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Starting Leaps of Change from the Village: A Lesson Learned from the Saemaul Undong Movement

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Abstract. Village autonomy carries along a demand for villages to become self-reliant through optimization of village development that is based on local values and resources. This paper aims at exploring village development within the framework of the Saemaul Undong movement in South Korea. This paper conducts a qualitative approach, and data are collected through in-depth interviews with some key persons related to Saemaul Undong. By conducting Saemaul Undong, the village development movement in South Korea covered three important aspects: improving environmental quality, increasing income, and improving the villagers' mentality. Those three aspects became the main values in transforming rural areas of South Korea to have a better life by optimizing their resources. Freedom in deciding the village program even there was also a national development policy is one of the key success factors of the Saemaul Undong movement. The success of the implementation of the Movement spread to other countries in order to adopt the strategies and model from its country of origin.

Keywords. Saemaul Undong, village development, local values, modernizing rural areas

Background

Amidst the efforts to balance the power between central and local governments in Indonesia, village autonomy emerges as a new variable in the constellation. The issues of traditional values sustained by villages give a bargaining position against the macro-structure of the balance of power. Despite the fact that in general, local autonomy in Indonesia is focused at district and city levels, the autonomy itself does not belong to those levels only. Instead, it is a delegation of authority (decentralization) from the central government (Hoessein, 2009).

Significant delegation of authority from the central to local government through decentralization policy results in pros and cons from various stakeholders, particularly revolving around readiness and ability of the local governments to govern and manage their regions (Prasojo, Maksum, Kurniawan, 2006). As a matter of fact, problems pertaining to local government performance in formulating and implementing policies that are the initial goals of decentralization, still occur up to date (Holidin and Hariyati, 2017). In addition to the problem of local government apparatus's poor capacity, non-optimal resources management, poor local governance, and various other internal problems, regional autonomy also contributes to the creation of inter-regional disparity. These are such problems that have inevitably led to more intense pros, and cons around the implementation of village autonomy since the village

government's institutional readiness and capacity remain questionable (Suyatno, 2015). Imposing village autonomy provides no guarantee that similar problems occurred at the province and municipality level would not be repeated.

The issue in distribution of power is strongly related to the issue that the implementation of village autonomy has enabled villages' unique characteristics, respectively, to rise as a part of the formal structure of government institutions in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the initial idea of village autonomy came from the assumption that it might serve as one of the solutions to increase public service and participation at the grass-root level. The initial considerations of village governance done through certain law on the village, which sets forth that village constitute the sustainer of typical traditional values, which is formed by inter-cultural acculturation, and often constitutes assimilation between traditional and religious values of the local community (Kushandajani, 2015; Nadir, 2013; Rimawati, 2015; Simanjuntak et al., 1979). These genuine values constitute the village's informal convention as a legal community unit which are supposed to originally be a source of inspiration, the determinant of activities of the village community, and also served as the underlying value for policy formulation and implementation at the village level, as a foundation to implement public participation in order to support village autonomy implementation.

The village administrative office was considered not fully effective in involving the villagers in developing their own village. Lack of transparency shown by the village administration in terms of utilization of the village fund had caused them to lose respect from the villagers. Thus they became apathetic towards the programs. On the other hand, the village administrative office had limitations in terms of human resources as the caretaker of programs in a village, thus with low participation from the villagers and limited capabilities of the human resources, the implementation of the village fund policy did not run well.

In order to achieve the community goal, which was the village fund to be utilized maximally to develop independent villagers economically, an effective empowerment program for the villagers is needed. Community empowerment is highly affected by the participation of the people as its core element. When there is no participation, empowerment will not be achieved. Participation is an important component in developing community empowerment (Craig and May 1995 in Hikmat, 2004). Furthermore, Hikmat (2004) stated that empowerment and participation were potential strategies in improving social economy and culture transformation. This process will eventually create people-centered development. Slamet in Mardikanto (2010) also stated that the growth of community participation in development was highly affected by three components: chance given for the community to participate, the willingness of the community to participate, and sufficient skills and abilities owned by the community in order to participate. Therefore, participation from the local community has an important role in supporting the effort to empower the community that eventually can create a self-sufficient community economically and thus improving people's life quality. Local values that are currently considered less important compared to the state's standards should be developed and implemented.

Problem Statement

With the existence of local values on one hand and formalization of financing mechanisms on the other, it becomes necessary to review the issue of sustainable village independence/self-reliance. The issue of financing indicates that the issue of local autonomy is associated with a development fund (Suyatno, 2015; Sujito, 2006). As a matter of fact, village autonomy carries a demand for villages to become self-reliant through the optimization of village-generated income based on local resources. This constitutes rationality for village atomizing which also

provides a solution for village community to get rid of the trap of natural resources exploitation, particularly after the wide-scale local autonomy was passed in 1999, as well as the trap of consumerism for village community throughout the ongoing modernization and urbanization (Prasojo et al., 2012; Sujito, 2006). The meeting between legal-formal framework through Village Law and village self-reliance that is based upon local values and resources can be seen at all this time on the village community empowerment in local tourism implementation, which was initiated and managed by the villagers themselves (Damayanti, Soeaidy, and Ribawanto, 2014; Rimawati, 2015; Sujali, 2008).

As a financing problem, despite its source and scheme, the issue of financing village operation has generated crucial issues relating to its governance. On the one hand, the high amount of Village Fund is clearly an opportunity to improve public service in villages. On the other hand, the fund distribution triggered potential problems associated with effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency in the management of the Village Fund (Aziz, 2016). Thus, there is a kind of urgency for governance design in line with the context of rural local values as well as supportive of village economic independence in a sustainable manner. This paper seeks to explain the local values support village development within the three main aspects of the Movement of Saemaul Undong and the relevance of it to Indonesian village development in the framework of village autonomy.

Method

This paper conducts a qualitative approach in exploring local values within the implementation of Saemaul Undong that might support village autonomy. Due to the vast scope of village autonomy, this paper focuses only on any efforts the villagers undertake to sustain their development progress. Exploration and analysis of several issues are expected to provide comprehensive information on the relationship between local values and the implementation of village autonomy policy.

We undertake Data collection through literature study and in-depth interviews with village apparatus, community leaders, observers, central government, academics, and civil society organizations focusing on local autonomy issues, particularly village autonomy, village community norms, and community empowerment. Specifically, we focus on the implementation and evaluation of the Saemaul Undong movement running in several villages in South Korea and its replication in other villages in some countries, including Indonesia.

Result and Discussion

Strengthening local values is one of the dimensions considered important to strengthen governance implementation, particularly from a community involvement perspective. Pavey et al. (2007), for instance, wrote about how efforts to build a community's capacity in governance must be in harmony with the community's values and interests. Meanwhile, Hueneke and Baker (2009) described how local values play crucial roles in the management of Uluru National Park in Australia. A number of other publications also show the importance of local values in environmental governance. These include, for instance, Lawrence, Ambrose-Oji, Lysinge, and Tako (2000), who explored the roles of local values in preserving biodiversity in Cameroun. In addition, N'Danikou, Achigan-Dako, and Wong (2011) wrote about the roles of local values in conservation measures.

Brahmana, Rochayanti, and Susilo (2009) research the value of collectivism (gotong royong) in the Mbuah Page Dance in Perbesi Village, Karo District, North Sumatera. Imanda (2015) studied about prosperous family in the Lintang Cultural System. Another author, such as Zulkarnain (2010), studied the roles of local institutions to the traditional wisdom in the

utilization and preservation of coastal resources. In fact, there are numerous other publications highlighting the issue which can be accessed at Portal Garuda. However, in those various publications on the local values, we have found less likely of them discussed how to implement the local values in the village government implementation.

This limitation is different from the best practices of the Korean Saemaul Undong movement. We can learn very much from one of these sustained village development models implemented in South Korea. The Movement was initiated by President Park Chung Hee, who led South Korea in the period 1961-1979 (Korea Saemaul Undong Center, 2019). In general, the village development movement in South Korea covers three important aspects, namely improving environmental quality, increasing income, and improving the mentality of villagers. The first aspect is improving the quality of the environment (environmental Improvement), namely environmental improvement activities that include basic infrastructure and facilities in the countryside, roads, bridges, irrigation, drainage, and other water and sanitation facilities. Second, "Increasing Income," namely, activities carried out through various productive economic training, expanding access to capital and marketing facilitation of agricultural production, will increase the villagers' income. Third, "Mental Reform," which is a structured activity that is carried out intensively to build the mentality of the rural population (the spirit of Saemaul Undong) to have a work ethic of hard, diligent, honest, and high discipline. This activity begins with the Improvement and moral commitment of leaders at every government level, then is transformed to all stakeholders, both the community and businesses.

The Main Characteristics of Village in South Korea

Villages in South Korea are not regulated by law. Villages are seen as a unit of people who inhabit a rural area and are characterized by an agrarian economy. Villages are recognized but do not sit in the hierarchy of the South Korean government. State apparatus serves as an extension of the government at the district level, and they play the role of a liaison between communities and the official government levels. In that sense, South Korea differs from Indonesia. Villages in Indonesian are officially recognized as part of the government hierarchy. The village has government institutions that function to provide services and conduct governance and development tasks for the local community.

Institutionally, in line with the lack of regulation of villages, the structure of villages in South Korea is more informal. Villages in South Korea do not have a formal structure that is uniformly similar. A village in South Korea is led by an informal head. Decision-making is mostly done through a series of meetings of villagers. In the Saemaul Undong Movement, the head is assisted by Saemaul leaders. Saemaul leaders, assisted by the village head, serve to motivate villagers to steer their village towards a better direction, and show that their village is able to compete with other villages in the area.

In electing its head, a village in South Korea does it through meetings, where community members, including Saemaul Undong leaders, discuss to reach a consensus on the right person. The elected head remains an informal leader because he lies outside the government structure. A number of actors are involved in the Saemaul Undong Movement. The main actor, who is essential in running the Movement, is the leader. A Saemaul Undong leader is a rather young, energetic, well-educated, accompanied by a capable woman who is specifically responsible for engaging women in the implementation of the initiative. In addition to Saemaul leaders, the head of the village's head is also important, for he has to assist Saemaul Undong leaders in carrying out their duties. In the government hierarchy in South Korea, there are also committees that are tasked with coordinating and providing assistance to leaders. At the central government level, the implementation of the Saemaul Undong Movement is also assisted by a support

system that consists of a number of institutions tasked with facilitating, coordinating, and evaluating the implementation of the Movement. Outside the government hierarchy, there are also a number of official independent organizations that assist the implementation.

The Foundation of Saemaul Undong and Its Success

From the ruins of the Korean War that devastated the basis for economic development at the grassroots level, President Park Chung Hee saw the need to build the grassroots community to improve Korea's social and economic situation at the time was heading towards hopelessness. Park encouraged the growth of three vital values for the recovery of the grassroots level. He has noted as well as the fears that the urban and rural community development gap was leading to the lack of support for the government by the rural population. Rural communities did not support the proposed industrialization. Benefitting from an oversupply of cement production for industrialization, Park engineered the rural, grassroots communities to support the values of Diligence, Self-Help, and Cooperation-Collaboration. The formal structure of the communities in Korea was the first potential for seeding these values, for, at the Korean grassroots level, rural community groups were led by someone appointed through consensus. There was no national regulation on this practice, but it had been practiced in Korea forever. This was where the Saemaul Undong Movement began.

About 36,000 community groups welcomed the initiative, as they were already practicing appointing a community leader through consensus. They discussed how to make use of the cement surplus for each community's development. Park continued to monitor the initiative, but there were about 9,000 less successful groups. Park then provided an incentive mechanism that fostered a competitive climate. Park's national development program departed from those ongoing and improving processes at the grassroots level.

The rural grassroots communities were free to choose among Park's ten programs and might even develop one themselves outside of the 10. Inter-community group proposals continued to grow to the point where a coordination mechanism was necessary in order to avoid conflicts, create harmony, and keep the good rapport among communities. Saemaul Undong became increasingly visible as infrastructure programs grew and reached the Korean rural grassroots level and played support to Park's national industrialization policies, known as the Park Chung Hee's Economic Era. Park also promoted Saemaul Undong values in the national education system in Korea.

Saemaul Undong became an icon of the success of Korea's grassroots community development without any government intervention in decision making, without heavy involvement of bureaucracy in decision making. The government only monitored and gave out rewards for success, which contributed to healthy competition in advancing said community. Park's success gave his people confidence, akin to giving them a fishing rod instead of fish so they would continue to grow. The system was also enshrined in education.

Saemaul Undong's success is a gradual process from infrastructure to the economic empowerment of the Korean grassroots communities to the sustainability of the government's industrialization policies. Eventually, the Saemaul Undong became an international movement where the Korean experience was shared with other countries. Meetings to promote the Saemaul Undong spirit are regularly held today.

The beginning of the Saemaul Undong movement can be traced to the delivery of 335 sacks of cement to 33,267 villages throughout South Korea in the early 1970s. This assistance was a government stimulus to build and develop rural infrastructure. Later, it grew to include a provision of stimulus funds that rural community members could use to improve their living

conditions. After becoming a national movement, the government restructured the fund for the Saemaul Undong movement.

The Saemaul Undong Movement took a unique approach, which combines a top-down approach with a bottom-up one in the implementation. Rural communities could propose a number of activities that they thought could be useful to improve their standard of living and welfare. The proposal from the village community would be considered by the central government and further assisted and facilitated, while the central government was also preparing a number of activities/programs that communities could choose. Rural communities might opt out of carrying out the selected activities if they saw them as being of little use to improve their standard of living and welfare.

As the implementation of the Saemaul Undong involved figures known as Saemaul leaders, who were young leaders from the local community, usually a pair of a man and woman who worked together to inspire and motivate the community to be actively involved in the Movement, they received training from the government to be able to effectively lead locals in running the Movement.

The decision-making process in the Saemaul Undong Movement was carried out through meetings that involved all the actors in the village. The government did not intervene in the decision-making related to the Saemaul Undong movement, and communities had the liberty to choose any activity to run. Making decisions through consensus at the local level could simplify the process of internalizing the Saemaul Undong movement by villagers. The internalization of the Movement by villagers in every aspect of their daily life helped smooth and simultaneously made this Movement successful.

Although the decision-making process of how the Movement should be carried out in villages and the decisions between villages might be different, the results could be integrated. The coordinating function for this integration was carried out at the government level, the lowest at the district level. The government coordinated the many implementations of the Saemaul Undong Movement to be integrated and mutually supportive. The Movement, which was a movement based on local community initiatives, needed to be coordinated so that its achievements were optimal, and it could provide more benefits not only for the locals.

The Saemaul Undong Movement also underwent an evaluation process. The first evaluation was carried out at the village level. The local community conducted a self-evaluation of the implementation of the Saemaul Undong Movement that had been carried out so far. From the district to the national level, the government, in addition to carrying out the coordination process, also evaluated the implementation of this Movement in accordance with the scope of its power. The results of the evaluation would be inputs to improve the future process. The evaluation results also serve as consideration for both rewards and consequences for the implementation of the Saemaul Undong Movement.

The evaluation process of the implementation of the Saemaul Undong Movement was not only administrative-procedural in nature, but it also touched upon the substantive aspects of the Movement. The substantive evaluation aimed to assess as to how far the Movement was able to increase community initiatives in making an effort to increase the standard of living and welfare in the community. After all, aside from the physical development (infrastructure), the Saemaul Undong Movement also aimed to change the thinking habit of rural locals to be able to develop and compete for a better standard of living and welfare.

The success of the Saemaul Undong Movement was also determined by a sense of competitive spirit shared by the locals. All had this competitive spirit, but it needed to be cultivated and continuously nourished. The spirit of wanting to top Japan, who once colonized South Korea, shared by South Koreans, including those in rural areas, made a positive contribution to the

successful implementation of the Saemaul Undong Movement. The sense of optimism from rural residents, who were constantly motivated in the implementation of this Movement, gave them confidence that they could meet the goal one day.

The Saemaul Undong Movement has provided great and tangible benefits for the development of rural communities in South Korea. The Movement, which at the beginning was a community initiative focused on the physical development to improve the standard of living and welfare of communities, had developed to the point it changed the mentality of the community. This Movement was able to create a mental revolution that changed the mindset of rural communities to be more optimistic and fight harder to compete and lead. The spirit that once belonged to the countryside now has become the spirit of the South Korean people to compete globally. The Saemaul Undong spirit was also internalized at schools, workplaces, and more, beyond rural areas. In fact, the Saemaul Undong spirit has globalized through various cooperation initiated by the South Korean government through various assistance programs to developing countries.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Korean national policy by President Park Chung Hee succeeded in bringing a better life for villagers by optimizing their local resources and values. The changes were conducted incrementally by appointing some pilot projects that then followed by others. A big lesson for Indonesia and other countries is the freedom or autonomy given to each village to decide their development plan based on their needs and characteristics. It is a challenge for many countries since the national government tends to apply a "one size fits all" policy. Consequently, local uniqueness and local value are marginalized from the process of local development.

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