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## **Korea's SaemaulUndong: Modules of Rural Development for India**

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### **Abstract**

India has been emerging as one of the fastest growing countries for the last two decades. The world has witnessed its dynamic growth in numerous facades. However, most of the development is urban-centric, widening the gap between rural and urban areas. The recent COVID19 pandemic has further exposed the rural-urban divide, sometime as lack of resources in rural area and sometime as migrant labor crisis. In a country like India, wherein, 69 percent of the population still lives in rural areas, and a large portion of the population is still dependent on agrarian economy, the government needs to focus on rural development programs. In recent times, the government has initiated various rural development programs. The policymakers are looking for exemplary development models that have succeeded. In this light, the SaemaulUndong (hereafter SMU) of South Korea can provide modules of rural development for developing country like India. SMU was introduced to bridge the urban and rural gap that had widen due to the rapid industrialization of the South Korea. SMU helped Korea in narrowing the rural-urban division by implementing various community-driven development (hereafter CDD) programs based on 'Saemaul Spirit,' i.e., diligence, self-help, and cooperation. SMU encouraged the rural population to participate actively in building their communities. It improved the lifestyle and raised the income of the rural population in a very short period.

This paper will discuss South Korea's new village movement and will attempt to trace out possible modules that can be beneficial CDD programs for rural development in India.

**Key Words:** SaemaulUndong, Rural development, South Korea, India.

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## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary era, India has ranked third in terms of GDP (PPP) and sixth in terms of nominal GDP<sup>1</sup>. The GDP growth rate has constantly been high compared to other developing countries of the world, and certainly, it is necessary for developing countries to have a high GDP growth rate. However, only a high growth rate is not enough for socio-economic development. The distribution and generation of GDP across regions and sectors are also important. In India, the service sectors contribute maximum to GDP whereas least by agriculture and allied-services but 50% of the labor force is still dependent on agriculture, and nearly 70% of the population resides in rural areas. This issue of concern has already drawn the attention of government and policymakers, but then again the situation does not seem to be changing. Rural India lags far behind than urban in almost every aspect of development like health, infrastructure, education, etc.

This triggers the need to look into some of the successful rural development policies that have been successful in other corners of the world. SMU was one among them, in this CDD program was introduced by the South Korean government in the 1970s to develop the rural areas that lagged far behind during the industrialization phase of South Korea. It is one of the best examples of cooperation between bureaucracy, government, and citizens. This helped South Korea in improving the lifestyle of rural areas and raised the income of people living there. Many developing countries of the world that face the similar problems of the rural-urban divide, particularly countries in Africa and Asia have adopted this model and have been successful in achieving their goals. In the year 2008, UN Economic Commission for Africa decided to adopt SMU as a model for its Sustainable Modernization of Agriculture and Rural Transformation.<sup>2</sup>

This paper will also look into SMU and will try to analyze the possibility of similar CDD programs for rural development in India.

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank

<sup>2</sup>Park, S. (2014, October 23). *What 'Clean India' Can Learn from South Korea's New Village Movement*. Retrieved 31, `2019, from The Diplomat: <https://thediplomat.com/2014/10/what-clean-india-can-learn-from-south-koreas-new-village-movement/>



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## 2. Korea's Saemaul Undong

As soon as the power of South Korea in the hands of Park Chung Hee, he adopted the policy of rapid industrialization for the economic growth of South Korea. This raised the overall national income of South Korea, but at the same time, it also created a huge gap between the rural and urban sector. The agrarian and traditional economic institutions were not able to compete with industrial development. The growth in the agricultural sector was 2.8 % compared to 14.5 % of the non-agricultural sector. There was a steady flight of population towards urban areas to work in industries. The exodus of population causes the displacement of rural communities from agricultural and their traditional occupation forcing them to be at the margins of the society, swelling a large number of urban and rural poor. This may also result in a loss of traditional skills and culture. The lifestyle was not only deteriorating in rural areas but also of the population that migrated from rural areas to urban areas. This raised the need to introduce the rural centric development programs and therefore, SMU was introduced in 1971.<sup>3</sup>

The SMU of South Korea was facilitated by egalitarian rural area, high literacy rate, socially integrated rural communities, strong agriculture support institutions, etc.

SMU formulated four defined objectives:

- Modernizing infrastructure
- Raising household incomes
- Reforesting mountains
- Improving the overall rural environment<sup>4</sup>

To achieve their goals, policies of SMUs were designed in consultation with the local authorities. SMU financial institutions were established to finance the rural population. The government rewarded the villages that performed better under SMU programs and bureaucrats were also mobilized to participate in this movement. The government focused on the bottom to top command and control method to ensure effective developments.

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<sup>3</sup>Kim, D. K. (2012). The SameulUndong Movement in Republic of Korea: Sharing Knowledge on Community driven development. Manila: Asian Development Bank.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid



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Communities those who had a comparative advantage in producing certain products were introduced to formal training and technology. Role of women was elevated by introducing parallel leadership program where it was mandatory to elect a female leader for Saemaul leadership training programs. The government also played a major role in mobilizing bureaucracy to engage with rural population for development policies.<sup>5</sup>

Government of South Korea promoted SMU in three different stages. In the stage, my main focus was given on building and developing infrastructure like roads, irrigation facility, etc. In stage II focuses shifted to enhance the productivity of farmlands and raising household incomes. The government also introduced a leadership and training program in the second stage. Finally in stage III government focused on expanding SMU. It also focused on establishing Saemaul factories that would help in the creation of non-farm employment.<sup>6</sup>

SMU helped South Korea in raising the average farm household income by eight times from 1970 to 1979. The productivity of lands also increased from 3.1 metric tons in 1965-71 to 4.0 metric tons in 1972-78. South Korea also witnessed a decline in the rate of absolute poverty from 27.0% in 1970 to 9.0 % in 1980.<sup>7</sup>

South Korea's Saemaul experience can be summarized in words of Sooyoung Park, "SMU was a movement to develop the work ethics of farmer by participating in village projects to accelerate rural modernization."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Reed, E. P. (2010). Is SaemaulUndong a Model for developing Countries Today? International Symposium in Commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of SaemaulUndong. The Korea SaemaulUndong Center.

<sup>6</sup> Kim, D. K. (2012). *The SameulUndong Movement in Republic of Korea : Sharing Knowledge on Community driven development*. Manila: Asian Development Bank.

<sup>7</sup> Han, D. H. (2013). SaemaulUndong(New Community Movement): Korea's National Community Development for Rural Modernization. *KDI School*.

<sup>8</sup> Abafita, J., Mitiku, F., & Kim, K. R. (2013, 09 30). Korea's SameulUndong (New Village Movement): A model for rural development in Ethiopia? *Journal of the Korean Society of International Agriculture*. 25, 217-230.



### 3. Saemaul Undong in India

#### 3.1 India's Rural Condition

Before tracing out the possibilities of copying SMU, it is necessary to understand the rural conditions of India and the issues that need to be addressed. Although India is growing with a high economic growth rate yet the benefits of growth is not uniform across India. Mahatma Gandhi's words, "The soul of India lives in the village"<sup>9</sup> can still be found relevant after seven decades of independence. Almost 68% of India still lives in rural areas. However, most of the policies are Urban centric this has widened the gap between rural and urban India has increased and gave birth to the debate of India v/s Bharat. The policymakers have been debating over this Rural-Urban divide, but a gap still seems to be widening day by day. Rural India lags far behind Urban India in almost all important socio-economic indicators. (Look table 1)

**Table 1**

Indicators	Rural India	Urban India
Population	68%	32%
Literacy levels	67.8 %	84.1 %
Net attendance		
i) Primary	71.2 %	73.8 %
ii) Secondary	47.2 %	60.5 %
Poverty	25.7%	13.7 %

Sources: Census 2011, Mukunthan, A. (2015, December 5). *Rural India is far Behind Urban India in every Indicator of Progress*,

<sup>9</sup>Mukunthan, A. (2015, December 5). Rural India is far Behind Urban India in every Indicator of Progress. Retrieved 2 2019, 28, from factly.in: <http://factly.in/rural-india-is-far-behind-urban-india-in-every-indicator-of-progress>



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The major reason behind this rural-urban divide is the dependence of the rural economy on the agricultural economy. The faster growth in urban areas and segmentation of the job market through skills has widened the rural-urban growth. Moreover, the productivity in India agriculture sector is much lower than that of the average productivity of the world. The major issues of rural developments are:

- Infrastructure

In recent few years, the government has worked for basic infrastructure developments like providing electricity, building roads, etc. in rural areas. However, it cannot be denied that development is uneven. India is yet to provide the infrastructure that will support their farmers. Like establishing cold storage in most of the rural areas, lack of cold storages leads to massive post-harvest losses, estimated at INR 92,561crore annually. India also needs a separate feeder of electricity supply for agricultural and household use. The maintenance of roads is also an issue of concern.<sup>10</sup>

- Size holdings of lands

In India, where a large portion of labor is dependent on agriculture, uneven distribution of land becomes a constraint in raising the productivity of land. One side there are farmers with small land holdings whose land size is so small that neither they can use advanced technologies to raise their productivity nor can they have enough capital to invest in agriculture, thus increasing the risk of debt. On the other side, there are large land owners, who own acres of lands and most of the landless laborers work on very low wages.

- Flaws in Panchayati Raj

India has local self-government in rural areas and is known as Panchayat. However, there are certain drawbacks in current Panchayati Raj system. Panchayats are yet to be the real institutions of governance in rural areas. The functions and power of panchayats have been affected due to sharing power with bureaucrats and politicians.

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<sup>10</sup>NITI Aayog. (2018). *'Strategy for New India @ 75'*. New Delhi: NITI Aayog.



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Moreover, Panchayats of some states till date remains deprived of funds for their functioning due to 29 items of work under the enabling provisions.<sup>11</sup>

### **3.2 Scope of Improvement**

The policymakers have argued that industrial growth of urban areas will gradually percolate down to rural. However, in a vast country like ours, we cannot wait for urban growth until it expands to reach rural India. We have discussed India's rural condition and observed that it is calling for structural transformation and effective policies to transform villages. The government needs to focus on almost all the facets of developments like infrastructure, education, health, etc. Modernization of agriculture through sustainable R&D is the need of the hour for better productivity of farms that will further raise their income level. Besides agriculture, the government also needs to focus on creating other employment opportunities that might bring a halt to migration towards cities. India needs to understand the development as bottom to top command and control mechanism of governance. Subsequently, policy makers also have to believe that development should be a natural process rather than sticking to target and schedules and finally, the decentralization of power and resources is must-must to achieve success.

In this context, SMU becomes an important model to be studied and understood to gain knowledge and experience to implement CDD programs in India. Even Goldman Sachs argued in his "How India can be next Korea" that, "India could and should adopt the Korean model considering there is a remarkable resemblance between the current India and South Korean economy of the 1970s".<sup>12</sup>

### **3.3 Modules of Rural Development for India**

Carrying forward my discussion and analysis, I shall argue that India is in dire need of rural centric development policies, SMU cannot be implemented directly to India; however, we can learn a lot from it. Similar to SMU India need to initiate government-

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<sup>11</sup> Singh, S. P. (2010). Emerging Issues in Indian Rural Economy. *Kurukshetra*, 3-6.

<sup>12</sup>Park, S. (2014, October 23). *What 'Clean India' Can Learn from South Korea's New Village Movement?* Retrieved 3 31, `2019, from The Diplomat: <https://thediplomat.com/2014/10/what-clean-india-can-learn-from-south-koreas-new-village-movement/>





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sponsored community-driven development (CDD hereafter), model. Observing India's vastness and diversity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I believe that CDD in India must be a provincial government's initiative as they are better aware of rural requirements of their province. A down-top approach of command and control is desired for successful CDD projects. The basic Idea that can be drawn from SMU is to involve the rural population in the formation of rural development programs and make them a stakeholder and experts and bureaucrats must be only responsible for facilitating the policies. Government must give autonomy to local bodies, and at the same time, the government also has to focus on parallel male and female leadership programs. The leaders elected in Panchayat election should also get training on governance and development. Besides this, the government also has to monitor the working and fund usage of local self-government. Rewarding the well-performing village will also be beneficial to motivate other villages to perform better. The investments and reforms in a certain field are must for developing the rural sector.

- Infrastructure development

Learning from SMU, Instead of introducing pan-India infrastructure program government must give authority to local bodies to prioritize infrastructure development in their region. Some might need an infrastructure that would facilitate easy access to the market, and some might need storage houses. Others might need cheap and easily available sources of energy. The many flood-prone villages in Bihar needs Dams more than any other infrastructure projects whereas the rural population, suffering from droughts in Maharashtra needs pipelines, canals, and rainwater harvesting infrastructure providing access to water. Development policies in a particular region must be introduced in consultation with the local authorities of the region, and at the same time, the job of the local authority must be monitored.

- Agricultural Reforms

Problems like lack of irrigation facilities, use of low-quality seeds, low adoption of advanced technology, and lack agriculture-related knowledge. Nearly 53 % of farm lands are deprived of water (although our country receives high rainfall yet it lacks rainwater management practices). These results in low productivity, yields of the

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majority of crops are much lower than the world average. Governments should start focusing on investing more panned way. Learning from SMU, “government should implement marketing and product procurement through pricing mechanisms that create an incentive for production.” Subsequently, to solve the problems of size holding government must introduced policies that encourage the farmers with small land holdings in land pooling to facilitate easy access of advanced technology to enhance their productivity. Alongside, similar to laws protecting the industry and corporate worker from being exploited by big conglomerates, the government must also introduce the laws to safeguard the interest of landless laborer working on farms of feudal.

- Social transformation and Education

Alike SMU the 1<sup>st</sup> motive of CDD in India has to cultivate the spirit of diligence, self-help, and cooperation which will be the essential component required for a successful transformation. Role of women in SMU cannot be denied; hence an effort is required to elevate the position of women even in traditionally patriarchal villages. The idea of no work being menial had to be developed in the minds of villagers such that they willingly take part in SMU programs. The leadership program is another effective way to bring social transformation. Trained democratic leaders of villages will be more effective in making their people understand.

Education has been one of the essential components of development for any society in the world, but we have observed (in table 1) that condition of education in rural India is no match to urban education. Moreover, quality education is limited to children of only to relatively rich families. Access to quality education for marginalized section by improving the public sector educational institution will be helpful in an inclusive rural-development. Besides, the government is also required to set institutions of improving the skills and knowledge of adults of the marginalized section to improve their lifestyle.



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- Employment

The only agricultural transformation will not be enough for raising the incomes in rural sector government also needs to focus on other alternatives. As we observed in the case of SMU, the government also focused on a tightly bound community who lived together and were specialized in producing certain things. In India, we do have a certain community who are more efficient in producing certain things than others. Government should train and enhance their skills and subsidize the technologies that would help them produce more efficiently; this would also help them raise their income. Besides this government should also focus on establishing MSEs and investment of corporate social welfare funds in rural sectors should be encouraged by governments.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

Neither it is advisable nor possible to completely replicate the model of any country to another. However, a country can learn several things from a model that has been successful in another country.

Considering this fact, India can learn several lessons of rural development from South Korea's SMU. It can learn how government mobilized bureaucracy and the rural population for the cause of rural development. The way local leaderships were nurtured can be beneficial for any developing country. Investments in agriculture should be logical like investing in R&D of seeds and fertilizers rather than subsidizing loans of farmers. Another aspect of SMU was elevating the role of women in rural areas becoming one of the most important factors that increased the rural labor force or filling the gap created by the migration of male population to urban areas.

If India needs a policy that can transform its rural condition and help it bridge the rural-urban divide, Korea's SMU experience has several modules for India.



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