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ENGAGING WOMEN IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH KOREA'S SAEMAUL UNDONG AND MALAYSIA'S FELDA PROGRAMS

State led rural development programs have been major contributors to the economic development of East Asian countries. However, the study and practise of development have revealed that men and women are differently affected through the process of national economic development. In the case of rural development, it has been found that gender blind social and economic development efforts do not take into account the discrepancies in power, opportunities and roles that women experience. This research looks at two exemplary state led rural development programs from Northeast and Southeast Asia to provide a gendered look at the outcome of the Saemaul Undong and FELDA programs. It discusses the theoretical evolution on the importance of taking a gendered perspective in rural development. Then it provides an overview of the policies directed at women in Saemaul Undong and FELDA followed by a discussion of the outcome. It finds that these programs were progressive especially in the explicit inclusion of women and youth into its administrative structure at a time when this was not common in South Korea and Malaysia. This contributed to changing how these societies fundamentally views what women are capable of especially in the case of capital production.

Keywords: *Saemaul Undong, FELDA, WID, GAD, rural development.*

Introduction

Over the years, the study and practise of development have revealed that men and women are differently affected through the process of national economic development. In the case of rural development, it has been found that gender blind social and economic development efforts do not take into account the discrepancies in power, opportunities and roles that women experience. Moser pointed out that women generally hold “triple roles” especially in many low-income, less developed countries.¹ Women are not only the primary care provider in a household, responsible for child rearing, education and housework, but they are regularly expected to be a secondary income provider while also play a major role in their communities as well. This is particularly

vital when looking at rural development efforts as the role that women play in both productive and reproductive activities are vital in any rural communities.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 48 percent of economically active women are employed in the agriculture sector.² Women also contributed longer working hours especially when unpaid household and care work are taken into consideration. Yet, women are more likely to have the least access to resources and opportunities. Rural development programs that mainstream gender concerns are directed towards providing empowerment to women in order to bridge the existing gaps to these resources and opportunities. When the empowerment of women in a rural community happens, there is a positive spillover on “the health, productivity of whole families and communities and also improve the prospects of the next generation.”³ Therefore, the empowerment of women exponentially benefits the rural communities.

For most part, studies into the East Asian development experience has been centred on its industrialized, fast pace and overall rapid urbanization. However, the rural development efforts by these countries should not be ignored. Some East Asian countries have launched large scale, nationwide rural development programs that have been credited for ensuring equitable development to their population. In the last few decades, the East Asian region (both North and South) has seen profound growth and development. According to the Financial Times, “Asian economies, as defined by the UN trade and development body UNCTAD, will be larger than the rest of the world combined in 2020, for the first time since the 19th century”⁴ More importantly, countries in East Asia have also been praised for its equitable growth resulting in the widespread eradication of poverty and an increase in living standards particularly in the Northeast Asian region and to a slightly lesser degree in Southeast Asia.⁵

The studies on rural development over the years show that it is not possible to come up with a generalized rural development theory. In the pursuit of national economic growth, most development is centred in the industrialized urban areas which increased the rural urban gap and creates new forms of rural urban interdependence with remote rural communities in particular being left behind.⁶ National economic growth that is centred in urban industrial spaces might increase the overall economic productivity of a nation but does not necessarily alleviate poverty in rural areas.⁷ Just as the development discourse has changed, the themes and ideas in rural development efforts have also changed. For example, the 50s and 60s were focused on the mechanization of agriculture while efforts in the 80s and 90s were centred on structural adjustment and participatory approaches. The introduction of good governance expectations in more recent decades emerged alongside expectations of sustainable livelihoods and decentralization as well as social protection and poverty eradication.⁸ Research has emphasised the importance

of effective leadership in contributing to rural development programs.⁹

Therefore, one can conclude that assessing the success of rural development programs is a challenging endeavour. This lies in the simple factor that rural areas vary not only in their characteristic but also in their demography and their economic capacity. Additionally, what may be a desirable outcome of economic development, for example the introduction of new income generating activities, might result in far ranging repercussions such as the destruction of the environment or the society's traditional way of life. More importantly, any policy needs to pay special attention to the types of vulnerability that different groups experience. Women, children, the elderly, the disable, and minority native populations are likely to either be left behind or suffer from the disadvantages that economic development can cause due to unequal access to resources and opportunities.

This research focuses on women in rural development programs. It provides a gendered look at the outcome of the Saemaul Undong and FELDA programs. These two programs were chosen as they have oft been cited as successful examples of rural development programs not only by the respective governments of South Korea and Malaysia but also from international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the World Bank.¹⁰ These programs have contributed to the improvement of infrastructure in the rural areas of South Korea and Malaysia and have been credited with improving rural income and livelihood.

However, both programs differ considerably in its goals and implementation process. The Saemaul Undong is a nation-wide campaign focusing on incorporating existing villages into the national development agenda. On the other hand, FELDA is a land development and settlement effort. In both programs however, women empowerment was made a priority and women leadership were explicitly considered and formally included into the leadership structure of villages. Accordingly, this paper looks at how have women been incorporated into the state led rural development programs of South Korea and Malaysia, specifically the Saemaul Undong and FELDA programs, and what have the outcomes been within these programs?

By utilising a qualitative, comparative case study method, this paper will begin by looking at theoretical evolution on the importance of taking a gendered perspective in rural development. Then it will provide an overview of the policies directed at women in Saemaul Undong and FELDA followed by a discussion of the outcome. Data collection for this section is done via document analysis. Primary documents from the National Archive of both countries, official annual reports from FELDA and modularization reports of the Saemaul Undong are also supplemented with working papers as well as academic journal articles, book chapters and news reports. Finally, it will share some conclusions for future discussion and research.

Evolving Frameworks Of Women Leadership In Rural Development

When it comes to understanding the role of women in relation to leadership and development, three dominant frameworks have prevailed substantially since 1970s. This began with the Women in Development approach that came about in the mid-1970s and later evolved into the more comprehensive Gender and Development approach. On the other hand, more recent trends have begun to emphasize the need to pay attention to human rights as well in order to ensure more equitable development for all. Although there are significant commonalities among the three approaches, analytically, there are key differences that can be underscored. These are the emphasis on mainstreaming gender concern as an independent priority, focusing on increasing resources and opportunities that are available to women. However, each framework further evolves the dimensions that need to be taken into consideration when mainstreaming gender concerns.

Women in Development

Since the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975, development agencies, academic think-tanks and other organizations advocated WID (Women in Development) framework which stresses the use of development resources to advance women's circumstances linked to economic growth and efficiency. It is the framework that views women's productive work more visible and contributory to development.¹¹ This approach is rooted in the modernization and human capital theories that argues that women leadership promotes development and social cohesion through equal access to resources.

However, critics pointed out the lack of nuance in the understanding of gender issues with this approach and that WID solely focused on women as an exclusive and monolithic entity ignoring the intersectional effects of class, culture, and race. It missed to include the patriarchal structure that causes divisive relations between man and women. This non-aggressive approach led to dismissing issues regarding women subordination and oppression in the existing socio-economic structure. WID heavily focused on the economic contribution of women's works and missed out the contribution of women in the private spheres which at the end neglected the discussion as to why modernization programs left women behind and in some instances marginalized.¹²

Nonetheless, this approach challenged gender inequality by getting women together, establishing platforms to leadership roles to enable women to contribute equally in productive rural occupational tasks and economic growth. Although the WID approach lacked the capacity to tackle complex issues of gender equality; however, it is important to underscore the fiscal and financial policy achievements associated with the framework that led to future

women empowerment discourse.

Women and Development

Eventually, WID evolved into GAD (Gender and Development) framework, which considers gender as an important piece in the complex and transforming social relations. Inspired by socialist feminist rational, it focuses on the holistic outlook in examining all aspects that affects women's lives. Unlike WID, GAD problematizes the origin of gender roles and stereotypes. It has a more nuanced discussion on gender and includes discourse that affects the opposite gender. GAD also recognizes the contribution of women both on productive and reproductive spheres by rejecting the dichotomy between public and private divide.¹³ It highlights the subjugation and oppression of women at home and stresses the role of the state to legislate social programs to progress women emancipation.

GAD emphasized the active role of women as agents of change instead of passive beneficiary of modernization projects. It also underscores the necessity for women to organize themselves to gain political capital and demand legal protection and support. However, operationalizing GAD to produce the tangible impacts necessary for development tends to encounter a number of complications. These include the difficulty in how to specify and understand social context; how to deal with the changing meaning of empowerment; how to engage with the issues of social justice; and how to strategically link women's interests to the agenda of those in power.¹⁴

Nevertheless, this approach contributed to the understanding and movement to advocate gender equality at the workplace by ensuring leadership positions for women in order to facilitate redistribution of power. Part of the mainstream discussion of the GAD writers was the need of a more definitive and empirical understanding of empowerment. Kabeer identified three critical criteria to measure women empowerment: (1) empowerment requires access to resources; (2) it relates to agency in making decisions and negotiating interests; and (3) it includes achievements of outcomes of value.¹⁵ In the GAD framework, the discussion of access to resources and engaging women in rural leadership is not only limited to inclusion but in terms of removal of institutional barriers towards gender equality essentially paving the way for more meaningful and lasting change.

Human Rights And Development

The two previous frameworks paved the way for many significant changes in how women and gender concerns are incorporated into development efforts. The WID framework heavily focused on improvement in the economic aspect, while GAD emphasizes a sociological approach in discussing

women's issues. Both frameworks were effective in advancing milestones in women's empowerment, but it is important to recognize that to truly achieve significant changes in women's right and gender parity there needs to be more than just socio-economic assistance. This is encapsulated in the recognition and development of rights-based framework that covers the entire intersectionality from economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights in order to promote women's rights as important agendas to be discussed and operationalized. As a response, global agreements, and declarations such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Beijing Declaration pushes the acknowledgement of women's rights and the commitment to integrate gender policies for developmental goals.

Concepts regarding the nature of rights, and capabilities and their effects on gender and political foundation of the demand for gender equality is tackled under the capacity approach.¹⁶ This approach deems that the measurement of equality, such that of political participation, needs to be based on understanding human development by suggesting policies that are based on valuing agency of women and affirming rights as obligations of each person to another.¹⁷ However, human rights and development framework is not without criticism. It has also been pointed out that this approach has the tendency to confuse the goals of political struggle from the injustices of recognition to remedying it with socioeconomic redistribution as well as its inclination to universalize women's issues which often misses some crucial contexts.¹⁸

Despite these criticisms, human rights and development framework emphasizes women's leadership and equal participation in public affairs as a key element of democracy and a pre-requisite for achieving sustainable development.¹⁹ Rooted from the idea that development is synonymous with freedom, this framework strives to achieve equality of rights and promotes women as capable leaders. To do so, governments are expected to establish and sustain the conditions that enables women to achieve outcomes of values. This entails access and participation in leadership roles that enable women's pursuit of individual and collective interests. Whereas GAD approach focuses on the structural issues, human rights and development framework presupposes ethical obligations in creating action plans. In an attempt to address the issue of universalism, capacity theory highlights free forms of deliberation and assembly as crucial conditions in conveying capabilities.²⁰ Human rights and development employs an intersectional approach, which includes both economic and gendered lenses, in enabling equal rights and opportunities among women.

Overall, the changing approaches highlights how the international community continues to evolve in its effort to improve the operationalization of women empowerment and enhance the impact of development programs to maximize the benefit for the communities they work with. Most importantly there needs to be a practical assessment of how these theories and approaches

are reflected in real world case studies to assess their real-world implication. By looking at the Saemaul Undong and FELDA, the paper attempts to assess how this theoretical evolution is reflected in the practical application of two different types of rural development efforts in East Asia. As mentioned earlier, these two programs were selected as they represent two inherently different types of state led rural development programs that have been seen as successful case studies in the Northeast and Southeast Asian regions respectively.

Women under the Saemaul Undong

The New Village Movement or *Saemaul Undong* of South Korea began in April of 1970 where the President announced the need for a “new village remodelling movement” espousing the virtues of “self-help, diligence and cooperation”.²¹ This was part of the effort to close the gap created due to the rapid urban-based industrialization undertaken by President Park Chung Hee. The Saemaul Undong has been credited with transforming the rural areas of South Korea via wide scale infrastructure development, modernization of farming techniques such as vinyl house farming, as well as various income diversification projects throughout the villages nationwide. Unique to the Saemaul Undong was also the establishment of the Saemaul leaders who functioned as the villagers’ and government bodies’ go-between.

As villages became the focal point of project implementation, the role of the Saemaul Village Leader was given a high level of importance. The Saemaul village leader is different from the traditional village head (*ijang*) who were paid semi-governmental officials.²² The selection of a village leader was crucial, as their role required them to be responsible for the transformation of the villages.²³ Village leaders were required to initiate village projects and persuade the villagers to contribute to the projects, manage the village assets for Saemaul projects, as well as oversee the day-to-day implementation. They were also required to be the ‘role-models’ in order to motivate the villagers.²⁴

The women leaders were also required to participate in the village development council and head the activities of the Women’s Association. They were also responsible for assisting the women in the villages to organize and manage their time between domestic and village work.²⁵ Under the Saemaul Undong banner, women leaders were selected and trained alongside the men, a radical departure from the strongly patriarchal South Korean community. The encouragement of the participation of women was also tied into the training programs, and after 1973, women leaders would also attend the training program hosted by the Saemaul Leader Training Institute. As seen in the table below, women between the ages of 30 to 40 in particular were active participants of the training program representing the most productive age group in the villages.

Table 1: Saemaul Female Leaders Class Trainees by Age

| | Total | Below 30 | | 30-39 | | 40-49 | | 50 Above | |
|--------------|--------|----------|---------|-------|---------|-------|------|----------|---------|
| | | No. | Percent | No. | Percent | No. | % | No. | Percent |
| Total | 10,299 | 2,303 | 22.4 | 3,683 | 35.8 | 3,720 | 36 | 593 | 5.8 |
| 1973 | 1,203 | 28 | 24 | 483 | 40 | 405 | 34 | 27 | 2 |
| 1974 | 1,000 | 184 | 18.4 | 398 | 39.8 | 385 | 38.5 | 33 | 3.3 |
| 1975 | 978 | 203 | 20 | 348 | 36 | 373 | 38 | 54 | 6 |
| 1976 | 1,079 | 180 | 17 | 412 | 38 | 421 | 39 | 66 | 6 |
| 1977 | 1,202 | 284 | 24 | 468 | 39 | 386 | 32 | 64 | 5 |
| 1978 | 1,062 | 272 | 26 | 370 | 35 | 364 | 34 | 56 | 5 |
| 1979 | 1,505 | 507 | 34 | 472 | 32 | 443 | 29 | 83 | 5 |
| 1980 | 789 | 177 | 22.4 | 243 | 30.8 | 315 | 39.9 | 54 | 6.9 |
| 1981 | 1,481 | 208 | 14 | 489 | 33 | 628 | 42.4 | 156 | 10.6 |

Source: The Saemaul Leaders Training Institute 1982/ 2015:92

The government also supported projects set up by women that targeted the improvement of their living environment. This attention was matched by the zeal and enthusiasm of the women. Women leaders, alongside the rural women folks, began promoting programs such as the rice-saving campaign, raising funds for women, in addition to running village consumers’ co-ops and day-care centres.²⁶ The women association also played a very active role in the villages with the rural savings movement, anti-gambling campaign, and temperance movement during the Saemaul Undong. Many women were also the head of the village co-op.²⁷ In this way, the empowerment of women was influenced by both the top-down and bottom-up component of the Saemaul Undong. As pointed out by Eun Mee Kim at the Commission on The Status of Women:

The top-down policies of the government included selecting women and men leaders from each rural community to organize self-help work for rural development. Since women did not have many opportunities to be educated and work outside of the home, the fact that SMU selected women leaders to head local Women’s Clubs was a catalytic strategy for women’s employment and empowerment. Through these clubs, women were able to lead the bottom-up efforts to improve their lives in rural areas. Women participated in income generating activities, attended self-help training, and improved the environment in the community.²⁸

The empowerment of women added to the growth of the community and with women spearheading the changes at the village level, the Saemaul Women’s Club carried out activities concerning both improvement of living condition and increasing income. In particular, the empowerment of women

to earn their own income and have their own savings was a positive net effect on household income and the village saving levels that also played into the SRP compound projects in order to raise the overall income of rural areas. The process also included the empowerment of women through their inclusion in the Village Development Council and the activities carried out under the village-level women associations allowed for the women to contribute through “improving living conditions, economizing household management, operating women’s organizations, enhancing women’s social role and status, and promoting gender equality”.²⁹

Despite this inclusion, education that targeted women, which mostly comprised of “cultural training, Saemaul training for women, and family planning” were all dispensed in a manner that precluded women’s participation in the policy-making process.³⁰ For example, although the women organizations played an important role in the dissemination and implementation of the family planning programs during the Saemaul Undong period, these policies were developed independently of the consultation of any women.³¹ This resulted not only in health issues for women from the “side effects of IUD contraceptives, sterilization, abortion, and birth control pills,” but also in creating a division between the ‘modern’ and ‘patriotic’ women against those who were not inclined towards modern birth control.

Women who had many children were labeled unpatriotic and even refused social benefits.³² Women’s reproductive roles in managing the households were not redistributed and though women participated actively in the Saemaul Undong activities, much of their labour was voluntary and were not compensated on par with men, while income and wealth accumulated by women also went to the husbands or were absorbed by male-led projects.³³ In general, the approach was to incorporate women as a means of production to achieve the stated goals of income increase with little change to the traditional role of women.

Immediately after the Korean War, the South Korean government launched a nation-wide effort to control the population, a program that lasted through the 1970s and 1980s and was incorporated into Saemaul Undong activities. This included public relation campaigns encouraging smaller families along with the distribution of birth control and even encouraging abortions and sterilization operations in return for monetary incentives.³⁴ Total fertility rates dropped at an astonishing pace around the country. In the 1960s the fertility rate was at 6 births per woman, 4.5 in 1970, and 2.8 by 1980. This population control measure was included as part of the Saemaul Undong policies in the rural communities through the women’s association who were “made to promote the family plan project” and it was considered “the most successful case (for family planning) in developing nations”.³⁵

Consistent with the general tenets of ‘Women in Development’ discourse at that time, Saemaul Undong policies focused on improving human

capital for growth and efficiency by providing leadership platform for women to enable equality and parity of resources. The Saemaul Undong proved that, given the resources, women were effective agents of change, both in terms of contributing the increase of income for the villages and to changing social norms in their communities. On the other hand, giving women the role of capital producer without an effort to champion the change in gender roles also resulted in negative consequences for many women in the rural communities, particularly in intensifying the work burden that women faced. Women were expected to become productive agents in generating income but were not provided with support in attending to housework or their role as the primary care provider in their families.

Women under FELDA

Malaysia's rural-urban divide emerged and was exacerbated during the long period of colonial rule. The ruling British colonial state institutionalized the division of race by function and the huge wave of Chinese and Indian immigrants that came in during the colonial period was never properly integrated with the local community. Instead, they were segregated by economic function, creating visible cleavages between the migrants mostly in urban commercial and industrial areas and the natives mostly in rural agricultural areas.³⁶ The overt goal of poverty eradication for the rural communities in Malaya at the end of the Second World War was something that both the local rulers and the colonial British Administration recognized.³⁷ Land ownership was closely correlated to the economy of the country as the Malay states were primarily agrarian therefore land development was a major part of the government's rural development effort.

The introduction of the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) in 1956 under the Land Development Ordinance to oversee and fund land development on the Malayan peninsula.³⁸ As landlessness was identified as a source of poverty in the villages, the provision of land would empower the rural communities of Malaysia as agents of growth through increased productivity and income earning capacity.³⁹ Due to the shortage of available land around established villages, FELDA was aimed at utilizing the untapped land of the peninsula by clearing out jungle areas and establishing settlements for the relocation of the rural poor. Settlements are generally 4000 to 5000 acres in size and the land made up of residential areas and plantation areas were divided amongst the 'settlers' who were selected by the government.⁴⁰ As these communities did not have the naturally inherited administrative structure already established in most traditional villages in Malaysia, FELDA was afforded the ability to introduce a more representative governance structure through the creation of a multi-tiered administration for the settlements.

The administrative structure of traditional Malaysian villages, particularly in Malay villages, was strongly influenced by customs and religious standings. The head of the village also had “very little formal authority and no coercive sanctions” and village governance was based on adherence to local customs.⁴¹ This lack of administrative power by the village leaders also meant villagers were more likely to direct their complaints and requests to the local assemblymen, bypassing the village administration altogether. Creation of a settlement-based administrative unit from the early periods of FELDA meant that the settlements could be approached as a fully integrated development area.⁴² From July 1967, the settlers were formally incorporated into the FELDA administration through the establishment of a Scheme Development Committee known as the *Jawatankuasa Kemajuan Rancangan* (JKKR).⁴³ The JKKR provided the settlements with the required organizational structure and the settlers’ involvement and participation were channelled through the JKKR to the higher administration of FELDA.

Every settlement’s JKKR was made up of the settlement manager who functioned as the Chair and the appointed settlers’ development officer as the secretary. Other members of the JKKR would also include the chair of the settlement’s school board, the chair of the settlement’s cooperative, the Women’s Organization (*Gerakan Persatuan Wanita* GPW) chair and the Youth Association chair. Three other members would also be appointed based on the reference of the Settlement Manager. By 1975, the structure of the JKKR was coordinated with the FELDA organization structure with the introduction of the regional and national level JKKR.⁴⁴ The JKKR at the settlement, regional, and national levels represent the system meant to channel the inclusion and participation of the settlers. The introduction and integration of the Women’s Organization and Youth Association also provided a means of participation for members of the community who were previously left out of the administrative decisions of the traditional villages.

The women organization (GPW) of FELDA is the largest women organization operating at both a national and local level in Malaysia.⁴⁵ The chair of the GPW sits on each settlement’s JKKR/JKPP and the highest regional representatives for the GPW are also members of the JKPP. With the establishment of the GPW and the involvement of women representatives, FELDA initiated a change from the traditional Malayan villages that did not normally have women participating actively in the running and management decision of the community.⁴⁶ Although FELDA’s governance structure included women representatives in the bureaucracy, the role of women in FELDA settlements was conceived along traditional gender norms. FELDA’s settlement programs were geared towards recruiting a population that would be able to contribute to the development of large-scale agricultural production, therefore, intake of settlers was directed only at men (although it is required that they were married). With its large estate-like production method, women

were normally excluded from the main agricultural aspect of the settlements.

The role of women in the settlement was generally restricted to household work and social projects. However, as women make up roughly half of the population in the settlements, FELDA spearheaded the set-up of a women organization in the settlements. The *Gerakan Persatuan Wanita* (GPW), or Women Organization, was established in almost all the settlements in order to carry out home management, and home economics programs. Members of the GWP also carried out home visits alongside the settler development officers to introduce home economic and family management programs. As a whole, the early years of FELDA provided little opportunities for women to become economically independent from their husbands or fathers. Small businesses were geared towards supplementing family income and women were only able to gain land ownership through inheritance after death.⁴⁷

This shows that FELDA's policies are reflective of the overall evolution in how gender policies are mainstreamed in international development trends. Earlier engagement of women in the initial years of FELDA precluded women from being primary productive agents as the ownership of plantation lands were reserved for men. Nonetheless, as the years progressed, economic policies are taking a more holistic approach as newer initiatives were no longer geared towards equipping settlers to become more productive plantation worker-managers, but towards diversifying income and increasing general education levels and opportunities for both men and women on the settlements. Although women are still largely excluded from the plantation-style agricultural work; educational and employment opportunities for women have increased within the settlements and women now play a larger role, especially in food and craft production. A recent study on 1501 FELDA settlers in the state of Pahang and Johor have also found a high satisfaction level (79 percent) amongst the settlers for its women development program.⁴⁸

The case of women in leadership positions in FELDA indicates continuous and progressive improvement in challenging and restructuring institutional inequalities. It normalizes women in decision making roles at the local community. This also made way for women to hold positions in the top leadership of FELDA. This is in line with the discourse of 'Gender and Development,' where women in leadership roles increases opportunities available to women in FELDA settlement. Conversely, this has not translated into the normalization of women in higher decision-making positions. For example, the number of women who have held positions in the FELDA board of directors and few and far in between. As of 2020, there is only one woman currently on the board.⁴⁹

Discussion and Conclusion

In both cases, it would be amiss to claim the progress made by women in the rural communities of South Korea and Malaysian settlements is wholly due to the policies implemented under the Saemaul Undong and FELDA programs. Previous approaches in history have showed that a top-down approach has limited effect on women empowerment at best and could further disenfranchised women at worst. Engaging women actively in rural leadership allows them to be involved in policy making which enables them to self-determine in both long and short term. However, we also should not deny the progressive nature of both programs especially in the explicit inclusion of women and youth into its administrative structure at a time when this was not common practise in the societies of South Korea and Malaysia. Women were included in the decision-making process and women organizations play an important role in contributing to the well-being of the rural societies. This contributes to changing the way society fundamentally views what women are capable of especially in the case of capital production.

When all is said and done, the effort to providing more opportunities and increasing women's capabilities through better access to resources is inherently an easier step. Challenging deep-seated gender norms are much more difficult. Even when rural communities are accepting of providing women with the capacity to earn and gain financial independence; women are still expected to become the primary caregivers of the family. Therefore, women's role under these programs were still strongly defined by their reproductive roles. The education and training modules that were made available to women in both the Saemaul Undong and FELDA also emphasised this role of women in these rural communities. These two cases are reflective of the changing trends in engaging women in rural leadership and development.

Saemaul Undong programs for women were reflective of the national priority of modernization and human capital development that mirrors the general trend of WID in 1970s. It may have boxed women to specific gender roles and generalized them as a homogenous entity divorced from the unequal relations of women and men, nevertheless, the Saemaul Undong programs propelled the women empowerment policies in South Korea by integrating women in economic system and emphasized the productive roles of women in leadership positions. Another factor that is interesting to take note of is also the role women played in disseminating and implementing the government's population control program. The rural women were the most successful agents in carrying out the government's policies exemplifying how successful women can be as agents of change, in line with the WID and GAD approaches. On the other hand, it also encapsulates why today's human rights approach pushes for further empowerment of women in key decision-making positions as the women themselves had no input in the formulation of these family planning

policies.

The FELDA program exhibited the general theme of GAD with regard to the progress and improvement of women's participation in politics by restructuring institutions and removing barriers to gender equality. Although efforts toward addressing the issues of women subordination and their modes of production are issues yet to be resolved. This can be seen in the long term benefit as many women in FELDA despite not being able to own and cultivate the land given in the beginning of the settlements would go on to become important secondary providers for their families through small and medium entrepreneurship. Women in subsequent generations of settlers' communities are also afforded the same opportunity for education as the men and this has gone a long way in ensuring that subsequent generation of women would have ample opportunities for employment and improvement in their standard of living. However, the lack of women in higher decision-making positions means that the change affected by these programs still remain localized. For example, policies do not look at long term changes and there is still difficulties in pressing for change when it comes to normalized gender roles. Women remain the primary caregiver, responsible for the bulk of housework in the family.

The Saemaul Undong and FELDA programs are good examples how state-led rural development programs can take on a holistic approach which mainstreamed gender into its policy formation. Both the Saemaul Undong and FELDA evolved with the change in time and many of its shortcoming exemplify why the understanding and approach to women empowerment needed to continue evolving. The Saemaul Undong in South Korea today exist more as a non-governmental organization geared towards community projects while the Global Saemaul Undong brand is incorporated as part of the South Korean development cooperation project with various donor recipient countries around the world.

Under the Global Saemaul initiative, countries such as Afghanistan, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal, and the Philippines which have implemented Saemaul projects have also begun implementing a strong gender awareness as well as placing importance on the role of women.⁵⁰ FELDA has also ceased to open new settlements, focusing instead on improving existing plantations while maintaining the welfare of the settler communities under its care. The GPW continue to remain the most active women's organization in the country, staying involved not only in the women development activities but charitable work as well as social and religious activities.⁵¹

These two case studies show how different programs have mainstreamed women leadership into their framework, effectively creating long lasting change in the rural communities of South Korea and Malaysia. It also demonstrates that women are very successful agents of change when provided with the opportunity to take part in local decision-making and as productive

agents in their own right. It also showcases how women organizations play an important role in providing the needed support to push forward women leadership and empowerment and this is an operationalization that can be implemented in any current and future rural development programs. These women organizations can be made more effective by enhancing partnership with other stakeholders such as with civil society as a counterbalance to the government.

Overall, further research into current challenges that women face in rural communities are always needed. More importantly, assessment on rural development programs need to look not only into short-term outcome but into long-term impacts as well. Changing economic dimensions, intensification of rural to urban migration and increased infrastructure development globally also means that the context of rural communities is also rapidly evolving with new challenges in the status quo. Empowerment and leadership efforts even based on the WID and GAD approach can still be effective tools even where mobilization and activism to achieve human rights in development are difficult to implement and achieve.

Endnotes

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