

WAYS FORWARD TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF BANGLADESH: LESSON FROM SOUTH KOREAN SAEMAUL UNDONG MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Modern Korean development stands on the movement of Saemaul Undong. It is the key approach that was responsible for prompt and sustainable rural development in Korea. The main spirits of the saemaul Undong are identified as the diligence, self-help and cooperation. Under this approach, resources are mobilized through community participation with strong government support and sponsorship to motivate, participate and change attitudes and awareness for the rural development. In order to formulate relevant and effective rural development policy in Bangladesh, this study sets its objectives as to evaluate Saemaul Undong Movement with respect to Bangladesh, compare between the Saemaul Undong Movement of South Korea and Sonirvor Andolon of Bangladesh and develop an approach for the management strategy of the Sonirvor Andolon. To fulfill the research objectives, this study depends upon the literature survey for detection of facts, findings and success of Saemaul Undong and tries to identify the major differences between the Saemaul Undong and Bangladeshi Sonirvor Andolon. Based on the successful performance of Saemaul Undong in Korea, the study suggests that strong political commitment from political leaders, more support for better performed villages through proper evaluation of village performance, equal importance on urban, rural and agricultural sectors and categorization of the villages as the basis village, self-help village and self-reliant village are the important attributive factors for formulation of relevant rural development policy in Bangladesh and others similar countries. The findings of the study will help to achieve the main goals of SDGs in Bangladesh. The study also provides a robust basis for policy makers, planners, researchers, and development partners for further research, project implementation in the rural areas and developing specified policies.

Keywords: Saemaul Undong, Sonirvor Andolon, South Korea, Ruraldevelopment, Bangladesh, JEL Classification: D61, N45, P25, R11, R58

INTRODUCTION

Colonized under Japan during the years 1910-1945, separated into two Koreas in 1948 and Korean War in 1950 destroyed almost everything and therefore, South Korean people had to start from the ashes (Whan, 2014). Hunger, poverty, idleness, gambling, desperate for the future, depended on outside help, isolation from international market, alcohol drinking, low agricultural productivity, and lack of energy were the common socio-economic features in this country. Rural situation was mostly worsening in the South Korea. Gross National Product (GNP) per capita was estimated at only US\$87 in 1962. Rural poverty ratio was estimated 34% in absolute term in 1967 (Whan, 2014). As a consequence, South Korea was treated as the basket cases in Asia.

Before 1970, South Korea gave importance on industrial sector and its benefits directly went to urban cities. In that perspective, a paradigm shift was essential by the government for balance, stable, and steady growth. Since 1970, government has turned its attention towards balanced growth between urban cities and rural communities and within a decade managed to

develop rural community conditions to match those of the cities (Park, 2009). Thus, the government decided to introduce Saemaul Undong (SU) movement for the reduction of the gap of benefits and disparity between the urban and rural. SU Movement worked as a built-in stabilizer and embodied the balance growth between the city and village which further leads to transforming rural communities from worse to prosperous position. Now, South Korea has overcome poverty and achieved rapid development. In the 2000s, South Korea was declared one of the leading advanced industrialized countries in the world (UN, 2007; Nielsen, 2011). It got membership in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) at 1996 (OECD, 1999). Table 1 shows the upward trends of macroeconomic indicators of the South Korea for the different decades.

Table 1. Major economic indicators in the South Korea

| Indicator | 1960 | 1970 | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 |
|-------------------------|------|------|-------|--------|--------|
| GDP growth | 2.3 | 10.0 | 9.5 | 8.5 | 6.2 |
| GDP/capita | 85 | 250 | 5,210 | 10,841 | 20,753 |
| Investment ratio to GDP | 11.6 | 26.3 | 37.1 | 28.8 | 29.2 |
| Saving ratio to GDP | 5.0 | 14.8 | 36.2 | 32.3 | 32.0 |
| Population growth rate | 2.9 | 1.9 | 1.0 | 0.8 | 0.46 |
| Export (billion US\$) | 0.03 | 0.84 | 65.0 | 172.3 | 466.4 |
| Import (billion US\$) | 0.34 | 1.98 | 69.8 | 160.5 | 425.2 |

Source: Whan, 2014

South Korea gave a lot of emphasis on its industrial sector that lead to enhance its trade volume. In 2012, South Korea produced the 7th World Trade Volume (WTO, 2012). At the same time, it puts equal importance to develop its rural and agricultural sector. Thus, joint development of agricultural and industrial sectors of South Korea paved the way for its solid foundation of a robust and sustained economic growth for decades starting from the 1970s. Today, South Korean, urban and rural areas enjoy one of the highest standards of living in Asia.

The findings of this study ensure to achieve the main goals (e.g., no poverty, no hunger, human well-being, quality education, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities) of SDGs in Bangladesh. Government of Bangladesh (GoB) gets relevant policy options from the study as GoB is obligated to ensure the well-being of its citizens especially for the village people. It is expected that VII Five Years Plan of Bangladesh will get important facts and findings to formulate rural policy of Bangladesh. The study also provides a robust basis for policy makers, planners, researchers, and development partners for further research, project implementation in the rural areas, and development of specified policies. The findings of the study are also helpful for similar countries to construct rural policy. The study generates cutting edge knowledge on the rural based issue and its management techniques, answer some unexplored research questions, and reduce research gap on the similar studies.

The general objective of this study attempts to explore the effectiveness of the Saemaul Undong Movement in Bangladesh by literature survey. The specific objectives of the study attempts to evaluate Saemaul Undong Movement with respect to Bangladesh, compare between the Saemaul Undong Movement of South Korea and Sonirvor Andolon of Bangladesh and develop an approach for the management strategy of the Sonirvor Andolon.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 shows the literature review; Section 3 explains the initiation, progress, and result of Saemaul Undong Movement; Section 4 presents the guide lines and building blocks of Saemaul Undong Movement; Section 5 shows the current rural development scenario of Bangladesh along with fact findings and difference between Saemaul Undong Movement and Sonirvor Andolon. Section 6 Based on the overall

assessment, Section 7 will present some applicable lesson learned for Bangladesh and implications of the program for today's development context and section 8 present conclusions and policy directions for Bangladesh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the 1990s, Asian governments are refocusing their urban development policies on (1) mobilizing financial resources for investment in services and infrastructure, (2) improving the efficiency of metropolitan as economic units, (3) investing in secondary cities and towns with growth potential and integrating urban and rural markets, (4) seeking greater participation of the private sector in urban development and (5) decentralizing more administrative and financial responsibilities to local governments in urban areas (Rondinelli, 1991). But in reality, rural issues are not highly focused like urban issues. Rural development remains a major challenge for developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Reed, 2010). 70 percent of the world's poor live in rural areas and most are involved in agricultural activities (World Bank, 2009). There is also new urgency for addressing rural problems generated population pressure on land, water and other resources, threats to the environment, climate change and widening income disparity between rural and urban areas (Reed, 2010). In this perspective, Saemaul Undong plays an important role to boost up the rural development and reduce the gap of income disparities between urban and rural. Success issues of Saemaul Undong can be attributed to its implementation of basic strategies for poverty reduction adapting to and making use of the Korean context-promoting opportunities and facilitating empowerment for rural people (Park, 2009). It is mentioned that homogeneous communities with a strong tradition of cooperation, solid and continuous economic growth, national leadership and strong political commitment, incentive system and cooperation, capacity-building training programs, village level efforts and government leads policies and strategies e.g. holistic approach, vertical integration and horizontal coordination are the key factors of the success of Saemaul Undong. Korean Saemaul Undong model is a classic example of rapid rural development. Other Asian countries adapted this model for further economic growth.

Myanmar is endowed with vast natural resources. However, its performance in terms of economic development in general and agricultural development is particular has not been satisfactory, Myanmar follows Korean experience and provide policy recommendations for Myanmar's future direction. Nepal also adapted this model and got the tremendous success to eradicate poverty and rapid rural development (Lee et al., 2012). Like the Myanmar and Nepal, Vietnam also adapted the model known as Doi Moi. It's a mirror image of Saemaul Undong. There are large numbers of existing peer-reviewed studies focused on Saemaul Undong and rural development in the world wide. But this type of study is the first time in Bangladesh.

SAEMAUL UNDONG MOVEMENT

The Saemaul Undong (SU) is the key important approach that was responsible for prompt and sustainable rural development in South Korea. The literal meaning of the Saemaul Undong is New Village Movement (or "SU movement," as it is often referred to), a classic example of community-driven development (CDD) program based on specific institutional principles and community participation (ADB, 2012; Ha, 2010; So, 2007; Jun, 2006). This movement was started on April 22, 1970 as a rural development campaign (Douglass, 2013). Later on, it spread like wildfire throughout South Korea. President Park Chung-hee was the key player to promote Saemaul Undong Movement in South Korea. He said (INQUIRER.net, 2014, Para 6):

"I am convinced that if we care for our communities with our own hands in a spirit of self-reliance and independence, doing our work by our own sweat, then soon our living standards will improve and we can remodel our communities into neat, attractive places to live."

For establishing and encouraging the Saemaul Undong Movement, he further said (Sopheana, 2014, Para 3):

“The government will support only those who help themselves. This is the only way to eradicate the sense of the dependence and encourage the work ethics. I am willing to risk my presidency with this politically unpopular policy.”

When the Movement was launched, South Korea started its take-off economically and there was no looking back from then on. The main sprits of the Saemaul Undong Movement are identified as the diligence, self-help and cooperation. Under this system, resources were mobilized through community participation with strong government support and sponsorship to motivate, participate and change attitude and awareness for the rural development (Choe, 2005).

In order to build a better and sound community, eradicate poverty, ensure improve livelihood condition and indigenous development in rural areas, Park Government provided small startup subvention for projects (20 to 30 percent of expenditure for village roads, bridges, storage shed, house improvement, community halls, reconstruction, green revolution, training centers for Saemaul leaders, mechanization, agricultural cooperatives and so on. Under this system, villages were classified into three categories: basic, self-help, and self-reliant (Sohn, 2012). Government authorities evaluated each village's performance every year in accordance with predetermined criteria. Each village was in Saemaul competing with neighboring villages. Competition was encouraged by the Government so that all villages can eventually be moved out of 'basic' level.

Many factors can be attributed to the achievements of Saemaul Undong Movement. While some are context-specific circumstances which created a favorable environment for community-based rural development programs others are policies deliberately designed for Saemaul Undong Movement (Looney, 2012). The major executed, stimulated and accelerated factors of SUM include homogeneous communities with strong tradition of cooperation, egalitarian society with land reform, solid and continuous economic growth, national leadership and political commitment or effective authoritarian regime, prohibition of usurious practices, agricultural cooperatives, social integrated rural communities, incentive system and competition, capacity-building training, commitment for education, public relations system, community participation and devotion and commitment of Saemaul leaders (Park, 2009; Sohn, 2012).

SU has tremendous achievements in the different sectors of the South Korean economy. At the initial phase of SU, farm household income increased from about 230 Won in 1970 to 1300 Won in 1979, average rice yields increased from 3.1 metric tons per hectare in the period 1965-71 to 4.0 tons in the period 1972-78, absolute rural poverty decline from 27.9% in 1970 to 10.8% in 1978 and ratio of rural to urban household income increased from 67% in 1970 to 85% in 1979 (Moor, 1985). According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the SU movement improved both individual and community well-being through:

1. Access to modern infrastructure and services brought about through mechanized farming, electrification, improvement in the quality of housing and health services and child care provided by SU nurseries during the planting, cultivation and harvesting seasons;
2. Empowerment of local communities and amassing of social capital;
3. Revitalization of community leadership by permitting younger people to assume leadership roles traditionally held by senior members of society and creation of a status free social context within the traditional rural village setting ;
4. Acceptance of modern roles for women in terms of overall social participation (ADB, 2012).

The improvement through SU leads to create a virtuous circle of human development from vicious circle of poverty. Improved basic infrastructure helped to increase productivity and income with better access and wider opportunities, while also creating a healthier environment with better sanitation (Cruz, 2003). Their experience of cooperation with the Government provided learning-by-doing opportunities for building capacities in project management. It also boosted confidence and changed attitudes which led to the empowerment of people in the villages and transformations in local governance (Park, 2009). For more details see the following table.

Table 2. Achievements of some Saemaul Undong projects in the 1970s

| Project | Unit | Target | Performance | Ratio (Percentage) |
|---|-----------|-----------|-------------|--------------------|
| Village roads expansion | Km | 26,266 | 43,558 | 166 |
| Farm feeder roads construction | Km | 49,167 | 61,797 | 126 |
| Small bridge construction | Ea | 76,749 | 79,516 | 104 |
| Small reservoirs construction | Ea | 10,122 | 10,742 | 106 |
| Traditional small irrigation (channel) | Ea | 22,787 | 28,352 | 124 |
| Traditional small irrigation (raceway) | Km | 4,043 | 4,442 | 109 |
| Traditional small irrigation (embankment) | Km | 17,239 | 9,180 | 53 |
| Village centre construction | Ea | 35,608 | 37,012 | 104 |
| Public warehouse construction | Ea | 34,665 | 22,143 | 64 |
| Housing improvement | Ea | 544,000 | 225,000 | 42 |
| Village layout renovation | Ea | - | 2,747 | - |
| Sewage system upgrade/construction | Ka | 8,654 | 15,559 | 179 |
| Electricity supply system installation | Household | 2,834,000 | 2,777,500 | 98 |
| Telephone lines | - | - | 3,45,240 | - |
| Saemaul factory construction/operation | Ea | 950 | 717 | 75 |
| Reforestation | Ha | 744,354 | 347,153 | 47 |

Source: Choe, 2005; Park, 2009

SU is a transplant-ready model to be replicated in other countries which are linked with national development plan, broadening tax-base, institutional incentive for resource transfer to agricultural sector, land ownership through land reform etc. It also developed partnership capacity between local government and community people and was able to establish democracy in grassroots and local government levels. Due to the positive contributions of SU i.e., significant improvement of economic and living environmental condition in rural area and consciousness and attitude changes of rural people and community participatory governance (CPG) has been achieved. The success of Korean SU movement has already become global model and countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Rwanda and Bolivia are incorporating SU Movement in their village.

APPROACH TO SAEMAUL UNDONG MOVEMENT

The SU was guided by some strategies e.g., village community as development unit, government initiating bottom-up approach, integrated approach, comprehensive approach, more support for the better performance and mutual learning.

Under the village community as development unit approach all villagers worked for common interest through social interaction and commonalities. This approach has two building blocks namely, administrative unit and planning and development unit. Administrative unit and planning and development coordinated and monitored each other activity when necessary.

Bottom-up, integrated (vertical integration) and comprehensive approaches of SU were circulated, activated, controlled and supported by the government and other specific directions which are depicted as follows:

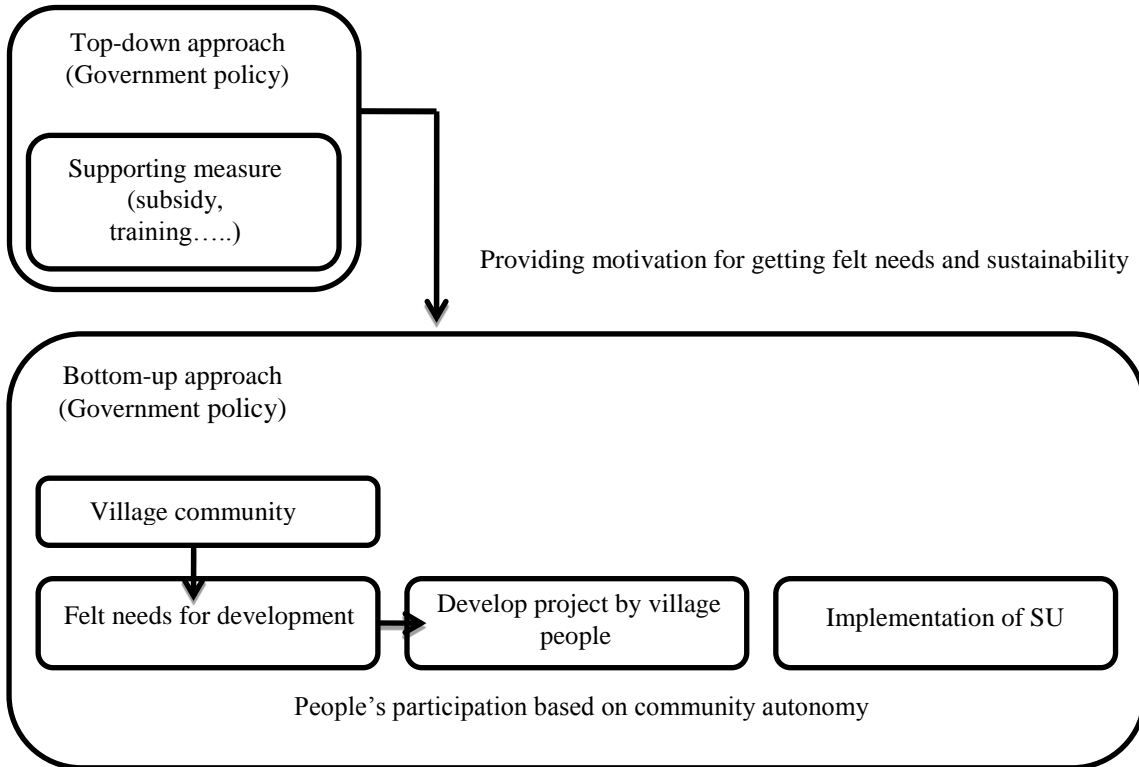


Figure 1.1a: Government initiating bottom-up approach

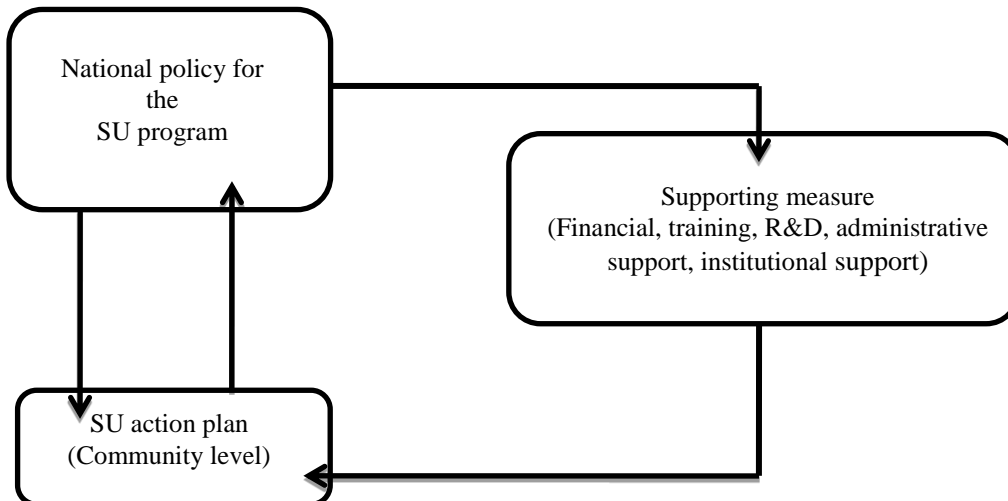


Figure 1.1b: Integrated approach (Vertical integration)

Support more for better performed community was accelerated and executed by rewarding village leaders for the success, increase subsidy for the better performance and reduce subsidy for poor performance and let them bench marking the successful villages. Under this approach continuous support was occurred until the community reaches to the level of self-reliance and empowerment.

Mutual learning approach has two integrated parts. These are SU training: learning from others and spiritual enlightenment. Ministers, government officials, professors, academician and community leader took part in the training session. The training session was conducted

by lecture method, demonstration and participatory discussion. On the other hand, the objectives of spiritual enlightenment encouraged villagers to self-help (can do spirit), cooperation to each other, community initiative and leadership building.

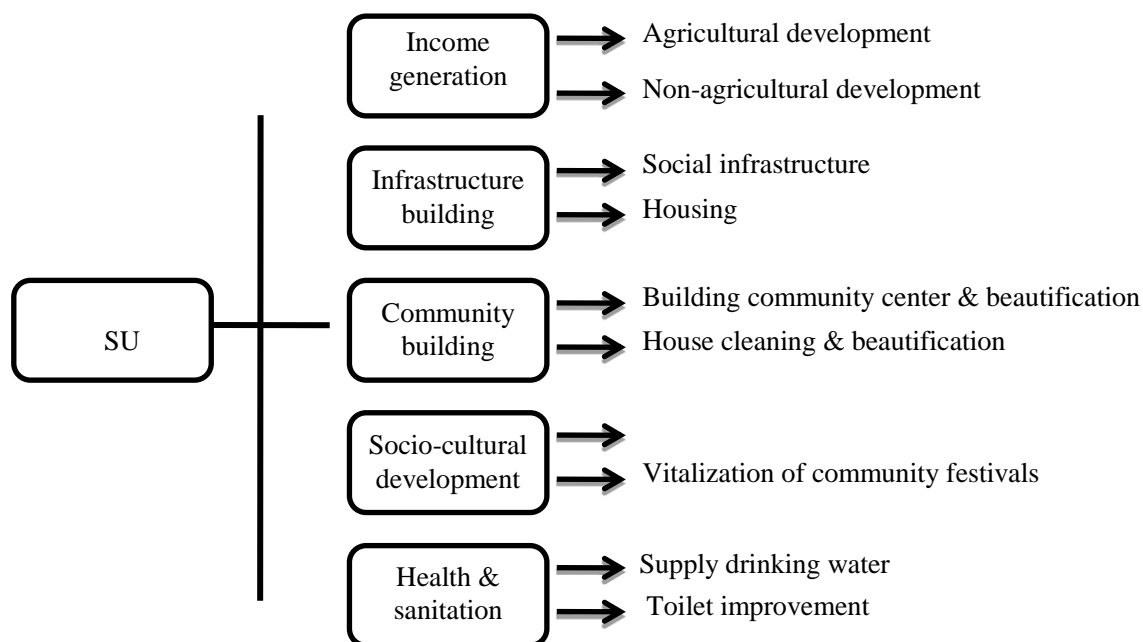


Figure 1.1c: Comprehensive approach

(Source: Whan, 2014)

CURRENT RURAL DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO OF BANGLADESH

Modern Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation in 1971 after achieving independence from Pakistan in the Bangladesh Liberation War. Like the Korean War, Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 destroyed almost everything. On that time Bangladeshi villages faced various problems such as illiteracy, religious superstition, low agricultural productivity, existence of disguised unemployment, low rate of capital formation, high population and existence of vicious circles of poverty. To get rid from these socio-economic problems especially poverty reduction, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Government gave importance on Sonirvor Andolon (cooperative movement) that translate approximately as “movement for self-reliance.” Sheikh Mujib spoke (BRDB, 2014):

“Every individual of Bangladesh gets food, shelter, education and belongs to the standard of life and it’s my dream.”

In 22 September, 1975, Sheikh Mujib Government lunched two-tier Sonirvor Andolon cooperative movement through the villages to ensure more production from agriculture and unified distribution of wealth among the marginal farmer (Hamid, 1988). Later, the Ershad Government also put importance on poverty eradication and rural development. President Ershad argued that villages are the principle source of the whole development of Bangladesh. Present Hasina Government also put importance on poverty eradication and rural development. Hasina Government sets some programs and projects like “Vision 2021” and “Ekti Bari Ekti Khamar”¹ for poverty alleviation and rural development.

Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) is the sole organization that implements the major objectives of the Sonirvor Andolon. BRDB is the largest key public sector rural development agency. Now, it has implemented more than 69 projects which are being

¹Ekti Bari Ekti Khamar means every house posses at least a single farm.

implemented in 476 Upazilas¹ under 64 districts. BRDB is working to organize the small, medium and marginal farmers, disadvantaged women, and asset less people of the rural areas and trying to form a cooperative to ensure their participation in development activities e.g., construction of warehouse, market place, irrigation activities and so on under the provisions of training, micro credit, technology transfer and capital formation through thrift savings. It is expected that implementation of BRDB projects/programs could be able to reduce poverty that will lead Bangladesh as a middle income country in future (see Table 3 for more details).

Table 3. Major macroeconomic indicators of Bangladesh

| Indicator | 1992 | 1996 | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty line (% of population) | 56.6% | 50.1% | 48.9% | 40.0% | 31.5% |
| GNI per capita, PPP (current US\$) | 600 | 730 | 890 | 1,560 | 2,290 |
| Gross National Savings (% of GDP) | 18.62 | 20.90 | 22.74 | 26.81 | 29.36 |

Source: World Bank data catalog, 2014; index mundi, 2014; Economy Watch, 2014

BRDB followed two-tier cooperative system. In the first tier, there is a village based farmer cooperative group and the second tier, there is an Upazila based central cooperative group. Upazila based cooperative group consists of nine members (members are selected from different villages of different cooperative groups) and it is responsible for conducting monthly meeting, decision making, credit disbursement, and project implementation based on urgency and relevancy.

FACT FINDINGS AND DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAEMAUL MOVEMENT AND SONIRVOR ANDOLON

Saemaul Movement of South Korea and Sonirvor Andolon of Bangladesh both of them are government motivated cooperative movement. The ultimate goals of both of these movements were same (poverty eradication, self-reliance and rural development). But due to the difference of socio-economic conditions they have some difference (see Table 1.4 for more details).

Table 1.4. Fact findings and difference between Saemaul Movement and Sonirvor Andolon

| Attributes | SU Movement, South Korea | Sonirvor Andolon, Bangladesh |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Sprits | Diligence, self-help, cooperation | Self-reliance |
| Community participation | Major | Minor |
| Government Expenditure | High | Low |
| Nature of village | 3(Basic, self-help and self-sufficient) | No existence of this system |
| Village competition | Encouraged by the Government | No existence of this system |
| Importance | Equal importance on urban, rural, and agricultural sectors | Comparatively give importance on urban sector |
| Evaluation | Village performance were evaluated | No existence of this system |
| Support | More support for better performed village | No existence of this system |
| Political commitment | Strong and consistence | Weak and inconsistence |

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2013

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SAEMAUL UNDONG MOVEMENT

In spite of rapid urbanization in most parts of the world over the past two decades, rural development remains a major challenge for developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. According to a World Bank report (2009), 75 percent of the world's poor live in rural areas and most are involved in farming (WB, 2009). The International Fund for

¹Upazila is a small administrative unit of Bangladesh (sub-district)

Agricultural Development argued in its Rural Poverty Report 2001 that the rural poor need legally secure entitlements to assets especially land, water, technology, access to markets, opportunities to participate in decentralized resource management and access to microfinance (IFAD, 2001). It consequently claimed that it is necessary to create a pro-poor policy environment and to allocate significant resources to the poor for the alleviation of poverty and economic growth (Park, 2009). There is also new urgency for addressing rural problems generated by population pressure on land, water and other resources, threats to the environment, climate change and widening income disparity between rural and urban areas. SU Movement teaches us how to ensure rapid and steady growth of rural and agricultural sector, eradicate poverty and close the gap between the city and rural areas and industry and agriculture. The integrated principles of SU also guide us to handle community based operational mechanism, shows the ways and means to construct partnership between government and village community (new governance system). Professor Kim Yu-hyok of Dankuk University wrote (INQUIRE.NET, 2014, Para 16):

“The Saemaul Movement is a drive for self-support based upon the principles of diligence, self-reliance and cooperation. It reaches into every area of life to foster progress that derives spontaneously from the strength of self-reliant spirit. It stands in the vanguard of growth in Korea and is founded ultimately upon the expressions of self-awareness as, ‘We can do it.’”

The Saemaul Movement work as the pillars of rural development, strong leadership skills, social innovation, spirit of social capital and strategies for integrated rural development through government intervention, community based and operational mechanism with initiating bottom up and comprehensive approach and strong political commitment of state political leader.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR BANGLADESH

SU Movement has become a national brand in South Korea’s program for sharing its own development experience with other countries. Based on an understanding of Korea’s historical context and development approach, government, policy makers and local leaders of Bangladesh and other developing countries can draw general lessons and ideas. They can study the experience of South Korean SU Movement and adapt it to their own situation for early recovery from economic depression, poverty eradication and rapid economic growth. The government of Bangladesh needs to provide strong government sponsorship to motivate, make people participate and change attitude and awareness , encourage community participation for willingness to work hard and provide free labor with the spirit of diligence, self-help, and cooperation. Again more support for the better performed community, categorization of villages as the basic village, self-help village and self-reliant village will encourage them to make competition with each other for uplifting their livelihood condition. And for all these changes the first and foremost requirement is strong political commitment of the state and political leaders .

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