

Accelerating Rural Development in Africa: ‘Sharing Korea’s Community Modernization Experience With Africa

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1.0 Introduction

Today Community Driven Development (CDD) is still relevant given the continued existence a real threat of inequalities between rural and urban communities in developing countries. This is because CDD possesses the ability to promote efficient use of resources by giving local communities resources and power to initiate projects that are most needed and have the greatest benefits to them.

Indeed, most developing countries have attempted to implement various rural development initiatives since the 1950s when most of them attained independence. CDD initiatives are regarded by developing countries as a way to upgrade the economies of rural communities which are in most cases lagging behind. It is an effective strategy for bridging the burgeoning gap between rural and urban household incomes, especially because it is good at developing structures that can be used to target the poor. These efforts are also justified on the basis that the majority of people in developing countries lives in rural areas where agriculture is the dominant sector. In Africa, for example, agriculture is the backbone of most of the economies and the biggest employer. In Ethiopia, for instance, the sector makes up 80% of the total economy, while in Kenya, 50% are employed in agriculture.

Thus, almost all developing countries have had various rural development initiatives or Association; Kalahi in Philippine, Comilla in Bangladesh, Ujamaa in Tanzania, Block Development Program in India and Sarvodaya in Sri-Lanka. Africa has scores of rural development initiatives, including cooperatives, village associations, community or cooperative banks, table banking and ‘merry go rounds’ among others.

However, evidence reveals that there are solemn setbacks in rural development initiatives when it is solely led by a central bureaucracy, on a top-down approach. Therefore the main advantage of CDD initiative is that it allows development to be people centered, by providing an opportunity for local residents to plan and prioritize development projects they need most. The World Bank gave impetus to this vision by asserting that CDD initiative ensures there is a real transfer of power, resources, and

accountability mechanisms to local communities, while also developing implementation capacities and institutions across all levels of the society (WB, 2009). Participation of the locals in community based initiatives has also been linked with effective targeting of the poor who deserve them most (WB, 2004). Nonetheless, CDD initiatives still require some government involvement or political mobilization in order to succeed.

In addition, CDD ensures local communities and their agents are given the capacity to plan and implement community development projects. In most, cases community based development increases chances for appropriate use of resources by entrenching transparency and accountability at the lowest level of the society.

While the goal of these movements remains similar- that of transforming rural communities and lifting their economies, their experiences and success stories remain varied. In most developing countries, there have been very few or no notable cases where these initiatives have transformed rural communities into economic power zones. It has been widely noted that this failure could be because these governments have poorly trained government extension workers, while in other cases, it is because the projects have not been appropriately synced with the local contexts. But success can also be hampered by lack of political will by the central government to devolve real power and resources to local communities and their governments. It has also been noteworthy that when such initiatives are dominated by local non benevolent politicians or elites, their chances of success are dim (Naela, 1983, WB, 2004). The other problem is that even though most of them can develop proper structures for implementation of the projects, they have not been successful at targeting the poor.

Despite the fact that most Community Driven initiatives failed in many countries to meet this well conceived goal, few were successful. Reeds (2012) underscored that the problem was mainly how governments could enhance rural development initiative in ways that increased participation and ownership by the locals. Similarly, one of the greatest setbacks in CDD initiatives is the inability to scale up successful pilot projects undertaken in a single community with homogenous characteristic to multiple villages or to national level project. Success cases show that this challenge can be overcome by a gradual well thought out expansion of pilot projects. They also need to be in sync with specific community contexts and develop local institutional capacities to foster the long term sustainability of the projects. Successful CDD is demand driven rather than supply driven. This is why Korea's experience with rural development initiative stands out, both for its success, scaling up strategy and speed with which it transformed rural communities.

1.1 Justification for sharing Korea's community modernization campaign with Africa

Eliminating extreme poverty is one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the United Nations (UN). However, as we come to the close of the first set of the MDGs in 2015, Africa is still facing absolute poverty, especially among its rural population. Korea had similar economic

circumstances that most African countries still continue to face up to date. At the time of their independence, the GDP of some African countries, specifically Kenya was at par with Korea's. However, guided by the community modernization campaign, accompanied with a series of five year development plans implemented with the developmental state ideology, Korea managed to transform itself in a short span of time to a developed country.

Due to its successful transformation from an aid recipient to a donor, many developing countries, especially Africa have shown great interest in adapting Korea's model of community development. Korea's experience with CCD is unique in that it was financed wholly by local resources from the government and citizen's voluntary contribution, while in other countries such initiatives are supported by international organizations. Indeed, the ODA had asserted that Korea's modernization campaign meets the international standards, and that Korea's experience would be of great significance to developing countries. In response, Korea has rolled out a knowledge sharing program in which it is training government officials from developing countries about its development experience.

Korea's breakthrough and development experience thus, can be shared by Africa because some of the challenges that bedevil these countries are similar to Korea's, notwithstanding political and geographical dissimilarities; Africa is currently experiencing a burgeoning disparity between its rural and urban population. While a great majority of its population resides in the rural communities, the income level for rural households continue to lag behind. The sorry state of biting poverty in rural communities in Africa is exhibited in different forms, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of basic necessities like toilets, sewerage systems, safe drinking water, poor disposal of wastes and dilapidated housing. Furthermore, while agriculture is the main economic activity in Africa's rural community that employs close to 70% of its rural dwellers, it is practiced in small scale with crude technology, thereby lowering productivity levels and causing acute food insecurity. Coupled with high unemployment rate among rural residents, these factors have led to deterioration in the living conditions among the rural poor.

There are also high levels of natural resource depletion in rural communities in Africa. This is partly due to ownership system that provides local residents with poor incentives to manage community resources. On the other hand, issues such as indecent lifestyles among the African youths and lack of public order, especially in the transport/ 'matatu' sector and a culture of complacency in poverty have slowly eaten the social fabrics on which African communities were built.

Since Korea's community modernization campaign was specifically tailored to tackle similar challenges, its replicability in Africa would go a long way to complement other community development initiatives currently undertaken by African governments to fight poverty among its rural population and improve standards of living. This can also strengthen the partnership between Korean and Africa.

In the next of articles we share some of the practical lessons that can be drawn from Korea's development experience through CDD.

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