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The Novel Saemaul Undong Model: A Rural Transformation Paradigm for Developing Countries –Review

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ABSTRACT

The novel Saemaul Undong of South Korea, a community partnership project with Government founded in 1970s, is a transformational model of sustainable community-driven rural development. Rooted in the standards of industriousness, self-improvement, and participation, the development successfully uplifted impoverished rural areas, improving infrastructure, income levels, and social cohesion. This paper explores the adaptability of the Saemaul Undong model for developing countries facing similar challenges of poverty, inequality, and underdeveloped rural sectors. By examining its core principles, success factors, and potential barriers to implementation, the study provides insights into how this model can be tailored to diverse socio-cultural and economic contexts. It also reviews case studies where Saemaul Undong-inspired initiatives have been piloted globally, highlighting lessons learned and best practices. The findings suggest that while the model holds significant promise, its success requires strong local leadership, government support, and a commitment to cultural and contextual adaptation. This exploration aims to contribute to global efforts in fostering sustainable, community-led rural development. There is likewise new earnestness for resolving rural issues produced by populace tension ashore, water and different assets, menaces to the climate, environmental change, and augmenting pay differences among provincial and metropolitan regions to achieve Sustainable development (Goals SDGs).

INTRODUCTION

Saemaul Undong, a local area based coordinated country improvement program of the Republic of Korea, helped with spanning the formative split among provincial and metropolitan districts during a ten-year period. Most South Korea's rural areas were seeing increasing conditions. In 1962, the projected Gross Public Item (GNP) per capita was simply US\$87, 34% was predicted in the year 1967 to be the absolute proportion of rural poverty (Whan, 2014). South Korea was considered as being one of Asia's basket cases (Iqbal & Milton, 2017). The visionary President Park Chung-Hee during 1970 spearheaded the community Development Project, or Saemaul Undong. Before the decade's over, it had spread to urban communities as a cross-country illustration of the Korean procedure for participatory development directed by the government (Douglass, 2014a). Its use of fundamental poverty reduction techniques that are tailored to and utilize Korean contexts—fostering possibilities and enabling rural people's empowerment—is responsible for its success. The concepts and vocabulary that are widely used in development now were not well understood by those who created and implemented Saemaul Undong forty years ago. But what they advocated, accomplished, and put into practice was identical to the aims, goals and strategies that are now supported by development experts. The significant lesson to be learnt from Saemaul Undong is that it created suitable plans and programs that used the distinct Politically driven economical, and social contexts. Countries that are developing ought to

meticulously assess their own position and devise feasible useful answers for their own (Park, 2012b). South Korea's broad socioeconomic advancements and decreased levels of severe poverty have culminated in unprecedented accomplishment in lowering the disparity in income between cities and villages in a very short timeframe (Yoon & Yoon, 2024). In retrospect, the sequence of events that led to Korea's successful economic development may seem planned, but it was more likely the result of opportunities and crises (Reed, 2010). Saemaul Undong is portrayed as a blueprint for alleviating poverty and achieving the exceptional economic growth previously experienced in Korea (Jeong, 2017).

It stresses the need for rural populations to break away from the dependency and "backwardness" exemplified by "lack of energy, hunger, poverty, inactivity, gambling, drinking alcohol, and low agricultural productivity" (Iqbal & Milton, 2017). In a single generation, the Korean government and people conquered poverty and accomplished significant progress. It demonstrates how Saemaul Undong Development came to be in Korea's progressive state, moving the Korean nation with a positive mentality to accomplish thriving through difficult work by making another culture in light of the basic beliefs of collaboration, self-improvement, and steadiness (Yangso, 2019). Consultation with farmers and other rural residents to find out their needs for information and to encourage them to be involved in the planning and carrying out of development projects will prove to be more effective (Ojurongbe, 2024).

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review paper employs a systematic approach to identify and analyze relevant literature on the chosen topic. A thorough search was conducted across databases such as Google Scholar with predefined keywords. The initial search yielded 30 articles, which were screened based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only studies published in the last 10 years, written in English, and relevant to the topic were considered. After removing duplicates and irrelevant articles, 25 studies were selected for analysis. The final selection was reviewed for thematic content, research methodologies, and key findings to ensure comprehensive coverage of the subject. After then, important elements were combined to give a thorough grasp of the topic. This methodology ensured a comprehensive and unbiased review process.

Saemaul Undong's Contribution to Rural Development

One important turning point in Korea's economic growth is Saemaul Undong (SMU). The achievements of the SMU are often cited by both Korean and international development economists, prompting organizations like the Korea International Cooperation Agency and the United Nations to invest considerable resources in leveraging the SMU experience for application in other countries (Kwon, 2010). Key factors in its success included government guidance and support, widespread community participation, and the nurturing of local

leadership (Soo, 2005). According to (Jwa, 2024), Interest in employing experimental techniques to reduce poverty has grown after Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT) won the 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics. The exceptionally Saemaul Undong in the 1970s, which established the foundation for such experimental approaches in economic growth, is examined in this study to investigate this issue. In line with the monetary separation standards framed in the new broad hypothesis of financial turn of events, it gives a complete model of country improvement aimed at ending poverty and emphasizes the crucial roles played by three important aspects: the government, village organizations, and the villagers. Saemaul Undong in South Korea was government-led, a rural improvement program that successfully raised agricultural output and enhanced living circumstances (Douglass, 2014).

Saemaul Undong (SMU) program promotes Focusing solely on principles such as collaboration, hard work, and self-help, one may contend that their effects were limited. Village based initiatives, such as replacing thatched roofs with galvanized iron, straightening village roads, clearing irrigation canals and starting small-scale revenue-generating ventures wouldn't be sufficient to account for the considerable increase in income attained. Comparable programs implemented earlier in Korea and community development (CD) efforts in other countries have generally shown limited long-term effects (Reed, 2010).

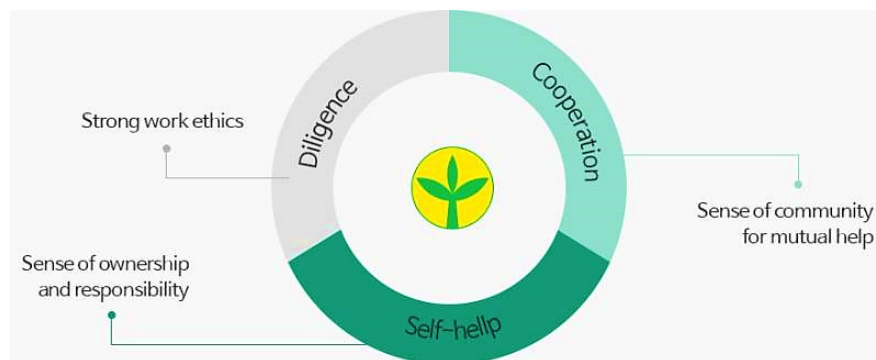


Figure 1: Core Values of Saemaul Undong

Source: (Amma, 2019)

Figure 1 Illustrates the core values of "Self-help" at the center, with interconnected qualities forming the outer circle. The focus is on a strong work ethic, where diligence is emphasized to encourage personal responsibility and ownership of tasks. Cooperation is also highlighted, demonstrating the importance of working together and fostering a sense of community for mutual assistance. The values within the diagram suggest that a balance of self-reliance and collaboration contributes to success. Overall, the image emphasizes building personal strength while cultivating a supportive, collaborative environment. Ever since the launching of the Saemaul Undong (SMU), the community-based program aimed to improve rural areas in South Korea during the 1970s, the nation has acquired notoriety for its ability to mitigate hunger issues

in countries that are still developing, notably Africa and Asia. The great success of Saemaul Undong (SMU) program may be credited to its action-oriented trend, emphasizing diligence, self-help, and cooperation (Park, 2022). The movement was defined by key elements such as government-provided financial support, collaboration among villagers, and the encouragement of a self-reliant mindset. These principles and implementation strategies formed the foundation of Saemaul Undong have potential applications for developing countries facing poverty, provided they are appropriately adapted to local conditions (Choi & Kee, 2024a). Saemaul Undong's effectiveness stemmed from its adaptation to specific Korean contexts, implementing basic poverty reduction strategies that promoted opportunities and empowered

rural communities. The Saemaul Undong experience highlights the importance of devising practical, context-specific solutions for developing countries seeking to

implement similar community development initiatives (Park, 2012a).



Figure 2: Factors that promoted Saemaul Undong's Achievements in South Korea

Source: Schmak, 2023

Figure 2 presents the factors of success of Saemaul Undong. South Korea's rural development movement was driven by several key factors. Strong government support provided resources and strategic guidance, while a sense of collective responsibility and community participation fostered unity. Leadership training empowered village leaders to inspire and mobilize their communities. Economic incentives and rewards for progress motivated active involvement. Infrastructure improvements, such as roads and irrigation systems, boosted productivity, while education programs equipped farmers with modern agricultural techniques. Together, these factors transformed rural areas and contributed to South Korea's rapid development.

The recognized Saemaul Undong project has gained a lot of global recognition perceived as an effective prototypical of country local area improvement. The nation's leadership's strong political resolve led to the creation of Saemaul Undong, a particular Korean approach to building communities and a public initiative to overcome poverty. The Saemaul Undong was successful due to several important components. Foremost among them was the guidance and support provided by the national government, which played a crucial role throughout the development process. Secondly, there was a great many individuals' cooperation in the execution cycle. Third, the Saemaul Undong succeeded in creating a major accomplishment through sustaining local area initiative which was chosen by country occupants themselves. At last, as a development for the profound change, the Saemaul Undong instilled individuals with the spirits of perseverance, the confidence, and collaboration

(Soo, 2005). A range of Saemaul Undong projects, developed and implemented based "by the individuals, for the individuals, and of the people" is the governing concept played a significant role in promoting inclusive growth in Korea. These projects focused on establishing governance, cultivating, social capital, and guaranteeing sustainability by boosting human capacities are the three fundamental foundations of human growth. These programs improved collaboration by establishing varied value chains that included manufacturing, processing and marketing, increased value addition, narrowed the rural-urban divide, reduced gender disparities, and facilitated inclusive growth through the fair distribution of benefits (So, 2019).

Projects Undertaken through Saemaul Undong for Capacity Building in Communities

The Saemaul Undong policy's salient characteristics are its importance on the leadership position of the leaders of Saemaul Undong, government funding, village cooperation, public officials' backing, a self-support viewpoint of the program aimed at encouraging community development (Choi & Kee, 2024b). The Saemaul Undong, the Korean development model, which can be shared with other countries, is rooted in the mindset, methods, and mechanisms of Saemaul Undong (SDM) and can be adapted to suit the unique conditions of any nation. To promote SDM globally, the Saemaul Development Network was created, with the goal of enhancing living standards and enabling people worldwide to lead more dignified lives (Oe-Chool, 2017).



Figure 3: Saemaul Undong Model Village Development Status around the Globe
Source: Centre, 2024

Figure 3 demonstrates the Saemaul Undong model. The model originated from South Korea in the 1970s, has been widely adopted globally as a framework for rural development and poverty alleviation. Countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have implemented principles of self-help, diligence, and cooperation to enhance rural infrastructure, agriculture, and community livelihoods. Nations like Vietnam, Rwanda, and Indonesia have

reported notable improvements in income generation, education, and health services in model villages. This approach emphasizes empowering local communities to lead sustainable projects tailored to their needs. Partnerships with international organizations have further expanded their influence, promoting inclusive development. However, success varies based on adaptation to local contexts and government commitment.



Figure 4: The three (3) Key areas Saemaul Undong Project (Improving Living Condition, Income Generation and mindset Changing Project)
Source: Centre, 2024

Figure 4 illustrates the Saemaul Undong Project, also known as the New Village Movement, focuses on three key areas to foster rural development. Improving Living Conditions involves enhancing infrastructure, housing, and sanitation, creating a healthier and more comfortable environment. Income Generation emphasizes agricultural modernization and diversifying rural economies to boost earnings and reduce poverty. Mindset Changing inspires self-reliance, diligence, and cooperation among community members, fostering a collective spirit for sustainable development. These pillars work synergistically to transform rural communities into thriving, self-sufficient hubs of growth and progress.

Implementation of Saemaul Undong in Developing Nations

The Saemaul Undong (New Community Movement) in Korea served as an impetus for economic development and provides guidance for poverty alleviation and local development in less developed countries (Baek *et al.*, 2012). Subsequently, during the 1990s, developing countries have increasingly focused on Saemaul Undong, with a particularly sharp rise in demand for relevant training programs in recent years. Between 2011 and 2015, 5,009 foreign nationals traveled to Korea to comprehensive programs pertaining to Saemaul Undong to further their knowledge and understanding on the project. Additionally, around 50 countries officially

requested Korea to share the Saemaul Undong approach (Seikyun, 2016). Rural development continues to be a challenge for underdeveloped countries, notably in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, though the rapid urbanization observed in many regions of the world over the previous two decades. In line with the World Bank report (Group, 2024), the urgency to address rural issues has grown due to climate change, hazards to the environment, population strain on water, soil, and other resources, and the growing disparity in wealth among rural and urban places. Consequently, rural and agricultural development is once again receiving increased attention from national governments and development organizations worldwide as being crucial to lowering poverty and accomplishing the UN Development Goals (Reed, 2010). The intervention of a non-governmental organization in Uganda, a rural settlement was inspired by confident mindset known as “nitubaasa” in native language translated as (we can do) by the Korean development strategy known as Saemaul Undong (Kontinen & Ahimbisibwe, 2024). During the year 2010, for Economic Co-operation and Development Korea evolved into an affiliate of the Development Assistance Committee. Korea International Cooperation Agency also known as (KOICA) and Saemaul Undong Centre had introduced the policy model to address development challenges in countries including Rwanda, Uganda, Nepal, Cambodia, and the Philippines (Doucette & Müller, 2016; Jeong, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2021; Schwak, 2023).

Table 1: Tailored Implementation Strategies for Each Country

Category	Recipient Country	Implementation Strategy
Group A	Rwanda, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal, Nepal, Uganda, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia (10 countries)	Integrated package project, the expansion of the scale of project across the nation, integrated consulting
Group B	"Sri Lanka, Kenya, South Africa, Mozambique, Pakistan, Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, Papua New Guinea, Cameroon, East Timor, Afghanistan (11 countries)"	Small-scale pilot project in villages
Group C	"Malawi, Nigeria, Solomon Islands, Burundi, DR Congo, Zimbabwe, the Philippines, Ecuador, Paraguay, Colombia (10 countries)"	Invitational training and education programs

Source: Seikyun, 2016

Table 1 depicts Tailored Implementation Strategies for Each Country. The countries are divided into Categories A, B, and C based on their development requirements, willingness, and present level of development, as well as our ability to provide help. Each group is then given an individually tailored plan. The circumstances of each recipient nation are considered while defining priorities and executing plans.

Established Benefits of Saemaul Undong Projects for Developing Countries

A Proven Model for Rural Development

Transforming Rural Areas

Saemaul Undong successfully modernized South Korean rural communities, improving living standards,

infrastructure, and agricultural productivity. The success of Saemaul Undong Projects compared to other initiatives lies in its feasible and action-oriented strategy that prioritized cooperation, self-help, and commitment. Notably, implemented the “monetary discrimination” (ED) concept which substantially enthused people to act, whereas other programs were largely implemented as mere assistance. The three key benefits of SMU from literature indicates; —(i) improved governance, (ii) strengthened social capital, and (iii) sustainability— make it highly valuable for African nations to adopt. The scenario in Uganda is presented to demonstrate the relevance of SMU for African nations (Park, 2022). South Korea and Vietnam have formed a cooperation to develop rural areas in Vietnam using the Saemaul Undong

model of rural development (Lestari, 2016). The Saemaul Undong (New Community Movement) in Korea served as an impetus for economic development and provides guidance for poverty alleviation and local development in less developed countries (Baek *et al.*, 2012).

Reduction of Urban-Rural Disparities

The movement bridged the socio-economic disparity between urban and rural areas, ensuring equitable development. SMU contributed to Reducing the development disparity bridging rural and urban regions through the implementation of community-based projects that enhanced governance, social capital, and sustainability (So, 2018). Saemaul is a technique for involving local people in business growth and enabling continuous cycles of primitive accumulation. It fits the focus on participatory development and conforms with the neoliberal goals of development agencies. Modern advocates point to its Schumpeter-like traits and ability to encourage social rivalry in rural areas. By changing attitudes, Saemaul seeks to bring about social change; its worldwide presence also complements the World Bank's current concentration on changing attitudes for capitalist goals. The complementing material interests of the Korean state-chaebol link and foreign development organizations which are reflected in this innovative initiative (Schwak, 2023).

Empowerment of Communities

Grassroots Participation

The model emphasizes the role of community Participants in designing and implementing development projects, fostering a sense of ownership. It emphasized grassroots participation, empowering villagers to actively engage in decision-making and project implementation (Eom, 2011). As a voluntary, community-driven organization, it stands as a successful example of a Gender equality and the reduction of poverty in countries that are developing were the primary focus of a community development initiative (Choi, 2017). The people in the community actively participate in the task assigned by the community leaders. According to (Min, 2017). The Saemaul Development Network was created with the goal of sharing the Saemaul Development Model (SDM) across the globe, enabling people from all regions to enjoy better living standards and lead lives filled with dignity.

Self-Reliance and Cooperation

Encourages individuals to take the initiative, work together, and rely on their resources to achieve common goals. South Korea aimed to internationalize its Saemaul Undong, while Vietnam aimed to attain the success of rural development. In this context, South Korea was able to provide funding, experience, and knowledge in mobilizing rural people's participation, while Vietnam was able to justify the possibility of adopting SU by developing countries (Lestari, 2016). The Saemaul Undong program in Indonesia promotes self-reliance

and community cooperation in rural development (Baek *et al.*, 2012). Community based projects created a snowball outcome, where one success sparked another, resulting in significant improvements in villages within a short timeframe. Local leaders proved to become more effective in executing public programs and were better equipped to meet the needs of villages and agriculture. Representing togetherness and national identity, the Saemaul Undong developed into a strong expression representing the Korean approach to development of communities. Key factors contributing to its success include strong government support, widespread citizen participation, and the cultivation of local leadership (Douglass, 2014).

Holistic Development

Infrastructure Development

Focus on building essential infrastructure like roads, schools, irrigation systems, and housing in rural areas. The program emphasized farming, women's empowerment, and infrastructure development, fostering collaboration between government and communities (Puspitasari *et al.*, 2019). Saemaul Undong changed many people's life by bringing notable advances in rural infrastructure. Most studies highlight the positive impact it had on living conditions and local infrastructure. With better roads, mechanized farming became possible, making agriculture more efficient. The expansion of telephone lines and electrification connected villages to real-time information, helping residents navigate changing market conditions and better manage their livelihoods (Park, 2012b).

Economic Growth

Improved agricultural practices, rural industries, and income generation opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. Rising living standards and earnings of rural families was mostly dependent on village improvements and highly subsidized rice production, which brought them into level with those of urban households. South Korea moved closer to achieving self-sufficiency in rice production. These community initiatives had an effect like a snowball, wherein one accomplishment motivated the next and led to notable changes in many urban and rural areas remarkably in a short period of time (Douglass, 2014). The Saemaul Undong (SMU) plan focuses on raising awareness, by creating income and increasing output, educating village leaders to help improve rural living circumstances, therefore strengthening the overall rural economy. Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) in partnership with The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) worked together to make the Saemaul Undong (SMU) Project official development aid team therefore, supporting the effort and working together to guarantee the success of the program for the success of the nation (ADB, 2012).

Social and Cultural Revitalization

Promoted the values of diligence, cooperation, and

innovation within communities. Saemaul Undong projects have confirmed that the need for rural populations to break away from the dependency and “backwardness” best shown by hunger issues, lack of employment, engaging in gambling, drinking alcohol, poor productivity in agriculture and energy shortage (Iqbal & Milon, 2017). The framework emphasizes hard work and collaboration in rural communities to improve livelihoods. By focusing on the need to change the “backward” behavior of the peasants, and on self-help rather than encouraging them to challenge their societal circumstances, the model readily enhances authoritarianism as it disregards issues such as securing human rights, democracy, and basic state provision (Jeong, 2017). The Saemaul Undong in Korea reformed the public sector to meet people’s demand for public services, enabling community development (So, 2021).

Inspiration for Other Nations

Global Adaptability

Numerous developing countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America adopted Saemaul Undong principles to address rural development challenges. It is indicated Pilot projects, known as Saemaul Undong, were launched in three villages to test and demonstrate the approach in the Pacific. These initiatives have been very important in improving rural people’ quality of life, boosting their resilience and ensuring long-term sustainability. Korea is now looking to expand the Saemaul Undong projects and tailor them to meet the requirements and conditions of local communities. Republic of Korea has demonstrated its commitment to further assist small developing island Nation in South Pacific in capacity building projects, for instance, Fiji Islands in the year 2023, received an amount of USD\$10 million in year via official development aid. This was only possible due to the good bilateral relationship between the countries. Over past 30 years, Korea has been a steadfast development partner for Fiji. This commitment extends to implementing the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and fostering a free, peaceful, and prosperous Pacific region (Affairs, 2025). In comparison, the Korean Saemaul Undong model focuses on a top-down approach that promotes active participation from local governments, top leaders, and residents alike.

The famous Saemaul Undong model promotes participation through a long-standing tradition of cooperation, ensuring that everyone plays a role in the process (Aida, 2024). Much as the Saemaul Undong approach in Korea was a national project to enhance modernization, in African countries it has mostly been implemented at community level in various locations, by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with support from KOICA, Korean Embassies, and the Saemaul Undong Center (Burghart, 2023; Nauta & Lee, 2017; Nyirenda & Mbelle, 2023). The approach has been implemented in several districts at community level, referring to one of the approximately 71,200 rural villages (Park, 2019).

Sustainable Development

Long-Term Impact

By empowering communities and building local capacity, the model ensures sustainability of development projects. Practicing the spirit of Saemaul Undong, fostering solidarity, creatively applying traditional values, and raising public awareness. Following public morals principles, driving according to traffic laws, doing honest business, and being timely. Emphasizing cleanliness, home décor, entrepreneurship, road upkeep, and environmental greening. According to (Min, 2017), The Saemaul Undong movement produced observable results from the above mentioned attitude, which raised individual well-being and communal welfare in turn.

Reduction of poverty via fast rises in family income. Through seasonal agricultural nurseries introduction, access to contemporary infrastructure and services include mechanized farming, electricity, housing upgrades, and health services. Community empowerment by means of social capital accumulation and simultaneous civil society development promotion. Social renewal by means of youthful leadership development and free village social life establishment. Saemaul Undong empowered women to have more social involvement and improvement in housekeeping responsibilities.

Environmental Sustainability

Projects often include environmental conservation and sustainable resource management practices. Forest resources were significantly depleted because of illicit harvesting and shifting cultivation during World War II’s between Korean and Japanese War. The Saemaul Undong led the implementation in 1973 of the Forest Development Plan, whereas the commencement of Rehabilitation and Restoration took place in 1970 (Lee & Lee, 2005). Research indicates that cutting-edge rural community development initiatives of Saemaul Undong Project, the income-generation aspect has a substantially more significant than the elements pertaining to thriving living environment and strengthening abilities. However, fostering a thriving living environment and strengthening abilities are the fundamental building blocks that guarantee the success of income generation in rural communities which in turn supports the achievement and sustainability of the project (Lee & Shim, 2020).

Poverty Alleviation

Improved Livelihoods

Boosts household income through better agricultural practices, infrastructure, and rural entrepreneurship. Saemaul Undong, which was centred around communities during the 1970s, integrated rural development initiative Saemaul Undong helped close the development disparity between big centres and remote areas through the course of a decade. The implementation of policies aimed at reducing poverty has been crucial to its success tailored to the specific context of Korea, focusing on creating opportunities and empowering rural communities (Park,

2012a). Saemaul Undong is portrayed as a blueprint for alleviating poverty and achieving the exceptional economic growth previously experienced in Korea (Jeong, 2017).

Food Security

Enhances agricultural productivity, reducing food shortages and dependence on imports. A variety of income-generating projects were carried out to boost rural household income and alleviate poverty. Along with new technologies and better crop varieties, chemical inputs and fertilizers were more used. Enhanced physical infrastructure contributed to increased productivity and income growth by offering villagers new opportunities to explore different activities and ensure improved availability of resources, markets, and necessary tools for their employment (Park, 2012b). Various studies have shown that Saemaul Undong and Official Development Assistance aligns well with set guidelines in global development. Along with a rights-based approach, this compatibility spans significant sustainable development plans like the 2030 Agenda, inclusive growth, empowerment, ownership, and capacity development for the government of the partner nation. It extends to more contemporary models as well, such as the SDGs and integrated sectors (Shim, 2024).

Leadership Development

Empowering Local Leaders

Saemaul Undong invests in training leaders to guide and inspire communities, ensuring long-term success. The Saemaul Undong (SMU) was a plan for rural growth across the whole country launched in the 1970s with the aim of reducing the disparity between urban and rural locations. In its first year, the government provided raw materials for nine village projects. In subsequent years, materials were selectively supplied to villages that successfully completed their projects. Villagers were responsible for deciding how to use the resources provided by the government. Given past failures in some rural development efforts, the Korean government understood the significant duty of leaders of villages in guaranteeing the success of initiatives supported by their community. However, there were challenges along the way, such as the lack of skills among village members and social norms that hindered women's active participation. To address these issues, a specialized leadership training program was introduced, and the Saemaul Leaders Training Institute (SLTI) offered a structured, extensive training course to provide local leaders the required knowledge to lead their communities effectively (Yang, 2017). Saemaul Undong did not confront the authority of traditional leaders. Instead, it fostered a new generation of younger, development-focused leaders who acted as agents of change in their villages (Reed, 2010).

Capacity Building

The Saemaul Undong Center has introduced its policy model to tackle development challenges in countries like

the Philippines, Cambodia, Nepal, Rwanda, Fiji, Laos, and Uganda. It strengthens governance at the grassroots level, fostering accountability and transparency. The Republic of Korea, like many other developing countries, has historically discouraged women from participating in social concerns. Saemaul Undong gave rural women a limited amount of opportunity to interact with the government and formally take part in social events. At first, their involvement in village activities was restricted to carrying out the so-called "jobs of women," but they ended up getting more involved. Activities that were thought to be the purview of men were successfully started and carried out by a few of the Saemaul women leaders. Women's remarkable accomplishments and persistent efforts helped the public recognize their abilities and enhanced opinions about their place in society (Park, 2012b).

Promoting National Unity

Shared Vision of Progress

Encourages collective national efforts toward modernization and development. Based on the ideology of focusing on people's effort and interest several Saemaul Undong initiatives were crucial for advancing sustainable development in Korea. The responsibilities of human development via the acquisition of people's capabilities involve the development of "governance," "social capital," and "sustainability," among others. The implementation of these programs resulted in the establishment of varied value chains that included production, processing, and marketing. These networks promoted value addition, more cooperation, and bridging of the rural and urban areas, decreased gender disparity, and promoted inclusive development by ensuring a fair distribution of benefits (So, 2019).

Spirit of Collaboration

Promotes harmony and cooperation among citizens, reducing socio-political divides. The strategy of building organizational capacity, improving access, developing infrastructure, strengthening system capabilities, and improving income and skills comes from village government working with the Saemaul Undong Global Foundation in several sectors (Puspitasari *et al.*, 2019). The Saemaul Undong's amazing success may be partially ascribed to the choice to concentrate on small towns as the core components of collaborative growth initiatives. In a small hamlet, the sharing of expenses and advantages connected to communal affairs is more under control and clear. Once attained, this helps the powers and obligations of the people to be more aligned. Within the framework of the SMU process, this agreement and active engagement in the initiatives let the people re-establish trust among themselves expecting future advantages (Park, 2012b).

Economic Contributions

Boosting National Growth

The fast economic change of South Korea was greatly influenced by the Saemaul Undong movement

transformation, helping it progress from an underprivileged, farming society to a developed nation-state. USAID emphasized that an effective smallholder-driven approach, for instance, inclusive growth could advocate the paradigm shift of the agricultural sector by embedding numerous small-scale farmers into competitive value chains. Economic Cooperation and Development asserts that inclusionary development implies Saemaul Undong contributes in boost to the economy that generates opportunities for all facets of society and equitably disperses the financial and non-financial gains of higher standard of living (Dunn, 2014). Saemaul Undong fosters a new work environment that helps increase income for its people by modernizing rural communities through a holistic development approach.

Export of the Model

South Korea's success with Saemaul Undong has made it a sought-after partner for international development cooperation. Nations seeking regional development strategies targeted at reducing poverty as well as foreign organizations helping grassroots development within such countries have underlined the importance of the Saemaul Undong program. These companies often send staff members to Korea in order to learn about the blueprint of the novel Saemaul Undong, the backbone of Korean advancement (Seok-jin, 2011).

Challenges in Implementing the Saemaul Undong Model in Developing Countries

The adoption of Saemaul Undong (SMU) in developing countries faces several challenges. Cultural differences can impact the effectiveness of SMU, as social settings may differ significantly from Korea's context (Lee *et al.*, 2014). Political constraints and government effectiveness are crucial factors to consider when implementing SMU abroad (Claassen, 2020). Economic feasibility is another concern, as countries need to carefully assess their situation and devise practical solutions tailored to their specific contexts (Yangso, 2016). Sustainability issues arise from the need to create inclusive value chains and encourage smallholder-oriented innovation (Claassen, 2020; Yangso, 2016). Despite these challenges, SMU's principles of diligence, self-help, and cooperation can be valuable for developing countries, particularly in Africa, where agricultural-rural development is crucial (Park, 2022). Successful implementation requires adapting the model to fit pre-existing conditions in recipient countries rather than rigidly applying Korea's framework (Lee *et al.*, 2014). Abafita *et al.* (2013), highlights that the factors that have been key for the success of SMU in Korea such as land reform; social ties among villagers; strong institutional support; strong leadership and political commitment on the part of government; and promotion of ownership and empowerment of rural communities could be judiciously incorporated into the rural development strategies to attain similar results.

CONCLUSION

Despite living in an era of unprecedented progress, nearly a billion people remain trapped in the cycle of poverty. Developing nations, home to the vast majority of the world's impoverished, struggle to combat this crisis alone. True change requires a united effort—civil society groups, governments, and citizens of developed nations must step forward to bridge the gap. While each country follows its own path to development, the core principles of poverty eradication must be adapted to local contexts to drive meaningful progress.

One such model of transformation is Saemaul Undong, a movement pioneered by the Republic of Korea. By fostering self-reliance, hard work, and community empowerment, this initiative reshaped rural Korea, lifting communities from poverty through a shift in mindset and action. However, replicating its success elsewhere is not without challenges. Cultural differences, political instability, and economic limitations can obstruct its implementation, while sustainability concerns demand continuous support and innovation. To make Saemaul Undong effective in new environments, it must be tailored with localized strategies, strong governance, and active community engagement, turning its lessons into a beacon of hope for struggling nations.

Recommendations

I. The successful adoption of Saemaul Undong in developing countries depends on a careful analysis of their specific situations, followed by the creation of practical, tailored solutions. There must be more consultation and collaboration to take the project forward and make it more effective.

II. Good governance hinges on trust among people. Simply having institutions in place doesn't guarantee they function effectively. It requires collaboration between public and private sectors through meticulous thought, convincing, and cooperation. The objective of a development plan grounded on the theory of governance is to strike a balance between the market- and state-centered development paradigms which are frequently as opposing forces.

III. The following considerations should be considered when employing Saemaul Undong's principles in rural development projects in countries that are developing.

IV. IV Saemaul Undong's basic principles, values, and approach should be described as the "Saemaul Rural Transformation Model", adaptable toward various ODA (Official Development Assistance) projects on a wide scale with more collaboration and reaching out to unreachable.

V. Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects should go beyond merely being another form of aid. They must focus on unlocking the potential of recipient countries, empowering them to independently design subprojects that are suited to the specific characteristics and development needs of their regions. To incorporate

Saemaul Undong's approaches to ODA projects, these efforts must align with International Development Goals, such as the SDGs, while also adhering to global regulations.

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