

Korean *Saemaul Undong* (New Community Movement) in the 1970s

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Introduction

The *Saemaul Undong*, started in 1970 by Mr. Pak Chong-hui, then the president of South Korea, was initially a development program for the purpose of modernizing rural areas. Three years after its launching, however, it pervaded the whole nation involving urban life, factories, and education. Although its main content was to improve rural life at the beginning, almost all projects in agricultural production and distribution began to use the name “*Saemaul*” one after another.

The reason for such a wide pervasion was because it became a movement to support government policy in the 1970s. The basic policy in those days was to improve heavy industry and to have a “showdown with conversation” with North Korea (the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea), under the restoration system which established a concentration of power in the President according to the constitutional amendment in October 1972.¹

In this paper, I will narrow the theme down to, and examine, the role the *Saemaul Undong* played in the 1970s from the viewpoint of rectifying increasing differentials between urban communities and rural areas in the process of industrialization. The *Saemaul Undong* also involved such operations as the preparation of an agricultural basis and increasing farm household income, which activities were under way before the launching of this program. But it is impossible to keep them distinct from the achievements of the *Saemaul* program. Therefore I will henceforth examine what results the *Saemaul Undong* achieved from the defined

Table 1. Achievements at the Examination Stage

(Unit: 1,000 won)

	Number	Total Amount	Residents' Burden	Subsidy
Afforestation	3,453	185,898	132,019	53,879
Expanding roads	176,643	5,923,201	3,921,391	2,001,810
Bank repairing	12,059	921,752	623,389	298,363
Compost yard	51,793	331,280	213,454	117,826
Reservoir	3,033	208,483	149,823	56,660
Irrigation	1,804	122,556	72,596	49,960
Ditch	24,348	1,110,384	710,615	399,740
Water facilities	65,419	1,722,392	1,134,584	587,808
Common laundry	24,129	681,903	468,332	218,571
Rattrap	7,892	33,212	21,371	11,841
Others	14,754	991,485	669,877	321,609
Total	385,327	12,230,527	8,112,451	4,118,076

Source: *Saemaul White Paper* in 1971 by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

viewpoint of improvement of the living environment and villagers' spiritual enlightenment.

I. The Outline of the *Saemaul Undong*

Initial Achievements

The early stage of the *Saemaul Undong* was carried out under the slogan of "spirit of self-help, independence, and cooperation" for the purpose of making rural people live in abundance. The emphasis on spirit stemmed from the proposer of this program, President Pak Chong-hui, and his image of villagers. To be specific, he had an extremely negative image that Korean peasants lacked enterprising spirit and a will to work, that they were idle, too dependent on others, enervated, and that they drank too much and indulged in betting and gambling and ignorant pursuits.²

At the stage of examination before the busy farming season in 1971, the Korean government supported *mauls* (natural villages) with 4.1 billion won's worth of building materials, to start enterprises necessary to the countryside. As shown in Table 1, such projects totaled up to more than 385,000. As in those days rural *mauls* were about 33,000, about 12 projects per *maul* on average were accomplished. This was an achievement beyond the government's expectation. At the next stage, the government gave support of 1 ton of iron rods and 500 bags of cement to 16,600 selected *mauls*, for each to start the next projects. In selecting those *mauls*, achievement at the stage of examination, the spirit of unity and the people's will, the leader's ability and other factors were said to have been taken into consideration. Thus,

Table 2. Target and Achievements at the End of Third Year

		Target	Past Records Quantity	%	Schedule Quantity	%	Remarks
Roads		km					
	Village Roads	28,663	22,909	80	5,754	20	
	Farm Roads	58,167	38,752	67	19,415	33	
Water Supply	Small Water-Supply System	15,662	5,176	33	10,486	67	
	Sanitary Wells	110,400	39,883	36	70,517	64	
Improvements	Roofs (1,000 houses)	2,075	740	36	1,335	64	
	Houses	439	—	—	439	100	execution from 1976
Brook Improvements		km					
		17,239	1,678	10	15,561	90	
Cultural Facilities	Electrification (1,000 houses)	2,532	1,142	45	1,390	55	
	Inter-Village Telephones	19,478	4,641	24	14,837	76	
Public Facilities	Public Warehouses	28,713	3,084	11	25,629	89	
	Public Baths	30,838	5,603	18	25,285	82	
	Maul Halls	34,665	23,634	68	11,031	32	

Source: *Ishin Kagyo Ichinen no Seika* by Kaigai Kouhou Kan.

President Pak Chong-hui's way was to support further those *mauls* that accomplished projects with a spirit of self-help and independence.

Also according to the progress of life improvement and the will to work, the government ranked all the *mauls* on three grades of "basic, self-help, and independent." Since priority projects and government's support differed by ranking, independent *mauls* were expected to make more progress.

Table 2 shows the target and past records on the completion of the main projects at the end of the third year (October 1973.) The most remarkable accomplishment was road improvements, and the second was the construction of *maul* halls, one of the public facilities, both of which achieved more than 67% of the target. Many of the projects remained at not more than 40%.

Improvement of Roofs and Houses

Among others, the most noticeable typical project of the *Saemaul Undong* was the improvement of roofs and houses. Roofs began to be improved from the beginning of this program and were repaired in 740,000 houses, or 36% against the goal of 2,075,000 houses, as is seen in Table 2. Actual results of roof improvements accomplished by 1978 are shown in Table 3. By changing traditional straw thatched roofs to tile-roofing, slate-roofing, or tin-roofing, the redundant straw was utilized as industrial materials, fuel, fertilizer, and so forth. Moreover, the project aimed at increasing farm household income and protecting the forests and many other effects in addition to just improving the rural living environment. This

Table 3. Results of Improving Roofs

(Unit: 1,000 houses)

Year	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
Results	413	476	401	338	466	494	30
Aggregate		889	1,290	1,628	2,094	2,588	2,618

Source: *A 10-Year History of Saemaul Undong* in 1980 by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Table 4. Results of Improving Houses

(Unit: House, million won)

	Number			Operating Expenses			Villagers' Burden
	Total	Support	Self-Help	Total	Finance	Subsidy	
1976	4,254	4,254	—	5,104	2,552	638	1,914
77	2,991	15,238	27,753	23,802	23,802	3,038	13,513
78	74,366	50,000	24,366	108,750	108,750	5,000*	20,750
79	64,171	35,000	29,171	125,071	125,071	4,000	24,214
Total	185,782	104,492	89,290	262,727	189,660	12,676	60,391
(%)	(100)	(56)	(44)				

Source: Same as Table 3.

project was completed in 1978, well ahead of the schedule, repairing most farm-houses' roofs with improved materials.

Additionally, improvements of houses were begun in the latter half of the 1970s when the *Saemaul Undong* in other fields had already obtained considerable results. The purpose of this movement was to construct cultural houses in rural areas, to build farmers' properties, and thus to narrow the differentials between urban and rural life. According to the results shown in Table 4, more than 180,000 houses were rebuilt in the four years from 1976 to 1979. These included nearly 90,000 houses rebuilt by self-help, while more than 100,000 farmhouses received financing and subsidies. The recipient of those financing and subsidies had to bear 23% of the cost on the average. The ratio of the number of farmhouses rebuilt against the total farmhouses was 8.6% as of 1979.

Project for Improvement in the Community Structure

A rural community, formed naturally over a long history, left much to be desired with respect to roads, draining facilities, and other sanitary arrangements. Therefore the project was planned to improve these fundamental facilities, as well as to arrange the housing sites systematically and rationally. In 1976 this project was launched in ten *mauls* on a trial basis. After reviewing its outcome and revising the plan, a project on improvement in the community structure was executed at 246 points in total, of which 98 points were along expressways and 60 points were

Table 5. Results of Improving *Maul* Structure(Unit: *maul*, million won)

	Number of Improved <i>mauls</i>				Operating Expenses		
	Total	Type A	Type B	Type C	Total	Support	Residents' burden
Total	2,102	420	1,591	91	94,815	42,853	51,962
1976	10	3	4	8	444	242	220
77	247	69	90	88	16,992	8,895	8,097
78	822	84	738	—	29,098	16,643	12,455
79	1,023	264	759	—	48,281	17,073	31,208

Source: Same as Table 3.

in and around main sight-seeing spots in 1977. Table 5 shows the circumstances of the execution up to 1979. Type A shows the communities moved to completely new places. Type B shows totally rearranged *mauls* without moving to different places. Type C shows houses partly rebuilt within a *maul*. The number of *mauls* that improved their structure totaled 2,102 as of 1979, or some 25% of the target of 8,428 *mauls*. The ratio of the residents' burden for this project was 54.8% on the average.

Changes in Rural Society and Villagers' Morale

Though the changes are hard to see from the outside, the followings were pointed out at a very early stage of this program.

As for changes in rural society,

1. Increased conversation between the different generations and classes of villagers.
2. Appearance of young leaders in place of established leaders.
3. Ever-increasing participation of women in public affairs.
4. Strengthened cooperation between the government and the people.

Additionally, viewing from the point of change of villagers' morale, conservative and traditional values were replaced by rational and scientific values. Thus, there are some who say that a villagers' spiritual revolution is taking place.³

In order to enlighten rural people and to educate leaders, the Central *Saemaul* Training Institute and 80 centers of education were established throughout the country. Many *Saemaul* Schools are also run in *mauls*.

II. Promoting Organization of the *Saemaul Undong*

As the *Saemaul Undong* was proposed by the then-president Pak Chong-hui, an administration structure played a great role in promoting the program. With the Ministry of Home Affairs taking the lead, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery and many other ministries were concerned with planning and execution of the

movement. Taking the Ministry of Home Affairs as an example, reorganization took place in January 1973 so as to establish three sections of *Saemaul* Planning, *Saemaul* Instruction, and *Saemaul* Housing, under a *Saemaul* manager at the Rural Administration Bureau. Necessary reorganization was executed at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Ministry of Education, so as to establish a new section in charge of the *Saemaul*-related matters and to appoint an officer in charge.

In rural administration structure, a *Saemaul* guidance section was established in each special city and province, and there were *Saemaul* sections in cities, counties and wards by 1973. Moreover in 1975, a county vice-headman was appointed in each county to strengthen the function of the *Saemaul Undong*. In addition to the above-stated system that was a part of the central and local administration structure, a promotional and cooperative structure on a large scale was organized, as can be seen in Figure 1.

III. Conclusion

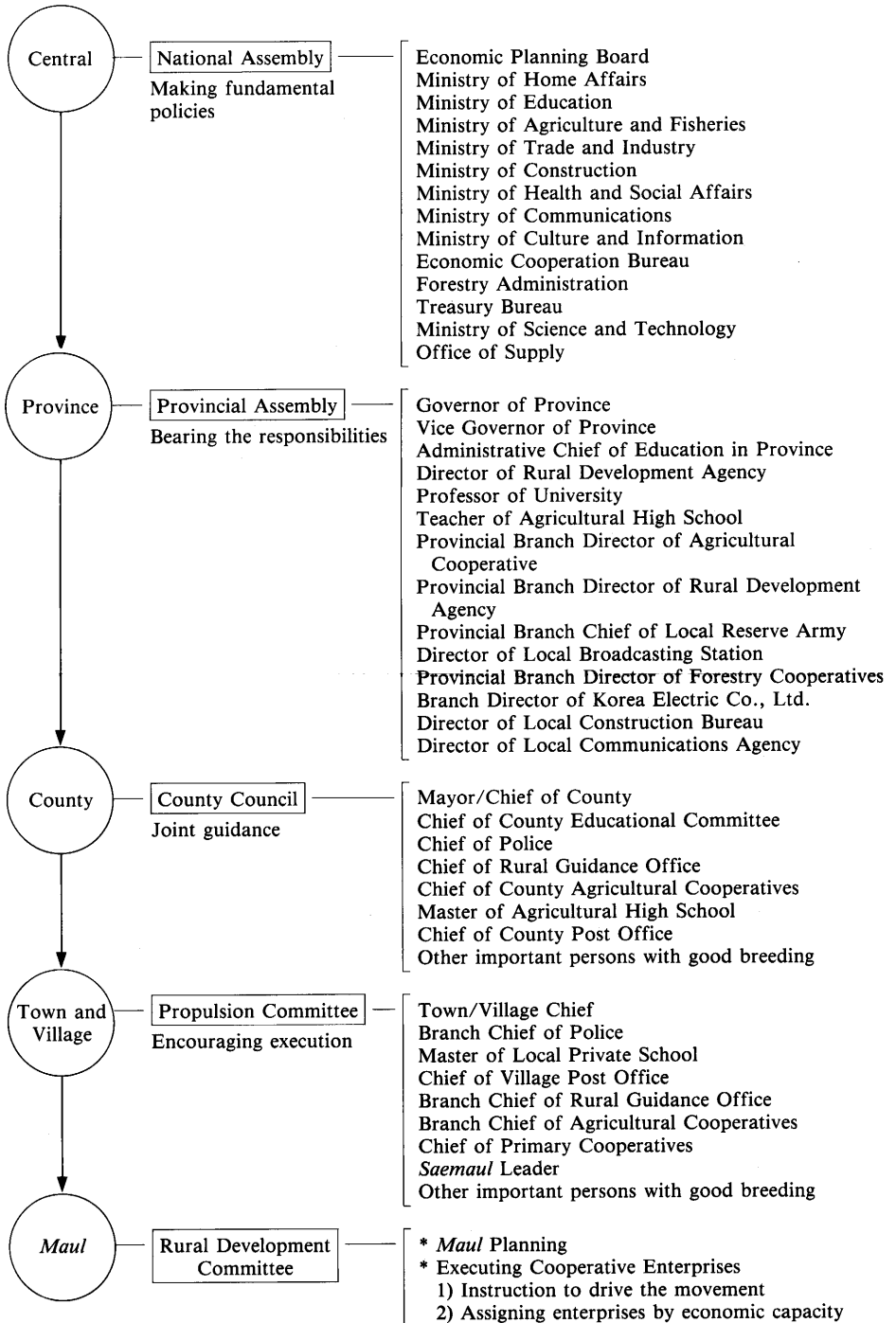
In considering the diverse phases in the *Saemaul Undong* executed in rural areas, its evaluation may not be easy. Therefore, at this time I will make a tentative evaluation of the *Saemaul Undong* in villages in the 1970s. The criteria of the evaluation will be the initial goal of this program "to set the peasants to improve their living environment, which will be changing their morale and to build rural areas where they live comfortably, mainly by themselves."

The existence of differentials between urban and rural areas in culture, education, medical treatment, traffic, and communications are a general subject in most countries. Especially, as is generally known, the Korean earning differential between urban workers and farmers in the late 1960s was a serious problem awaiting a solution. During the Second Five-Year Economic Development Plan, from 1967 to 1971, 200,000 people moved from rural areas into urban areas annually. The *Saemaul Undong* program was launched amid this situation.

As seen above, improvements of roofs, construction of roads, brook improvement, and making public facilities were completed in most of the *mauls*. Though small in number, big projects such as house improvement and reorganization of villages were also executed. Thanks to these projects, the appearance of Korean rural areas, with a history of several centuries, has undergone a complete change. The introduction of high yielding varieties of rice and the increase of the government's purchasing price of rice also contributed to making the farm household income equivalent to those of urban workers in the mid-1970s. It cannot be denied that these changes had great impact on the morale of villagers together with the effects of the *Saemaul* education.

In Korea many people talk about the success of the *Saemaul Undong*, which has attracted developing countries' attention as a successful example of rural development program.

Figure 1. Propulsion and Cooperative Organizations of *Saemaul Undong*



Source: 1973 *An all-round Guide for Saemaul Undong* by the Central Committee of *Saemaul Undong*.

Passing through the 1980s, however, when we review it from the present standpoint, it must be recognized that the *Saemaul Undong* in rural communities in 1970s had some serious limitations against the initial objectives.

For one thing, farm household debt has steeply increased since the beginning of 1980s. Secondly, Korean peasants are so anxious about their uncertain future, especially because of the Uruguay Round which is about to come to a conclusion. Although an increase in exports of industrial products caused strong requests from other countries to open the market, including agricultural products, in the latter half of 1980s, the basis of agricultural production still has to be greatly improved. In reality, the present state of Korean rural areas and the peasants must be defined as being far from the slogan of the *Saemaul Undong*, "construct a comfortable rural areas with villagers' diligence, self-help, and cooperation."

For all that, I have no alternative proposal in detail as to what should have been done as a rural development program. Also I have never heard of a rural development program more successful than the Korean *Saemaul Undong*. Consequently, despite the limitations of the *Saemaul Undong*, we have to attach more importance to the difficulty in solving the agricultural problems in the process of industrialization of a developing country after the World War II, which still remains our common unsolved problem.

NOTES

1. Among a variety of studies and evaluations on *Saemaul Undong*, this analysis is based on the following: Ministry of Home Affairs, *Saemaul White Paper*, 1971. Ministry of Culture and Information, *Results of Saemaul Undong in 1972*, 1972. Central Committee of *Saemaul Undong*, *1973 An All-round Guide for of Saemaul Undong*, 1973. Ministry of Home Affairs, *A 10-Year History of Saemaul Undong*, 1980, and others.
2. This is based on: *Will for Self-reliance — Word Collection of President Pak Jeong Heui*, Seoul, 1972; Press Interview with President Pak Jeong Heui — 1. 8. 1974, and others.
3. This is based on: Ministry of Culture and Information, *Results of Saemaul Undong in 1972*, 1972. Central Committee of Agricultural Cooperatives, *Agricultural Yearbook*, 1973. Other references are: Takao Taniura, "Rural Development Policies in ROK in the 1970s: With Special Reference to the Saemaul Movement," *Asia Keizai*, October 1980. Sadatoshi Mabuchi, "Saemaul Undon in the 1970s and Korean Agriculture," *Kiyo*, Vol. 35, December 1983. Wang, In Keun, *Modern Sociology of Agricultural*, Seoul, Bakyong-sa, 1983. Do Hyeon Han, *Peasant Control by National Authority and Mobilizing Policy With Special Reference to the Saemaul Undong*, Seoul, 1989. Wang, In Keun, *SAEMAUL UNDONG as A Korean — Version Rural Development Program and Approach*, Modified version of a paper presented at the XVI Pacific Science Congress, Seoul, Korea August 20–30, 1987.