

Privatization of the Saemaul Movement

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I. Introduction

"Saemaul Movement" in Korea makes an excellent example of successful community development projects led by private organizations and local residents. The key to the success of this movement, as I conceive, is its unique orientation and process rather than outcomes.

In many developing or underdeveloped countries, various community development movements led by private organizations often turned into a failure. Much of the reason has to do with difficulties in gaining cohesiveness among residents. Korea's Saemaul Movement, on the contrary, has been able to overcome such difficulties, as it turns out to be an exceptionally successful case of a "civilian-driven" movement.

This paper is based on my experience between 1971 and 1988. Throughout this period, I was deeply involved in the movement as Director of Saemaul Movement Assistance Division in the Ministry of Home Affairs and in the Government of Chun-Nam Province, and as mayor or chief officer of several local governments.

The issues I would like to address in this paper are the following:

First, the concept and ideology of Saemaul movement.

Second, approaches and strategies for an effective movement.

Third, the process of shifts from a "government-driven" to "civilian-driven" movement.

Fourth, private organization system and its mobilization.

Fifth and finally, the impact of the civilian-driven Saemaul Movement on the environment of local government autonomy.

II. An Overview of the Saemaul Movement

1. Basic Ideas and Concepts

Saemaul Movement is a community development strategy. The movement has been in effect since its inception in 1971.

The idea of Saemaul Movement was conceived as a means to achieve nation building and economic development. In the process of pursuing modernization, the Third Republic led by President Park Jung-Hee found it necessary to seek nation building and economic development as two main strategies. And Saemaul Movement was launched as a means to implement these strategies.

Saemaul Movement as a means to achieve nation building emphasized inducement of citizen participation in physical development of the nation, sweeping out social evils, and community development projects. The movement as a means to achieve economic development would initiate programs to increase national income.

In seeking enlightenment of citizen consciousness for participation, three spirits – diligence, self–help and cooperation – have become leading ideologies. It is for this reason that the movement is often recognized in the outside world as a “can–do spirit in Korea.”

Economic aspects were so widely publicized that the movement is often known as a “movement of better living.” But it has far more comprehensive goals and means. Included among the goals and means are not only economic but also political, social and cultural aspects. In what follows we will see the meaning of the movement in each of these aspects.

1) Saemaul Movement in the Political Sense

In the political sense, the Saemaul Movement implies “full devotion to national security.” Full devotion to national security is central to nation building and, in this context, seeks formulation of public opinion, keeping public opinion in accord with national goals, and defense against communist invasion.

To comprehend this concept, it is necessary to understand the nation’s security problems: the Republic of Korea in the South has faced hostile North Korea since the division of Korean peninsula in 1945. To comprehend it even better, recall the Korean War from 1950 to 1953. During the three–year war, more than four million people (including twenty thousand or so UN troops) lost their lives, and ten million or so of people became separated from their families.

With the threat of invasion from the North continuing even after the cease–fire agreement in 1953, the South found it necessary to establish a system of “full devotion to national security.” An urgent need to defend the nation against the communist North and bring peace to the peninsula dictated this policy.

2) Saemaul Movement in the Economic Sense

In the economic sense, Saemaul Movement means “challenge to poverty.” For long, poverty was a fact of life: When Korea launched its First Five–Year Economic Development Plan in 1961, per capita GNP of the nation was only 84 dollars; and when the Saemaul Movement began in 1971, it was still no more than 318 Dollars.

Poverty was considered responsible for people's lack of morale and wide spread laziness. There was an urgent need to turn this around. There also was a strong need to overcome a seasonal problem of hunger: each year during the months of April through June many farm households suffered an extreme shortage of food – these months were called “the barley hump,” referring to the season when rice harvested in the preceding fall was consumed up while new source of food, barley grain, was too early to harvest.

The Saemaul Movement was intended to solve these problems and, in this sense, was a movement toward better living or simply a means to overcome poverty.

The Saemaul Movement as a better-living drive emphasized diversification of income sources of farm households that were largely limited to rice production, and supported the growth of export-oriented industries to increase earnings of urban workers. As a result, the production of main grains(rice and barley) reached self-sufficiency by 1975 and, accordingly, our farm and fishing households were able to escape from the barley hump. This was considered such an overwhelming achievement that the Saemaul Movement became to be identified almost solely as a better-living movement.

3) The Saemaul Movement in the Social Sense

Saemaul Movement as a drive for social development was to reform people's life-style through, among other things, creation of hard-working environments and promotion of healthy life conditions. The reform was undertaken at the family level as a drive to adopt and further expand modern technologies and facilities in daily life. Kitchen renovation into Western styles using modern equipments is an example. At the work place level, the reform meant a drive for reduction in energy consumption. And at the community level, it was a drive to build more public facilities like running water and roads.

4) Saemaul Movement as a Drive for Attitudinal and Cultural Development

The Saemaul Movement was in a sense a movement for spiritual reform of Korean people, and has achieved a lot in this area. The movement has been a success

in that it changed people's attitude from laziness to diligence, from dependence to self-reliance, and from individual selfishness to cooperation with others. The drive toward better cooperation was intended to restore our old tradition of, among other things, "Doo-re" (a form of community savings and sharing union), "Poommasie" (a system of farm-hand sharing among neighbors), and "Hyang-yack" (community codes of ethics and cooperation).

2. Approaches

Saemaul Movement has taken various approaches. Here we will see how it has proceeded in project development, areas of application, leader groups, procedures or methods, and program areas.

In project development, the focus moved from the living environment improvement of rural communities to the growth of incomes of rural families, to reshaping of the appearance of urban areas, to a drive for export increases, and finally to economic development.

In the areas of application, the movement at the beginning focused on rural areas only, and later expanded to urban areas. The focus also shifted from communities to work places and citizen groups.

The movement at the beginning was led by the so-called Saemaul leaders in rural communities. In later phases, women Saemaul leaders took part in leadership, and work place Saemaul leaders were also included there after.

The procedure or methods of program implementation begins with so-called Saemaul education or training and then moves on to implementation of specific programs at community and work place levels, to evaluation of the outcomes, and ends up with feedback of results.

Program areas were divided into nine. There are: rural communities, urban areas, work places, factories, schools, youth, women, Saemaul libraries, and Saemaul credit unions.

3. Characteristics

Main characteristics of Saemaul movement can be summarized as follows.

First, Saemaul Movement is to mobilize human and capital resources at a marginal point. Limited financial resources at the national level would be invested only on large-scale regional development projects; and small-scale community development programs at, e.g., small village or school district levels would be manned and financed in so-called Saemaul ways, i.e., through neighborhood labor and self-raised funds, instead of national tax money.

Second, the expansion of Saemaul Movement both in the area and in the program was led by members of communities and work places. As community members' capacity to run various programs grew, the areas of application expanded from a single community level to multi-community level, to school district level, to economic district(market area) level, and then finally to residential region level.

Third, Saemaul Movement has the characteristic of cooperative efforts for joint development and joint progress. The movement provided a ground for people to look for strong ties with others under the concept of "we," instead of identifying themselves only as "individual self." This attitude spread to the point where people would seek better living together at the national level. Accordingly, community-level development programs expanded from only around "me" to the whole community.

Fourth, the Saemaul Movement has the characteristic of a voluntary reform movement. The movement has been undertaken as a self-reform project of each individual in a community and, at the same time as a social reform project.

Fifth and finally, the Saemaul Movement, needless to repeat, is characterized as a movement to strengthen the nation's abilities in various respects.

III. From "Government-Driven" to "Civilian-Led" Movement

In the history of Saemaul Movement, there once was raised a controversy over who should play the leading role. This question, however, disappeared at the turn of the 1980s when the government-driven Saemaul Movement was spontaneously shifted to a Civilian-led Saemaul.

1. Controversies over Leadership : Government or Civilian

The Saemaul Movement, in the early stage, called a movement toward "improvement of living environment," included such programs as supplying 200 cement bags, one M/T of steel rod per village, and educating community residents for spiritual reform. These programs were supervised and controlled by local governments. This, in turn, led people to believe that the Saemaul Movement is led by the government. In addition, the following factors led people to misconstrue that Saemaul was exclusively managed by the government.

First, it was the nation's president himself who initiated the Saemaul Movement.

Second, the late president Park Jung-Hee publicly announced the Saemaul Movement as the leading national agenda for nation building and economic development.

Third, the government has invested into this movement virtually every resource – human and capital – available beyond what was necessary for national economic development.

Fourth, most government employees, including ministers, were required to serve in the Saemaul Movement as active change agents.

Fifth, the performance in the Saemaul Movement was used as an important evaluation standard for local government administrators.

All these factors, as I mentioned earlier, led people to believe that the Saemaul Movement was supervised and controlled by the government. Yet, we need to know that the people, and not the government, played the key role in the Saemaul Movement from the beginning. Although the government took the leadership and provided support for the movement, government worked mainly as motivators of villagers' diligence, self-help and cooperation.

Accordingly, as the Saemaul Movement saw remarkable accomplishments in fostering people's self-reliance capacity and skills, it became an entirely civilian-led and managed movement in the eighties.

The following explains why and how this occurred.

First, people's capacity for self-reliance was enhanced. What made this possible was the people's strenuous efforts, and education and training. And, as a result, they finally acquired a feeling of self-confidence. In addition, leveled-up intellectual thinking, growth in income, improvement in technology, enhanced management capacity insured. All these contributed to tablishing solid foundations for the civilian-led Saemaul Movement.

Second, we can point out that the Saemaul Movement was necessary in the 1980s for various reasons. At its early stage, the Saemaul Movement's prime motto was "to have a better life". The long cherished desire for wiping out poverty required a strong and powerful driving force for providing motivation and stimulus. This role was naturally assumed by the government.

However, such a government centered approach was changed entering into the 1980s. Here's why. The Saemaul Movement faced a limitation, as people's needs did not lie solely in increasing incomes. As incomes and living standards rose and industrial development advanced, people's demand for welfare and cultural activities was rather strongly expressed. In other words, improvement in living conditions - income wide - was no longer the sole motivator for the Saemaul Movement. The movement was required to more positively respond to this change in people's demand. Consequently, there was a need to diversify the movement's goals and approaches and promote appropriateness and flexibility based on village's potentiality. In this process, people's voluntary participation and their active role in operating the Saemaul Movement were manifested.

Third, the managerial capacity of the civilian sector was greatly enhanced. At the beginning, the Saemaul Movement did not have a key person who would serve as a focal point, nor any organization which would promote the movement. With ten years passed since its inception, Saemaul had produced an enormous number of leaders who had will and commitment to the cause of Saemaul. These people were well trained, coming from various quarters of Korean society.

2. Organization Structure of Civilian—Led Saemaul Movement

The Civilian—led organization structure of Saemaul movement, formed originally in 1980, has undergone several changes, before it reached the present organizational form. The following explains the current structure.

1) National Center of Saemaul Movement and Its Affiliates.

〈Figure 1〉 in the next page shows central administration and nation—wide organizations.

2) Local Community Organization

There are two types of organizations through which the people of a given community can express their interests and needs.

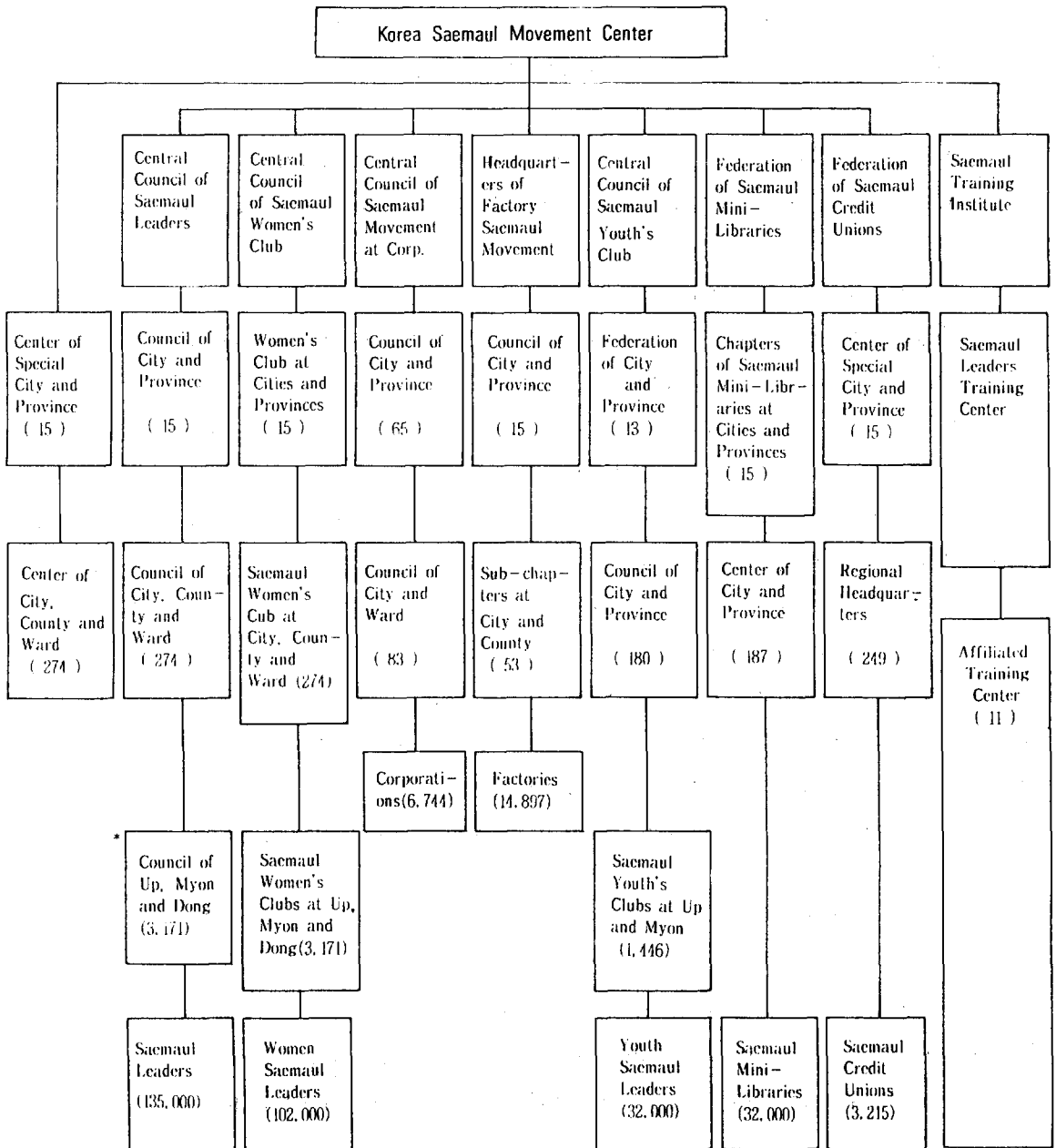
① The first type of organization includes such gatherings as general meetings and neighborhood meetings in which all members of the region can take part. General meetings (one per village) and neighborhood meetings (one per 20~25 families) represent the main groupings of people who wish to be directly involved in the activities of the region. As such, these meetings serve as the core of the Saemaul Movement.

② The second type of organization includes such entities as the Council of Saemaul Leaders and the Council of Saemaul Women's Clubs. These entities provide the framework for an indirect, representative form of involvement in community activities. The ostensible purpose for these organizations is to foster cooperation and support among neighbors through the open exchange of ideas and opinions.

IV. Resident Participation

In principle, the diverse Saemaul Movement projects were worked out via resident participation at all program stages, i.e., in planning, implementation, evaluation, and feedback. Either "unanimity" or "majority" was the rule for decision—making.

<Figure 1>



* The smallest units of local administration are Up, Myon, Dong.

1. Patterns of Participation in Town—Projects

1) Planning Stage

Decided in the residents' general meeting are the projects to be undertaken, the scope and term of the projects, cost-sharing, and ways to mobilize labor. Since the costs and benefits accrued from the projects are fairly shared among the participants, the decision-making processes flow smoothly without severe confrontations.

2) Implementation Stage

Participation of all residents continue at the implementation stage. For projects that need professional skills(e. g. , civil engineering and architectural skills), the skill-holders contribute their skills, while other residents pay the costs for implementing the projects.

3) Evaluation Stage

Once the implementation of projects is completed, either the resident representatives from each participatory unit or all residents take part in assessing the procedures of implementation by each participatory unit, and in settling the accounts.

4) Feedback Stage

Information & data obtained from project evaluation are used in two ways. First, they are directly reflected into successive projects. Second, stored in archives, these are utilized for future reference.

2. The Effects of Resident Participation

Resident participation in carrying out each project has promoted participatory consciousness. Discussion sessions in the participatory process have enabled participants to learn the methods of democratic decision-making. In addition, the participation has provided the residents with opportunities to learn valuable skills like civil engineering, architecture, and production of highly-profitable agricultural products. Due

to this, the level of skills held by all residents have been enhanced to a great degree. Most importantly, the resident participation has functioned as a training course for democracy, fulfilling democratic civic consciousness into daily life.

3. Strategies to Encourage More Participation

In spite of these positive effects, it has been recently pointed out that the extent to which residents are concerned with, and participate in the Saemaul Movement has declined. According to this view, this was caused by two factors: (1) increases in per capita income led by rapid industrialization during the 1980s; (2) the pursuit of political democratization.

Considering the positive effects of resident participation, in part, it should be a valid claim that we need some kinds of strategies to encourage more resident participation. We may consider the following as alternative strategies for vitalizing resident participation:

First, resident consciousness of self-reliance and self-determination must be reinforced. The key actors in developing local community through the Saemaul Movement are the residents themselves. Therefore, the success of the Movement relies heavily upon the development of the consciousness of self-reliance and self-determination, and a sense of self-confidence.

Second, the initiative for Saemaul Movement projects must be given to the private sector; and programs must be guided systematically by mid and long term plans. Thus far, government aid has been crucial for Saemaul projects. Such a government-centered approach reveals two kinds of problems: only short term projects are carried out; and problems are dealt with in an instant way. This approach should be abandoned. Each village or cooperative region must have a long term, comprehensive plan that goes along with national plans. Mid and short term plans must be made and carried out based on these long term comprehensive plans. Investment decisions of available resources also must be made in accordance with these long term plans. Note that the long term plans for the Saemaul Movement are a sub-set of the Basic Urban Plan and the National Land Development Plan. Thus, implementation of the

long term plans for the Saemaul Movement should be closely linked with these broader plans.

Third, government should continuously foster participation of organizations in Saemaul Movement. And the reason is that privatization of Saemaul Movement does not mean a complete separation from the government. It means a division of labor between the government and the private sector. Government may provide directions and basic principles in a flexible way, and support private organizations. Private organizations should turn the ideals of Saemaul Movement into reality and carry out specific projects and activities suitable to each program area.

Fourth, the success of a civilian-led Saemaul Movement depends on whether competent leaders can be continuously recruited. Competent leaders are those who can integrate residents' will and endeavors into a unified force for persistent promotion of Saemaul projects. These leaders can play a key role in transforming the Saemaul Movement into consensus based, self-determined activities of the residents, by the residents, and for the residents. For continuous acquisition of competent leaders, there must be efforts to strengthen education for current Saemaul leaders, develop effective devices for motivating them via enlargement of their roles and enhancing their autonomy. There also must be efforts to actively search for promising future leaders as well as solid programs to foster and support them.

V. Conclusion : Saemaul Movement as a Basis of Local Autonomy

The Saemaul Movement has been the most successful crusade for regional development strategies that the Korean people has ever pursued nationally.

The Saemaul Movement, as it was originally intended, enabled Korea to achieve the goals of nation building and economic development. Therefore, it seems fair to say that Korea's present status as a model of economic development can be credited, to a large extent, to the success of the Saemaul Movement.

Further, the privatization of the Saemaul Movement in the 1980s and in the years that followed has enhanced resident participation in regional and social development programs. Democratic decision making and cooperative implementation, acquired

in the process of selecting and carrying out specific Saemaul programs, played a decisive role in raising democratic citizenship.

These results, in turn, promoted decentralization. This is true in two respects.

First, privatization of the Saemaul Movement provided a ground for local autonomy, as it nourished residents' self-regulatory abilities. If local autonomy is expected to improve the welfare of the people in the region and achieve regional development, the policy making scheme should follow a bottom up approach and programs should be selected based on resident preference. From this perspective, the civilian-led Saemaul Movement is considered to have fulfilled the necessary condition for local autonomy.

Second, the transfer of the Movement's initiatives from government to private hands promoted decentralization of government authority by encouraging civilian participation in the projects that were previously sponsored by governments. Therefore, it is desirable that government support and direction for regional programs be limited to administrative, financial and technical matters, directed to the promotion of purity and creativity of private initiatives. From this point of view, the Saemaul Movement led by the private sector is expected to fulfill the sufficient condition for preservation of local autonomy.

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