant economic growth mitigated the extra burden of expenditure incurred by Saemaul Undong. The ratio of the Government assistance for Saemaul Undong to tax revenue was on average 2.48 per cent and did not go above 5 per cent at any point except in 1975. Strong and continuous economic growth increased tax revenue, which allowed the Government to continuously support and lead the programme with little budgetary concern. Sustained economic growth also helped to 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.

**Table 6. Annual expenditure of Saemaul Undong, tax revenue and gross domestic product**  
(Unit: billions of Korean won)

Year	Community Contribution (A)	Government assistance (B)	Others (C)	Total contribution (A)+(B)+(C)	Revenue (D)	Gov't assistance/ revenue (B)/(D)	GDP (E)	Community contribution/ GDP (A)/(E)	Gov't assistance/ GDP (B)/(E)	Total contribution/ GDP
1971	8	4	0	12	1 065	0.39%	3 412	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	1 376	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%	1.59%	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%	18 356	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%
total, ave	1 316	1 027	409	2 751	33 281	2.48%	120 385	1.01%	0.70%	1.91%

Source: Park, J. and D. Ahn (1999). "Saemaul Undong and Yushin Regime", *Critical Review of History*, No. 2, Institute of Korean Historical Studies (Seoul), p. 51.

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

## National leadership and political commitment

It has been argued 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 making surprise visits to villages and training centres. A 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 as they knew their personal gains, such as promotion, were dependent on their performance.

## Policies and strategies of the Government

### *Holistic approach*

Saemaul Undong took a distinctive holistic approach by combining training in capacity-building and institution-building with physical development activities based on the villagers' needs. The programme started with relatively small projects that could produce distinctive changes in the village but be accomplished relatively easily so that the villagers could realize their capacity and build confidence in themselves. At the same time, it provided training on sharing the practical experiences of Saemaul leaders in successful villages and delivering practical knowledge and technical skills necessary for project management. Villagers 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.

Saemaul Undong also comprehensively dealt with various challenges that the villagers identified, coping with the multidimensional challenge of poverty. By not focusing on a specific challenge, it efficiently dealt with the diverse but interlinked adversities that rural villages faced. Under broad Government guidelines, priorities were determined by the people and were carried out step by step.

### *Horizontal coordination*

To effectively address the multidimensionality of poverty and to deliver the comprehensive development plan package in cooperation with rural villagers, the Government of the Republic of Korea devised a distinct approach of horizontal coordination. The Government delegated the 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 the 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 channelled 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, local governments and the central Government. Each level of government managed programmes under its control and reported to the higher level authority. The central Government provided general guidelines and directions and coordinated the overall management of the plan. The local government acted as a pipeline conveying the voices from the villages to the top and transferring directions from the top to the village. Local governments were permitted to modify at their own discretion the action plans under their jurisdiction to some extent reflecting local conditions and the opinions of the villagers. Each level of local government was also accountable for monitoring and coordinating the activities of the lower level governments. From the central Government 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 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 from receiving further assistance for the following year. 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 villages with assistance, favouring those advancing towards a "self-sustainable community" while spurring the lagging villages to catch up with others.

Conversely, the Government also provided successful villages and their leaders with rewards. They were regarded as national heroes and presented their stories at cabinet meetings and training courses and in schools. Local government officials, with their personal interests regularly at stake, sometimes every day, 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 from 1972 to 1980 (Park 1974). Programmes provided practical skills and technologies on project management and new tools and technologies



in agriculture. Practical knowledge gained from training programmes helped to improve their living standards, which in turn led the villagers to change their traditional attitude and strengthen the lessons of attitudinal change provided by other training. Training also provided the participants with a chance to share knowledge and exchange views on their failures and successes while serving as a communication channel relaying the suggestions and opinions of the participants to the government.

## **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 and radio channels frequently broadcasted updated news and success stories. During the Saemaul Undong period, early in the morning each day, all radio channels broadcasted the Saemaul song and special programmes on village news and stories. This massive public relations drive certainly helped to deliver the necessary information to the villagers and to 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 channelling the voices of the bottom to the top.

## **Village level efforts**

### *Community participation*

For any rural development programme to be successful, active participation and ownership among villagers is a prerequisite. With Saemaul Undong, the tradition of cooperation developed to become calculated participation with the experience of consensus building, and collective decision-making and implementation in managing village projects.<sup>7</sup> According to a report by the Ministry of Home Affairs, between 1971 and 1979, each rural person contributed 12 days of work per year, totalling 1.1 billion work days, to Saemaul Undong. In 1978, a large-scale survey done by the Korea Rural Economic Institute showed that 67 per cent of the respondents said that they attended all the village meetings held in their villages, while another 28 per cent said they attended often (Boyer and Ahn 1991).

A close linkage between personal interests and village projects can be ascribed as the main reason for the active participation. When the programme began, village level participation was mobilized by the local government and was limited to the passive provision of labour. Having observed the positive changes and realized the possible benefits, villagers gradually became more proactive. Under the limited autonomy they had in

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<sup>7</sup> Cooperation in Saemaul Undong could be said to be more goal-oriented and systemized. The Saemaul council systematically managed cooperation projects, which were evaluated to see whether they achieved their target or not. In this sense, cooperation in the programme was more systematic compared to traditional collaboration among people.

implementing projects, they became actively engaged in village-level decision-making and the implementation process. The selective assistance approach and public relations drive by the Government increased the villagers' interest and the competition among them. Greater assistance to more successful village policies led to a spirit of competition among villages, resulting in the increased participation of villagers.<sup>8</sup> The massive dissemination of success stories via the mass media also attributed to promoting a more competitive spirit, positive attitude and hope for change among the villagers.

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 of time by mobilizing people. Inadvertently, the experience of participation provided villagers with 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 identified the crucial presence of an organizational or political "entrepreneur" that mobilizes and leads people in collective activities as one of the key factors in successful local development. The democratically selected young male and female leaders of Saemaul Undong played an important role in promoting participation and in 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. Most villagers pointed to the devoted and diligent Saemaul leaders as the number one factor of success.

It is interesting that, though they were the potentially powerful local leaders often with strong local support, Saemaul leaders never became a challenge to the Government authority. Though it was not clear whether it had predicted a possible threat and had exercised precautionary measures, the Government banned Saemaul leaders from joining any political party. 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.

## **IV. LIMITATIONS AND CRITICISMS**

### **Failure in adaptation**

In the late 1970s, after completing most of its planned activities, Saemaul Undong was in need of transformation in order to better help farmers to adjust to the different rural

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<sup>8</sup> In some case they were elected by the villagers, while in others, the leader was designated according to consensus among villagers. In other cases, some people volunteered to be Saemaul leaders.

environments. However, it failed to make the necessary changes and lost momentum. The spread of individualism and the 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 rather than increased cooperation.

A 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. The undefined ending can also be seen as a lesson learned, but is not enough to completely deny it all of its achievements.

### **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. Though it was evident that rural development was accelerated by Saemaul Undong, it may 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 the positive changes brought about by Saemaul Undong. The successful mixture and coordinated activity could in some way suggest that the scope of work was comprehensive enough and the horizontal coordination among ministries was adequate and appropriate.

### **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. Some have claimed that President Park used Saemaul Undong to sustain his illegitimate Fourth Republic<sup>9</sup> 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, development efforts were often concentrated on more visible villages close to highways, while remote communities were given less assistance.

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<sup>9</sup> 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 the power of the Government of the Republic of Korea to President Park and deeply damaged the civil liberty and democracy movements.

There seems, however, to be no Government policies, including development policies, that are neutral and free from political influences and interests. Government policies and programmes should be evaluated on the extent to which they benefit the targeted people.

### **Top-down model under an authoritarian regime**

Critics also claim that, since Saemaul Undong 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 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 cooperate closely. Especially in the first phase, top-down directives and, in some cases, even coercion were used to mobilize resources and induce rural people to participate. It could be said that, in some developing countries with frequent regime changes, it would be difficult to continuously and sustainably support such a policy. It is not impossible, however, to provide sustained support for a programme in a democratic regime. Regardless of the type of regime, moreover, it is not the case that all programmes that receive strong support from the leaders 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.

### **Increased burden on rural people**

The form of contribution changed from labour donation<sup>10</sup> 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 nine fold from W0.22 million (\$763) to W2.2 million (\$4,545), while during the same period, the average household debt rose 13 times, from W13,000 to W173,000 (KOSIS 2008).

More than 50 per cent of the household debt was, however, taken on as a means of increasing production, which could in turn contribute towards increased productivity and income (Kim 2000). With more physical capital, 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 approximately 8 per cent, a 2 per cent increase from 1969 (KOSIS 2008). It should be noted that, in 1980, the debt to income ratio drastically increased to 13 per cent and by an amount of W340,000 per capita (KOSIS 2008). It is not clear, however, whether this sudden increase was due to the de facto demise of Saemaul Undong or to other factors.

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<sup>10</sup> In many participatory rural development projects, including Saemaul Undong, villagers took part in some of the activities by providing their labour. They worked in construction building, for example, schools and bridges.

### **Marginalization of poor people**

Though rural villages in the Republic of Korea were relatively egalitarian, there still existed villages with significant inequality and people living 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. When funds had to be collected or labour donated, the burden was typically heavier for the poorer villagers, who certainly had less cash and were probably less inclined to give their labour away for free, especially when they relied heavily on wage labour to earn a living. 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). They had little or no farmland to cultivate and the cost of replacing roofs or wiring their homes for electricity was too heavy a burden for them. There was little change in values or attitudes among people in this group, and they generally did not speak favourably of Saemaul Undong (Brandt 1981).

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

### **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 7 and figure 1). 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 and Ahn 1999). 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, which rather required systematic and comprehensive strategies and drastic changes in agricultural policies. 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.

On the other hand, others have argued that Saemaul Undong was never meant to replace industrial development or to deflect the subsequent urban migration. Economic development in the Republic of Korea was based on industrialization and policymakers never intended to change that course. The goal was to lessen the negative impact of industrialization and the rural urban gap. Saemaul Undong was designed to prepare the

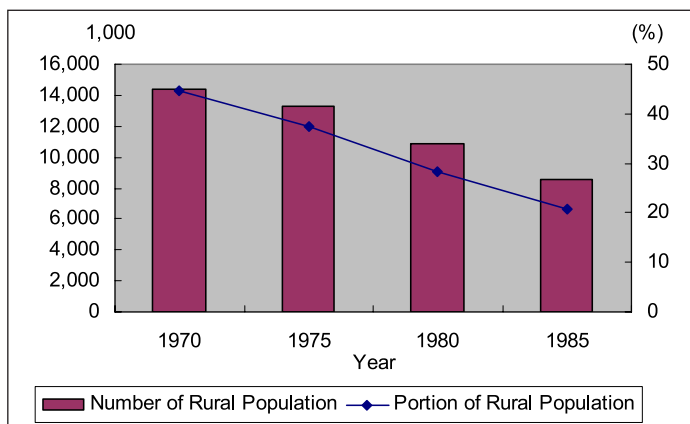
rural population to adapt to urban life and to minimize the impact of their migration by providing rural people with technical training in various fields and employment opportunities in Saemaul factories in rural areas.

**Table 7. Population growth rate**  
(Percentage)

<i>Period</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
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:* Sun-Woong Kim (1980) "Urbanization pattern of Korea and urban population increase component", *Korea Development Review*, Spring, p.151.

**Figure 1. Rural population change from 1970 to 1985**



*Source:* Data from the National Statistics Information Service, accessed from [www.kosis.kr](http://www.kosis.kr) on 7 March 2008.

## V. LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Some have argued that Saemaul Undong, having been implemented some 30 years ago, would not be appropriate 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 took place a long time ago but 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 the 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 rural areas. 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. In addition, it brought some favourable changes in abolishing archaic customs and empowered women to become development agents. The increased accountability and capacity of local government officials and the empowerment of villagers can also be listed as desirable changes, though most of these were brought about unintentionally.

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 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 a pro-poor policy environment and to allocate significant resources to the poor for the 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. In other words, though the terminology was archaic and the methodology and approaches were not clearly defined in the ways that today's development programmes are, what Saemaul Undong achieved and how it did so were not different from the goals that rural development projects and programmes aim to accomplish today.

In fact, the distinction between Saemaul Undong, as well as other successful rural development programmes, and unsuccessful programmes is that the successful programmes developed and implemented workable, practical and specific plans and strategies in accordance with and making use of specific local contexts. Few people dispute or disagree with the importance of the key principles of development, such as building an enabling environment or promoting the inclusive participation of local people in the 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. Using the centralized structure, it horizontally and vertically linked relevant ministries while it connected the performance of the government officials to the progress of Saemaul Undong, making use of meritocracy at that time. Saemaul Undong also combined favourable social contexts with practical and workable policies and strategies.

In other words, it linked the right policies with the right conditions. It combined a favourable social environment with cleverly designed tools and strategies promoting the involvement of people, while at the same time staying in line with Government policies. Based on strong social capital and an egalitarian rural social structure, the Government promoted the participation of villagers. Continued economic growth supported the programme financially, while 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 specific political, economic and social contexts. Following the model blindly would therefore 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 that could be applied in other development programmes and further issues to consider in current development contexts.

### **Importance of political commitment**

Many studies listed the political commitment of the leader or of 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. 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 government officials tend to put more effort and pay more attention to the policies and programmes that the top leader considers the top priority.

For 10 years, President Park emphasized Saemaul Undong as a top governmental priority. The unwavering commitment of the top leader enabled the Government to allocate 5 per cent of its tax revenue every year to the programme for the 10 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 encouraged low-level officials by linking their performance evaluation to Saemaul Undong delivery. It would have been difficult to sustain and manage the nationwide programme for a decade without continuous commitment from the top leader.

### **Creating an enabling environment based on meritocracy and vertical integration**

According to Boyer and Ahn (1991), reflecting the focus on democratization and good governance, which are central in the development agenda of today, many countries have adopted or moved towards the decentralization of governance. While centralization has disadvantages, decentralization is not a panacea for ending poverty and underdevelopment in rural areas of developing countries. In many developing countries, the local poor depend



heavily on the local elites who dominate resources and power. Abrupt decentralization without a well-laid plan and insightful consideration of the existing power structure may end up legitimately 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, the government-selected leaders were 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 were the people who passed the national civil service examinations and were dispatched from the central Government. Those measures effectively reduced the influence of or domination by the local elites during the course of the Saemaul Undong period.

Delicate coordination between the central and local government reduced overlapping and duplication and resulted in effective management. Using the centralized structure, it horizontally and vertically linked relevant ministries and coordinated their activities and plans. While the central Government set the guidelines and strategies for the whole programme, each level of local government planned and managed its subprogrammes under its jurisdiction. The lower levels of government submitted progress reports and completion reports to the higher levels of government. All the reports were later reviewed by the central Government. Developing countries should devise ways to build the capacity of their governments with careful consideration of their own institutional structure.

### **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, this was not enough to ensure the effective implementation of the programme. 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. Observing the benefits and realizing their capacity, the villagers gained self-confidence and belief in the usefulness of the programme. This naturally led to increased participation.

Second, 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 the villagers said were the most urgent and serious. The implementation of the projects was

therefore in their own interest, which reduced possible opposition among the people to the Government decision requiring the usage of their own resources for implementation.

Third, the Government boosted morale and stimulated competition among villagers by selective assistance and information distribution. It provided more assistance for villages with more outputs, and the differences in assistance were publicly announced. Villages with less assistance tried to catch up with those receiving 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.

### **Understanding and incorporating local context**

Numerous research studies have noted the importance of local contexts in community development programmes. Saemaul Undong also owed its success to the incorporation of the social, cultural and economic contexts of the Republic of Korea at that time. The notions of diligence and cooperation promoted by Saemaul Undong were based on traditional Korean values. The massive mobilization of resources and strong chain of command from the top level of Government to the villages were 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 favourable environment for community-based rural development. These are country- and time-specific conditions that may or may not exist in other developing countries. From the choice of village projects to the capacity-building of local governments, a careful analysis and assessment of specific conditions and contexts should first be conducted to ensure successful rural development. Programmes should be rooted in their own sociocultural contexts at any point in time.

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