

## Book Review

# Toward Indigenous Development: Lessons from the Korean Experience

PROSERPINA DOMINGO TAPALES\*

A review of In-Joung Whang, *Management of Rural Change in Korea: The Saemaul Undong* (Seoul: Seoul University Press, 1981), xviii + 287 pp.

### I

The paradigms of development have undergone rapid changes in the years following the Second World War. Whereas in earlier years the western model of capitalist industrial development remained unquestioned, the failure of the model in Third World countries has led to a reassessment of the strategy in the last two decades. Recent paradigms have espoused rural-focused development of many varieties, like regional development, integrated rural development, and needs-oriented strategies calling for people's participation in every facet of activity.

As development has come to be accepted as stemming from many paths, its goal has been redefined to mean the improvement of the quality of life for every man. Thus, countries aspiring for the newly defined goal have experimented on different strategies: Bangladesh established the Comilla Academy to

emphasize human resources development at the rural level; Tanzania aimed to achieve intensive agricultural development through the *ujamaa* village; the Philippines in recent years stressed rural cooperatives; Sri Lanka encouraged the Buddhist-inspired *Sarvodaya* movement; and Korea launched the much lauded *Saemaul Undong*.

Probably the most successful of these is the *Saemaul Undong*, a rural development strategy aimed at indigenous, self-reliant development. Its success can be gauged in terms of the phenomenal increase in the income of the farm households and the improvement of the quality of life of people in the villages since its inception in 1971.

### II

What is *Saemaul Undong*? In Whang's words, it is "a Korean version, uniquely adopted to Korea's own societal and cultural context, of integrated rural development... a *nationwide* social movement, which requires large-scale mobilization of industrial, manpower and tech-

\*Assistant Professor, College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines.

nical resources from every sector of the country" (p. 21, underscoring his).

What makes for Korea's success? In this book, Whang focuses on the managerial aspects of Saemaul Undong and relates these with its outputs as well as with its rural development philosophy. He used several methodologies: field survey, interview, document and literature survey, and, of course, his insight as a development administrator who has worked extensively with the Korean government, the academe, and international organizations.

On the managerial aspects, he points out those ingredients which he considers crucial: stimulators and change agents, organization, management, and training.

He divides his discussion of stimulators and change agents into three—political commitment and government support, village leaders, and modes of participation. He says that "top leadership commitment to the *Saemaul Undong* is of essential importance to its success," because "actual commitment of top political leadership tends to affect resource allocation as well as the legal/administrative framework in favor of the rural sector" (p. 55). Furthermore, "government commitment has a synergetic effect on rural development; the deliberate, consistent and solid package of government support and commitment tends to have multiple impacts on rural innovation" (p. 56).

Whang describes the recruitment, training, and roles of Saemaul leaders. He says that the leaders "were actually representatives of the general populace"

(p. 64). They perform roles as initiators, executors, educators, advocates and coordinators of village projects; in general, the leaders "most actively perform the role of initiator" (p. 79). They also maintain working relationships with the village people, village chiefs or local government officials. In terms of performance, Saemaul leaders "tend to carry out developmental projects in a democratic manner and maintain a smooth cooperative relationship with the village head" (p. 89).

A very important aspect of Saemaul Undong is the extensive participation of the people. According to Whang, this can be attributed to "(a) relatively equal access to land ownership, (b) equal opportunities in education, (c) training in organization and leadership through the military service of rural youngsters" (pp. 98-99). These have led to "significant changes in rural communities which in turn resulted into: (a) a 'hands-on' training effect, (b) a potent force in effecting profound changes in individual behavior and attitudes via group dynamics, and (c) a source of control and influence over the village residents and institutions" (pp. 110-111).

Organizations, management, and training in Saemaul Undong have been catalysts for developing administrative capability for rural development. Planning at the village level "involves mostly project identification by village members, simple design for project implementation, identification of the kinds and amounts of necessary inputs or resources, and the proper communication of project ideas to local officials in order to secure ad-

ministrative support" (p. 118). The Saemaul monitoring system is efficiently done at all levels of government, from the village to the township, provincial, and central levels. This efficiency Whang attributes to "the influence of the military subculture upon village leadership, upward and downward communications from the villages to central levels" (p. 156).

The Korean approach to rural development training is unique in that Saemaul leaders, including the women, are trained together with the social elite, and in urban Saemauls, with high ranking government officials. This is so because "the main thrust of the *Saemaul* training is to change the values of village leaders, both men and women" (p. 166). Follow-up activities are also done after the training program: through letters, publications, refresher courses, and alumni meetings.

These managerial components of Saemaul Undong have had tremendous impact on the Korean society.

On the national economy, it has effected income redistribution, private savings, balanced regional development, export promotion, and technical improvement. Saemaul has been attributed to be the cause of narrower income gap between the average farm and urban laborers households income. Savings grew 150 times from 1971 to 1979. Saemaul projects cover housing improvement, sanitary water supply, rural electrification, and rural communication facilities. Export promotion is achieved through the establishment of Saemaul factories.

Saemaul Undong has made a significant contribution to the village economy. It has led to increase in village income, change in agricultural production mix, and higher standard of living in rural villages. These are largely brought about through strategies to generate rural employment, to motivate the rural people, and to link opportunities and motivation. Employment generating strategies are comprehensive: (1) providing the supply by creating employment opportunities; (2) creating demand by motivating rural people to self-help, diligence, and cooperation, and (3) providing mechanisms to link supply and demand.

Beyond the economic realm, Saemaul Undong has had positive impacts on values and perceptions of rural farmers. Whang's interviewees in the government claim that Saemaul training and experience has "induced change in the internalized values and perception of rural people toward a more development-oriented, and modernized outlook" (p. 222). Similarly positive values have been gained by the villagers. As Whang puts it: "The vigorous implementation of the *Saemaul Undong* has strengthened a cooperative attitude toward neighbors within their villages through *Saemaul* projects" (p. 235).

After evaluating the effectiveness of the managerial components of Saemaul Undong, Whang raises the question of its transferability to other developing countries. Saemaul Undong, Whang underscores, has been organized "without an academic research base or theoretical reference. . . . The strategies and program content have been adapted to fit Korean

society and culture through the continued process of trial and error" (pp. 243-244). Thus, what can perhaps be transferred are only the technical aspects, the "managerial techniques, monitoring and management information systems, the approach, methodology and subject matter of training" (pp. 254-255). He cautions: "Some other factors which affect considerably the socio-psychological dynamics may not be easily reproduced in a different cultural context" (p. 255).

How does Whang assess the practicability of Saemaul approaches in the coming years? He foresees the necessity of advocating a resource-saving strategy of development as an "inevitable course of action for the future of Korea in view of international politics surrounding the idea of a New International Economic Order which has been advocated extensively by the Third World countries" (p. 257).

### III

A lot of material has been written on Korea's marvelous Saemaul Undong experiment. However, Whang's book is by far the most exhaustive, as it touches on the basic integrated rural development philosophy, the results of the Saemaul experience, the assessment of the transferability of experiment to other countries, and the further prospects of the concept in Korea. More importantly, it dissects those ingredients necessary in making such a strategy work, delving on aspects of management necessary to increase administrative capability. Whang therefore accomplishes his goal of making "a descriptive analysis of the *Sae-*

*maul Undong* from the managerial perspective with a view to identifying the actual mechanisms of the nationwide rural development movement and to finding some policy implications for the future" (p. 7).

Whang presents an inspired narrative of an entire movement, a rural development concept which is propelled by a deep sense of commitment from the national leadership in terms of material, moral and financial support, and a sense of involvement on the part of the village leaders and the people; for instance, the President personally gives awards to the best leaders, and the latter are asked to brief the high officials on their techniques. The commitment of top leadership and the involvement of the people reinforce each other.

However, where Whang becomes enthusiastically detailed in the discussion of Saemaul success, he becomes restrained in explaining facets of its failure. When he says, for example, "that voluntary participation on the part of the people in planning and implementation of Saemaul projects should be promoted," he writes, in the same vein, on "the current tendency of forced modernization by the government apparatus which should not be continued" (p. 263). Considering his inspired account of government-people collaboration, his statement leads the reader to wonder what "forced modernization" really means. Are those government supports in terms of cement and monetary assistance forcing modernization? They are presented in the book as a motivator for people-initiated planning. Could

it be in the Spartan-like training of leaders at Suwan? But then, even that is commended by the author.

Likewise in suggesting the aspects to be adopted by other countries, the author warns that "some mistakes made by the Saemaul Undong in Korea should not be repeated by other countries. They are: the excessive intervention and support by the government which in part created a dependency syndrome among rural people, the principle of uniformity of government support ignoring differing local situations and the excessive emphasis on the immediately visible and tangible results of projects" (p. 255). To this, he adds in a later chapter, "a distorted pattern of consumption among rural people" (p. 259). But he did not amplify his meaning of "dependency syndrome" within the Korean context, nor did he give detailed reasons why the pattern of consumption is distorted.

The book would have been more complete had Whang picked up these points and elucidated upon them as clearly and as extensively as he does on Saemaul's glories.

Sometimes, he fails to expand on some points and merely refers to earlier works of his; for example, in explaining the impressive role of women in integrated community development, he ends with the statement that "even if women have contributed much to the economic development of Korean society, it will take time for them to secure the corresponding social status to which they are entitled"

(p. 235). Why? The reader may have to look at his 1980 work to find the answer. The problem, however, is that because he fails to cite his references after each chapter, it is difficult to assess which books he refers to in the bibliography. For instance, there are four works written by Whang in 1980.

But these are not cases of total omission and perhaps are minor flaws in the work. Whang may even be commended for mentioning them in the book.

On the positive side, Whang's book is very systematically presented. He appropriately includes a summary at the end of most chapters. He narrates the Saemaul experience by paying attention to those factors which make it truly a Korean model of development, stressing the positive ways by which culture and tradition are harnessed toward developmental ends.

Whang's work is important in many respects: First, it integrates and expands on a lot of scattered literature on Saemaul Undong mostly found in journals or in unpublished conference papers. Second, it presents the case for rural development from a development administration perspective, and therefore the book has added relevance to students of public administration. Third, it underscores the need for Third World countries to chart their own paths of development, adapting techniques according to their peculiar situations. Whang's work shows that rural development can succeed if culture and tradition are har-

nessed towards socioeconomic ends, that foreign models cannot and should not be copied without questioning. Lastly, for those designing to formulate development models to suit their specific countries, Whang's presentation of the Korean experience provides initial ideas to ponder upon.

#### IV

How can the Saemaul Undong experience be adapted to suit, say, the Philippines?

Clearly, there are managerial techniques which are universally applicable. Nevertheless, even in the adoption of those techniques to each country, modifications have to be made to suit the psychological make-up of the leaders and the general populace. These modifications can come in the design of training programs; for instance, the training methodology used for Saemaul Undong may be too rigid to suit the Philippine temperament.

There are other aspects which are uniquely Korean and cannot be transplanted into the Philippines. Whang credits the compulsory military training as responsible for creating a subculture which has resulted into the efficiency with which the Saemaul Undong is managed. The Philippines, for instance, will have to tap some other indigenous resources for developmental purposes. As Korea used the Confucian ethic to send its messages, the Philippines can modify it to suit the people's temperament.

What the Saemaul Undong experience teaches, and which Whang documents in this book, is that development approaches, while aiming at the same goal of improving the quality of life, have to be adjusted to fit specific needs and specific circumstances.

Only the goal of development is universal. The paths leading to it are diverse. Each country must choose its own path and build up the means from within.

## **THE SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

The Second National Conference on Public Administration will be held at the Philippine International Convention Center, Manila from 30 November to 3 December, 1982. The Conference will highlight the celebration of the Pearl Anniversary of the College of Public Administration and serve as an initial contribution to the Diamond Jubilee Celebration of the University of the Philippines in 1983.

The Conference will expand on the theme: "Public Administration in the Eighties: Problems and Prospects." It hopes to pursue the following objectives:

- (1) **provide an opportunity** for the professional discussion of issues, problems, and prospects in the study and practice of public administration;
- (2) **explore critical key issues and problems** in the bureaucracy and gain insights of the experiences of public administrators;
- (3) **identify new patterns for coordinated training systems** designed to upgrade the competencies of government officials and employees.

The Conference will examine three major areas in the plenary sessions:

Plenary Session I: The State of Public Administration Education in the Philippines

Plenary Session II: Nature, Causes, and Extent of Corruption

Plenary Session III: The Relevance

of Public Service Training to National Development

Each session will have convenors who will chair the discussions, ensure continuity and integration of the subject, and identify paper writers and speakers. The convenors are: Dr. Raul P. de Guzman, Dr. Dolores Garcia, and Prof. Ligaya Jorge for the Academic Stream; Atty. Hermes Pelayo and Dr. Angel Yoingco for the Practitioners' Stream; and Hon. Albina M. Dans, Dr. Gabriel U. Iglesias, and Mr. Jose P. de Jesus for the Training Stream.

Conference Workshops will follow on 3 December, 1982 to provide an in-depth study of the problems and issues presented during the plenary sessions and to explore possibilities of solving them.

Ranking government leaders and practitioners have been invited as principal speakers at the plenary and workshop sessions.

As an added feature to the Conference, books of interest to public administrators will be on sale at the U.P. College of Public Administration, and photo exhibits highlighting the major contributions of the Office of Budget and Management, Commission on Audit, Civil Service Commission, Metro Manila Commission, and of schools in Public Administration to the improvement of governmental management in the Philippines will be on display at the lobby of the third floor of the Delegation Building, Philippine International Convention Center.